

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE #47 NOVEMBER 2022: "GHOST"

Welcome to Issue 47, "Ghost," in which our contributing poets explore that which haunts.

Issue 47 includes work by Cat S. Chen, Chloé Derain, Amorak Huey, Alison Lubar, Heather Qin (this month's featured poet), Matthew Weddig, Dare Williams, Ziyi Yan/闫梓祎, and Emma Zhang. Please view The Gallery below!

Featured Artist—Bill Wolak

Bill Wolak is a poet, collage artist, and photographer who has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, and *Barfly Poetry Magazine*. In addition, his collages and photographs have appeared recently in the 2022 Rochester Erotic Arts Festival, the 2020 International Festival of Erotic Arts (Chile), the 2020 Seattle Erotic Art Festival, the 2020 Dirty Show in Detroit, the 2018 Montreal Erotic Art Festival, and Naked in New Hope 2018. He was a featured artist in Best of Erotic Art (London, 2022).

Poetry Gallery

"The West Mall" by Cat S. Chen

An apartment on the third floor, overlooking the highway:

D.N.

Two children standing
two dots of color
listening to the growl
And I look at you,
until you run
seeing a ladder
and you climb.

among crisscrossing blades of dried grass,
against the pale sky, buildings, pavement,
of the hurtling cars in our backyard.
with tales of home and pet lions on your lips,
toward the chain fence, a dare in your eyes—
where they meant a wall—
The fury of the highway turns into a cheer.

This is a false memory,
you died.

but it was the strongest one in my mind when I learned that

K.S.

Now a real memory
in the early morning,
I don't like it
when we see a red light
we assume aliens,
certain that
parts of the world are
out of reach.

wedging ourselves behind the couch
on a sleepover my parents didn't understand.
but you convince me that this is what Canadians do,
in the building across the highway,
keep vigil until daybreak. I feel it—
four eyes are enough for truth and also that some
forever behind a barrier of hurtling cars

A.Z.

An adult memory
of an ashtray,
a souvenir I gave
to the balcony
and watch
like children
the smoke behind us.

from two towns over I superimpose here
black with golden flowers,
you years after I left, and immediately you go
with a cigarette, cover the flowers with ash. I join
the highway, cover my ears
who race the hurtling cars until we win, all

“dancing with ghosts” by Chloé Derain

window open. light pouring. bed sheets stained with nameless clouds. i hear the traffic, the garbage truck. my hair smells like the thousand hotel rooms i've painted with my hands. i get up. my body shakes. drank too much. eyelids heavy. thick tongue. feels like an ordinary morning. i'm throwing up ghosts. they're playing on the floor like wild children. searching for clothes. blue skin, blue oxygen, i hear you sing, i hear you, get off my knees & let me move. yes, like that, thank you. touching myself in the mirror. wondering what my blood looks like. dead flesh. i see you, dear. take my hand, please don't let it go. yes, like that, thank you. lackluster drawers. walls swaying. streetlamps running in. i think i'm going in circles. please remind me you're there. please don't let go.

“I Have Been Trying to Make Sense of Love Again” by Amorak Huey

after Vievee Francis

I thought to compare us to the weather
but rain never lasts.

I read somewhere
a cloud weighs millions of pounds —

no wonder, then,
the cloud eventually cannot hold.

We are always in such a hurry to find shelter.
I want to hold still
in the wet

long enough to take a picture —
a way to remember us that way

or a failsafe against the inevitable forgetting.
Perhaps I've missed the point.

Perhaps I was thinking of the moon.

"Inedible" by Alison Lubar

Suburban PA, 1991

When Ojisan horse-bites, turns his knuckles to teeth,
to catch my soft, pre-teen upper-thigh, Bonnema wields

a snappy plastic-bottomed slipper as aegis. We all have
matching white bunny ones: her, my mother, and me.

Polyester wooly faces with a little pink triangle nose.
Barely space for toes. Mine are so brown next to them.

My mother warns, *Don't get too dark!* like I don't belong
this bronzed. *Phenotype is fate*— damns genetic destiny.

The world won't ever really change, so best to water
it down, best to dilute even if all that's left is mud.

Runoff from rinsing acrylic brushes. My mother buys me
a stone bracelet to ground, protect. The chakras are really

plastic-coated glass beads. They flake a rainbow, leave
milky translucence, lack any magic. But tiger's eye is real.

Brown, warm, striated, golden stone. I'd still prefer that
to the expected edibles: chocolate, rum, caramel, cinnamon.

Describing any part of a person that way implies that everything,
everyone melanated is consumable. The world is full of cannibals.

My mother and mother's mother would blanch me, keep
the almond eyes set in a marble face, unloved by sun. But Oji

instead let me darken like him. Even each pinch was a wish, to turn
softness to steel, something bitter and sharp and always ready to bite,

or at least break your teeth.

["Racing Into the Night" by Heather Qin, November's Featured Poet](#)

after Ayase

In my first memory, our new apartment still ached
with wet paint and you mistook beginnings
for endings. It was afternoon and you
were intoxicated. Your hair was slathered
lichen. I stand on the balcony, the one you gazed at. Before
we moved in, we were told the previous owner had
a sickly wife. A wife who flung herself, daylight
scissoring each broken bone. I shared two cocktails
with the ghosts of you I trick myself into seeing. You
claimed to speak their language. *Are you a ghost?*
You laughed, said *you wish*. Old notebooks, dead
birds speared with broken glass, eggshells drowned
in yolk— that's what you left. I always hated how you watched
the world through the window of a moving train,
far away. What do I cherish? Those times we stole
the lip gloss we could never afford from Hermes, chased
our vacations across the airport runway, shared

black coffee while you listened to me through
the wrong end of the playground
megaphone. On your birthday, you flew
off our fire escape, mistook recklessness
for courage, multiplying the suns until you knew
the shadow of death. *You are good.* I repeated it
until you nodded, having forgotten your name
while Mitski spun through hospital speakers, throat still
tight like a fist. I open the windows to air out
each promise you made. *How lucky,* living in a world
where another's yes is a means of survival. *Am I a good person
yet? I'm sorry I keep gorging myself on what
nobody wants to hear.* When October moved
in across the street, you dream three nights in a row
about dying in a train crash, windows and rails
shattering across the sky. Only this time, I tell you
to get off the train. It's cold outside, but let's walk instead.

Heather's Commentary on "Racing Into the Night":

In 2020, I first heard Yoasobi's "Racing into the Night," a deceptively upbeat song that shot to fame online despite its darker lyrics: they describe the speaker struggling to live with their partner who wishes to take her own life. I began writing the poem in the summer of 2022, conceived as a loose bundle of abstractions only a few lines long— I didn't know what I wanted to say or where I wanted to go with it. When I shared the piece in a workshop, I realized how much I was dancing around the topic. I never dared to start a difficult conversation about the importance of reaching out to others for fear the meanings were a few sizes too big, too heavy for the words. After months of revision, I realized I wanted the piece to be a response, an aftermath, and most importantly an alternative story, serving as a sort of 'memory capsule' for the 'she' that the speaker is trying to hold onto.

The original song depicted a romantic relationship between two characters trying to understand each other, with the partner's sentiment beginning to bleed into the speaker's. Yet here, the speaker *already* understands their partner's self-destructive tendencies and wants to help her as another human (and less so as a partner). Dead birds and eggshells, city trains and coffee— these details serve to capture the little mundane things that we take for granted, and they were the fragmented images I thought of before the poem's narrative was anchored. Loneliness was normalized under pandemic restrictions, and even romanticized for the belief that it allows people complete control over their lives. I wanted to explore a version of the story

where birthdays might not translate into happiness and trains don't always take us to our destinations, but the bonds between us serve as lifelines rather than telephone lines.

General Editor Belinda Munyeza's Commentary on "Racing Into the Night":

This poem starts out strong with lines and images that immediately awaken the senses. The first couple of lines plunge us right in the centre of the narrative. Then, Qin begins to layer image over image that brings us even closer to the world the speaker is reflecting on and painting a picture of. Using alliterations and sibilance, the poet makes it easy for us to glide through the piece like a dance. But slowly, the images become sharper, darker and the dense sibilance becomes almost insidious; seeming to foreshadow the tragedy to come in later parts of the poem. Furthermore, as the poem unfolds, we begin to feel the poignancy of grief as the poet employs rhetorical questions to explore the unanswered questions that remain after tragedy strikes. The poem's language continues to intensify towards the end; painting a devastating but gorgeous narrative that ultimately culminates in a slow emergence from the darkness. But still, elements of this darkness haunt the reader at the very end, making the poem linger beautifully.

["murderino lonelyhearts"](#) by Matthew Weddig

the film's forensic scientist has
quite a crush on the detective and is
quite a weirdo and

the other detectives are like oh
great she's here and
she runs up like HI KEKOA
IT'S A BAD ONE
love all over her face
like the blood all over the floor

he does not respond to her advances
it might be because he is not interested
but it might also be
because of the gruesome murder scene

one day you will meet
in a room without
a dismembered body/
one day may we all so much as meet
in a room without

a dismembered body/
and it will be appropriate to hit on him
a heart still inside its body
we ask for so little in this life

it is not the forensic scientist's story
she is a minor character with a hot coworker
kept apart by their traumatizing jobs
and her inability to read the room

["Settling Into My Wreckage Waves Crashing Behind Me" by Dare Williams](#)

I want my despair
to be perfect
but you've come
into the center of the floor
lights on your face.
I'm watching the jackets
of mine and a former lover.
I'm watching you dance
as if you know your body
and how it can move in public,
your muted smile.
The song that's playing
is not good, but you are good
and I am tonight's bruise
purpling in the corner.
The overwrought décor
of this place is camp; my life
a swirl of comets
threatening to dissolve me.
I want to spill into yours
delicately then stay
there swimming.
It's better that you don't
know we're tip toeing
to the grave
echoes of joy
flaming behind
us.

“moving/dream” by Ziyi Yan/闫梓祎

two things are unique to a home:
writers’ block and wetting the bed. in sleep

my adult teeth pushed each other
from my mouth like dominos. you held

me, a wrinkled fetus with long hair—
we can laugh at that. but really, you held

old jeans like a plea. my stomach bulged
from the fabric and i forgot why

we took turns apologizing.

whenever my sister wants to play
a board game, i say *i need*

to write. actually i scratch out
my hair and watch videos of celebrities

kissing in the next room. i crawl
to her bed when i know she’s crawled

to yours. in a false dawn you nestle
me to your stomach, so i feign deafness

as you open the curtains. 五分钟走, you
snap. in haste, i paw everything

out of my underwear drawer—

i never wrangled our knocker to choke
your screaming. i was sprawled

on the porch, wincing at how even wood

whined under me. the time you waste

in driving me has dribbled
down my chin, searching for taste. mom

we whittle this house
to a pyre. tonight

my mouth is dried raw and i'm sorry
i mocked you for this:

we've locked our keys in the new house.
your jeans in my closet are moving.

* “五分钟走” translates to, “we leave in five minutes.”

“resonance” by Emma Zhang

how everything is just one thing away from nothing. we walk past
dry creek on a sunday afternoon muttering *density, research, eclipse*, cranes erupting
like bean sprouts from city corners, triumphant with the time they will create.
cigarettes, back corners, mondays drawing staves by the pool deck. she says:
the first step to growing up is to hear the birds sing again, so i wait under the willow tree,
braiding my shoelaces like you taught me in fourth grade. and come nightfall,
she bangs the windows, rolling dough into some elongated triangle, *remember the carnivals?*
and i no longer call my grandparents but i fold my clothes like they taught me to,
a peninsula of straight lines with a dip. and they tell me *you have until i'm 80*
and i've never understood the use of wind chimes except to shine where it hurts the least,
quench the call of church bells and ragweed and yearning for jawbreakers. & i stayed,
i've always stayed. the creek is drying and our family friends are driving out of the same
ivy lined gates and nothing is just one thing soft still holding you.

Poet Biographies

Cat S. Chen (she/her) is an immigrant and non-profit immigration attorney. Her poems have appeared/are forthcoming in the *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Eye to the Telescope*, and *Samjoko Magazine*. She frequently puts into the world thoughts on immigrants' rights and community lawyering and not so frequently puts into the world art.

Chloé Derain (she/her) is a French political science student who loves literature & weird music. In her spare time, she is a pianist & a photographer, but above all, she is a word traveler:

poetry, all poetry, nothing but poetry. Converted to G. Apollinaire, A. Pizarnik & S. Plath, she strives to create a new kaleidoscopic language that acts like an intellectual electric chair. She greets you from Lyon! *Instagram: @catachtonie*

Amorak Huey is author of four books of poems including *Dad Jokes from Late in the Patriarchy* (Sundress Publications, 2021). Co-founder with Han VanderHart of River River Books, Huey teaches writing at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. He also is co-author with W. Todd Kaneko of the textbook *Poetry: A Writer's Guide and Anthology* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and the chapbook *Slash/Slash* (Diode, 2021).

Alison Lubar teaches high school English by day and yoga by night. They are a queer, nonbinary, mixed-race femme whose life work (aside from wordsmithing) has evolved into bringing mindfulness practices, and sometimes even poetry, to young people. Their work has been nominated for both the Pushcart & Best of the Net, and they're the author four chapbooks: *Philosophers Know Nothing About Love* (Thirty West Publishing House, 2022), *queer feast* (Bottlecap Press, 2022), *sweet euphemism* (CLASH!, Spring 2023), and *it skips a generation* (Stanchion, Fall 2023). You can find out more at <http://www.alisonlubar.com/> or on Twitter @theoriginalison.

Heather Qin (she/her) is a student from New Jersey. She is an alumna of the Sewanee Young Writers' Conference and the Iowa Young Writers' Studio. Besides writing, Heather loves classical music and reading.

Matthew Weddig (he/him) is a Brooklyn-based medical editor. He has previously written about arts and culture for *NPR*, *Kill Screen*, and *Bad Books Good Times*, and his poetry has appeared in *Heavy Feather Review* and *Full Stop Quarterly*. He likes to make his cat watch horror movies with him. Assorted works can be found at linktr.ee/matthewjulius

Dare Williams (he/they) is a Queer HIV-positive poet and literary worker rooted in Southern California. A 2019 PEN America Emerging Voices Fellow, he has received support/fellowships for his work from John Ashbury Home School, The Frost Place, Brooklyn Poets, Breadloaf, and Tin House. Dare's poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best American Poets. His work has been featured in *Foglifter*, *The Shore*, *Exposition Review*, *West Trade Review*, and elsewhere. Follow him at Darewilliams.com. Twitter: @Dare_Williams13

Ziyi Yan/闫梓祎 (she/her) is a young Chinese writer living in Connecticut. She is an alumna of the Iowa Young Writers' Studio and the Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship. Her writing has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards on a national level. She is published or forthcoming in *Polyphony Lit*, *elementia*, *Breakbread Literacy Project*, *eunoia*, *Daphne Review*, *Paper Crane Journal*, and others. She is a poetry finalist for the BreakBread Literacy Project and the winner of the Piedmont Institution Communications Contest. She is also the founder and Editor-in-Chief of *The Dawn Review*. In addition to writing, she loves watching old

One Direction interviews, blasting karaoke in the middle of the night, and annoying her younger sister. You can find her on Instagram @Ziyiyan___

Emma Zhang (she/her) is a Chinese American writer from San Jose, California. Her work has been recognized by The Adroit Prizes, and appears in *Up North Lit*, *Evocations Review*, among others. She reads for *Aster Lit* and *The Adroit Journal* and is endlessly fascinated by doorknobs.

©November 2022 *Kissing Dynamite: A Journal of Poetry*
ISSN: 2639-426X
All rights reserved.