

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE #43 JULY 2022: "RELIC"

Welcome to Issue 43, "Relic," in which our contributing poets consider the reach of the past on the present.

Issue 43 includes work by Michael Buebe, Toby Grossman, Pamilerin Jacob, Fiona Jin (this month's featured poet), Elizabeth Joy Levinson, Kalyn Livernois, Andrew Sinclair, L.A. Sklba, Ankh Spice, Meghan Sterling, Hilary Tam, and Jane Zwart. Please view The Gallery below!

Featured Artist—Melody Serra

Melody's passion is teaching and empowering others by sharing what she has learned. She started an arts and crafts program at a children's hospital and also taught at San Quentin State Prison. Melody hopes to inspire youth to explore and expand their creativity through web development, writing, and art.

Poetry Gallery

"Odie" by Michael Buebe

sad-jubilee / summer
reading — a kiosk
stocked with daydreams

*it certainly is weird
to write for you / like this /*

but the /

dog-eared pages — coffee

rings / we played
like naked sleepers
over each lyric

how these / dogs / birds
clouds / in separate purple
kisses pass in fluid
like spit —

my ear it
connects to
my heart

each
the other's
lynchpin

[“I Would Like to Fast for Three Months” by Toby Grossman](#)

**C.W. Eating disorder references*

After Devin Devine

But only so fruit tastes better. I would like to eat just strawberries for the lifetime of a myth. I would like to be wounded enough to heal. I would like to take the safety off this shotgun grief. I would like to remember. I would like to forget. I would like to be five again. I would like to be a duck. Last night I dreamt I drowned. I would like to be dead. I would like to come back to life. I would like a god that doesn't glorify obedience. I would like a god. I would like to stitch every word that refused to leave the bomb shelter of my mouth. This is how we survive. I would like to build a house with the wood of my burning shame. I would like to greet starving by her first name, *helium*. I would like to heave this guilt into the trunk of a car with no brakes. I would like the reluctant prayer of my full belly to be less worship and more faith. Somewhere, *idol* is not another way of saying *body*. I would like the midwife of regret to stop birthing me descendants. I would like a holy man to curse me with an everwonder exile. I would like to go home. Will you

show me to a door that welcomes wraiths? I would like to forgive the bee for the sting in our honey. I would like to know why god insisted on the ignorance of my ancestors. I would like the fire of my truth to be a dragon. The way it always breathes even though it's imaginary. I would like to be hungry. I would like a paradise bloated with six hundred and twenty species of berry. I would like to feast on want until I am finally emptier than grace.

“[The Second Contemplation]” by Pamilerin Jacob

—*from Contemplations on the Beloved*

I do not think I will be great.
This humbles me — the idea
that my life is destined
to bear, always, the scent of dust.

The assurance, I suspect, is rooted
in desire — a deep seated aversion
to spotlights, a multiplying distaste
festering within.

Better to say then, I do not want
to be great, merely heard.

Not that obscurity gladdens me,
rather, it seeks possession
of my body, the way fingers
lay claim to gloves.

I doubt you would want this too—
to be the nail in furniture, unseen
[though necessary]. You have always
considered yourself loaded
with a radiant future.

A tomorrow with enough decibels
to engulf the world.

Said once of Peter, *from his body
were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs
or aprons, and the diseases departed
from them.* You, origin of everything

beautiful. In our story,
I am each handkerchief
racing from all corners of Israel,
to reach you.

“Sign for the model tanks at Cantigny Park warns of slippery surfaces” by Fiona Jin, July’s
Featured Poet

Sign for the model tanks at Cantigny Park warns of slippery surfaces because little boys who would’ve been unbodied in 1918 now monkey bar from machine gun barrels. In botanic garden sun, killing machines dormant under camouflage green paint remind me of the rubbery swing chain coatings that bombed sticky tween fingers into callouses three summers ago. I’m peeling the scab-like bark from a tree when someone says: “daddy, it [the unaliving part] is as long as I am.” Boy smiling Mentos-white teeth is measuring how much doughboy still roars with blood, ready to grenade itself. He is moistening palms against a painted skull and crossbones. The bark hacks off and cleaves open to a dried, dusty red as he explodes into Coke-colored mulch chips, and I imagine his elegy: died for his country, with sweaty hands that couldn’t hold on.

Fiona’s Commentary on “Sign for the model tanks at Cantigny Park warns of slippery surfaces”:

People have called me the “human embodiment of poetry,” and that’s not necessarily a compliment. For better and for worse, writing is not only my profession but my life: I see infinite meaning in every moment, make fever from consciousness. The school year had ended unusually early, in May, and soon after I visited what I thought was a botanical garden. It was, but amongst flowers and fountains I also found hordes of toddlers swarming over models of WWI-era tanks—coated with protective green paint, bolted to the ground, with plaques listing fun facts and warning about slippery surfaces—as if the park had *anticipated* that children would play violence like a toy. As if violence could ever *be* a toy. As if the most concerning part of a toddler measuring their height with a machine gun was the possibility of falling into the mulch below. That night, I exiled myself and a smartphone to the backyard and typed the first draft of this prose poem in essentially one sitting as the sun fell. In this piece, I juxtaposed imagery of brutality and war with symbols of childlike innocence (playground equipment). I used a very steady, barren tone, leaving bare the horrific nature of these words for readers.

My poetry is ultimately born from such strong emotion. The ideas for my most successful poems almost always start with an ephemeral image representing some truth felt so intensely and *necessarily* yet so frustratingly unsaid that I *must* see it to tangibility, make fireworks from precious flame before it sputters back into the barely unknown. In “Sign for the model tanks at Cantigny Park warns of slippery surfaces,” I wanted every sentence to be a bomb, to make the world *feel* the eerie nature of dysfunctional childhood borne from the desensitization and romanticization of war and violence, this dangerous complacency.

EIC Christine Taylor's Commentary on "Sign for the model tanks at Cantigny Park warns of slippery surfaces":

What I loved about Fiona's poem most is the careful attention to detail and the deliberate selection of images that of course paint a picture of the scene, but more importantly develop the sad irony of the children's loss of innocence. Here, we are forced to confront this country's fascination with the relics of war and the romanticization of war-time eras.

["Ghost tour" by Elizabeth Joy Levinson](#)

You don't need to let the ghosts in
because they are already with us,
weaving the space between us closed.
This holiday we gather in shame,
maybe survivor's guilt or something else,
and we walk the cobblestone streets, night,
a cotton rat scurries from our approach,
an owl in flight won't make a sound.
We ask the ghosts for more time.
A streetlight flickers in response
and some young wannabe tries her best.
Her beads clanging against each other,
plastic gems against her dark pinstripes,
her lacy corset. Clothing for summoning spirits.
If it works, it's only because
there's so much loneliness in a city,
there's so much longing in a family,
and her voice is deep, it echoes.

I loop my cold, gloved fingers in my husband's,
but can't feel his warmth through the fabric,
only the pressure in his squeeze and then --
the release.

["None of Us" by Kalyn Livernois](#)

Into a bath, I take tea and a book I cannot forgive:
it killed the dog. Today, I saw fields of lupine. They grow

on racemes, colored like strawberry milk and grape chewing gum—
lush in the field on TV while I eat pizza in a place where the waitress

has a black eye her swept hair doesn't hide. I think I should feel
sorrow for her but I could be wrong and if I said something

I might embarrass us both. What could I offer anyway? My mind
is the mist obscuring the moon. My mind is the horse

fenced in a field. Why do we worry like we do about how long
the stray chin hair has been there; the tragedy of spinach stuck

in teeth; about backsides perhaps too small? None of us
are getting out of here alive. I saw the bruise. I saw the dog.

She died by machine. She sleeps by the side of the road.

“triptych for my everyday cycle” by Andrew Sinclair

triptych for my everyday cycle

I.
today, i am the greatest gift
under the tree, gold
-ribboned, & the soft
hand reaching to unlace it.

i am the humbuzz. the idea

that anything is within me
rings, cresting like a bird's
dawn-chorus as daylight seeps
onto shimmermorning snow.

II.
welcome to my everyday cycle.
please don't laugh, because sometimes
when i tell people about my everyday
cycle, they har-har & say, *hey!*
that's what i call it whenever i do
my laundry! & that makes me
want to list everything i can't do right
until they pity me enough to leave

me alone, because whenever *i* do
laundry, i'm left with a heap of hot dust
bunnies & no clothes. i'll try
to sweep up the dust, but the bunnies
bound from their birth-box &
i have to hunt them through my house.
half the time, i can't even catch them!

i peel grapeskins with my thumbnail,
lending bare fruits to halloween parties
just so i can say i've done something
for the world. i'm just another angel
for whom god forgot to give a goal.

geez. at night, i mumble good things
into each of my ears to help me sleep.
you're better than this, day-maker.
you're the humbuzz, the sun.

III.
i can fill the gaps in my teeth
with the sun on days like these.
when i smile, it's blinding, & when i sour
myself, the world falls into a new dark

age. i know everyone
hates it when i'm charged
with the light—too volatile,
they say—but i deserve it

more than any of them. it's *me*
versus the world, & *i'm* winning.
i know where i'm going!
the others can follow me or stumble
around & bump in the night.

god, i'm so warm, i'm dazzling!
the future seems bright—just look
at me!—& i am the sun.

“We are alive” by L.A. Sklba

Do you ever wonder if we have lessons to learn
about how we are cells floating together
tight enough to make us a whole,
that this is true of doors too
made solid by the bonding together,
still in motion yet held so tight.
If our cells and theirs happened to align just so
would the door not suddenly open,
not on a hinge, but how space makes room for space,
the passing of particles across time,
two solids suddenly mingle,
and move on.

“Put down the knife” by Ankh Spice

Morning finds us beached. In its socket we find the fishing line, lead sinker swinging
a droplet of shadow. No hook. Snarled on the rocks, too far out too far gone
to ever get free. I will think of it each time you know my reach: *love I think
you're getting too tired to swim*. I'm not so sure you knew when we began
to fall how equal we'd tide up for mercy. We swing back and forth. A kid threads weight
through the eye of a tyre—instinct, experiment, move just so, it flies the view
from mussel to shark, pink to blue. Your fingers, minnowing safe
into my wave, my too-much-for-a-man. Strappy kelp, messy growth and *I love that we still
hold hands* it means when we walk four arms describe a pendulum, the arc never planned
before the tangle. I've learned there are things that for all their heavy never sink us—
just dangle, gods-know-just-how-long. What incidentally tender purpose, this wild-invisible
connection of distant points. A couple of horizon islands tick long together, mapped spit-
to-spit on a secret continuum, and all that appreciates the miracle of their join is here;
cunning smile of curved earth, unhooked bait in a drip of shade, a lead weight abandoned
as easily replaced. And now, us. I mean if anyone ever shut up for a second
about what shapes are worth saving, which knot curves right to be tied with which,

sat their judge down quiet on this giddy rock: heard a line or two singing—so queered
by tension the sweep cuts keen through the noise: *oh come on then you. Hate like gravity,*

*it's never stopped trying to take us down. Saw not a problem awaiting a blade
but a familiar pulse, brazening away. Not the drag but the force that stops us all falling*

off the world; plumbs us in, tugs out the whoop at the top of the swing, sines
the wave. That lets anyone put down the knife, the lead. I mean the force that draws

one lost body, teardropped to ghost, now no burden at all, toward another. Call it
momentum, that we still found more, more than one way to say *stop just stop*

*this. You won't find the end to begin to untie us. We move in each other, just like you,
tangled and moved by all of this too. The weapon reflects your own face as you raise it.*

“Bargain” by Meghan Sterling

What deal was made as I was lifted from
my mother's body, praised by my father's song,
a boy, a boy, guessed at from the bloom of my
swollen genitals. In truth, I was half-lion, half-lamb,
birthed a shivering beast into the wild winter wind
as it stirred the long tendrils of bougainvillea.
Curtains of flowers parting. My mother had
refused medication. What deal was made to ensure
the name carried on, gift to the family, to the land,
the palm trees in a procession down A1A. Cue
the music. Cue the potential. The lipstick to apply.
The rouge. My mother had pleased them, had delivered
the goods. The women in a circle. The women cooing.
She will be a princess. She will be a doctor's wife.

“Domino effect” by Hilary Tam

Watch closely: My hands and your hands and our hands in their hands

All searching for something, the something not yet defined,

Grasping for each other in the fissures. Collapsing into each other's

Humanness. Inevitable collision. Cosmic Injury. The ground cradling

Our necks. Tired eyes still parallel to the sun. We trade blames
As currency, as if the explosion didn't hurl us from our feet
Because we lit the match. Over a plate of charred cookies, my mother tells me
All things happen for a reason. So I spend my years looking for bottles
To break, grandeur I can set into motion. I scream into my palms to see
How much violence starts at my fingertips. These days, I don't know
Whether to classify empowerment as how many glasses I can shatter
Or how many times I plummet into folded arms. A trust fall: Two players
But no one to catch our backs. Look, here we are facing each other
Like dominoes: Erected just so we can fall, our limbs pressed to dust carpets
As if surrender is something holy for us to worship. Behind and after us
We leave a trail of bodies, a curvature of gnashing teeth and quivering jawbone
Whose names we will never know. Hellos and goodbyes and how-are-yous
Cushioning each other like a platter of bones. And you know we'll leave unwritten
Poems in our wake because we were always one for dramatic exits. Maybe
It's as simple as that: A story left unwhispered, forget-me-nots carried away
By our exhales and before you know it we are afraid of beauty,
Flowers angled towards our necks like violet knives.

["I hold myself in readiness" by Jane Zwart](#)

to lurch, furious and afraid,
from the rooms
where my children are not.

I do not want to use the word
foreseen for what
I have seen: panic, preamble,

car keys ransacked from
the predictable
drawer, a sedan backed

over a curb, the house left
gaping. I don't
want to guess what curses

I'd call down on slow vans
or on toddlers
tugged from crosswalks.

And the curse of that other
son, whom gaming
didn't train to aim low enough—

I am afraid of every verb in it.

Once my son
called my fearsome hold

a deathgrip. He was not wrong.

Poet Biographies

Michael Buebe (he/him) is a poet and painter from Galesburg, Illinois. Author of "little spider cage (erotic velvet)" a microchapbook from Ghost City Press (summer 2022). He has work out & forthcoming in: *Common Ground Review's* Annual Poem Contest (honorable mention 2021), *TIMBER*, *Lover's Eye Press*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Jenny*, *Masque & Spectacle*, and *Prometheus Dreaming*. You may find him and all his links through <https://linktr.ee/Buebe>.

Toby Grossman (she/her) is a poet exploring the inherent paradoxes in our absurd existence. She wrestles with scale differences between the smallness of our blue dot home and the largeness of human grief. She often writes through the lens of her experiences with mental illness and alienation.

Pamilerin Jacob (he/him) is a poet & editor whose poems have appeared in *Barren Magazine*, *Agbowó*, *IceFloe Press*, *Palette*, *The Rumpus* & elsewhere. He is the curator of PoetryColumn-NND, a poetry column in *Nigerian NewsDirect*, a national newspaper.

Fiona Jin (she/her/hers) is a writer and artist in the Chicago Metropolitan Area. She lives for a sky one day less so on fire. You can find her at @fionajin07 on Twitter.

Elizabeth Joy Levinson (she/her/hers), a high school teacher in Chicago, has an MFA in Poetry from Pacific University and an MAT in Biology from Miami University. Her work has been published in *Whale Road Review*, *FEED*, *SWWIM*, *Anti-heroin Chic*, and others. She is the author of two chapbooks: *As Wild Animals* (Dancing Girl Press) and *Running Aground* (Finishing Line Press). Her first full length collection, *Uncomfortable Ecologies*, will be published in the fall of 2023 (Unsolicited Press). Find her on Instagram: @ejoylevinson, Twitter: @ejoylev, and online ejoylevinson.wordpress.com

Kalyn Livernois (she/her) is an MFA student at New England College. She lives in the NC mountains where she moonlights as an oyster shucker in training. She is a prose editor at *Cobra Milk* and the managing editor of *Variant Literature's* journal. Her work has most recently appeared in *Door=Jar*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. You can find her on Twitter @kalynroseanne.

Andrew Sinclair (he/they) is an eighteen-year-old writer. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Paper Crane Journal*, *Fish Barrel Review*, and *brave voices magazine*, and his poetry has been recognized by the annual Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. You can find him at @andrews_writing on both Twitter and Instagram.

L.A. Sklba (she/her) is a poet and journalist currently writing and working from Colorado. You can read more of her work in *EcoTheo Review* and *Neutral Spaces*. Find her on both Twitter and Instagram @lasklba and on her website: lasklba.com

Ankh Spice is a queer, sea-obsessed poet from Aotearoa New Zealand. His poetry is widely published, eight times nominated for Pushcart Prize/Best of the Net, and was joint winner of The Poetry Archive's WorldView2020 competition. He co-edits at Ice Floe Press and is a poetry contributing editor at *Barren Magazine*. Ankh's debut poetry collection, *The Water Engine* (2021) is available from Femme Salvé Press. Find him on the web: ankhspice-seagoatscreamspoetry.com, on Twitter: @SeaGoatScreams, and on Facebook: AnkhSpiceSeaGoatScreamsPoetry

Meghan Sterling's work is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Rhino Poetry*, *Nelle*, *Colorado Review*, *Poetry South*, and many others, and has been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes. Her debut poetry collection, *These Few Seeds* (Terrapin Books), came out in 2021, and was a

Finalist for the Eric Hoffer Grand Prize in Poetry. Her chapbook, *Self-Portrait with Ghosts of the Diaspora* (Harbor Editions) her collection, *Comfort the Mourners* (Everybody Press), and her collection, *View from a Borrowed Field*, which won Lily Poetry Review's Paul Nemser Book Prize, are forthcoming in 2023. Read her work at meghansterling.com.

Hilary Tam (she/her) is a student and sandwich enthusiast from Hong Kong. Her work appears in *Wine Cellar Press*, *The Lumiere Review*, *Fahmidan Journal*, *Celestite Poetry* and more. She can be found playing duotrigordle at ungodly hours or taking long walks. She is on Twitter @hiilarytam.

Jane Zwart teaches at Calvin University, where she also co-directs the Calvin Center for Faith & Writing. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *HAD*, *Threepenny Review*, and *TriQuarterly*, as well as other journals and magazines.

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