

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 6 JUNE 2019: "SHADOW PUPPET"

In our sixth issue "Shadow Puppet," follow poets through journeys that grapple with the past, wrestle with love, and struggle with the self.

This month's featured poet is Jill Mceldowney.

Issue 6 includes work by Jack B. Bedell, Chloe Clark, Ann Eleven, Mark A. Fisher, Dane Hamann, Judith Kingston, December Lace, Kara Lewis, Jill Mceldowney, Jessie Lynn McMains, Robert Okaji, and Tara K. Shepersky. Please visit "The Gallery" below! And Satya Dash is featured in "Fading" to make it a baker's dozen.

### Featured Artist

This month's featured artist is Siham Karami, a poet/writer who discovered photography as a way to see and open up the beauty all around us, in the most unexpected and ordinary places. Selected work is forthcoming in *Fourth and Sycamore*, *Animal Heart*, and *Peacock Journal*. She is also the author of the full-length poetry collection *To Love the River* (Kelsay Books, 2018). Her poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Off the Coast*, *Pleiades*, *Tupelo Quarterly Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Literary Mama*, *Third Wednesday*, *Able Muse*, and *Anti-Heroic Chic*, among others. She blogs at [sihamkarami.wordpress.com](http://sihamkarami.wordpress.com), which includes a photography page.

### "Lines for Lake DeCade" by Jack B. Bedell

Down the warped dock,  
boards frayed and leaning  
toward the surface of this lake,

water going brown, then to froth,  
sand flies mosquito hawks trawling motors  
hum in the gray light

of tired days heavy nets. Lord  
of fin and wing and prayer  
hold me here as long as you can

before the water shifts,  
brings its salt in.

“A Consolation of Stars” by Chloe Clark

One day, the world will be swallowed  
By the sun, though it's more likely  
We'll have already devastated it by then

We are not so kind to our homes  
The ones we live in  
The ones we make in other  
People

We always imagine routes out  
Colonizing other planets  
In our heads  
Even though  
The earth is still around us  
The one we love is still  
Right next to us

We think: it's okay if we wreck  
This, make this mistake  
There are other places  
We can go

We map trajectories of  
Opportunities we could have  
In every face, in every bit  
Of unoccupied space

This is a coping mechanism  
As much as it is  
A self destructive one:  
We need to know  
We had always known  
It would go bad

But here is what I will promise  
To you: when I pack  
My bags for Mars,  
Map the way I'll arc

Past stars, I will  
Still, always,

Take you with me

“Someone Will Always Claim the Ear of God” by Ann Eleven

If I had a thousand acorns I'd have  
a thousand acorns and only the idea  
of a forest. Did you know when  
I loved you? Or was it like someone  
moving about in the next room  
while your book is open, your eyes  
fixed on the page? I once put  
my hand in your hand. I was  
thinking of summer. I also was  
thinking of winter. I'm like that.  
Each thing contains its own  
and opposite. You said *tell me  
about yourself* and I told you,  
there have been many accidents  
and I have evaded their consequence  
through no particular virtue or expertise  
or even quick thinking. In some other part  
of the world the cavernous shadows  
of ice float the frozen sea. If I lived  
there I'd tell you different things  
about summer, the dark day,  
the glacial creak of ice  
strained under its burden,  
the sun as a high cold fire  
that sinks to be swallowed  
by ocean. The kind of tired I know  
puts its head in ovens. I speak  
from beneath its inherited old  
umbrella. If I had the idea of forests  
I'd also have seasons. I won't tell you  
what happened in other countries  
or who is dead. *What's the coldest  
thing you ever held in your mouth?*  
I was swimming. I found on my  
tongue I carried a coin. I coughed  
it up. They caught but did not  
cut me open. They did not need

to cut me open! I put out my tongue,  
all sullen, paid up for the world.

“dawn” by Mark A. Fisher

if you had seen her eyes  
when she was young  
summer afternoons  
where she seemed to know  
my true name  
like it was written  
on the bark of trees  
for owls to read

we adopted her nightmares  
brought them up as our own  
only dreaming for themselves  
we never understood  
that they were mere  
cling wrap phantoms  
trying to be profound

when she left me  
I wrote her a letter  
I keep it in a drawer  
with rubber bands  
and bits of string  
rattling about  
with the mornings  
that never came

“Ennui” by Dane Hamann

Always, the body will gnaw its lonesome  
way toward the invisible grove of  
ennui. Toward the shadows tumbling from  
the mountains teething into the sun’s path.  
Still, many points of joy are allotted  
along this passage. Music that quakes ribs.  
Late spring rain tinseling the trees. The heart,  
a postcard of warm lamplight. It’s never  
just the depth of a lake masked by snow or  
the slow mud-death of a trampled meadow

that wears down the already worn, covers tracks already covered. The body will misremember this. Believing, perhaps, in spirals. That there might be a way back.

*“Object Permanence” by Judith Kingston  
In which I learn to lie to myself from a Grand Master*

When my mother transferred her allegiance to the other butcher, she changed her route

or ducked below the window sill avoiding the friendly eyes of the previous favourite

whom she had betrayed and deserted for another with a wider choice of game.

You can solve any awkward situation like this, I learned, just make sure you are out

of line of sight because when the people you have hurt can't see you then the hurt

disappears as well. People cannot feel when they cannot see, I learned.

People cannot talk when you are invisible either, so we hid behind pillars on platform 5,

not to share a carriage or a conversation with friends travelling to the same event,

and I found that awkward questions slowly starve and wither if you ignore the email

that posed them – maintain radio silence until the bracing westerly wind has erased

all inconvenient thoughts and you can start again with: how are you? It's been a while.

I learned that you can keep a wash of brittle sunlight on the day by denying the existence

of the rain and that you have no reflection  
in the mirror if you simply look away.

“Cremains” by December Lace

You exist within me now,  
a garden of you  
growing  
into my teeth.

I can taste your ash,  
seeds burning from the back of my throat  
    swollen red,  
        a new pig born screaming into this earth,  
            damp lust grown from a seasoned lover.

Embed yourself in between the small gaps of my enamel.  
I can keep your fiery remains safe there,  
the slim slit pulling you down.  
You dissolve into my roots  
existing within me now.

A garden of you  
growing  
into my teeth.

“Love, Too, Is a Kind of Imposter Syndrome” by Kara Lewis

like when I worked at the coffee shop and I’d take slow steps and watch  
the liquid slosh, a tide of sleepy-eyed violence teetering

over the white saucer. I’d think, *I cannot hold all of this  
without toppling*. Once, a man asked for soy milk and only after

he walked out did I realize I’d stirred in 2 percent. That night in my dreams  
he clutched his throat and seized.

He stared at me with saucer-eyes  
and said, *It’s all your fault*. He said, *It’s the simplest things —*

*milk, a song, a kiss—* that kill us.  
Sometimes, I’m afraid you will become allergic to me,

that I've given you too much. Or, maybe,  
the allergies are seasonal, waiting

to activate some Saturday in spring, when we're looking at geese,  
thinking, *You could feed any creature your stale crusts*

*and they'd follow you forever.* How many times have I squawked  
after someone? But you keep breathing

like the coffeemaker at 2 a.m. dreaming of dawn. The first time  
we slept in the same bed together, I breathed

completely. Not like when I hold it in and then explode  
or like when I try to match my sighs to the rise

and fall of another naked chest. When you said, *I love you*, I couldn't  
say it back — I just pictured dozens of porcelain mugs crashing —

so, instead, I told you, *I finally stopped running*  
*out of air.* When I bring you coffee in bed, I spill it

into your mouth, asking, *Are you sure*  
*you still want to be woken?*

[“If I Don't Meet You in this Life, Let Me Feel the Lack” by Jill Mceldowney](#)

Now there is almost no sound when I imagine  
how your body might look through ice,

dazzling ice refracted back to snow.

Let me sleep then  
and dream of fish  
or leopards or how every tree is a personality.  
It is never about the sex

when you show up again—

backlit by the hallway light.

You don't ask to come in, you just are  
and the most romantic thing I will ever do is to fuck you  
while I am on a drug holiday.

I mean nothing between us. The world has always been ending,  
I am getting what I asked for  
when I asked for

your weather. I would give my body  
for an instant of lightning. All night I try

to be a better person. Not for you—  
maybe because of you—before you

I loved  
like a wild animal sees at night. I've been fortune told  
that you will

abandon me slowly  
like the cold pulling me through  
the darkness or a confidence that leads me

but for one minute of fleeting life I put feathers on your birds.

The trail I follow is not of my making.  
If it was the moon  
it fell  
from my hands as you sleep with your back to me.

The earth is taking its time,  
is deciding how to kill us or how to change us—

I lay my hand flat  
against the perishable harp of your spine.

All night I ask you *why*.

**Jill on "If I Don't Meet You in this Life, Let Me Feel the Lack":**

The title of this poem, "If I Don't Meet You in This Life, Let Me Feel the Lack" is quoted from the 1998 film *The Thin Red Line*, a film that largely examines transformation, particularly the way violence serves as a catalyst for transformation. In my most recent work, I have been similarly investigating the way the body is transformed or transfixed by the violences and interactions of love, grief, addiction, loss. I am especially interested in the role grief plays in the transformation of the body: What is the best you can give someone you love if feeling becomes impossible? In the aftermath of violence, in what ways does the body feel differently? How does feeling change in the wake of loss?



In this poem, I wanted to try and understand how the processes of grief can alienate a person from not only those that they love, but from their own physical body. I wanted to explore the intersection of love and this grief because love is presented as an idealized all-healing and all-powerful force capable of “bringing you back” and “setting all wrongs right.” Yet, in the world of this poem, it isn’t, and in the end the speaker is left questioning if it ever was.

### **EIC Christine Taylor on "If I Don't Meet You in this Life, Let Me Feel the Lack":**

Jill's poem is full of beautiful language—lines such as "for one minute of fleeting life I put feathers on your birds" are breath-taking. And couched in this beauty lies the raw emptiness that we're sometimes left with after having been hurt. Love doesn't fix that emptiness, and if we're being honest, we don't expect that it will. We know that "The earth is taking its time, / is deciding how to kill us or how to change us—" and all we can do is wait. Jill's poem offers the opportunity for readers to wrestle with these feelings through a sympathetic speaker.

#### [“Lilac Palace, 1987” by Jessie Lynn McMains](#)

In a Genesee County backyard there was  
a hideaway, a huge lilac bush with a hollow

just big enough for a scrawny six-year-old  
to fit in, I called it the Lilac Palace, crawled

in there with my pink plastic radio and candy  
cigarettes, bubblegum, jelly bracelets in rainbow

colors, jelly sandals, 1987 all over, I made believe  
and the boughs wove themselves into castle walls,

the scent of the small purple flowers was my faerie  
perfume, the flat rock I sat on my throne, I became

Queen Mab, Queen of the May, my plastic beads  
and bangles were precious jewels, a broken branch

my scepter and I ruled over a kingdom of squirrels  
and cardinals and my trusty dog became my guardian,

fierce gryphon—eagle-winged, lion-pawed beastie, or  
the music on my radio turned my fantasy to pop, I was

an '80s star, dreamed my hair wild-dyed & teased up to  
the heavens, dreamed baubles and spangles, lycra and lace,

I could be Madonna or Cyndi, The Go-Go's, The Bangles,  
all of them at once, papa don't preach, I had the beat, wanted

to have fun, walk like an Egyptian, sometimes I was even  
Billy, an Idol in motorcycle gloves, peroxided & pouting,

sneering: *start again*. C'mon. Or not: sometimes my world  
was nothing more than itself, but itself was enough. Sweet

mutt sleeping in the just-mown grass, which smelled of just-  
snapped green beans and grape jelly, the squirrels chittering

and the cardinals' loud, down-slurred whistle, the blood-  
feathered male and the female's muted garb, flat rock warm

beneath me, and me, sugar-stoned, the boughs overhead  
and the lilacs the color of bruises, and above that the sky

turning the color of lilacs, dusk coming on, all that, my  
soundtrack the songs on my pink plastic radio, cutting

through the pseudo-suburban static, me, alone, safe from  
factories closing, marriages dissolving, safe from the house

of brick and all its yelling, and it was summer and if I could  
slow the pace of nightfall I might never have to go inside again.

"Clandestine" by Robert Okaji

How did you slip so deftly past those bottled  
years, through my ribcage and into the safe

room never before broached? I am the little  
stones you gather, the morning's obsidian eye.

Though the wind's unseen fingers caress you,  
coveting in a way I cannot, my hand, warm

against your pale belly, knows the truth of  
contrast and heat, of flesh and gnarled bark.

Unveiling these furtive moves, our love smelts  
tears into nuggets, transforms nights into

blue sky, sultry chatter into celestial song.  
Our secrets kiss the dark quiet.

"At the Beloved River: a Ritual, a Question, a Promise" by Tara K. Shepersky

Moon and mountain,  
river ripple,  
traced upon my face:  
*in hoc signo vives.*

I'm sure I've sinned  
and we'll deal with that together.

It's not the point of you.

"What We Carry"

From EIC Christine Taylor: Our discomfort with the self: to what extent do we fade into our own inner conflicts? In his poem "The Geometry of Isolation," **Satya Dash** explores the tension between wanting a sense of solitude yet being uncomfortable with the self.

"The Geometry of Isolation" by Satya Dash

If I were asked to draw a house I would still  
rely on hopeless fantasies smudged

on a first grade drawing book- impossible dreams in  
brick and cement, triangles bonneting squares

in self-effacing geometry, a trapezoid red tiled roof  
connecting whatever the folds couldn't join.

These shapes of our abandoned minds to lie  
amidst rumbling mountains or near a rueful sea

on the precipice of our epochal lives with a sun  
overhead for daily consolation. But of course

in reality let's say somehow I erect this monument,  
a labour of my sinewy love. Then soon enough,

forgetting all this I would worry about the neighbour's

pet, humidity, red ants, barking dogs and the coarse

garden soil. Which is why I need the security of an evacuation procedure even before I start drawing.

Can someone read it please? Read it aloud. With intonation and feelings. Much like a song whose

melody would swish and swirl – benevolent tornado carrying me away from the roil of this churning world.

### **Satya’s Commentary on “The Geometry of Isolation”:**

Deconstructing this poem leads me to arrive at two fundamental notions at strife with each other – a desire for solitude and the impossibility of being completely at ease with oneself. The poem was born somewhere in the middle of the hanging, swaying bridge between both these implacable pillars.

In the chaos of our unrealized fantasies, we often forget little things that have offered us quiet delight in the past – an uninterrupted listening to a favorite track, a sincere conversation with a friend, munching candy in the quaint part of town. At the end of certain pursuits even after reasonable success, you pine for circumstances when you had the ability to sip joy from them. This poem in some sense stemmed from the fear of this meaninglessness, a haunt of drudgery, of all things trundling towards travesty. During the time of writing, I remember wrestling with a purposelessness unsure where the motivation to wish, to feel, to even suffer springs from. Now looking back, it deposits itself in the bass of the somewhat doctrinal tone of the lines.

I was pulsing with a clutch of indifference, nauseous from peering too far ahead in life, a bleakness of vision as if staring down a dark well and asking myself how different really can you feel in ten year’s time in the same world. The poem began with invoking memories of childhood, a fondness of the familiar geometry in shapes and sceneries so comforting as a kid. But failing nostalgia, it soon started to mimic reality, taking a dark turn of its own. The end, of course seeking refuge in ignorance, a fire exit escape – an urgent evacuation, a prelude to the birth of any resettlement.

Stanley Kubrick in an interview for *Playboy* in 1968 remarks: *However vast the darkness, we must supply our own light.* The poem attempts my collapse in a noir of the vastness, a screen fading into black, painting a backdrop for the faintest possibility of light. I can attest now – it did arrive in shapes, then unknown to me.

### Poet Biographies

**Jack B. Bedell** is Professor of English and Coordinator of Creative Writing at Southeastern Louisiana University where he also edits *Louisiana Literature* and directs the Louisiana

Literature Press. His latest collection is *No Brother, This Storm* (Mercer University Press, 2018). He is currently serving as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019. He can be found on Twitter @jackbedell and on his website: [www.jackbedell.com](http://www.jackbedell.com).

**Chloe N. Clark's** (she/her/hers) work appears in *Apex, Booth, Glass, Little Fiction, Uncanny*, and more. Her poetry collection, *Your Strange Fortune*, is forthcoming from Vegetarian Alcoholic Press and she is co-editor-in-chief of Cotton Xenomorph. Find her on Twitter @PintsNCupcakes

**Satya Dash's** recent poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Passages North, Prelude, The Florida Review, Porridge* amongst others. He has dabbled with short fiction in the past and been a cricket commentator too. He spent his early years in Odisha, India and has a degree in electronics from BITS Goa. Now he lives in Bangalore and recites his poetry in the city's cafes. Twitter Handle - <https://twitter.com/satya043>

**Ann Eleven** (they, their) is a queer, non-binary writer and librarian who lives in Chicago. They have one cat and are always in search of the next good sandwich. Their homes online are <http://www.junkyardattic.com> and Twitter: @junkyardattic

**Mark A. Fisher** is a writer, poet, and playwright living in Tehachapi, CA. His poetry has appeared in: *Angel City Review, A Sharp Piece of Awesome, Altadena Poetry Review, Penumbra, Turnip Truck(s)*, and many other places. His first chapbook, *drifter*, is available from Amazon. His second, *hour of lead*, won the 2017 San Gabriel Valley Poetry Chapbook Contest. His plays have appeared on California stages in Pine Mountain Club, Tehachapi, Bakersfield, and Hayward. He has also won cooking ribbons at the Kern County Fair.

**Dane Hamann** works as an editor for a textbook publisher in the southwest suburbs of Chicago. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Northwestern University, where he also serves as the poetry editor of *TriQuarterly*. His chapbook is available from Sutra Press and his micro-chapbook was a part of the Ghost City Press 2018 Summer Series. He can be found online at [www.danehamann.com](http://www.danehamann.com) and on twitter at @donnyhamms.

**Judith Kingston** is a Dutch writer living in the UK. Her poems have been published in various online magazines such as *Barren Magazine, VampCat Magazine, Anti-Heroine Chic* and *Salt Water Soul*, as well as the Fly on the Wall Press print anthology *Persona Non Grata*. Besides writing, she translates, teaches and occasionally narrates audiobooks.

Social media links:

Twitter: @judithkingston

Instagram: @judith\_kingston

**December Lace** is a former professional wrestler and pinup model from Chicago. She has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune, Pro Wrestling Illustrated, The Molotov Cocktail, Pussy Magic Lit, The Cabinet of Heed, Dark Marrow* and *Rhythm & Bones YANYR Anthology*, among others as well as the forthcoming *Riggwelter Press* and *Coffin Bell*. She loves Batman, burlesque, cats, and

horror movies. She can be found on Twitter @TheMissDecember and <http://decemberlace.blogspot.com>.

**Kara Lewis** is a poet, writer, and editor who lives in Kansas City, Missouri. Her poems have appeared in *Sprung Formal*, *Stirring: A Literary Collection*, *Plainsongs Poetry Magazine*, and *Number One Magazine*. She is also a contributor to the Read Poetry blog and has received the John Mark Eberhart Memorial Award for a collection of poetry. In addition, she has published her journalism, fiction, and personal essays. When she's not writing, she can be found hanging out in bookstores, eating tacos, and advocating for reproductive rights. You can follow her on Twitter [@kararaywrites](#).

**Jill Mceldowney** is the author of the chapbook *Airs Above Ground* (Finishing Line Press) as well as *Kisses Over Babylon* (dancing girl press). She is an editor and cofounder of *Madhouse Press*. She is also a National Poetry Series Finalist. Her previously published work can be found in journals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Muzzle*, *Fugue*, *Vinyl*, the *Sonora Review* and other notable publications.

**Jessie Lynn McMains** (they/them) is a poet, writer, zine-maker, small press publisher, and spoken word performer. They are the author of multiple chapbooks, most recently *The Girl With The Most Cake* and *forget the fuck away from me*. They have been publishing their own and others' writing in zines and chapbooks since 1994, and have been performing their work across the US and Canada since 1998. They were the 2015-2017 Poet Laureate of Racine, WI, and currently write a reoccurring column for *Pussy Magic*. You can find their personal website at [recklesschants.net](http://recklesschants.net), or follow them on Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram @rustbeltjessie

The author of five chapbook collections, most recently *I Have a Bird to Whistle* (Luminous Press, 2019), three micro-chapbooks and a mini-digital chapbook, **Robert Okaji** lives in the Texas hill country, where he occasionally works on a ranch. His work has also appeared in such publications as *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Crannóg*, *Vox Populi*, *The Lake*, *Boston Review*, *Panoply*, *Oxidant|Engine* and elsewhere.

**Tara K. Shepersky** is a taxonomist, poet, essayist, and photographer. She makes her present home in Oregon's Willamette Valley, with roots joyfully tangled up in half a dozen soils of America's West. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Shark Reef*, *The Hopper*, *High Desert Journal*, and the *Clackamas Literary Review*, among others.

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