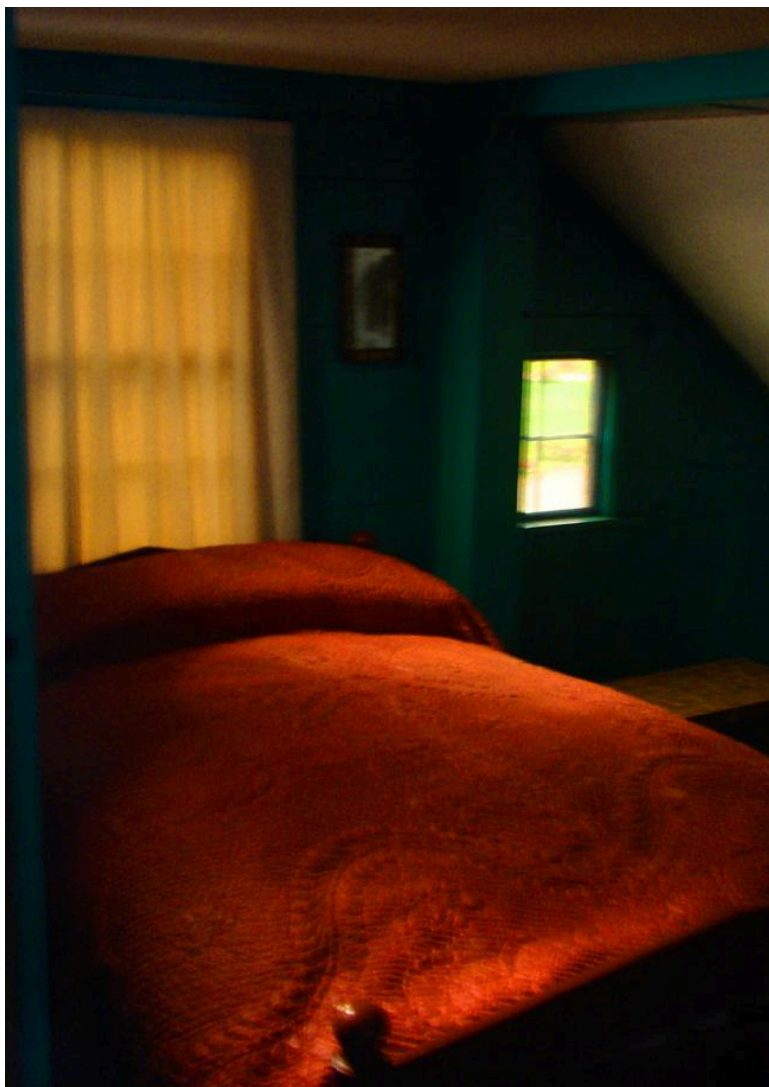


The Apostrophe

Issue 13 | Q2/2026 | Yawn



This publication brings together work from authors and artists around the world, and is edited by members of the Hong Kong Writers Circle.

In The Apostrophe, the five points of the bauhinia flower (Hong Kong's emblem) are paralleled each quarter by exactly five original pieces.

Editor-in-Chief: Jan Lee

Art Editor: Sadie Kaye

Contributing Editors: Sam Powney and Jay Oatway

Table of contents

A Yawning Gap	4
<i>Editor's Note</i>	
The Purge	7
<i>Fiction Maryam Kaleem</i>	
Mesozoic Warning	12
<i>Poetry Henrik Hoeg</i>	
The Day After	14
<i>Fiction Stewart McKay</i>	
The Yawn	17
<i>Flash Aaliyah André</i>	
Family Planning	20
<i>Poetry Elinor Maycan</i>	
Authors	21
Artists	22

A Yawning Gap

Editor's Note



The theme for this issue was inspired by the editor's chance observation of a rather passive-aggressive piece of graffiti spray-painted on the gate of a shop front: the word YAWN in a lazy font, repeated on each panel. This editor's first thought was to take it as a critical response.

But what a diversity of inspiration it has generated!

From “The Purge” by Maryam Kaleem we learn to feel fear in the subtleties of a glance. Henrik Hoeg, in “Mesozoic Warning” brings a humorous – or is it? – take on the span of eons in sonnet form. Meanwhile, our returning author Stewart McKay has produced, in “The Day After”, a poignant evocation of what it feels like to simply be dead tired of life.

We are also delighted to have a piece of flash fiction in this issue, one of the first to actually be titled with our quarterly prompt, “The Yawn”, by Aaliyah André, and to close out the issue with a heart-warming poem by Elinor Maycan, “Family Planning”.

We also have several returning artists this issue, including Kasra Shroff (who was featured in Issue #1!) and some brand new work from first-time contributors.

There's a yawning gap in our world for original art and literature, and we will do our part to fill it.

Jan Lee, Editor-in-Chief

,



The Purge

Maryam Kaleem



A week ago, Arthur Barclay won the election — a first for the Revolutionary Party.

Today, he summoned us to the Assembly Hall.

I assumed it was the official party summons following his victory. About time, I thought.

When I arrived, the hall was already full. Rows of dark coats pressed shoulder to shoulder, the air thick with polished leather. Men I had spent two years campaigning beside sat rigid, speaking in low, careful voices that never quite rose above a murmur.

The seating was arranged by seniority. I was guided to a modest seat in the middle row, beside a man whose position I never quite understood.

Arthur Barclay entered with armed guards, rifles resting easily in their hands. Conversation died, and the crowd erupted in cheers. Then, Arthur raised his hand, and the hall stilled. He adjusted the microphone and shuffled his papers.

Finally, he spoke.

“Today, I have brought you all here to address something that can no longer be ignored.”

His eyes were cold.

“A group of high-ranking officials has conspired to remove me from power.”

The room froze.

“The guilty parties,” he continued, “are already in this room.”

My skin turned cold. Sweat gathered at my temples.

The man beside me shifted in his seat. Only then did I notice guards stationed at the end of the hall, closing the doors. Locking them.

Footsteps echoed as a heavysset man climbed the stage. I recognized him immediately, Laurence. He had openly disagreed with Arthur during an assembly a month earlier. He stood behind the microphone, unfolded a paper, and began to speak.

He confessed.

He spoke of treason, of conspiring to overthrow Arthur Barclay and the new regime. Arthur took a seat at the edge of the stage, lit a cigar, and watched.

None of it made sense. Laurence had never opposed the revolution.

I wasn't sure anyone truly had.

But I had.

My head throbbed. I could barely hear the words anymore. That was when I noticed Laurence's hands. They were shaking. His collar was ruffled, and beneath it, a faint trace of crimson peeked through.

After Laurence finished, the guards seized him and escorted him out through the doors they had locked moments earlier. He did not glance at anyone as he passed.

Arthur stood up once again, unhurried, re-lighting his cigar.

“What should be done with traitors?” he asked. “In this country, there is only one answer. An eye for an eye.”

Terrified applause filled the room. I clapped too. What else could I have done?

“When I read your name,” Arthur said calmly, “stand and leave.”

My legs went numb.

The names kept getting called. The air tightened.

“Me? I didn't do anything!” the man next to me shouted, rising abruptly. I flinched at the sudden movement, “I swear — on everything I own —”

Arthur doesn't even look at him. “When your name is announced, stand up and head through the door,” he repeated in a cold voice.

One by one, they were led away. No one was told where they were going.

I noticed names crossed out on Arthur's list.

I did not want to know what it meant.

Then silence settled in.

"That is all," Arthur said. "Thank you for your loyalty."

My name hadn't been read out.

The room erupted. Men stood cheering, clapping, crying. I stood too, my legs buckling beneath me, my hands clapping violently as tears streamed down my face.

That was when Arthur looked directly at me. He held my gaze and smiled.

,



Mesozoic Warning

Henrik Hoeg

I come to preach, son of a line long dead,
Still seeing in mankind old follies rise;
We too let brief success go to our head,
Exulted appetite, and called it wise.

We made our force the gospel and the law,
Our roaring urge the bludgeon and the creed;
The petty globe held captive in our jaw,
Blind to the hungers only time can feed.

Her span has crushed our haughty bones to crude,
That liquid gold your industries consume,
Perspectives from short lives were ever skewed;
You too will rest in her entropic tomb.

So, heed your future; reflect in due course who'll
Dig up your bones to use for mere fuel.



The Day After

Stewart McKay



The old lady hasn't been outside in four months. Five, perhaps. She lost count around the time her neighbours fled. Quick, clumsy footsteps down the stairs in the deadest part of the night. She likes to imagine that they got away.

Her stomach gurgles. She hasn't eaten for weeks, apart from the damp biscuits that she rations to four a day. Lying in bed, tracing

the lines on the ceiling, she stifles a yawn. Her mind is sharp, but her body is so very tired.

Today will be the day. She's not sure whether she has known this all along, or if she's just made the decision. Either way, she moves carefully from her cool, damp bed to her dressing table, which wobbles as she leans on it to sit down. She applies lipstick. A light-grey sheen is beginning to soak through the thin blinds. That's as bright as it's going to get; the sun was another thing that disappeared.

She can feel the roughness of her lips beneath the sticky scarlet paste. She can see her hollowed eyes in the blotchy mirror. From the world beyond the window she hears nothing but a steady silence. She moves on to powdering her cheeks. Dusty specks hang in the fetid air, and the woman counts seconds, then minutes in the deep quiet. Perhaps it's all over already.

It will be soon, anyway. For her. She gathers her hair in one hand, wondering how it can feel both limp and brittle. In the dresser drawer she finds a clasp, with golden fingers and a ruby red top. It sparkles in the grey-light, a beacon from another time, long-lost treasure just unearthed. It takes her several attempts before she's happy with the reflection in the mirror.

The air from the wardrobe is thick and musty. Her hands feel for a dress hanging at the end of the rail. Powder blue printed with roses. She wonders if it will still fit, then smiles ruefully when it hangs limp from her shoulders. The effort of raising her hands above her head has left her out of breath.

A jacket hanging at the other end of the rail, thick and bristly, is almost too much for her to lift out. Once she held her daughter against its fur collar, while the girl wrinkled her nose and giggled. Those eyes, perfectly round pools of wonder. Unblinking, gazing up.

Dead now, of course. She focuses on what needs to be done here, now, this morning. She reaches for a velvet hat hanging behind the door, brushes the dust from its dome, and makes her way out into the dimly lit hallway. A ball of string lies in a corner, pillowed in dust. She tries to remember the cat's name, but it's long since faded from her mind, disappeared into the shadows like the cat itself. Like she will soon.

Her knees crack and her fingers tremble on the banister. She feels light, as if she could let go and float to the door. She realises that it's the guilt that's left her. She wonders why she used to care, what she used to be so terrified of. The time for her act of defiance has arrived, finally, when she will walk out into the street beyond in her Sunday best, never to return.

The air is as sharp as a knife. The silence is even louder out here, buzzing and groaning, but over it all the click of a pistol being cocked reaches her ears. Loud and clear.

,

The Yawn

Aaliyah André



Somehow I had convinced myself it would not happen again. Life had returned to normal, and my porcelain plates remained porcelain. My toothpaste frothed and was spat into the sink every morning and evening. During my lunch break, I bought sourdough sandwiches from the bakery and bit down into the sharp crust with no fear. Straws didn't intimidate me. The suction of my lips spread soft drinks and milk tea onto my tongue with ease. The life I lived was mundane, my shirts clean and my teeth pearly white.

At first, nothing felt different. It was all the same, but with you here. We walked along Victoria Harbour late at night and the only thing coating my lips was lipstick. Until saliva built up behind my teeth, and I gulped it down. Until your smile was an invitation for my body to swell in the wrong places. My shirt was

too tight and I stifled a yawn, shielding my open mouth from the sidelong gaze of the woman draped in film, wishing my own lips could be cast in bronze and sealed forever.

When you stepped close, I didn't stop you. My open mouth met yours under the pale moonlight. Tomorrow, the porcelain will be spotted red.

,



Family Planning

Elinor Maycan

Maybe we could be
like a metal fence
consumed by the trunk of a tree
after years of coexisting in place

You could quit your job,
and we could build
a raspberry trellis
or a shelf that hangs above the toilet
or a secret language

Our weekend agenda could include
counting the hairs on your toes
or holding eye contact for ten minutes;
no talking

I was thinking,
you know how to use a post driver,
and I know which spot gets the most sun

,

Authors

***Aaliyah André** is a student of Creative Writing and Classics working somewhere between the sargasso sea, the wild Atlantic way and the fragrant harbour. She is interested in people, plants and the porosity of clay. Her work can be found in University of Galway's Literatum, Black Tones' Blue Bodies and ROPES Literary Journal.*

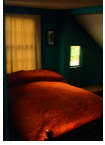
***Henrik Hoeg** is a Danish poet living in Hong Kong. He is the organizer and main MC of Peel Street Poetry, an open mic that has now been running for over 20 years. He has published three books, with his latest being Birth is the Coward's Way In, a collection of poems and short stories.*

***Maryam Kaleem** is an engineering student who's had the privilege of growing up surrounded by stories in every form - novels, films, theatre and television alike. Of them all, writing stood out as the most beautiful, perhaps because of how accessible it was: a way to create entire worlds from nothing but words.*

***Elinor Maycan** is a graduate student and writer located in the Pacific Northwest. Her work appears in orangepeel literary magazine and Candlelight Magazine.*

***Stewart McKay** has lived in Hong Kong since 2012. An active member of the Hong Kong Writers Circle, he has contributed to several of their anthologies, editing two of them: HK24 (2017) and Lost in Transition (2023). His flash fiction and short stories have appeared, and have been shortlisted for prizes, in publications such as Grindstone Literary, Raconteur, and Fiction Factory. His debut novel, The Ballad of Billy Lopez, was published in 2024.*

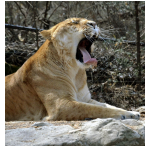
Artists



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9

1. *“Bed, Shelbourne”* by Christopher Woods
2. *“The Yawn”* by Matt Ricardo
3. *“YAWN”* by Kasra Shroff
4. *“Fire Horse”* by Sadie Kaye
5. *“Clawed”* by Ricky Sadosa
6. *“The Morning After the Night Before”* by Zed
7. *“The Watcher”* by Zed
8. *“The Martyrs’ Wall”* by Christopher Woods
9. *“Summer Blooms”* by George Tang

Christopher Woods is a writer and photographer who lives in Texas. His monologue show, *Twelve from Texas*, was performed in NYC by Equity Library Theatre. His monologues have been performed most recently at Equity Library Theatre in NYC, The Invisible Theatre in Tucson and the Pro English Theatre in Kiev, Ukraine. He has received residencies from The Edward Albee Foundation and The Ucross Foundation.

Sadie Kaye is Art Editor of *The Apostrophe*.

Matt Ricardo is a variety performer from London who lives with his wife and cats by the seaside in Brighton, UK. His passion is writing and taking photographs while travelling to gigs worldwide.

Kasra Shroff is a photographer based in Hong Kong. He recently graduated with a double distinction in his film course at King George V School, and will study film at Bournemouth.

Ricky Sadiosa has made Hong Kong his second home since the 1990s. Originally from the Philippines, he's travelled to more than 150 international cities and countries. He loves connecting with fellow photographers and admiring their work. A passionate human rights advocate, in 2017 Ricky was shortlisted for the Justice Centre Hong Kong's Human Rights Art Prize for his photo journalism. Ricky spent 5 years traveling the world in the footsteps of Philippine national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal. During his travels, he produced a feature-length documentary film and took photographs for his latest 500-page coffee table book.

Zed is an adventurer and award-winning documentary filmmaker. He has made over fifty films that have been watched by fifteen people. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, but rarely spends time there. He lost his heart in Havana and his mind in Sarajevo.

