

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 37 JANUARY 2022: "SHUTTER SPEED"

Happy New Year!

Welcome to Issue 37, "Shutter Speed," in which our contributing poets explore the implications of time and exposure.

This month's featured poet is **Jack Apollo Hartley**.

Issue 37 includes work by Schyler Butler, Nicole Callrä, Molly Greer, Jack Apollo Hartley, Taiwo Hassan, Matt Hsu, Zebulon Huset, Jess Kadish, Grace Liu, nat raum, Suzanne Richardson, and Sunday T. Saheed, and Shannon Wolf is featured in our Baker's Dozen spot "Shift." Read The Gallery below!

### Featured Artist—Arden Hunter

**Arden Hunter** is an aroace agender writer, artist and performer. With an eclectic range of interests from the horrific to the whimsical, the theme tying all of their work together is an inexplicable and unconditional love of the ridiculous beast that is called 'human'. Arden has words and art hosted and upcoming with *Thi Wurd*, *Acid Bath Publishing*, and *Outcast Press* among other places. Find them on Twitter @hunterarden and at [ardenhunter.com](http://ardenhunter.com).

### Poetry Gallery

#### "As If Still" by Schyler Butler

I am not hunky dory, splashed upon a hot sidewalk  
next to you watching the sun spill its mercy on the horizon.  
It is your horizon, this ivy laced suburb  
a portrait hanging free in your nostalgia.  
You point here and there, your former home  
a Hallmark greeting boasting trees once new  
and now grown, surrounded by avenues  
and green spaces that remember your laughter,  
that cradled the broken pride of your first car crash,

that watched you punch your brother then disappear  
into its woods, mulberry potions laced with black willow leaves  
a bit of solace. A prosperous childhood, I suppose, since despite  
its hiccups and squabbles, you love your family and they love you.

It is no accident that my insides scream with every step,  
that I jostle beneath the sun's rays and yearn to raise my fist in its direction,  
this same sun spilling upon my youth though I couldn't see it,  
my nostalgia dreaming of salvation for my people,  
of creating time machines for every generation as if different versions  
of me could travel back to plantations, to new ghettos  
and cold houses and all that desolation with bowls of mercy,  
as if the sun spilled in me something that could save them.

"how to pray" by Nicole Callräm

*"I touch leaves, I close my eyes and think of water"*  
—James Wright\*

your departure left an abandoned church, a deep well I  
chant into— forty moonless nights fast from feast, from touch

your absence is concentric, a quaking heartbeat— leaves  
cool as earth, still like bark, fingertips tentative— now I

no longer remember how to stop breathing air/you in, close  
these lips against invading memories, close this door to my

thorned heart, o, eternity's curtain— o, downcast eyes  
I know there is some goodness here for me, sliced pears and

deep sleep promised me that. & I fall I fall to my knees, think  
of us, you, raw vulnerability of autumn's last days, the folly of  
a faithless one like me praying to find meaning in still water

*\*Golden Shovel based on James Wright's "Trying to Pray"*

"The Pretty Girls" by Molly Greer

When my mother goes to the hospital,  
there's always a frantic search

for the right make up bag.  
Not *that* pink bag – the pink bag with *stripes*.

I never learned how to wear make-up,  
but when I was twelve,  
I begged for permission to shave.  
Still flat-chested with spangly legs,  
all I wanted was to be one of those girls.

The boys notice the girls with shiny legs  
much more than the ones who can outrun them.  
I could be one of the girls  
tanning on the asphalt during recess  
without fear of the sun reflecting  
off blond hairs on knobby knees.  
I could be one of the pretty girls.

My legs look like a lumberjack's now,  
but I try my best to love them.  
I pull pink unicorn socks over wiry hairs,  
slide my feet into black combat boots.  
Lumberjack/unicorns/boots is hard to stomach –  
I'll probably shave tonight.

In the hospital, my mother is beautiful.  
We're getting along today  
and the afternoon light is just right.  
She opens the pink striped bag,  
paints her lips and lines her eyes.  
As she fluffs her cheeks with blush  
she confides in me and says,  
*when I'm dying, make sure you pluck my chin hairs.*

*“dioscuri, halved”* by Jack Apollo Hartley, January's Featured Poet  
*or: I name myself after a twin*

I will be like a present unraveling for you. okay? ribbon tied untied tied again loose. I will  
tell you everything. like a puzzle laid out so neat you can put it together with a shake of the  
table.

another simile, if it'll help you get it /  
—I will be like a clementine tangerine /  
cutie mandarin whatever it is under /  
those hot lights in the store /  
waiting to be bared. //

alone, I do it myself—contort my arms, tear myself slow along each seam so the thin  
membranes peel apart without breaking. then I seal myself up again. leave a dent for you to  
thumb.

I promise, baby, I will burst apart /  
in your hands. I have done this before. /  
countless times I have done this before /  
with no one to see /  
how cleanly I do it. //

**Jack's Commentary on "dioscuri, halved":**

This poem is one of those works that are so awkwardly autobiographical you want to hide them as much as you want to show them off—but I think there's a charm to those! (And, you know, I hope some readers agree.)

Between the Dioscuri that make up my sign and their semi-brother Apollo, my namesake, I saw a potential to talk about that yearning some of us have for being *seen* and *understood* on the level a divine twin might be capable of. On the mechanics side, I wanted to evoke that twin imagery: two titles and two sets of stanzas with four lines each and an extra unpaired. Each successive metaphor, as well, is intended to build the feeling of the yearning's intensity. Not only is the speaker craving to be understood as a whole, but even in the attempt to *explain* they are desperate. This particular desperation—wanting something so badly that you'll do all the work for someone—is so vulnerable to me. How intimate, yet not. You don't even need them to figure you out. You just need them to look.

**Assistant Editor Morgan Ridgway's Commentary on "dioscuri, halved":**

This poem begins with such an earnest longing and doesn't let go. It speaks to the yearning so many, perhaps all of us somewhere, have to be understood to a depth we often cannot fully articulate. Each metaphor builds upon the next creating an intensity of yearning, a compounding desperation, and we wonder if the speaker will at last be understood in their entirety. In such desperation sits a level of vulnerability as the speaker proclaims they will do all the intimate work of exposure because the desire to be understood is simply that great. This poem challenges us, asks us to interrogate how far we will go to be seen, to what depths do we seek to be understood, and in the end presents the desire to be known as part of the vulnerable condition of living.

“conversations with my mother on the prayer mat” by Taiwo Hassan

*allahu akbar/ this might be a poem/ where its end/ is a pyre/ where fears replace corpses/ and promises of a miracle burn./ on mornings/ like these/ i find myself/ on a prayer mat/ a journey/ i begin/ with a damp body/ in and out/ my troubled spirit/ seek answers/ in the embrace of wuduu/ heaviness replaces my soles/ and my voice/ becomes a stranger/ iqamah/ thoughts seep in/ and ordinary names/ don't do them justice./ i remember you/ iyá bejì/ your face/ melting my worries to sand/ your lips/ a smile/ then a line/ then a verse/ then a supplication / táyélolú, rántí./ i / a wall/ ruku'u/ your words/ subhana rabbi al adheem/ i remember the first time/ you taught me/ to pray/ to find an anchor/ in the unknown/ to be a testament/ of elements/ that latch on to hope/ even in the dark./màámi, mo kúkú rántí/ how threads/ of your light/ morphed into strings/ then knots/ then these knees/ then the ground/ subhanah rabbi al a'ala/ how like the skies/ i fell/ and clouds/ nested on my back/ is this how/ a boy/ learns/ the science of diffusion?/ carry my hands, mother/ can you feel the hollow/ in their bones? / hold each finger/ the cold on every nail/ is this where i let you go?/ where i melt into everything/ but peace?/but you?/ asalam alaikum warahmatullah.*

“美国” by Matt Hsu

Charmed: when you clomp down the street and exchange handshakes with the girl dressed in blue gingham. It's warm—black iced tea warm, not leeches in the swamp warm—and I've got these shoelaces unraveled into a spread-eagle

spool. Pockets filled with cracker jack, peach pits, sour apple gummies, eucalyptus, stray pieces of copper, goose feathers, ticket stubs stubs from the 7:30 showing of *Superman*, paper clips, bottle caps. Ba waves goodbye

with both hands and I wave back with three.

They needed him, his bruised hands, his eye  
for bridge machinery, his flower-print shirts  
and crooked grin. Tomorrow I'm heading to  
the dock. Pick up catfish and snail shells and

stack them in a brass bucket, eat jello with  
whipped cream, flip quarters, find hermit  
crabs. Push paper boats across the current,  
loop yo-yos, swap baseball cards. Smoke  
straw cigars. Catch cicadas. Drink moonlight.

["Triangle Shaped by Window Inches In, Afternoon" by Zebulon Huset](#)

Castoff light  
    from  
    an unimpeded sun  
also cajoling molecules  
    before eyeballs.

Some flitting  
    dust mites  
    and friction-filched  
flecks of dead skin  
    fletch the air, but  
    so much nitrogen.

So much volatile,  
    vibrating chemical,  
    waiting to kaboom.

Where they mine  
    natural gas,  
    faucets  
become flamethrowers.

We, flammable carbon  
    and so much water.  
    Don't supernova. Yet.  
Pace your fission.

The afternoon yawns,  
    again.

Leave the dishes  
                  in the sink.  
      Float to bed.  
It's early, still.

“The world will be made while” by Jess Kadish

we're steeped in something else, like brewing the coffee: grind, pour, filter, drip, drip, drip, day in & out & in and out & one morning we'll look up from the too-hot cup, singed fingertips singing, & see snow where we could have sworn the trees were just barely at their peak of green. Last summer I swam in a lake down the road from where I'd lived for years. I never knew it existed, yet there it had been the whole time: full & swollen wet, the surface a thin film of smeared insect bodies. As we treaded water sixty feet deep, sun-warmed at our shoulders & spring-cold at our toes, the woman who owned the lake said to me—“This time of year, the world shifts toward death, though we can't see it yet.” On the shore: weeds tall as sunflowers, yesterday just tiny things, now bending beneath the weight of their own extravagance. Shameless blooms already turning timid. Soft petals to crisp curls. The air buzzing with the longing howl of cicadas. They've spent so long waiting. They're finally here. They don't have much time.

“a list of grievances” by Grace Liu

i am no stranger / to worshipping the / dry skin that prunes / into the hazy sandpaper of / a silken america / on my tongue / vessels, pulling away, / biting the pale shore / i no longer visit the asian market / my confession is that of / crying curdled milk / no casket but infantile / i tell everyone i fuck elegies / pick spilling flowers from a free spirit / you, caressing my eyelids like rubber / whispering prayers that i stuff / calluses in my mouth / just to taste bitterness / us, wrapped in a dirty / suburban stereotype under a vegetable garden / another dream muddled with cheese pizza / & bubblegum sneakers / greasy fingers sliding down my throat, ethereal / what does it matter, / anyway? the sky still falls / still peeling with overripe clementines, always / asking of a melting pot.

“skeletons” by nat raum

your top drawer was for peppermint gum wrappers  
and spent oil cartridges, all that you hid rather  
than throw away. i lay beside you, lulled by rhythms of

gnashing teeth, training your jaw to chew through  
me each night, sinew and marrow and all.

i grow fearful i've become nothing but bones aching extra  
on your birthday, the day i went to the hospital, the day  
you left. at first i'd written us star-crossed, lion cubs  
within sanctuaries of medicated taffy chews and the glow  
of idle television screens. we'd swallowed half our words

by september, thrown elbows by october, gone numb  
by the arrival of january's austere grip. your covetous hands  
reached for awards i only give out posthumously, rungs  
of blight up my spine which push me over before day's end.  
i am bound you by the dull throbbing of my knuckles

twice as much as the folded scrap notes you left, lost  
to ash one drunken night last winter. you've met the test, tale  
told in fragments of night terrors, in labored breaths too  
shallow to cry mayday. each day i bury artifacts of ours,  
each night still met with static. i gnash my teeth now.

["Bone Opera" by Suzanne Richardson](#)

They used to call me  
Big girl big  
Boned  
Whale girl  
I was swimming in a  
Bone ocean  
A big girl  
In her big  
Bone home  
I was a girl unfurling  
Bone fern

Bone girl  
Bone dawn  
I was eating  
In a bone house  
Drinking  
Bone milk  
To keep

Growing  
Tectonic  
Bones split  
I grew into  
A big jewel  
Bone opal  
All stares  
Beg me to  
Bone open

Some times  
Big girls go  
Bone quiet  
When I walk by  
They scream  
My tall girl  
Limbs  
Are a  
Bone riot  
They drink me  
Bone cold  
With greedy stares  
I am hunching  
In my  
Bone chair

Bone woman now  
Tottering on highest  
heels  
Breast city  
A full breast and  
Bone meal  
All I want is to go  
Bone numb  
Don't look  
I'm no one  
Hear them say I'm  
Bone dumb

One day  
I learn  
In my neck

There are  
Seven bones  
I open  
My bone  
Throat  
Sing my  
Bone song  
Bone story  
Big boned woman  
In all her  
Bone glory

Bones don't want  
They just are  
Bone boats  
Taking you  
To cities  
To shores afar  
When I am  
Bone old  
No longer  
Able to  
Bone roam  
No more flesh  
Flowers  
Too bone sick  
Or bone ill  
Please will  
Someone  
Reach into  
The bone thick  
Into my  
Sternum  
And touch it?  
Please  
Love my  
Touch my  
Bones

“Escapade” by Sunday T. Saheed

I do remember, they said I came to

this world through the backyard. Mother says she doesn't know what I run from — the portico is full of acacias, oleanders & quinces & whatever else pricks. Sometimes, it doesn't matter how much I walk the gethsemane miles after miles, my shoes are dust-free. & for my lips, oily. Not wilted like a strand of cactuses at harmattan. Every time father sits out on the pavement, his shirt on his shoulder & a radio crackles into his padded ears. I watch him from the rear, & a smile forces its way through my lips at a snail's pace. There is no dead thing here, Bàbá apart from the vegetable on my tongue. Magnolia flowers blossom here, a pathway breaths. Perhaps, we might serve our cheeky bones to old age —not to our pains. Grab the camera, take this shot of me sipping rum & not blood. My lips are clean & pale. Dab the photograph into sepia or grayscale of other's fiery tongues. Tonight, I'm looking into the mirror to check what sprouts in my reflection. A black boy, with tribal marks, with purple shorts. Or a monster, blood in mouth who escaped destiny & cheated fate!

#### ["Shift," Our Baker's Dozen Feature](#)

In "Are All The Fathers In Your Poems Real?" **Shannon Wolf** uses the form of an "after" poem to explore the speaker's relationship with their father.

#### ["Are All The Fathers In Your Poems Real?" by Shannon Wolf](#)

*after Aimee Nezhukumatathil\**

If by real you mean as real as the stinging light still burning  
in an empty refrigerator, the pooling on a water-ringed table,  
the crumple of a toe against a desk's steel leg—  
then Yes, every last page is true, every sharp word,

bark and bitch. Wait, I have made them all up—all of them—  
and when I say I am fatherless, I mean my father was less  
and so somewhere there is a room full of fathers, all of them.  
Can you imagine the number of beater cars, how many  
unearthed golf balls? Even now, my fathers prepare to call me.  
One dials the phone, another commandeers the speaker.  
One screams into the abyss of the internet and one sits  
at my grandmother's grave. One sleeps with his broken glasses  
on, another is preparing a dinner alone and every single  
one of them wonders why I am never coming home.

\* "Are All the Break-Ups in Your Poems Real?" by Aimee Nezhukumatathil

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56130/are-all-the-break-ups-in-your-poems-real>

### **Shannon's Commentary on "Are All The Fathers In Your Poems Real?":**

This poem came out fully formed and running. Much of that immediacy owes itself to the piece from which it borrows its form: "Are All the Break-Ups in Your Poems Real?" I encourage anyone reading this, to read that poem, and in fact any poem by Aimee Nezhukumatathil for a thorough grounding in poetry that just always works. I was inspired by that poem and how it encounters past experience - the surprising color of the language amid the prosaic appearance of the piece on the page. I love its question and answer format, and how the poem goes so far beyond the limitations of our understanding of a call and response.

The original poem dallies somewhere between laughter and nostalgia, and I wanted to walk a similar line. I like to think I am achieving an element of vulnerability, alongside some stinging, palpable anger. I've borrowed some of the structural phrasings of the sonnet-like piece, "If by real you mean" and "Wait. I have made them up—all of them—" for example, and I particularly admired what the final lines, with their repetition of "one," allow the writer to reckon with. For Nezhukumatathil, the "one" allows a playful acknowledgment of the ex-lovers' acts of service: "one chops up some parsley" or "One changes the baby," whereas in my piece the "one" encounters the sickening desperation of the speaker's father: "One screams into the abyss of the internet." Hopefully, the more sardonic language suggests a sizeable tonal shift away from Nezhukumatathil, closer to derisive than facetious.

I won't speak too much on the personal meaning behind the poem, as I hope that the poem speaks for itself on that account - but I will say that I regard poetry as a form of seizing the narrative for oneself. With so many platforms at our fingertips these days, it seems easy for others to speak for you, or rewrite your story in their own favor. This poem is a reclamation of my own story, as a daughter and as a woman in her own right.

## Poet Biographies

**Schyler Butler's** (she/her) work appears in *Transition*, *Hobart*, *African American Review*, *Narrative Northeast*, *Obsidian*, *Juked*, and elsewhere. Currently, she lives in Columbus, OH. Find her on Instagram: @whistle\_the\_blues and Twitter: @SchylerButler

**Nicole Callräm** (she/her/她) is a nomadic bureaucrat and disciple of existence in all her life-affirming and confusing manifestations. She adores rideshare bikes, red wine, and Osmanthus flowers (preferably a mix of the three...all at once). Nicole has been published in *A Shanghai Poetry Zine*, *Nude Studio*, *Rat's Ass Review*, and *Alluvium*. She attends the Shanghai Inkwell Poetry Workshop, constantly learning how to be better and braver from these creative souls. You can find her on Twitter at @YiminNicole.

**Molly Greer** (she/her) lives in Maryland with her husband and two children. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Full House Literary*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, and *Outcast Press Poetry*. You can find her on Twitter: @MKGreerPoetry.

**Jack Apollo Hartley** (he/him) is a poet, Gemini, and dissatisfied only child. His work can be found in *perhappened*, *Wrongdoing Magazine*, *warning lines*, and other lovely places, but he's loudest on his Twitter @jackpollyharts.

**Taiwo Hassan** (he/him) is a writer of Yorùbá descent, a poet, and a vocalist. A Best of the Net Nominee, his poems have appeared in *trampset*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Brittle Paper*, *Dust Poetry Magazine*, *Ice Floe Press*, *Shallow Tales Review*, *Second Skin Magazine*, *Warning Lines*, *Augment Review*, *Madrigal Press*, *Nigerian NewsDirect*, *Praxis Magazine*, *Wizards In Space*, and several other places. He emerged as the first runner-up for the MANI 10 year anniversary Poetry Competition. A poetry editor at *Jupiter Review*, he's also an undergraduate student of Demography and Social Statistics at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ilé-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. His first chapbook, *Birds Don't Fly For Pleasure* is forthcoming for publication by River Glass Books.

**Matt Hsu** (he/him) is a student from San Francisco, California. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and he's published or forthcoming in *Blue Marble Review*, *The B'K*, and *Paddler Press*. In his spare time, he enjoys playing tennis and eating dark chocolate. Currently, he's querying his first novel: a twisty, thriller-mystery about a crafty assassin. You can find him on Twitter at @MattHsu19 or at his personal website [matthsu156538437.wordpress.com](http://matthsu156538437.wordpress.com).

**Zebulon Huset** is a teacher, writer and photographer. He won the Gulf Stream 2020 Summer Poetry Contest, and his writing has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *North American Review*, *Meridian*, *The Southern Review*, *Fence*, *Texas Review* and many others. He publishes the prompt blog [Notebooking Daily](http://NotebookingDaily.com), and edits the journals *Coastal Shelf* and *Sparked*.

**Jess Kadish** (she/her) is a queer Jewish writer whose poetry has also appeared in *Hooligan Magazine*. She's a member of Chicago's 2<sup>nd</sup> *Story* collective, where she writes, curates, and directs personal narrative performance. You can hear some of her work on their [podcast](#). She's also an actor, and you can find out more about that at [jessicakadish.com](http://jessicakadish.com). The title of this poem was originally a text from a friend who meant to write "the world will be made whole" but thankfully was just one letter off.

**Grace Liu** (she/her) is a teen writer from Michigan. Her work has been recognized by The Poetry Society UK, Leyla Beban Young Authors Foundation, and more. You can find her on Twitter at [@graceewrites](#), where she tweets about almond butter and occasionally her writing.

**nat raum** (they/them, b.1996) is a queer disabled artist and writer currently working towards their mfa at the university of baltimore. their work is based primarily on their lived experience with c-ptsd, chronic illness, and queerness, and often takes the form of small-edition image/text publications. recent projects have explored queer escapism, healing, and gender transition. nat's work has appeared in publications including *sledgehammer lit*, *warning lines magazine*, *delicate friend*, and *gutslut press*. they are also the founder and editor-in-chief of *fifth wheel press*, a queer lit/art publishing space. nat is an avid fan of glass animals, noise-cancelling headphones, indica-dominant hybrids, and bisexual lighting, preferably all at once. find them on the web [natraum.com](http://natraum.com) and on instagram and twitter [@gr8earlofhell](#)

**Suzanne Richardson** earned her M.F.A. in Albuquerque, New Mexico at the University of New Mexico. She currently lives in Binghamton, New York where she's a Ph.D. student in creative writing at SUNY Binghamton. She is working on a memoir, *Throw it Up*, and a full poetry collection, *The Want Monster*. She is the writer of Three Things [@nocontactmag](#), and more about Suzanne and her writing can be found here: <https://www-suzannerichardsonwrites.tumblr.com/> and here: [@oozannesay](#)

**Sunday T. Saheed** is a 17-year-old Nigerian writer and a member of Hilltop Creative Arts Foundation. He was the 1st runner-up for the Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors, 2021. He was also a finalist for the Wole Soyinka International Cultural Exchange, 2018. His works have appeared or are forthcoming on *Augment Review*, *Rigorous Mag*, *Trouvaille Review*, *Giallo Lit*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Cruzfolio*, *Kalahari Review*, *Open Leaf Press Review*, *Cajun Mutt Press*, *Applied Worldwide*, *Spirited Muse Press* and others. He can be reached on Instagram on [@poetsundaysaheed](#)

**Shannon Wolf** is a British writer and teacher, living in Denver, Colorado. Her debut full-length poetry collection *Green Card Girl* is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. She received a joint MA-MFA in Poetry at McNeese State University and also has degrees from Lancaster University and the University of Chichester. She is the Co-Curator of the Poets in Pajamas Reading Series. Her poetry, short fiction, and non-fiction (which can also be found under the name Shannon

Bushby) have appeared in *The Forge*, *No Contact Mag*, and *HAD* among others. You can find her on social media @helloschanwolf.

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