

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 9 SEPTEMBER 2019: "COME TO LIGHT"

In Issue 9, we watch that which often remains buried "come to light"—let these poets take you on this journey.

This month's featured poet is Jessica Dubey.

Issue 9 includes work by Lynne Burnett, Jessica Dubey, David Hanlon, Kavi Kshiraj, Ellie Lamothe, D. S. Maolalai, Jude Marr, Njoku Nonso, Precious Okpechi, Corey Sparks, Prem Sylvester, and Kory Wells. And Jasmin Lankford is featured in "Landscape" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

This month's featured artist is Elizabeth York Dickinson, who received her MFA in writing from Sarah Lawrence College. Her poetry and photography are published or forthcoming in *Gravel*, *Halfway Down the Staircase*, *Coffin Bell*, *Ghost City Press*, *Riggwelter* and *Ink in Thirds*, among others. She currently resides in Evanston, Illinois. Follow her on Twitter @aworldwanderer.

Featured Musician

This month, we are pleased to feature the work of Suchoon Mo. Suchoon lives in the semiarid part of Colorado. His music compositions appear in *Treehouse Arts*, *FishFood Magazine*, *Cerurove*, and *Forge*. He has been composing for many years, but he has no formal music education. Requests for sheet music may be sent to: suchoon@aol.com.

His recent poems appear in *Aji Magazine*, *Jonah Magazine*, *Modern Literature*, *Modern Poets Magazine*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Armarolla*, *Transnational*, *All The Sins*, *Bitterzoet Magazine*, and *Nine Muses Poetry*. He obtained his Ph.D. in psychology from University of Pennsylvania.

"Zoo" by Lynne Burnett

They made love sometimes like animals—
mouths open, greedy for the spoils of night,
shamelessly biting into the soft flesh

they have to make how to be
battlefield ready and what to do
with all those remainders

Jessica's Commentary on "The New Math":

Never as a child, even with my overactive imagination, did I ever envision a gunman breaking through the doors of my school. My children were young when the Columbine High School shootings occurred, but even then the massacre felt like a distant, isolated incident.

I remember at the height of the AIDS epidemic hearing that eventually everyone would know someone personally affected by HIV. Now, I think that eventually all of us will know a victim of a mass shooting. It's a terrible thought to entertain.

While all of the school shootings are difficult to comprehend, the one at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, was particularly gut wrenching. We bear the scars of this violence, if not on our bodies, in our psyche, children especially so.

This poem was inspired in part by a *60 Minutes* episode about a campaign called "Stop the Bleed," an effort to make first responders out of ordinary citizens, including children. Bleeding kits, or as they are often referred to as "active killer kits," include tourniquets, gauze and a chest seal like those used in battlefield scenarios.

Contributing Editor Tim Lear's Commentary on "The New Math":

The opening lines unfold in a relaxed manner, and the domestic setting and light tone reminded me of a Billy Collins poem. But the poem's familiarity and my initial reflex to treat the speaker's revelation as comic and nostalgic soon fades. Dubey's fluid line breaks become unsettling and suggestive (I drew a link to Newtown, for instance, that could have felt forced or cheap but didn't), and the ominous turn is enhanced by the harsh alliteration ("active killer kits") and unrestrained repetition ("turn turn turn"). Yet the tourniquets infinite turning, like adult hand wringing and politicking, accomplishes nothing -- there is no stopping the loss, an end foreshadowed in the poem's opening line ("I couldn't help").

After I read "The New Math" I had to look up the definition of a "remainder," my math being poor however it's defined and dated. And I learned that it's an equation "where the pieces don't exactly fit," where "a part of something is left over when other parts have been completed, used, or dealt with." The irony in Dubey's poem is that very little has been dealt with. And the sadness is that we're what's left over.

“On Blue” by David Hanlon

Inside every man lives the seed of a flower

If he looks within he finds beauty and power

—Minnie Riperton – Les Fleurs

Are we ever our own heroes?

My favourite colour represented everything I was not
everything that I hated I was not

football pitch-shackled
flushed ball-kick
directionless detected pink *like a girl*
unpredictable
as my chaos-lead life

Drowning in the decorated whirlpool
of my own bedroom my own living space
bedcovers curtains carpet
pigmenting my identity

Who saw the conflict in my colouring book pages?
My chosen crayon fury-scrawled
beyond the lines

I tried to stay inside them
kept weights under my bed
watched too much wrestling
learned all the words to ‘The Real Slim Shady’

I was a moth fleeing the lightbulb
only to throw myself back into it over and over again

I was the slow drip of a leaky sink faucet
holding back an ocean ready to burst from steel pipes

I was skies away oceans away
from the norm I so wanted to be and to not have to be

I look now at every new-born boy

“Cleared ground” by DS Maolalai

this is leirim. on the side
of a mountain. this is me,
learning how to drive. I'm 15;
giddy nervous, knuckling the steering wheel,
the gearstick and handbrake.

next to me, my father
gets frustrated
while I cut out again. around,
trees are everywhere, taller
than the mountain they grow on.
they are pine; we are in a timber
plantation. and we go jerky
past unused machinery
and bewildered deer,
rotten pools of water
where tadpoles
sprout legs. overhead
a skein of mallard ducks
hums like a running engine. finally

I get the bite
and push us forward.
ahead is empty ground,
blasted black
and dead
and clear.

“Aftermath” by Jude Marr

we are still matter light
slow-dancing, dying eyes

bright as

we (are) still
matter, motes a drift

dying

eyes are we still

back to you; from the star
that greets new born children
to the feeling of being here before, suppose
we all have. the world is a circadian
rhythm; we must love till death loves
us back – fierce. I understood mother
meant this as a thumb rule: our living
must be singly filled before we are
paired – but having an identical twin
that’s only parallel in another universe
didn’t feel like a shell I wanted to be
my address. because this town,
as I later grasped, had so many shells
out there, ones I got excited into, with
just enough energy to keep me unpaired,
until death could love me back tender
the way I kissed him the first time.

“Psithurism” by Corey Sparks

restless
tree leaves
shush us
from just
outside
our too-
warm room
the dry
night’s cool
eschews
windows
thrown wide

like the
small suns
above
flaring
against
the dark’s
certain
passing
our three
restive
bodies

make heat
hers and
mine and
our child's

stubborn
zephyr
brisks back
up the
canyon
climbs past
scrubby
blue oak
predawn
gray pine
toward the
rosy
fingered
false dawn
that wakes
the sprite
these days

she sleeps
sparsely
resists
shushing
so to
suss some
soothing
cadence
we slip
soft steps
down in
the still

Bidwell's
asphalt
walk black
below
the buttes'
clinging
shadows
past the

plane trees'
ghostly
trunks the
promise
of rest
mere leaf
murmur

“We Have Lost All That We Found” by Prem Sylvester

We first heard love as a slur, a tongue of storm.
In the liminal space between death and death,
our parents read their vows, sandpaper-throated
& we weep for it. We were forged in detritus
come before furnace. Do they hear us break?

My mother makes whips of my father's failings,
& all my memory is the silence lashed onto him.
Your father's rage echoes in your mother's sobs,
& the salt of his violence is wet on your shoulder.
Home pockmarked our backs, stuttering into cacti.

When I sought your faith in us, in tattered love,
what vines bound your lips, that I heard no promises?
what burrs dug into your heart, that welted our time?
My mother's words throb in me, glassy in the miasma:
ruin is my blood. I am the man she loathes, antithetical.

This is our nadir: ribs as cage, fingers as scissors.
We loosen our threads with hands not our own.
Old shadows eye us, fulfilled, touch a twilit myth.
Oculi collapse into now. Death is party, not witness.
We are flames untwinned. We have lost all that we found.

“My Zinnias Grow Like Good Intentions” by Kory Wells

I apologize as I stand before them this morning, garden shears
in hand. Because I planted their seed in diminished sun, the
only sun in our shaded yard. Because they grow thick and
misshapen, racing across earth toward the two o'clock light,
curving and breaking for the brittle ceiling of my expectations.
Because my assumptions have been so wrong. How they think.

How they feel. How they synthesize their wisdom into endless blooms. Because summer's blazed relentless, our discontent settling like the humid air. Because men arrived with weapons. Because a car can be a weapon. Because the violence of politics. Because the politics of violence.

This world careens every moment in drastic misdirections of belief. And aren't we all to blame? I've made the mistake of speaking softly; of speaking too little; of speaking too much. The zinnias have stood night after night bearing the weight of their heavy heads. They face another frenzied day of sweat bees, duskywings, hummingbirds. And now they know I've come again to ask more: To bleed not. To endure the pain. To turn that pain into keeping on. To grow across the whole damn yard to spite me. Imperfect in the half-light. Furious in their vivid hope.

“Landscape”

From EIC Christine Taylor: Sexual violence, abuse, gaslighting. . . . **Jasmin Lankford** interrogates our culture in "For Nice Guys Who Pick Flowers"—a ghazal.

“For Nice Guys Who Pick Flowers” by Jasmin Lankford

If you feel her struggling during sex, keep going. Petals are to blame for forgetting to ask not to be plucked. Use enthusiasm to erase blame.

You love her body so much you don't want to wear protection. Mistakes don't mean murder by miscarriage. A flower even without a vase is to blame.

When you walk down the sidewalk, slice an orchid's stem with sharp words. Get angry as she shrivels up. She's ugly anyway, it's not misplaced blame.

Every flower was planted for you to pluck. Swallow seeds, wilt in silence. You can prune rose petals before they're ready. No one will trace your blame.

Stay rooted in your truth. Your upbringing, your inability to be emotional, your unknown strength, your uncontrollable anger. All faces of blame.

That little waterlily who rejected you in fifth grade excuses your behavior. She crumpled your poem on the playground. Cite her actions in case of blame.

When you repeatedly step on those sunflowers, you can call your cruelty a defense mechanism. Come to Christ. Ask for his grace to absolve your blame.

Abuse church carnations behind closed doors and sit in the first pew on Sundays. Buy her expensive perfume and say nothing. Flowers know their place in blame.

Whether the tulip is red, yellow or white, you're entitled to those spring blooms. Don't bother removing leaves, rip them. Spray water in haste, then leave the blame.

Ignore the peony when she begs you to stop. Just tell her how pretty she is. Her brown skin, curly hair. Soft eyes asking to be hurt. Tell her to embrace the pain, the blame.

Your existence cultivates your crimes to convict every other colored blossom. So bloom. Jasmin flowers won't stand in your way. Spread dirt and new seeds. Landscape over blame.

Jasmin's Commentary on "For Nice Guys Who Pick Flowers":

"For Nice Guys Who Pick Flowers" stems from a desire to document how women are not to blame for the trauma that happens to them. As a survivor, taking the blame for my trauma has been a difficult belief to unlearn. Writing has helped me heal, find my voice, and return to my body.

My writing is often rooted in structured poetic forms and extended metaphors. I've found safety in sharing parts of my story this way. I love getting lost in the challenges of the form. The ghazal, with its autonomous couplets, repeating refrain, and rhyme scheme, allowed each of the flowers to unfold as individual stories with a satirical tone.

While many of the couplets can be read independently, each flower is planted together as a cohesive representation of the violence against women. When writing about my experiences, I always return to the words of Alex Elle, "Honor your bloom. Trust your wilt." My poems don't pretend there was no wilt.

Traditionally, the ghazal concludes with the poet's name incorporated into the last couplet. My flower name in the final line is a version of myself from last year. To her and to all survivors: I see you. I hear you. Your stories are valid. You are not to blame. Your trauma is not your identity. You are allowed to wilt and bloom over and over again.

Poet Biographies

Jessica Dubey is a poet living in upstate New York. She was a 2018 nominee for a Best of the Net Award. Her work has appeared in numerous print and online journals including *Oxidant / Engine*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *ragazine.cc*, and is forthcoming in *IthacaLit*.

Lynne Burnett lives in the Pacific Northwest. Recent or forthcoming publications include *Arc Poetry*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Crosswinds*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *IthacaLit*, *Malahat Review*, *Mockingheart Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Ristau*, *River Styx*, *Tamsen*, *Taos Journal of Poetry & Art*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Underfoot Poetry*, and several anthologies. A Best of the Net nominee, she is the 2016 winner of the Lauren K. Alleyne Difficult Fruit Poetry Prize. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook, "Irresistible" in March, 2018. She maintains a blog/website at <https://lynneburnett.ca/>

David Hanlon is from Cardiff, Wales, and currently living in Bristol, England. He is a qualified counsellor/therapist. You can find his work online in *Into The Void*, *Barren Magazine*, *Mojave Heart Review*, *Riggwelter Press* and *Homology Lit*, among others. His first chapbook is forthcoming in 2020 with Animal Heart Press. You can follow him on twitter @DavidHanlon13.

Kavi Kshiraj (they/them) is a queer, Indo-American poet found in New Jersey. They spend time on hobbies such as writing, Greek mythology, and their various identity crises. Find them on Twitter & Instagram @klytimestra and on Tumblr @kavikshiraj

Ellie Lamothe is a Sociology student, activist, and poet living in K'jipuktuk (Halifax, NS). She's passionate about feminism and collective healing, and is the founder of *Laurels & Bells Literary Journal*. Her work has appeared in *Glass: A Journal of Poetry (Poets Resist)* and is forthcoming in *Riza Press* and *Constellations: A Journal of Poetry and Fiction*. You can follow her on Instagram @ellielamothe and Twitter @laurelsandbells.

Jasmin Lankford (she/her) is a poet, cat mom, and world wanderer living in Tampa, Florida. She graduated from the University of South Florida with a degree in Communications. Once upon a time she studied Creative Writing in Paris. Jasmin was recently published in *Honey & Lime Literary Magazine*. Follow her @jasmin_justlisten on Instagram.

DS Maolalai (he/him) has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and twice for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019). He may be found on Twitter @diarmo1990

Jude Marr (they, them, theirs) tutors, teaches, and writes poetry, as protest. Their chapbook, *Breakfast for the Birds* (Finishing Line), was published in 2017. Recent credits include *Wend*, *Minerva Rising*, and *Eye Flash Poetry*. Follow them @JudeMarr1 and find more of their work at www.judemarr.com

Njoku Nonso is a Nigerian poet, essayist, and medical student. His works has appeared in *Brittle Paper*, *Dwartsonline*, *Praxis*, and elsewhere. He loves dogs. Hook up via twitter @NN_Emanuel

Precious Okpechi studies Biochemistry at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His work has appeared in *Brittle Paper*, *Praxis Magazine*, *Nthanda Review*, *The Muse*, and is forthcoming in

20.35 *Africa: An Anthology of Poetry*. He is currently the Custodian of The Writers' Community (TWC), University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Twitter: @OkpechiPrecious

Instagram: @p_okpechi

Born and raised in California's Central Valley, **Corey Sparks** is an Assistant Professor of English at Chico State, where he teaches and publishes on medieval literature, poetics, and digital humanities. This is his first poetry publication. It is part of a larger project titled *Florilegia*, which is inspired by a return to rural California after moving around for graduate school. His work is invested in form and intimate mythologies of rural spaces. He lives in a house built in 1916 with his wife, two preschoolers, and three cats.

Prem Sylvester (he/him) is a writer from India who turns into words the ideas he catches a whiff of from time to time. Sometimes people read these words. His work has appeared in *Parentheses Journal*, *Rabid Oak*, *Turnpike Magazine*, *Royal Rose*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, and *Memoir Mixtapes* among others.

Twitter handle: @premsylvester

Kory Wells is the author of *Sugar Fix*, a poetry collection available from Terrapin Books this month (September 2019), and the chapbook *Heaven Was the Moon* (March Street Press, 2009). A former software developer, she's now on her second act as a writer, storyteller, and advocate for the arts, democracy, and other good causes. In 2017 she was selected the inaugural Poet Laureate of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where she manages a reading series and open mic. Sample more of her published work at korywells.com, or connect with her on social media:

Instagram: [@tnpoet](https://www.instagram.com/tnpoet)

Facebook: [@kory.wells.author](https://www.facebook.com/kory.wells.author)

Twitter: [@KoryWells](https://twitter.com/KoryWells)

©September 2019 *Kissing Dynamite: A Journal of Poetry*
All rights reserved.