

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE #44 AUGUST 2022: "MELANCHOLIA"

Welcome to Issue 44 "Melancholia," in which our poets explore the depths of emotional stores.

Issue 44 includes work by Olayioye Paul Bamidele, Chris Blexrud, Lilia Marie Ellis, Jennessa Hester, Luke Johnson (this month's featured poet), Robin Kinzer, oleg pupovac, Chloe Shannon Wong, and Senna Xiang. Please view The Gallery below!

Featured Artist—Laura Minning

Laura Minning began writing creatively at the tender age of nine. Her first poem was published by her Alma-matter in 1989, and her second received an Editor's Choice Award by the National Library of Poetry in 1993. Laura's work has been featured both in hard copy and on-line, via publications like *Literature Today*, *Amulet*, and *Stanzaic Stylings*.

Poetry Gallery

"A rendition to Abiku, when harmattan scarified our skins" by Olayioye Paul Bamidele

there's a cry inside: first joy; then death
morphing the green leaf to yellow & swirl. outside

there's breeze. outside, there's wheeze
of pain & ferric chloride agony.

dear Abiku, i see your star(dom)
how it trails with the mockingbirds to scorn
our last hope. how the owls

carrying your voice, say: *arise, there's no antidote
to the plague of grief.*

i wake up this morning & your face stride

past like a firefly in my eyes.
i know i have anew wedge to lift - pain,
something uneasy to bypass.

outside, the family sits again to decide
how the placenta will not regrow in the
woman's womb, to birth Abiku again.
& i know this method is mouth: once
the words windfall, they will dried like
spittle.

outside, the breeze is blowing again.
outside, the walls & skins are being
scarified from the breath of Abiku.

**Abiku: this means stillborn in the western Yoruba of Nigeria, Africa.*

“To Light” by Chris Blehrud

I kiss you at the beginning of this
poem for I cannot wait till its end

I still haven't learned not to rush
even the middle part of things

like the day we spent at the park
and you would not let me sleep

all that sun and you kept me under
it—beside you, half-awake

and I felt like a bug in a lamp, so close
to a light I could never imagine leaving

“the boys we pray for twice at night” by Jennessa Hester

girls like us know

that you can recognize a boot
by feeling for the grooves

on your boyfriend's neck

that *glor-uh! glor-uh!* sounds no different
when a bullet screams it into the red
silence of the supper time table

that in this place
the quick can learn but one thing from the dead:
how to die like a *re-yuhl* man

little & lonely
in a blaze of

mourning

“little sorrows” by Lilia Marie Ellis

1.

dreary leaves; they died before their beauty; like dewdropped desire they've settled in
their crevices; molding; human, in how short they fall of being human;
even now, the willow; how much you is in it; love's lusters, still embering warm; giving
their all, in vain, to be;
as i walk, backwards; heaved heartfirst toward my longings;

2.

the pretty plaster future comes crashing into now; pieces scatter like dreams exposed to
light; our brittle sharp promises, how recklessly we bear them; these are our lives, the
consequences we've wrought; this is the price of motion; want, a relentless carrying;
the grace i nearly drowned in, smooth and smothering flush against me; love, quietly
cataclysmic; grief and elation, kaleidoscoped; joy sealing joy's loss; like autumn's last birds,
unreturning;
that hurt is inevitable does nothing to numb it; besides, i want to feel;

3.

in the brisk glow of your falling arms i realized love is not enough; tragedy; sunward
turmoil; our unbridgable, quaking selves; love is not enough; cool wind, the years it nourished,
wilting; love must have gone somewhere; but where; in the brisk glow of your falling arms; love
is not enough, i realized; except i am lost, and the opposite of lostness is you;

4.

sieving; little sorrows leaking out like starry drops of God;
(how i love you; sweetdaggering memories, in their early unfurling; how i fear the day i'll
stop missing you; how i rehearse this heartbreak; always; as if it were new)
waist-deep in winter's firstfruits, here, the silent Earth; little by little, giving way;

5.

the tender dark; snow, embrace; i weep, and night weeps beside me; i close my eyes;
gently hopeful;
i pray tomorrow i will only sting with love;

Luke Johnson, August's Featured Poet

"On the 1st anniversary of my father's death, I"

sit with my uncle in the half-dark watching

I Love Lucy

and laugh at how

my uncle sucks a cigarillo slow enough

the smoke ringlets

his nostrils

and rises

so the fan which slices them

is suddenly holy

and the flannel coat clutched with father's sweat holy

and the boots

he wore holy

and the abalone ashtray holy

and the hog he shot from fifty yards

and hung on the far wall holy

the warbling lyrics

of night herons holy

I press the smoke slow in my palm and pant

quietly holy

cod on the stovetop: sizzling:

ii.

cod on the stovetop: cold
and my uncle out with a bottle of boons
in his lap
and an old mutt licking the wound
on his heel.

I am tempted by the oven flame, the gas
and all its hissing,
how a wolf spider huffs
when caught in a snare
and will eat itself alive. I've swallowed the weather

and wear black to mimic sleeted streets
the spray from passing tires,
but sometimes, warm,
on a day in August,
when the wind
has fucked the white acacia
and wild onions finger
the fields, I
am asked again if what's in me is holy
if a crater is holy

if the weather shift holy.

And the song
of my mouth

is unmoored.

Luke's Commentary on "On the 1st anniversary of my father's death, I":

Stay with me here: Recently I re-watched the emotionally brilliant movie *Monster's Ball* with Billy Bob Thornton and Halle Berry. In it, there is the iconic line from Berry: "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." And whew, this time that line stuck in my craw. It pierced me in such a truthful place, I felt the tectonics of my heart and body move. You see, for 39 of my 40 years I was bound by a daddy-wound so deep, it affected every area of my life: my family, my wife, my kids, my job, my relationship to the world, myself. It was a black vacuum, a whirlpool, by which the fragments of myself were swallowed. I was barely able to stay above water. I was split. Divided. Like a lion with a limp. Lost. Forgive me. I know I'm being a little emotional. So I'll land the plane here: my first book *Quiver*, due out fall of 2023 with Texas Review Press, is a book of exorcism and reckoning. It names the ghosts so the ghosts can move on. It is "sick and tired of being sick and tired." When my dad lay dying in a hospital bed, a stroke leaving him in a near vegetative state, I finally got to touch his face and hands. Kiss his cheek. Tell him all the things. I got to reconcile in such a holy way my wound was closed. That February day in 2021 exchanged my daddy's life for my healing. Because of that I now miss him the way a boy should. This isn't glorifying him. He was a broken, crap dad who didn't know how to love. But he left me with so many wonderful things: my love of nature, food, my laugh. And so yes, grief is layered. It's filled with seasons. But it's good. "On the 1st anniversary of my father's death" is a poem in my next project. It signifies the sequel to *Quiver*. This new project is developing into a book of grief and praise, light melancholia. The line movement in this poem is meant to represent grief's dance. And I'm glad it seems to have worked.

Assistant Editor Dia Roth's Commentary on "On the 1st anniversary of my father's death, I":

What first struck me about Luke Johnson's "On the 1st anniversary of my father's death, I" was its treatment of time as it relates to the traces of our grief. Johnson deftly slows us down such that "the fan which slices [smoke rings] / is suddenly / holy." The poem continues to show us such holiness in the father's objects, all frozen in time—a flannel coat "still clutched with sweat," worn boots, a prize hog hung on the wall. We're trapped, with the poem's speaker, in a room of grief, smoke hanging thick and still in the air.

But as the poem moves into its second section, time accelerates—as so often happens in the wake of loss. The cod that was moments ago sizzling on the stovetop is now cold, the uncle who was blowing smoke rings is asleep in his chair. In the poem's newfound expanse, where "the wind has fucked the white acacia / and wild onions finger / the fields," the speaker asks us to reconsider holiness, this time wondering if "what's in [him] is / holy."

“Dreaming of Lilacs” by Robin Kinzer

Maybe there’s a part of me that thought
it would be easier to divide up books, dresses,
furniture, even my three fuzzy felines. That it
might be simpler to go ahead and go this time.

Maybe I’ve spent my entire adult life waiting
for this— sandbagged and sweating, burn scars
scattered across my abdomen, so often sick,
so often in too much pain to stand. To even sit.

Maybe I function as bear trap, ready to snap
myself at the knees. Pain no longer bloodless.
Maybe when I heard 45% fatality in five years,
a part of me was ready to lay down and let go.

Maybe I passed the field of wild lilacs again last
night, pulled my ancient blue Subaru over to the side
of the road, closed my eyes, and imagined the petals
closing, soft and satin, over my entire body.

Maybe I’ve stopped showering. I’ve stopped
brushing my teeth. I’m afraid to leave the house,
check the locks ten times a day. Maybe it took just
a few months of recurrence to backslide so far

that it’s hard to remember the self I spent years
reclaiming. I built a life away from the feral
abdominal pain, the choking nausea, the inability
to eat. Still, here we are, facing down the worst

odds of this forty-one year history of illness after
illness. A part of me is just tired of standing
in pharmacy lines, of recycling slim orange bottles,
of trying twice as hard to do half as much.

A part of me is just done, has been done
for a long time now. Is ready to lie down in
the field of lilacs. To wrap the purple petals across
my powder-pale skin, and finally get some sleep.

“it helps me sleep when i remember” by oleg pupovac

it helps me sleep when i remember
my mother guiding my hand to the oven
holding some rosemary wrapped in twine
telling me to repeat a prayer after her, slowly
i don't remember the prayer
but i remember it included my uncles
on the night before christmas
me, my mother and an oven in the middle of a desert
it helps me remember what her chest smelled like
and how her dyed blonde hair thinned at the edge
i wish i did not forget the prayer, what i repeated
when the bedouins went about their business
preparing for the cold night, working in the scorching heat
i wonder if they thought then about ahura mazda
about the priests who have washed up on their shores
i don't think so, i think they only knew eternity and coffee
and on occasion trampled an empire before theirs
a carcass of a learned leviathan hunched out of the sand
cautioning the future like some stern father
like some mother whose suspicion was ritualised
whose superstition was surpassed only by tradition
i wish i had the presence of mind to say
mother write down this prayer, i may need it at thirty three
it may help me sleep to pray for my uncles in the desert
and for their wide fingers and blind blue eyes
if that mother, the one bent over the eight year old, could
imagine a fire from an oven and a parish in the desert
then i can imagine how my wife's waters billow
and how the back of her neck sees no sun, only closed eyes

“Ten Million COVID Cases as Ocean Resuscitation” by Chloe Shannon Wong

Golden Shovel after Mother Goose's "Ring around the rosie"

You put diamonds on to go swimming tonight, and what I see is a different ring—
an old, soldered plastic one, a second, deliberate mouth, a mask looped around
all the roads and rivers that keep your body together. You are golden now, but the
breaths tucked between your wheezing teeth were once far less than rosy,
and I remember clutching your fingers between those citrus-stained coughs. My pocket
has held ten million sickbeds. Yours was white, water-logged, jammed full

with prayers and shark teeth. Doctors sunk you into the ocean and told me to think of better things—the Sierra-glow that I grew up on, a fledgling quail’s birth song, the posy flower you put inside my redwood bassinet. They said, this woman will soon be ashes—but I answered, this woman’s name is California; starry seaside; she accepts no ashes today. From that, your lungs heard *surf* and *survival*. Between echoes, we watched the gray whales beach you back to shore, and between breaths, I milked all the mussels that followed. Now see the ocean two years later, half-in half-out of its falling—salt still sits between your lips, but it cannot drown our grotto hearts down.

“Warranted” by Senna Xiang

On the afternoon when the officer says you’ve been arrested,
you flicked your cigarette into the hole in your mother’s front porch.

A house pastelled with rot as it tries to forget the fights within its walls.
Four counts of shoplifting and a nine-hundred dollar fine. I soliloquize,

you serenade, but somehow
there’s a difference in the meaning.

Inside, the supermarket is sardined with bottles promising
love, oblivion, forgiveness, forgetfulness. Each glass vessel

a coffin. I come home in the mornings to you scissoring
shards out of the space between your blood vessels. Outside,

the picket fence is peeling. The neighbors punctuate our polygraph,
every tip a trial too criminal to face. Lying is a sin, you

tell me. Tell me you love me. Tell me you’re sorry. Tell me
you mean it. Testimony for the damned. You say that prayer

doesn’t always mean asking for things. Together, we sit on the
splintered pew where you learned your mother passed away.

Alone, I look straight into the candlelight that cauterizes the cross.
If not God, then what? If not prayer, then a dream. First count. I loved

God for you and believed it when you said
I was an angel sent to save you. From what?

Alone, I dream that we live somewhere where a year is not a cul-de-sac

and our evenings in the kitchen don't explode like perennials. What I mean is

the monotony of the cycle. Together, we walk out of the church.

Die martyrs in the afterbirth of holy water. I've lied about you

to my mother and yours. Twice I've stood on your mother's front porch
barefoot. Twice I've watched you turn your back on her as your footsteps

punch the grass. I skirt the void in the wood and kneel by the flatness in the floor.
In the distance, those saintly singing police sirens. I push my hands

into those itchy silhouettes, yours to leave and mine to thief. Second count.
Every evening, I find you in the kitchen. Month-old petunias melt off the blood

on your hands. Let's call it quits after three months. Waiting
on better days that won't come. Better days were billboards we

passed on the road trip we thought would make us closer. I ask you
to call me and you do because you fell in love with me more that day.

K-pop on the radio blaring manufactured love. I sit next to the
landline whose wires burn a bigger hole in the porch. I was still

in denial that day. All my words clogged the scummy pipes of my throat.
My words, a third wealth you scammed through the line. Your words, penniless

in the face of my opulence. The officer's search warrant, yellow and crinkled
at the edges. Like this was a misdemeanor in the making. I still love you

so lividly. I still have so much to say. I won't. I hold this pretense
like a handbasket. Stuff it full of falsely inviting housewarming gifts.

I say goodbye to you one last time on the porch steps. The officer
has already opened the back door. I look down into the wooden hole,

no surprise that it's already been filled.
I think the space will be good for both of us.

The last count: the future you never meant to fulfill. Evening finds me
with the porch light oscillating like a polygraph. Sorry swings into

I love you swings into—

Poet Biographies

Olayioye Paul Bamidele, also called Shakespeare, is a writer and a student of mass communication. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Spillwords*, *Lunaris*, *Artlounge*, *Afreecan*, *Ninshar Art*, *Ice Floe*, *Kreative Diadem*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Synchronized Chaos Mag*, *Threposs*, and elsewhere. You can find him on Facebook @paulolayioye, Instagram @olayioyepaulbamidele, Twitter @olayioye_Paul, and WhatsApp @ 08162573107

Chris Blexrud (he/him) is a librarian and writer living in Albuquerque. Though he doesn't know how long that will be true: the writer part, or the Albuquerque part, or the living part.

Lilia Marie Ellis (they/she) is a trans poet. Their chapbook *Love and Endless Love* was published by giallo. Follow them on Twitter/Instagram @LiliaMarieEllis!

Jennessa Hester (she/her) is a transgender artist and scholar working out of Lubbock, Texas. She serves as a managing editor for the *Iron Horse Literary Review* and has previously worked in a variety of programs designed to bring literature, poetry, and international cinema to local communities. You can find her on Twitter @cherrypoppunk.

Luke Johnson's poems can be found at *Kenyon Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Florida Review*, *Frontier*, *Cortland Review*, *Nimrod* and elsewhere. His manuscript in progress was recently named a finalist for the Jake Adam York Prize, The Levis through Four Way Press, The Vassar Miller Award and is forthcoming fall of 2023 from Texas Review Press.
Website: lukethepoet.com Twitter: @Lukesrant

Robin Kinzer is a queer, disabled poet and sometimes memoirist. She was once a communist beaver in a PBS documentary. She previously studied psychology and poetry at Sarah Lawrence and Goucher Colleges and is now an MFA candidate at University of Baltimore. Robin has poems recently published or shortly forthcoming in *Little Patuxent Review*, *Wrongdoing Magazine*, *Gutslut Press*, *Fifth Wheel Press*, *Corporeal Lit*, *Defunkt Magazine*, and others. She loves glitter, Ferris wheels, and waterfalls. She also loves radical kindness, vintage fashion, and carnivals. She can be found on Twitter at @RobinAKinzer

oleg pupovac (he/him) is a serbian artist. he is currently working on a contemporary performance and his first collection of poems entitled *i am writing to know your name*. oleg is based out of his village raštević in croatia where he spends his time dreaming of winter, writing in his airconditioned room and imagining himself in all the rocks, cement and olive trees. you can find him on ig @dos_peas twitter @olegpupovac and dospeas.com

Chloe Shannon Wong (she/her) is a rising high school junior from Arcadia, California. Her writing has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers and the *Los Angeles Times High School Insider*. She is an alumna of the Iowa Young Writers Studio and the Kenyon

Young Writers Workshop and is also a California Arts Scholar. She loves bingeing Netflix and spending time with Rusty and Lily (her pet cats).

Senna Xiang (she/her) is a teen writer. Her work has been published in *Gasher Journal*, *Peach Magazine*, *Superfroot Magazine*, and other lovely places. Her writing has also been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and the Adroit Prizes.

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