

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE #41 MAY 2022: "US"

Welcome to Issue 41 "Us," in which our contributing poets explore both the grace and destruction we enact on each other.

Issue 41 includes work by Eniola Abdulroqeeb Arówólò, Chloe England, Dina Folgìa, Cristina Lai, Sandra Lin, Vicki Lin, Shilo Niziolek, Andrew Walker, and Keagan Wheat. Please see The Gallery below!

Featured Artist—Carl Scharwath

Carl Scharwath has appeared globally with 75+ journals selecting his art photography. His first photography book was published by Praxis. His photography was also exhibited in the Mount Dora Center for The Arts gallery and The Leesburg Center for The Arts. Six global poets have also selected his photography to grace the covers of their published books. Carl was the art editor for *Minute Magazine* (4 years), was nominated for The Best of the Net award (2021) by *Penumbria Magazine*, and was a finalist for the Mary Cassatt award for his photography.

Poetry Gallery

"ayekooto" by Eniola Abdulroqeeb Arówólò

ambush, there's a lot facing my country
lately:

chaotic bodies hid in the smoke screen of peace
a train of sunflowers died in the phonemic of war
i sickle out the blade killing all the meek animals inside me
we faith in the rebellion of gunshots.

i speak French now—a language i harvest from the throat
of my lover who also majors in this collective grief.

je t'aime aussi, i plant a kiss on my country's forehead
in return for her robust ruins.

merci beaucoup, i am grateful you spared me when
you came for mother, grandma, auntie.

fait accompli, it's nice doing the business of turmoil
with you.

au revoir, who is on the list today to be squeezed into
a viral obituary.

s'il vous plaît, call me when home is no longer a threshold of charred bones.

***ayekooto**—a Yoruba phrase for parrot.

[“To Martyr a Woman” by Chloe England](#)

And listen, the blood wasn't red when they cut her.
It was gold & glowing & gleamed

She was beautiful, they said, bleeding starlight
they wondered if this is what it means

to believe in redemption. If perhaps
there is a man in the sky. If beauty is all that she was made for.

if her pain was worth the sacrifice.

To see a woman expel the universe. For her to leave us with this awe.

They think that it was worth it. They think it made us believe.
They think beauty is what she was for – a beauty made
to grieve.

///

But what of the fire that torched her touch?

What of the steel of her bones?

Do you wonder if perhaps that starlight through her veins was rusted blood turned gold?

///

Because listen, there is no beauty in the throes of hunger,
Or this cruel semblance of death.
This is a tale they tell to keep us reaching

But listen, look at those clutching hands,
All withered and bone
Look at the hollowed ghost they made you,
look at the ugliness of this death

This floor-flung madness, this tale old as Bristlecone Pine.

///

There are few women I know who glowed from the inside out:

It's 1917, & the Radium Girls are hungry, & they are dying.

Skin-glowed and hollow, their blood was still red.

["I dreamt my parents were together but still I was the one yelling" by Dina Folgia](#)

trumpet-mute cries from my clogged mouth
the static of my summer friend mosquito
three decibels quieter than my rage

my mother says something segmented
toddler-like, akin when eyes are open to:

dina stop
autism

autism?
autisming?

but mother I can't
not when the noise already stops here
right where the seam between dream-life
and waking folds at my lips
a single speech-cancelling pucker

my father cries silent on the floor
as if he gave his last sounds to me

to puff away through jelly-air
viscous with misunderstanding

they say that in dreams if you
have not experienced something awake

your mind
creates the closest

falsest
approximation

I have never screamed raw
never parted thick ocean with
my salt-bubble-breath

I will not let
my blown-throat

fill
or empty

“Relative Velocity” by Cristina Lai, May’s Featured Poet

I spent the spring of thirteen with a cat’s eye marble balanced between my uneven molars
green, like the grass-stained tongues of the geese
hissing at me as they darted through the fields next to the middle school track where I ran,
dodging their gashed black beaks and mud-emerald shit smeared across the painted, pounded
polyurethane
my body tangled like a loose daisy chain, folding over at the waist,
knotted at the lips as I swallowed the sounds of thawing

the next year, I joined the lacrosse team
learned to bite down and yell around a mouthful of hard plastic
how to cradle something tightly before letting it go
nothing was rightfully ours, then, and so everything was
distance only existed to be closed:
legs, churning as we sprinted across the field
leaving behind the worn hems of our ponytails and polyester skirts unfurling in our wake
and fingers, reaching – smoothing over the seams of tan lines across sore shoulders
tracing the grooves branding our foreheads and untilled cheeks
it was spring again, after all. the geese knew better than to come near us then,

ivy-limbed girls, hollering while we chased each other – as if being heard was itself the victory;
cleats ripping into soft earth, chlorophyll painting our lips sage with triumph;
running,
running, just to feel the joy of not being hunted

Cristina’s Commentary on “Relative Velocity”:

Poetry, to me, is a place to explore and acknowledge the significance of a moment, a memory, a feeling; to confront and honor how something permeates through your body. Working on this poem allowed me to return to specific moments from my adolescence that have stuck with me after all these years and consider them more deeply. In writing, I started with the tangible memories that appear in the piece – the geese, the grass, even the marble. I focused at first on the physicality of these experiences, and it took some time for me to dig further into what gave them such staying power in my body and mind beyond a general sense of nostalgia. As I explored these memories and the emotions I associated with them, I found that they were grounded by sentiments and desires of that age that I had never properly allowed myself to give voice to. Specifically, there was a connection between my years of middle school athletics and the tentative boundaries of my selfhood as a teenage girl – how the hazy awareness of things changing outside of my control made me feel lonely and afraid, and how much I wished to feel victorious over something, anything, in my life. The ability to act on that want can be a meaningful thing — there’s something special about a space just for girls to play, to be audacious, to celebrate even the smallest triumphs. Even the vulnerability of connection and dependence can be considered a conquest against all odds. I don’t think I would have been able to so clearly identify what such a space looked like in my life if not for the process of working on this poem.

Assistant Editor Lytey Kay’s Commentary on “Relative Velocity”:

Lai’s “Relative Velocity” swept me up in its nuanced momentum and lively imagery. The slow and breathless read of long lines, like a slow-motion replay, set the tone and scene. I was put in a state of pondering speed and the cause and effect of how we move, our bodies in particular, through the world. The relationship between all the alive and moving parts around us. The poem speaks to an eternal human longing to understand why we are who we are and to share our stories. I revel in the end where it seems the speaker has found a medium to take back their power from the “cause” that set their previous course and forges ahead, blazing their own path, running as in freedom.

[“Ephemerality as Haibang” by Sandra Lin](#)

There, through the car window. The sky a brocade of shimmering dark
velvet. I am nothing more than a moment here. Just today,

I ate haibang for the first time in years, the shelled flesh
soft and mushier than I remembered, my molars sinking
right through. I swallowed anyway. It didn't taste
like the ocean anymore. Instead, my father's scarred hands, wielding
kitchen blade, sawing away at the mollusks' mouths to split
open their bodies like a surgeon at the operating table.
I have never memorized the map of stars, never been taught how
to read them. I watched the disassembled shellfish meat swirl
in the clear container, limp before the fire. Here, on the ride
home, I wonder if everyone believes they are permanent until they
become witness to another death, if someone out there is rolling
down the window to get closer to the stars only to realize
there is no proximity to immortality. Tonight the moon is a
slip of gold hooked into the dark. A beautified reflection of

what I've stomached. I know I will get lost up there after my last breath.

My hands tremble in the safety of my lap; it must be the cold.

"all things oriental" by Vicki Lin

on a gold-washed morning, my mother tells me about the
pearl & how it is torn from the flesh of the oyster's
gaping mouth. yellow run through with red, an arrow, a soundless scream.
& what can be done with this hurt but carried around,
like an extra organ, a third lung?
she prays for a spoon in her mouth & all she gets is a knife
in the form of language, the syllables of this land cutting her mouth open.
she has been holding her breath for so long now
& i wonder if water remembers the shape of everything it touches.
if it remembers her skeletal hands, veins and sinew, forever reaching for
something *better*. this dawn-eroded land is just another promise
waiting to snap between her fingers. dust and splinters, nothing more.
but the end line is this: i am trying so hard not to become
another body beneath your blade, another life hollowed of varnish.

"And the Angels Were Humans Braced for the Fall" by Shilo Niziolek

We moved from the desert to a town on the side of a hill,
pinned in by the Columbia & Youngs Bay rivers, ocean ahead—
I thought it was a kingdom, thought I'd found heaven,
or something like it, but after I'd met him, the boy whom
I worshipped in all the unholy ways, knees in the mud,

& after rain poured so hard part of the hill slunk off its own side, & the black tar road tremulous, shifted, cracked and bruised itself, and we walked it in the dark of night, nothing about that ungodly hill making sense, the river always sparkling out ahead while on land the angels swarmed above their own not-yet-built graves on muddy land, & later when a storm ripped windows out of storefronts, smashed glass, trees, & left power lines whipping on the ground, & when I hid from him in a ditch, only to be found and consoled, satiated by my own hunger, that diabolical force which still haunts me now as I sleep, I discovered what someone must have known: that all heavenly kingdoms must crumble under the weight of greed; that greed is how we learned to love against trees, bare skin against soft lichen, in the crush of my back seat, on holy nights, wind thrashing through trees and the north star twinkling in our eyes.

“Watching the End from a Window” by Andrew Walker

Streetlights pop on like gunshots
& I try not to think of the children
who play underneath—cheap
shoes scuffed against uncaring
blacktop, lungs filled with an air
that does not want them but I do
watch the parents glancing over
their phones in concern & wonder
if it is fair to paint anyone
in my selfish red when the sky is only
smoke & we are all becoming
ocean.

My love calls
& we do not speak of the heat that kills
the future like a cop but of popcorn
& watercolors & children in shoes
more beautiful than ours. The call ends
& a chorus of what I hope are fireworks
jolts car alarms awake & they weep
until morning under soft, yellow lights.

“Dear Logan,” by Keagan Wheat

Portsmouth never had
many kids when I needed
to learn how to play games.
Those kids wouldn't recognize
the immaculate transition my body
suffered through. I don't think we
are still friends. I have fewer curves
like the intimidating *modern*
house, squared and barren.
Caeneus should have been enough
to lift logs or escape aspiration.

The cherry mo-ped
circled the block twice
before leaving, and I still
was hurt by your anger
over my body.

Poet Biographies

Eniola Abdulroqeeb Arówólò (he/him/his) is a Nigerian emerging writer, *frontier V* and an undergrad of Mass Communication. He is passionate about inequality, politics, domestic violence, and child rights. His works have appeared or forthcoming in *Brittle Paper*, *Rough Cut Press*, *Poetry Column ND*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *Afreecan Read*, *Ice Floe Press*, *Inverse Journal*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Lumiere Review*, *B'K magazine*, *Pepper Coast Lit*, *Perhappened magazine*, *In Parentheses Art*, *Rulerless Magazine*, and elsewhere. Find him on Twitter @eniola_abdulroq

Chloe England (she/her) is a Welsh poet and writer currently completing her degree in BA History at Exeter University. Alongside her studies, Chloe has been writing since her teens when poetry felt like the most pertinent outlet to adolescent dramatics. She writes about and is inspired by themes of home, identity, mental health, history, and the beauty of the everyday. You can find her other work in *ENIGMA Journal*, *Bloom Magazine*, and, upcoming, *The York Literary Review*. Additionally, you can follow her at @Ouijachloe on Instagram and @Onlinechloe on Twitter to keep up with her journey as a poet.

Dina Folgia (she/her) is an MFA candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University. She was an honorable mention for the 2021 Penrose Poetry Prize, and a 2020 AWP Intro Journals Project nominee. Her work appears (or will be appearing) in *Ninth Letter*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Defunkt Magazine*, and *Sidereal Magazine*. She is a poetry editor for *Storm Cellar*. Follow her writing journey on Twitter: @dinafolgia

Cristina Lai (she/her/hers) is a writer from New York. Her work has been published by Broken Sleep Books and in *Honey Literary*.

Sandra Lin 林诺晨 (she/her) is a Chinese American born in Manhattan, New York who currently attends Bell High School in Florida. She is a Scholastic Awards National Gold Medalist, national winner of JUST POETRY!!!, the first-place winner for the 2021 Polyphony Lit Fall Contest and the 2022 Nancy Thorp Poetry Contest, as well as a finalist for *Lumiere Review's* 2022 Prose Contest. Sandra is working on "The Heima Project," a platform that aims to empower marginalized voices in literature. To be a part of this project, contact her on Instagram and Wattpad @sandranuochen or her website <https://sandranuochen.carrd.co>

Vicki Lin (she/her) is an aspiring Chinese American poet and writer born in New York. She currently lives in Florida and is a junior at Bell High School. She enjoys drinking tea and having educational conversations, when she's not reading and writing. Vicki has won various Keys from Scholastics Art and Writing, and looks forward to expanding her horizons even more.

Shilo Niziolek's (she/her) cnf manuscript, *Fever*, was first runner-up in Red Hen Press's Quill Prose Prize and a finalist in Zone 3 Press's 2021 CNF Award. Her work has appeared in *[PANK]*, *Juked*, *Entropy*, *HerStry*, among others, and is forthcoming in the CLR, Gingerbread House and Pork Belly Press's zine: *Love Me, Love My Belly*. Shilo holds an MFA from New England College and is Associate Faculty at Clackamas Community College.

Andrew Walker (he/him/his) is a writer currently living in Denver, Colorado. He reads poetry for *No Contact* and has work published in or forthcoming from *Pidgeonholes*, *HAD*, *Waxing & Waning*, *Crack the Spine*, *Eckleburg* and elsewhere. You can find more of him on his website at druwalker.com and you can find most of him on Twitter @druwalker94.

Keagan Wheat (he/they) writes poetry on FTM identity and congenital heart disease. His work appears in *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *The Acentos Review*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, and more. Check out his interviews with Brooklyn Poets and *Poets and Muses*. Living in Houston, he enjoys collecting odd dinosaur facts and listening to many podcasts. Find them @kwheat09 on Twitter and Instagram.

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