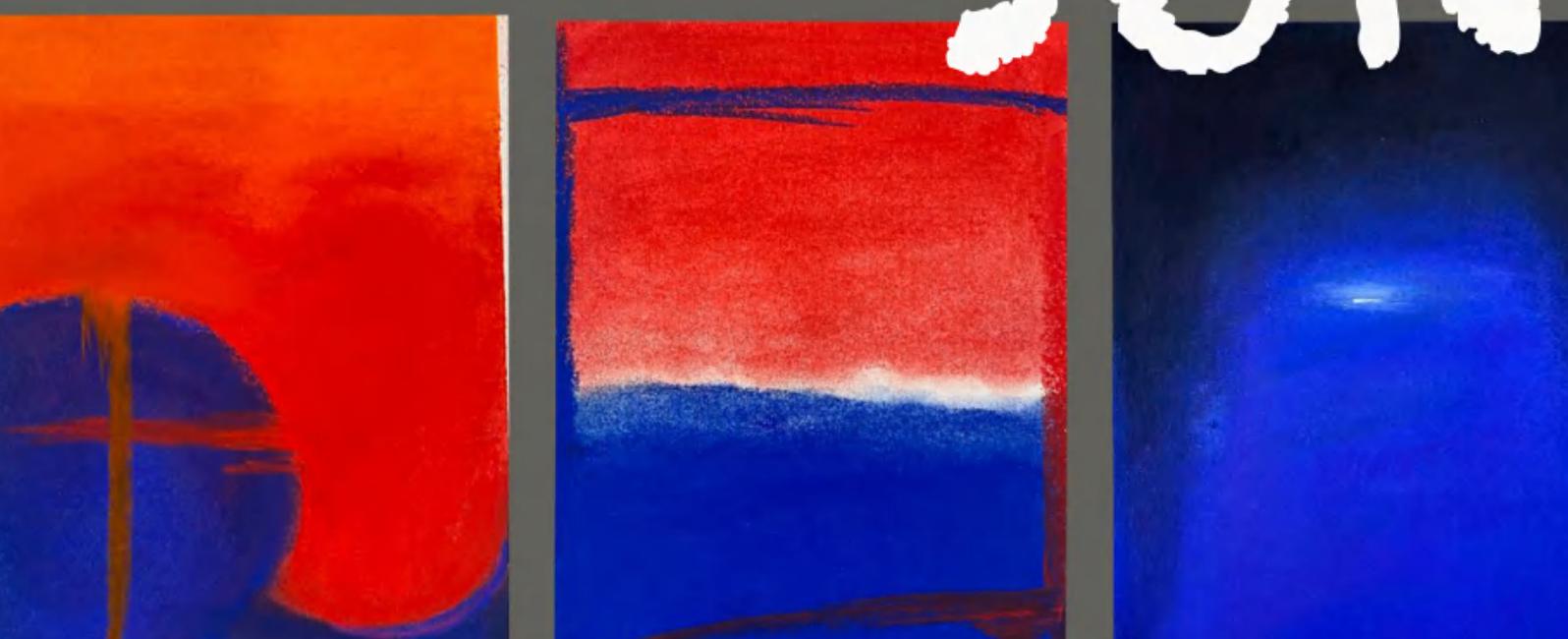




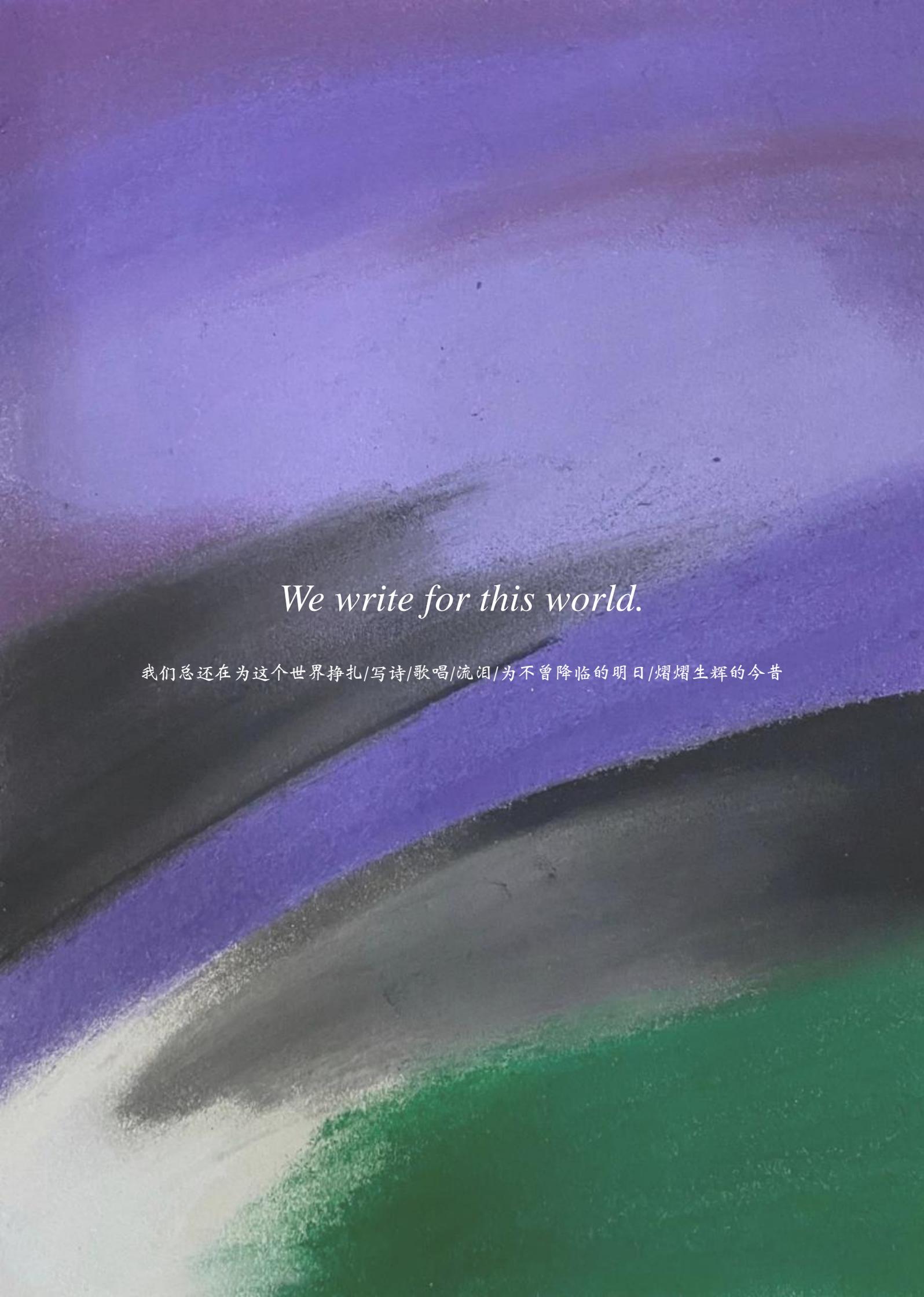
POETIC
SUN



ISSUE 3



EDITORS: SHIYANG SU
JIANING RAN

The background is an abstract composition of broad, textured brushstrokes. The top half is dominated by shades of purple and blue, with a darker, almost black, diagonal stroke cutting across it. The bottom right corner features a vibrant green, while the bottom left is a lighter, yellowish-tan. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and layered colors.

We write for this world.

我们总还在为这个世界挣扎/写诗/歌唱/流泪/为不曾降临的明日/熠熠生辉的今昔

Contributors

Ajanta Paul

Alfredo Quarto

Allan Lake

Ave Jeanne Ventresca

Bud R. Berkich

Carla M. Cherry

Caroline Andreea Zgorțea

C.J. Kreit

Cordelia Hanemann

Damien Posterino

Douglas V. Miller

Gregory Johnson

Jane Mary Curran

Jianing Ran

Elizabeth Kirkpatrick-
Vrenios

Lindsey Morrison Grant

Lorna Wood

Marc Isaac Potter

Merit C. Nwachukwu

Poppy Livacious Wild

Robert Cohen

Shiyang Su

Cover Design: Zixi Wang

World

New maps are drawn
On the heart, every dawn.

Like chalk borders in a child's atlas.
Their boundaries smudge and dissolve.

Migrant memories and displaced dreams
Dismiss the dividing lines, and their confines,

As we return to the hazy horizon of hope
To haunt the site of old delights.

No cartography in the world
Can separate us,

For we *are* the world.

— Ajanta Paul

Ruin

Some hear the sound of rain.

I hear only ruin.

In cataclysms that destroy

I hear the fall of Troy,

In that ominous drizzle

I see the steeple topple

And hear the fall of Constantinople

The change from Byzantine to Ottoman rule.

Rain...ruin...a refrain,

Perfect saga of pain.

Inca, Aztec, Maya

Mesopotamia and Harappa

Gone into the dusk

Without a backward glance.

I hear ruin in the acid rain

Attending a nuclear explosion,

And see Fate holding her sides

And laughing at genocides.

Some hear the sound of rain.

I hear only ruin.

Still I reason, maybe this ruin

Will, some day, fertilize the scorched terrain.

— Ajanta Paul

Bio:

Dr. Ajanta Paul is a poet, short story writer and literary critic who is currently Principal and Professor of English at Women's Christian College, Kolkata. A Pushcart nominee, her poems and short stories have been featured in national and international literary journals such as *Spadina Literary Review*, *The Pangolin Review*, *The Piker Press*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Innerchild Press International*, *Written Tales Magazine*, *The Bombay Review*, *The Statesman*, *Setu Bilingual Journal*, *Café Dissensus* and *Borderless Journal*, to name a few. Ajanta has published a collection of short stories - *The Elixir Maker and Other Stories* in 2019 (Authorspress, New Delhi) and has contributed poems to several seminal anthologies of poetry.

Castaway Upon the Shore

The sound of waves lapping shore
waves lapping shore
 waves lapping
lapping.

Wayward ducks in broken
V formation cross the sky
sensing winter's coming
we follow with our eyes
till they disappear in clouds.

Ashore she casts her line
tied to her bait of shrimp
stuck on the sharp viewpoint
of her barbed words meant
to pierce and catch the fish
hidden in the sightless sea
save for the fine filament of light
that settles gently deep in sleep
upon her swaying seaweed bed.

Her pole is a magic wand
dispensing fish on her line
an unwritten stanza resting
upon the waters of her castaway
longing for something wild and alive
on which to feed and find
self-nourishment.

— Alfredo Quarto

Bio:

Alfredo Quarto is an environmental activist and poet living on an organic farm in the foothills of the Olympic Mountains in Washington. He's been published in numerous poetry publications including: Poetry Seattle, Catalyst, Raindance Journal, Piedmont Review, Haiku Zashi Zo, Paperbag Poems, Seattle Arts, Spindrift, Arts Focus, Arnazella, Dan River Anthology, Amelia, Americas Review, Vox, Middle House Review, The Closed Eye Open, Elevation Review, Montana Mouthful, and Tidepools.

Down Feather

Single down feather on clay footpath,
like something alive in the breeze.
Not quill feather. Nothing symbolic,
conspicuous as tail or flight feather.
A small, soft downy feather appearing
of little consequence but once was.

That's the weight of what moved me
that day I never circled on my calendar.
A look, a word, a tone. Some small thing
unsubstantial as thought, the stuff that
makes things grow. Temples standing up-
on what certain mites might call faith
are often built – seem to float – on
just such wispy foundations.

— Allan Lake

Bio:

Allan Lake, originally from Saskatchewan, has lived in Vancouver, Cape Breton, Ibiza, Tasmania & Melbourne. Poetry Collection: *Sand in the Sole* (Xlibris, 2014). Lake won Lost Tower Publications (UK) Comp 2017, Melbourne Spoken Word Poetry Fest 2018 and publication in *New Philosopher* 2020. Chapbook (Ginninderra Press 2020) *My Photos of Sicily*.

COLLAGE OF MANY COLORS / the occupation of death

death is an insatiable hero
whose occupation takes him
to far away places, nearby dreams
and twinkle lit towns
where these elderly bodies wait in shadow
with long tales of their childhood and
mismatched socks of red and brown. he rearranges

the way things look, mindful of
responsibility and passing seasons. removes
weeds from lush lawns, observes
dandelion and lily orange, to make it
his choice where new growth will appear.

he dashes through hospital wards,
selecting this or that in his path, designs
room for new arrivals. here, he is planting
disease and virus at will.

there is the constant
claim in silent forests, tall oak and willow
under silver moon notice his small silent changes
of design.

methodical maneuvers touch three act plays
where footsteps of soldiers come and go,
at fade and dissolution from some certain moment.

he will come for you and
me, like a paper wrapped package in the mail
to be opened with care
or returned with sender unknown.

— Ave Jeanne Ventresca

Bio:

Ave Jeanne Ventresca (aka: ave jeanne) is the author of nine chapbooks of poetry that reflect social and environmental concerns.

Her most recent collection, *Noticing The Colors of Ordinary*, was released in the summer of 2019. She edited the acclaimed literary magazine *Black Bear Review*, and served as publisher of Black Bear Publications for twenty years. Her award winning poetry (contemporary and Asian) has been widely published internationally within commercial and literary magazines, in print and online. Ave Jeanne was nominated for the Pushcart Prize for 2019.

Chasm

My mind, a blank.

Nothing matters anymore.

This chasm between
past and present

an Acheron gulf. No bridge, no
Charon ferry across

this Styx.

This hell.

— Bud R. Berkich

Bio:

Bud R. Berkich is from central New Jersey. He writes in all genres, including screenplays and literary criticism. He is the co-founder of two poetry groups: the Borders Poetry Group in Bridgewater, NJ (2003-2009) and the Somerset Poetry Group (2006-present). From 2004-2008, Bud was involved with three Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festivals. His favorite poets are William Carlos Williams and Emily Dickinson.

It Must Be Something I Can Live With

When I asked what color I should paint
the bedroom, he suggested red.

I get it, I said.

We are

two hearts thrumming in tangled sleep,
thumping, entangled arms and legs
light back scratching. thin bleeding.

Red beckons memories

the Christmas Aunt Joan bought us sweaters with cherry decals.
I was jealous because Donna got the red one.

College graduation. Before Mommy snapped a picture
of Daddy and me, I laid my right hand on Daddy's shoulder.
Left hand against left leg. My candy-apple red nails gleamed.

The soups and smoothies I make with my red blender.
Red onions in homemade guacamole,
atop kale salad and veggie burgers.

My best friend's favorite color is red.

To celebrate her new job,

I bought her a bouquet of carmine roses
that bloomed for a week.

Red can be

lipstick, except
my complementary color is brown.

Red is reminder

of the necessity to stop. Wait.
I had to learn, full pauses at stop signs.

Never stop short at red traffic lights.
The ticket I got taught me not to run through them.

Red is also

menstrual blood seeping
my white terrycloth bathrobe
July 12, 1983 at 1:12 p.m.
Crying in the arms of my smiling mother.
I was 12 and not ready for the calendar watching,
keep-your-legs-closed warnings.
Leaks into panties even when you pressed the pads down firmly.
Scrubbing out the crotch with a small bar of soap.

Heavy flow of fibroids.
Clumps like red jelly.
Blood dripping on toilets at home
and the floors of public bathrooms
stooping to mop the blood
with toilet paper before anyone saw.

Red is

burn of knives slicing fingertips
as I chop fruits and veggies.
The time I was cutting open a box
of butternut squash soup and cut my finger.
Oh, the blood.
I wrapped my finger
for the longest time to stem the flow.

Red is

a pajama top I bought before a trip
to see a boyfriend who stopped calling me six months later.

Red is

serosanguinous fluid flowing from

the hole in Donna's right leg. The tumor was 12 centimeters.
She learned to walk again,
then the cancer spread to her lungs, her eyes, her brain.
We buried her six months later.

I get you, he said.

We'll choose a color you can live with.

— Carla M. Cherry

Bio:

Carla M. Cherry is a veteran English teacher. Her poetry has appeared in publications such as *Anderbo*, *Eunoia Review*, *Random Sample Review*, *MemoryHouse*, *Bop Dead City*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *433*, *The Racket* and *Raising Mothers*. Carla is studying for her M.F.A. in Creative Writing at the City College of New York. She has written five books of poetry; her latest is *Stardust and Skin* (iiPublishing 2020).

I dreamt my last road

I got in the car and began driving
In the dark night, the road stretched long
In front of me.
I used to be scared at the idea
Of driving around, at night, on my own,
Now it's just another moment passing
While I drive in an old car, destination unknown.
The future stretches out in front of me
Like patches of grass coming out in spring,
Illuminating everything around me,
Even though the road has no streetlights to begin with.
I turn the music on and listen to the radio,
To an old show they used to have somewhere in the world,
A sort of starry night before you go to sleep
With soft ballads in the background,
Lulling you towards good dreams.
I'm back in my car again,
The one I never thought I would get to see,
Carrying me forward, a new destination awaits,
I have no idea where I'm going
At the end of my days.
I have lived well, I will say,
I was loved and I did love,
Maybe, some will say
At the end of my days,
No one will know where I have gone,
Not even me, a dreamy island stretches right in front of me.

I had a dream last night
That I had died
And got into my very first car,
Driving around, like I always did,
I used to have a map in hand,

Last night I didn't have anything,
No markings and no light,
But I had music and soft voices
All around, coming as tunes
On the waves I continuously changed
On the radio.
It was summer, I think,
I could hear cicadas sing.
It was peaceful and exciting
At the same time
To go somewhere I had never been.
I always dreamed of going to an island when my life ends.

— Caroline Andreea Zgorțea

Bio:

Caroline Andreea Zgorțea majored in Management, but since she loves connecting to people and hearing their stories, she ended up being a counselor and a paramedic. Her love for the arts was passed on from her grandparents, especially books being a faithful companion to her days. As an artist, she took part in drawing, painting and photography exhibitions in a need to express her inner world. She sells her drawings and photographs through an online gallery based in the U.S. and one her drawings has been chosen as the cover for the Issue 12 of the Awakened Voices, a literary journal from Chicago, along with its story, taking the shape of prose. She has published a short story in 2013 in her native language, Romanian. When it comes to writing, she loves to write about ordinary and extraordinary things with a twist. She has a great passion for traveling, drinking tea, listening to music and cooking.

Skinny-Dipping in Hillview Lake

I spent the summer on the ranch
When I was twenty-one
Birthed dust clouds beneath my boots
Inhaled aromas of leather and dust
Kissed the velvet breath of horses.

The sweat of each day evaporated
On cranberry sunsets splashed wide
Across a canvas speckled with pines.
We lay in the grass, staring up at the sky
Filling with stars, sharing our souls.

I wanted to catch that summer in a jar
Moments trapped like fireflies
Or the mosquitos whose bites you counted
On your sunburnt skin.

It's bittersweet, the way life keeps moving—
Or doesn't.

When I heard you were gone
It knocked me breathless
Like I'd been thrown from a horse.
Then it woke me
Like a jump into frigid water:

Your moonlit peal of laughter
As we all ran naked from the beach
Hurtling our bodies
Into the cold black cover of lake
Brilliantly alive.

Our fragile hearts beat the passage of time
And things kept safely in jars die anyway.
Better to blaze through the open air
Brightening, for a moment, the night.

— C.J. Kreit

Bio:

C.J. Kreit lives in Kentucky with her husband and two young sons. She holds a BA degree in English from Spring Arbor University where she has been previously published in the university's literary journal.

under sterile thunder

no water in the creek only rock
and the spongy residue of past springs
the sound of water a memory only

dry sterile thunder cracks open the night
up ahead momentary the white road
neither beckoning nor refusing

the road a ribbon of black lonely journey home
after the shock after dread
quarantine and isolation

the catalogue of names our new ghosts
our masks now make us
who we have become

anguish of lost spring in our eyes
the horror of not touching
the living fearing the living

eerie the silence except
this grind of tires on the gravel incline
the road that winds the road taken

there is loneliness here despite
cities and towns
houses with lights

night sneers at the traveler
houses turn their backs
a howl of wind whips trees

cowled again in dark again no rain
only a land parched lifeless

and without water

"under sterile thunder" continued/ new stanza Cordelia Hanemann

hordes of memories a crowd of bats' wings
hovering decayed castle of oak
hollow at the core dry bones of a dead tree

lightning blazons down a blackened wall
(darker than the night itself)
torn rocks like broken grave stones

the kept Hours are futile
deep wells without buckets
the steeple stark against an indigo sky

no water in the font
no sign of the cross windy chapel
black clouds hoarding rain

here steeped in silence blood rising
heart into jugular choking
coughing driving on through this

dark night no obituary only road
car wheel wheels grinding
home empty rooms doors with

or without keys only nightfall
and the occasional streak of lightning
the sound of thunder its broken song

lonely traveler

— Cordelia Hanemann

Bio:

Cordelia Hanemann is currently a practicing writer and artist in Raleigh, NC. A retired professor of English at Campbell University, she has published in numerous journals including *Atlanta Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Dual Coast Magazine*, and *Laurel Review*; anthologies, *The Well-Versed Reader*, *Heron Clan* and *Kakalak* and in her own chapbook, *Through a Glass Darkly*. Her poem, "photo-op" was a finalist in the *Poems of Resistance* competition at Sable Press and her poem "Cezanne's Apples" was nominated for a Pushcart. Recently she was featured poet for Negative Capability Press and *The Alexandria Quarterly*, she is now working on a first novel, about her roots in Cajun Louisiana.

No Chorus

We've been on the same ride for years.
A lucky wheel without a flap to slow it down,
Doom trapped on a merry go round,
Your head will spin without a sound,
Around it goes again.
We've been writing the same song for years.
No melody to rinse the soul,
No twinkle in this pot of gold,
No words are real for fools not told,
Let's sing it all again.
We've been hunting the same thing for years.
Fire blindfolded - what have you got?
It's not what you thought you had shot,
Bloodhounds all know you've lost the plot,
Just hear them howl again.
We've been closing our eyes for years.
Unwrap that box of dynamite,
Dark message in the broad daylight,
Then you're in knots again tonight,
So close your eyes again.

— Damien Posterino

Bio:

Damien Posterino (he/him) is a poet currently writing full time in Mexico. Damien is Melbourne born but has also made London his home. His poetry explores themes of characters, commentary and capturing moments in time. He is being published in the June 20th edition of Fairy Piece Magazine. twitter.com/damienposterino

Summer Day

Popsicle smiles and
ice cream kisses,
sprinkler rain with
water balloon misses.

Sea serpent waves
sink meat-tray ships,
thrashing water when
they all take a dip.

Humming along with
a bumblebee's buzz,
blowing away all the
dandelion's fuzz.

Laying on the grass
watching some ants,
run and jump 'cause
they're in your pants.

Swinging the swing
wa-a-ay up high,
'til toes are lost
way up in the sky.

After running wildly over
a green backyard lawn,
laying quiet in a hammock
sighing out one, tiny, yawn.

— Douglas V. Miller

Bio:

Douglas V. Miller is a disabled Vietnam veteran, writer, poet, and editor. He has published in, *Continue the Voice*, *The Rational Creature*, *Writer's Egg Magazine*, *Terror House Magazine* twice, three issues of *Stripes*, is included in, *Who's Who of Emerging writers 2021*, and is in the anthology, *Mythology of the Heart*.

Goddreams

Caught in memory black eyed
and stricken
with small thoughts
eating away the time.

He said.

A god in denim
plays with himself
with a backdrop
of borrowed dreams
muddy shoes worn
in the house
leaving little dried
reminders
of the earth.

Bashed by apathetic wind
snarling bits of experience
play upon the god's
black eyed daydream;
push away the dead leaves
push them all away,
back to the star
from whence they came
atomic and perfect.

Paralyzed in an easy chair
sleep descends upon the god
like sap from an angry maple
amber dreams and nightmares
forever frozen in a lost time
a lost universe
a forgotten present
a gift returned
to the service desk

way in the back.

The god picks his nose
and stares at the clock face
bad posture and neglected lungs.
Miracles surround him
in splendid display
a museum all his own
filled with relics
watched with dulled wonder
New England clam chowder
and uncut grass.

— Gregory Johnson

Bio:

Gregory Johnson has been an artist and poet for over forty years. For Gregory, poetry and art is a much-needed therapy, a way to get out of this mind trap. He attended Cooper School of Art, Cleveland, Ohio. He is an active member of the Ohio Poetry Association. He has been published in their annual collections, "Common Threads" 2019, 2020 and its upcoming 2021 issue. His poem, "Love Amoeba" was featured in the "Cuyahoga County Library Celebration of Poetry" in April 2020. His art evolved from being bored with the "usual" and delving into the inside of his soul through inspired "doodles". His media is felt tipped pens, which he fell in love with in art school while doing layout work, on paper and foam core. His art and poetry can be found on his website: gregoryalanart.com.

Close on Midnight

When traffic dies down and the racket of human psyches goes quiet,
when the busy, burning noise of phones, caffeine and password protected worlds
relents
and only a few diehards are still awake, chasing money,
I open *Leaves of Grass*
or *Ash Wednesday* or *The Tempest*, crack the spine
and read, sometimes aloud, into the hours when
poems expose their sharpest edges,
each bladed word a single sound.
I overhear whispers among the lines.
Revels begin, spirits emerge from thin air,
voices claim acquaintance with the night.
Hope returns and spreads itself, a string of stars
across the perfect silence of the sky.
I read poems late at night while creatures sleep.
I find I listen better in the dark.

— Jane Mary Curran

Bio:

Jane Mary Curran lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She is retired from a college professorship in piano and a second career as a hospice chaplain and spiritual director. She is the author of *Indiana Girl, Poems* (2019), and *Midwives of the Spirit: Thoughts on Caregiving* (2002). Her new collection in progress is *Heresies: Lost Voices*.

Thin crop

An Apocalyptic August in California – The New Yorker

The sky is lit with clementine and fuchsia; strikes of lightning, dry, purple,
color the horizon like stained-glass. I huddle and hibernate masked
from the heavy air, choked by fear. How can I run from my shuttered
home in the midst of this burning town? I am no longer safe from
the blaze or the virus, and the infernos' greed devour my speech.
This year's crop of hope and courage has become dry kindling.
I try to escape this brief now that has become a river of red
tail-lights disappearing into the smoke like melting stalagmites,
but where can I go? A hurricane of pelicans hovers over the ocean;
smoke uncoils over the world in slack awe.

— Elizabeth Kirkpatrick-Vrenios

Bio:

Elizabeth Kirkpatrick-Vrenios resides in Mendocino, CA. Nominated for a Pushcart Prize, her poetry has been featured in such online poetry columns as: Ekphrastic Review, Abyss and Apex, Kentucky Review, Form Quarterly, Scissors and Spackle, Foliate Oak and in issues of Poeming Pigeon, Unsplendid and The Edison Review. Her prize-winning chapbook, *Special Delivery* was published by Yellow Chair Press in 2016, and her second chapbook released in April 2021, *Empty the Ocean with a Thimble*, by Word Tech Communications. A Professor Emerita from American University, she has performed as a solo singing artist across Europe and the United States.

Daddy Dance

I can no longer recall the bookends,
the in and out of that precious night,
but I can still feel my dad's sinewy arms lifting me up.
He smelled of Lucky Strikes and postman's pits
as his weekend beard bristled against my cherub cheeks.

I recall Lawrence Welk's Champagne Music Makers on the TV
and the sound of my own giggles
as he and I swayed to and fro
with the sound of bubbles popping
I recall his putting me down to pick up Penny
and my own impatience in awaiting
my next turn.

To our surprise, he lifted me again,
holding us both...
to our mutual delight
as we danced a tarantella
until his pants fell to the floor...
where we ended up as well,
my sister and I,
as we laughed until tears came to our eyes
and our wee bellies ached.

I can still see the delight in his eyes
when sweet memories blanket his thoughts,
as they are a comforter to us all.
Warm nostalgia tucks me in at night.

When I hear a polka it takes me to this place.
When I hear children laugh
I slip on God's shoes and dance a tarantella
until my cares drop to the floor and I lose myself
in memory and giggles.

— Lindsey Morrison Grant

Bio:

Self-identifying as a neurodivergent, two-spirit, elder storyteller deeply rooted in the lore and roar that is Portlandia of The Left Coast. Their success, survival (if not salvation) are found in a superlative support network, mindfulness practice, and daily exercise in words, sounds, and images.

Where the Machine Can't Go

" . . . painted portraits have a life of their own that comes from deep in the soul of the painter and where the machine can't go. The more photographs one looks at, it seems to me, the more one feels this."—
Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 14 Dec.1885

What are you seeking in those self-portraits,
over and over, so sad, so baleful?
Are you in quest of your own genius?
Or do you fear you haven't got any?
Or is it the sadness of dragging it
up from that place where the machine can't go

into—Is that it, too, or part of it?
Do you, armored in your blue smock, fear us?
Our eyes, lost in the blues, oranges, greens,
whirl inexorably to yours, looking
for the place without machines, but we find
ourselves blocked by sadness, madness, anger.
Did your own eyes, wary and wild, block you?
Did you then dash and slash in a frenzy,

only to find that all your mad daubing
still could not reach it? Did you, soon after,
try again, with a new hat, or a pipe—
refusing to accept defeat—only
to leave another scarring testament
to the place where machines can never go?

And did you, in the end, harvest your ear,
take refuge in the indifference of wheat,
the inexorable glare of the sun,
the murder of crows? Did you, journeying
in those landscapes, seek unity, yet feel

that always, just over the horizon,
that place waited, calling your eye, your brush
to paint humanity, just one more time?

Mother and Child

(after a portrait by Robert Sijka)

Tortoiseshells, coats blended together
in one dying fire. The little one,
its cheek pushed against its mother's,
looks out—one eye wide against danger,
the other narrowed, prepared to flinch.
The turned-down mouth, soft amidst the fur,
remembers love's desperate needs—
the mingling and the pulling away.

The mother looks off in the distance,
her eyes haunted and feral with
the weight of love against her.
Watchfully she balances
the dyad she has made against
the realm of savagery and loss
where she alone provides, protects
and conquers.

— Lorna Wood

Bio:

Lorna Wood is a violinist and writer in Auburn, Alabama, with a Ph.D. in English from Yale. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Bookends Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Cacti Fur*, *Quaranzine*, *Nevermore*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Coastal Shelf*, *After the Pause*, *Escape Wheel* (great weather for MEDIA), *Lucky Jefferson* (365), *North of Oxford*, *DASH*, *Poetry South* (Pushcart Nominee), *Luminous Echoes* (poems shortlisted for *Into the Void's* poetry contest), *Leaves of Loquat V* (second prize, Loquat Festival Literary Contest), *Five:2:One* (#thesideshow), *Unstitched States*, *Gnu*, and *These Fragile Lilacs*, among others. She was also long-listed for the Erbacce Prize, and poems she published in *ShufPoetry* were positively reviewed on *New Pages* (15 Dec. 2016). In addition to poetry, Wood has published fiction, creative nonfiction, and scholarly essays. For more information, consult her Amazon Author Page at <https://www.amazon.com/~e/B00HAGNZAE>.

Tremble is a Verb

... seconds ago, there would have been something to write ... now I am not so very sure ... the go-carts that roar from decades gone by ... through a thick miles-square

patch of woods, remind me, that some boy's father spends time with him, and teaches him things ... has the patience to hang in there with him while he struggles to learn.

As I slowly move this way or that ... this way and or that way ... I am trying to make my physical movements be something of interest to myself, or the wind, or the chickadees

or the acorns. For example, I am trying to learn what a basketball is and why do people throw it so high up in an oak tree with a metal circle in it ... a metal circle that does not resemble any basket grandma has ever made. ... now, years later,

I know that the branches
were both
excellent
blockers of my shots
plus in their own way
they were attempting to embrace me

"hang in there kid" they were saying "even though, yes, this is doing irreparable damage to whoever you might have been ... someday you will be free enough to walk down a sidewalk without voices playing so loud in your mind that you cannot walk unimpeded;

*someday
you will learn to open
a can of soup by yourself
and someone will say
'I love you.'
and by then you will know what that means."*

... the chickens in the chicken coup pretend they do not hear the oak tree's counsel the red leaf maple says she is busy making her seeds drop with that special winged twirl

that she likes so very much.

Catastrophes in the form of old jalopy cars drive by hell-bent on making it to Smiley's

Bar and Friendly Place one more time. The go-carts roar around and around the dirt track over on Poor Man's Road and the vague void

of existence

gags me, hugs me.

— Marc Isaac Potter

Bio:

Marc Isaac Potter aka Marc Isaax Potter (they/them) ...is a differently-abled writer living in the SF Bay Area. Marc's interests include blogging by email and Zen. Since 2001, Marc has produced a TV Talk show at the Community Access level; the show is called *In Our Community*. His Twitter handle is @marcisaacpotter.

UNMOISTURIED

when I am asked to define home,
I remember my mother and sigh.

Where I come from is craggy on skin
Brutal wars fought with sagging traditions.

We had maggis
not the type from the bible
these ones wore suit and tie.

My mother always defines home in three sentences:

the landscape is low and dry,
the kind of dry that brakes your lips in two
such that happiness remains buried in your guts.

we are all sailing winds of
premature periods and unintentional commas.

longing and searching for relief,
but all we ever got were sighs,
bloody dew drops,
sore throats,
broken backs,
and dry skin.

we sought for home in our home,
home where we could rest our head,
rest our bodies and voices.

the wary tale of loss remains
stitched in our bones
birthmarks,
art pieces,
and when we die,
Linage.

— Merit C. Nwachukwu

Bio:

Merit C. Nwachukwu is a writer and blogger from two states in Nigeria. She has been published in The Muse Journal in Nsukka, Enugu state, Nigeria. She has forthcoming works in Arts Lounge, an online literary journal. She also studies English and Literary Studies at the moment at the University of Nigeria.

Unleashed

Once upon a menstrual cycle tidal red as primal vital would stream and beam its vicious hormonal dream. A tiny seed that would not breed into a love divine, would give a sign that it was time to let this temple shine. Endorphins stormed while nest was formed for whole and fertile foetus; alas what met us merely thus: an ending failing kernel. No vernal force but no remorse let nature take its course; a wave of blood and matter poured cascading down from blessed walls, a delicate natural pyre for a vacant darkened fire. The viscous mucus that would found umbilical mass came tearing down, suffused with blood it cruised and bruised our cervix. Like a boiling furnace we worked the surface, labouring at our service. Without haste the muscles race to rid body of its waste. Cramping harder pain like murder, stabbing daggers and battering hammers for seventy two hours or more! At last the gore, ancient feminine lore, has fulfilled its monthly chore.

— Poppy Livacious Wild

Bio:

Poppy Livacious Wild (Liv) is an atheistic Satanist from the North East of England. Her beliefs are the product of a dark mind and a catholic education. With nothing but trouble for her curiosity she faded into herself for many years until a pandemic brought out her lustrous, wicked poetry.

STEVIE

Stevie's gone,
Shot through the heart,
For the war,
He did his part.
To the corps,
He was just a number,
To his mother
He is dead.

— Robert Cohen

Bio:

Robert Cohen has been a writer for five years & has provided his services independently. Robert has also self-published, "Tough Guy Legends."

His education includes an MS in Physiology from Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven & an MBA from Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant.

Robert was a former member of the Plymouth, Michigan Library Writers Club & a Vietnam Veteran, Fleet Marine Force Corpsman, Charlie Company, 1st Bn, 26th Marines.

The End.