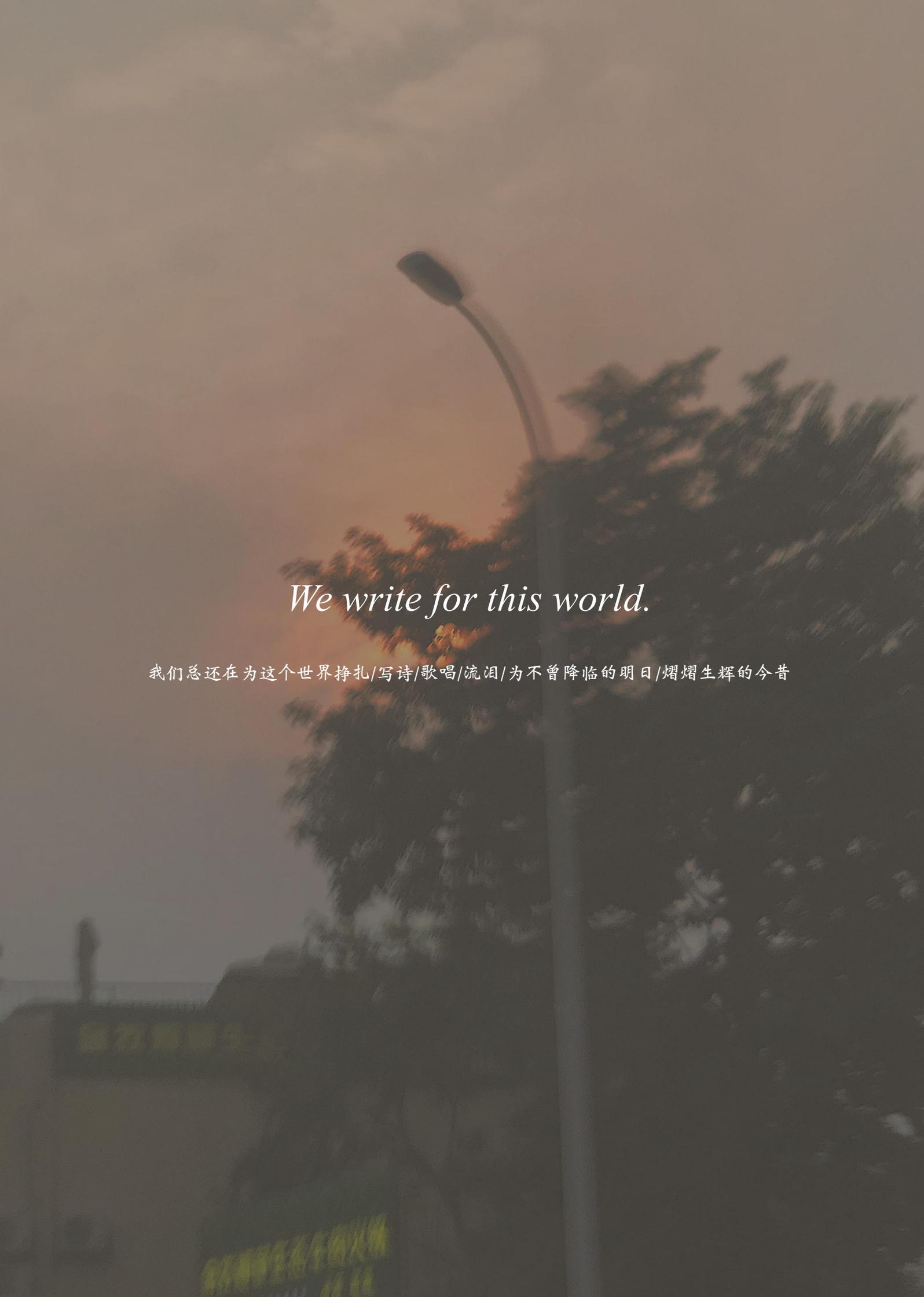




# POETIC SUN

# ISSUE 2

EDITORS: SHIYANG SU  
JIANING RAN

A photograph of a street lamp and trees at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and grey. The street lamp is a modern, curved design. The trees are dark and silhouetted against the sky. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

*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

Alex De-Gruchy

Bobby Parrott

Brad Shurmantine

Elliot Wilner

Eve Rifkah

Gene Bradbury

Jianing Ran

Jim Muires

Joseph Hart

John Lysaght

Ken Allan Dronsfield

Lhance Karl Caratao

Michael Lee Johnson

Michelle M. Mead

Ray DiZazzo

Sandra Schachter

Sheryl Guterl

Shiyang Su

Tope Ogundare

## The Man Who Would Mosey

I'm alone, or at least as alone as a man can be  
Out here surrounded by nature, by life  
The buzz of insects, the grass swaying and rustling in the breeze  
The sparkling stream burbling softly as it flows between the trees  
On the prairie far below grazes a herd of buffalo  
Beneath that great expanse vivid and blue  
Above a hawk cries as it glides gracefully, a distant speck  
My horse snorts, shifts her head, "Good girl" I say as I pat her neck

The marvellous, sunlit landscape stretches to the horizon  
I sit in my saddle, captivated  
By the snow-capped peaks and the rolling green plains in their grandeur  
No riotous march of progress, just the world's sublime candour  
Thoughts and memories, places and faces, joys and regrets  
Drift away, trifling, ephemeral things  
There are no words so I just breathe, taking in air cool and pure  
Then I spur my horse on, a man at peace and never immured

At least that's the dream, the reality nothing so wondrous  
The muffled noises of unseen neighbours  
Bare walls and harsh lights and the clattering of trains passing by  
Brick and steel and concrete crowding out the greenery and sky  
Days spent alone and silent, true, but far from where I belong  
Freedom and contentment out of my reach  
But I'll take what I can in a time and place I'll never dwell  
So for now I think I'll just go on and mosey a spell

— Alex De-Gruchy

### Bio:

Alex De-Gruchy is a writer of fiction and non-fiction, his work to date having included comic books, short prose fiction, videogames, film, radio and other audio, and more: [www.alexdegruchy.wordpress.com](http://www.alexdegruchy.wordpress.com).

## After These Several Cups of Music

Fragrance of lilac, just before rain—  
the mention of mothers, the wide place  
an outsider makes. Flavor of a drink

a madrigal we play on the lips. And rain  
is never wrong. In the candy spectacle  
of games hangs a safe space where laughter

is never bottled. Nor drunk near enough. Green  
daydreams of elastic, peopled in telephones,  
the frank movements of the moon. Stare me not.

As the curves of mountains indent toward an open  
window, a thrown rock orbits the Earth barely  
for a moment. Here is a harmony: Scratch lightly

the skin of a yet unstruck match head. The air  
vibrates its spaceport of molecules, hums in  
thick, vastly microscopic units of violet. Where

cake offers a certain window of escape, a mirror  
ramps the situation of furniture clear back to legless.  
Sourdough toast engages poetry in only the *least*

bookish. Which is to channel the varnished  
crunch of committees in a sluicing wash of starlight.  
We feel so small. These doll-house skies, quartz

liminal as the liquid-filled compass of your eyes  
turns its lens a more bluish tinge. And then  
we shall hear East for once far nearer, flusters

of hot air balloons whispering downrange. Nor will  
the kingfisher reflect his emerald insistence  
upon mere wizardry. Especially in *this* music.

— Bobby Parrott



**Bio:**

Bobby Parrott was probably placed on this planet in error. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, this Poet's universe frequently reverses polarity, slipping his meta-cortex into the unknowable dimensions between breakfast and adulthood. In his own words, "The intentions of trees are a form of loneliness we climb like a ladder." Poet, musician, photographer, and teacher, he currently finds himself immersed in a forest-spun jacket of toy dirigibles in ascension, dreaming himself out of formlessness in the chartreuse meditation capsule called Fort Collins, Colorado, where he lives with his house plant Zebrina and his wind-up robot Nordstrom.

## Ode to LBJs

*“The term ‘sparrow’ covers a wide range of relatively small, mostly drab brown birds, which birders often call “LBJs” or “little brown jobs” because they can be notoriously difficult to identify.”*

Blessed be the nameless poets,  
we wee ones,  
little brown jobs who chitter away  
and fly into windows.

Blessed be the painters behind their easels  
on the concrete pier, their parchments blue.

All the little yellow flowers on skinny stalks,  
mowed down each week, who spring back up  
to feed the bees: bless you.

Sons and daughters no one adores,  
who eat alone, snuggle with cats,  
go to bars to be seen & watch football,  
who hold up little bits of their life  
on Instagram: thank you.

Insects click away in the grass.  
Someone knows your name, your face,  
admires your barbed thighs.  
Listens.

— Brad Shurmantine

## Bio:

Brad Shurmantine ([bradshurmantine.com](http://bradshurmantine.com)) lives in Napa, Ca., where he writes, reads, tends three gardens (sand, water, vegetable), keeps bees, takes care of chickens and cats, and works on that husband thing. His fiction and personal essays have appeared in *Every Day Fiction* and *Nightingale & Sparrow*; his poetry in *Jam and Sand* and *Blue Lake Review*. He backpacks in the Sierras and travels when he can, and has a serious passion for George Eliot.

## CROATIAN HOLIDAY

(A Prose Poem)

The bus rolls on through the quiet of the night, its tires humming a ceaseless senseless song, a pervasive white noise that coaxes us to sleep, or at least to drowse, as we recline in our plush seats, serene, sated and soused, after a festive evening in a Dalmatian village house. We are thirty-five American tourists, in Croatia on holiday, now returning to our hotel in Dubrovnik, an hour's drive away. Languid and torpid, we still savor the meal we had in the village house, the goulash and dumplings and the grilled sardines and the brandy they call rakija, all seasoned with Slavic songs and chords plucked from the balalaika. No one speaks, silence reigns, only the tires hum their song and the bus rolls on. Nary a word issues from the mouth of our young guide Tomislav, who is usually so loquacious, ever eager to expound and expatiate; but Tomi, too, now appears to be sedate, so we all drift into a reverie, happily reliving the evening's revelry.

Half an hour has elapsed, another half hour the bus must cruise before we reach the comforter-covered beds in our Comfortable Hotel, so we sink into somnolence. Then, suddenly, the microphone comes alive and crackles and Tomi's voice bursts into all our brains, severing every reverie! We are now only twenty minutes from our destination and Tomi has been roused from his languor by the driver of the bus. What urgent message, we wonder, does Tomi at this late hour think he must deliver? Does he have news of another Balkan calamity? Or will it be another travel story, another banality?

No, the irrepressible Tomi is about to favor us with a lecture, never mind the hour, and we are his captive listeners as he seeks to further our appreciation of Croatian culture. He immediately challenges us, oblivious to the lethargic ambience of his audience:

What, comes the question, are the three leading causes of death in the Croatian population?...

We look at one another in dismay... really, what is there to say? We cannot overcome our inertia. What do we know of death in Croatia? Eventually a couple of people do respond in a diffident way...Cancer? ventures one, Heart disease? ventures another...

Wrong, says Tomi, that's not the answer...I'll tell you the answer. The three leading causes of death in Croatia are: one, road accidents; two, husbands who beat their wives; and three, wives who poison their husbands.

Although we heard what he said, we aren't sure what he meant. Was he telling us truly the facts of life in his country? If so, all of us think, Croatia must surely be a very sick society. Or did he mean what he said as a joke? If so, this was a joke that lacked all propriety. We look at one another glumly, too embarrassed to speak, and throughout the bus silence reigns again, except for the tires humming their senseless song. What can we say? What did he mean? Could it possibly be true, is that what people here do? Then, penetrating the gloom, out of nowhere it seems, comes the small, still voice of a woman, earnest and artless, asking this question, without the least bit of guile:

What kind of poison?

There is no response for a very brief while, no sound apart from the tired hum pervading the bus...when !abruptly! there arises a roar of many voices, a raucous chorus of howls and shrieks vented by each and every one of us, which drowns out the drone of the tires and quickly becomes tumultuous -- until it seems the bus itself might

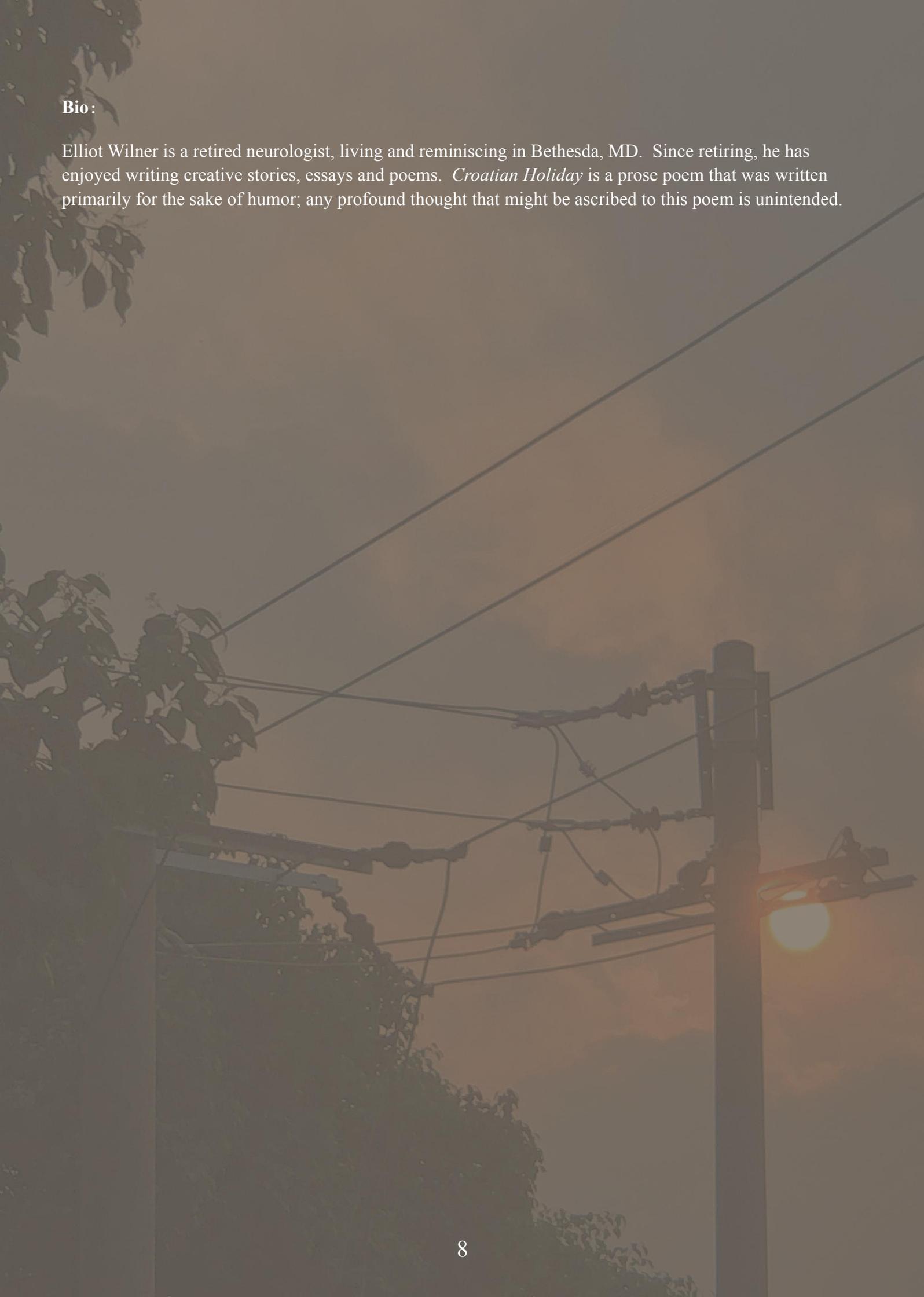
convulse! It's an epidemic of laughter, infecting every passenger as well as the driver!  
No doubt, that's the funniest thing we have ever, ever heard! Who would ask a question  
so brazen and absurd? What homicidal thoughts must be brewing in that woman's head!

Now we are approaching the city limit of Dubrovnik but the roar has yet to subside, and  
when the driver switches on the overhead light, all eyes turn to the woman in the aisle  
seat second row right ...to Betty, who is sitting quietly, quite composed, while her husband Edwin  
frowns meekly at her side. Her gaze is fixed on Tomi standing in the aisle, as if she has been  
waiting for his answer all this while. Betty appears a little abashed – only a little – but she does not  
join in the laughter, and husband Edwin, it's plain to see, does not consider this to be a laughing  
matter.

Tomi, dumbfounded for once, does not offer an answer to Betty's question, but he advances down  
the aisle toward the subdued couple, kneading Edwin's shoulders with both his hands to buck him  
up; and then he bends to kiss Betty tenderly on her head, like a parent kissing a child who's been  
tucked into bed. Now Betty ventures a smile and Edwin erases his frown, as together they arise  
from their seats and exit the bus, looking ahead to what, all of us hope, will be a night of pure,  
unadulterated conjugal bliss.

Yet, some cynics among us harbor a suspicion: Come morning, will Betty seek out  
Tomi...to repeat her oh-so-innocent question? And, crucially, will Tomi then seek out  
Edwin in the morning...and give him fair warning?

— Elliot Wilner



**Bio:**

Elliot Wilner is a retired neurologist, living and reminiscing in Bethesda, MD. Since retiring, he has enjoyed writing creative stories, essays and poems. *Croatian Holiday* is a prose poem that was written primarily for the sake of humor; any profound thought that might be ascribed to this poem is unintended.

## Mackworth Island, ME

On the island of the deaf  
a dead tree        hollow    gnarled  
shaped like an ear        the listening tree  
the school named it

the students soundless whisper  
secrets        lost in fog  
gulls silent

when we go to the island  
we too speak into the ear  
words travel through the rotted wood  
spiral from mouth  
to air        to nothing

the tree more real than god  
hard beneath our hands  
we want to give our words away  
haunted by echos        of words  
the tree didn't swallow.

— Eve Rifkah

### **Bio :**

Eve Rifkah was co-founder of Poetry Oasis, Inc. (1998-2012), a non-profit poetry association dedicated to education and promoting local poets. Founder, and editor DINER, a literary magazine with a 7-year run. She is the 2021 recipient of the Stanley Kunitz award.

She is a retired professor from Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

She is author of *Dear Suzanne* (WordTech Communications, 2010)  
*Outcasts the Penikese Leper Hospital 1905-1921* (Little Pear Press, 2010)  
*Lost in Sight* (Silver Bow Publishing, 2021)  
chapbook *Scar Tissue*, (Finishing Line Press, 2017)  
chapbook, *At the Leprosarium* 2003 winner of the *Revelever* Chapbook Contest

## Flying Alone

Alone, I fly  
among the flock,  
north into dark skies,  
racing a memory.

My hearts beat  
to migration's song,  
north calling us into  
the dark night.

— Gene Bradbury

## Bio:

Gene Bradbury writes from the Pacific Northwest where he lives with his wife, Deborah and a library of ten thousand books. Gene enjoys writing in multiple genres: poetry, children's stories, short stories, and devotional material.

## Water Bearer

In this and other times,  
a grandmother, mother, daughter  
bears water to her home.  
Vessel balanced high,  
her pace sways and flows to a liquid rhythm.  
Woman, conveyor of that which sustains all life.  
The gush of birth, tears of merriment or sorrow,  
sweat born of strain and play.  
The gift she bears freshens, quenches,  
washes away each day's toil,  
germinates the morrow.  
Moistened lips breathe living hymns,  
easing babes to slumber,  
lightening the weary heart,  
last comfort to the dry dying.

— Jim Muyres

## Covid Goodbye

Sunlight across hospital white sheets.  
Her ever cold hands seek his ever-warm hand.  
Masked smiles, eyes shine as they have,  
all these years.  
Time has gone its way.

Their touch comforts, rocks, and sways.  
Behind closing eyes, vivid newborn colors,  
splash in blind light.

Impossible other world melodies caress.  
Wavering otherworld scents hint,  
of an undreamed Eden's shore.

Yesterdays and today meld into one now.  
A last easy moment, an eternal moment.  
Together, centered in a still eternity,  
wrapped in a star string drawn round.

Masked lips, last kiss.  
Two exhale, one inhales.  
It only takes a moment,  
goodbye.

— Jim Muyres

## Graduation

The only thing she was,  
was beautiful.

This is what she saw in the mirror,  
surprised her as a girl.

The early attention from the boys,  
and men.

Even when too young.

Her dad's eyes too were drawn,  
then clumsily looked away.

Mom and dad had wished  
she was not so much that way.

Embarrassed somehow,  
as a family,  
at the beach, or church,  
always the looks.

Some girls hated her for it,  
or were somehow drawn.  
As though she had a special light.  
There was no special light.

Now she had a degree in something.  
It was in a drawer, in her bedroom.  
Back home from college,  
Now what?

Mother had hoped  
she would be engaged  
by now.  
She could be  
of course.

The thing is,  
she did not want,  
a man,  
or anything.

— Jim Muyres

**Bio:**

Jim is retired from a lot of things, impressive, some not. Having enjoyed a lifetime of reading he developed a passion for writing poetry, short fiction and drawing cartoons.

When asked why he writes, he replies, “I write because I can’t not write”.

Jim has been published in Hey, I’m Alive, The Moccasin, Poet’s Choice, the Enchanted Muse and an upcoming issue of The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature.

His other passions are relationships, slowly remodeling a house, photography, political activism, spiritual growth and being outside. A self-described bumbler he mostly tries to bumble forward.

## The Homecoming

1.

After many years wandering,  
Wandering where  
No deities answered,  
He uttered no prayer.  
He traveled and journeyed  
On ocean and lands  
Possessing no more  
Than himself and his hands.  
And then he came home.  
He returned to them all.

He entered the castle  
And stood in the hall.

His family welcomed him,  
Each with a smile.

They bathed him and dressed him,  
And each with a smile.  
Healing the absence

That company mends,  
The Saturday coming  
They summoned his friends  
For happiness, music,  
Reunion and feast;  
And for the occasion  
They'd slaughter a beast.

The time trickled past  
And the castle was dressed  
in silver and curtains.

What joy it expressed!

"For you. For my son.

Now all partings are past.

My son," said his mother,

"Has come home at last."

And she smiled.

2.

He walked through the castle.  
He wandered the halls.  
He went to the sea  
Where the swell-thunder falls.  
He watched them prepare  
For the upcoming feast.  
He questioned his mother,  
"Say, where is the beast  
That we're going to eat  
On that wonderful night  
When we are together  
And all becomes right?"  
And she smiled.

3.

The days drifted by  
And the party was near.  
His mendicant heart  
Felt the starting of fear.  
The tables, the goblets,  
The chairs and the plates  
Were set and arranged  
For this best of all fetes.  
The draperies that  
The old castle would wear  
Were hung like a rose  
  
In a prostitute's hair.  
He nonetheless asked himself,

"What will we eat?  
There are the apples,  
But where is the meat"  
He questioned the servants,  
And each of them smiled.

4.

And then, then he knew,  
Sardonic and grim,  
What they would eat  
At the feast would be him.  
He ran to the doorway.  
He rushed to the gate.  
He fled down the road  
To escape from the fete.  
Then on the roadway  
He suddenly paused.  
He thought of grief  
Being human had caused.  
He thought of the failures.  
He thought of the fright.  
He thought of the sweet  
Celebration that night.  
And he smiled.

5.

He turned on the causeway  
And solemnly wept.  
Back to the castle  
His walking feet stepped.  
There in the doorway  
His mother had been

Waiting for him  
To return once again.  
And then when she saw him  
She quietly smiled.  
And reached to embrace him  
And murmured, "My child."

6.  
The party was gala.  
The wine was supreme.  
This verse was the sleep  
That composes a dream.

— Joseph Hart

**Bio:**

Joseph Hart has a BA. He has had poems published in small magazines and was twice nominated for a Pushcart. He recently had a collection of poems entitled "Poems Published in India" accepted for publication by Kelsay Books. His favorite poets are Keats and Millay.

## Moonlit

Mother-of-pearl orb ascension,  
Majestic presence of singular beauty,  
This celestial gift,  
A luminous reflection  
Of full countenance,  
Luna light suspended  
In ebony sky ashine  
with sparkling jewels,  
She, faithful steward of the night,  
Watching over us from above,  
Defends against utter darkness.  
Beacon for dreamers,  
Companion for loneliness,  
She traverses her realm  
Gracefully making her appointed rounds  
Abiding by the sun`s retreat and return.

— John Lysaght

## Bio:

John Lysaght is a poet and fiction writer who began honing his craft while at university, graduating in 1968 with a degree in English and Classics. He went on to achieve a Masters in Social Work. He has enjoyed a rich work history as teacher, foster care worker, social work supervisor, and therapist for community mental health. In his writing, John seeks to explore the human condition as it interfaces with its environment. His poetry has appeared in Avocet, The Greenwich Village Literary Review, The Galway Review, the Ogilvie and Nine Muses, among others.

## The Morning Rose

In the waning hours of darkness  
The mourning doves and blackbirds  
begin their day talking to the robins.  
They chirp and sing to wake orioles,  
cardinals, and mocking birds alike.  
While the dew fairies fly to their  
rest during the light of day, lovely  
colorful roses begin to awaken.  
Velveteen petals start to open as the  
sun's first rays begin to peek just  
over the horizon and the tendrils of  
morning mists rise high into the sky.  
In the jungle of concrete, wire and  
noise, a little yellow rose emerges  
from the cracks along the sidewalk.  
The rose fights for it's very survival;  
It bites with a thorny kiss when trying  
to grasp it's beauty within our fingers.  
And as the sun gently slips below the  
horizon we close our eyes to another  
day the little rose wraps tightly in her  
petals waiting for the next sunrise.

— Ken Allan Dronsfield

### Bio:

Ken Allan Dronsfield is a disabled veteran and prize winning poet from New Hampshire, now residing in Oklahoma. He graduated from the Community College of the Air Force. He has six poetry collections to date; 'The Cellaring', 'A Taint of Pity', 'Zephyr's Whisper', 'The Cellaring, Second Edition', 'Sonnets and Scribbles' and his latest collaborative book, 'Inamorata at Twilight'. Ken's been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize and six times for Best of the Net. He was First Prize Winner for the 2018 *and* 2019, Realistic Poetry International Nature Poetry Contests. He has recently begun producing Creative Content on his YouTube channel and has had wonderful success sharing his poetry with the social media community. Ken loves writing, thunderstorms, coin collecting and spending time with his rescue cats Willa and Yumpy.

## Ellie

I used to hate it when you add a strand of your hair on the food,  
Because it reminds me of the bathroom drain or even sometimes the toilet itself.  
I used to hate it when you also dye my wrinkly forehead, until it looked like the goldfish's,  
Or when you pull a bunch of my itchy white hair all at once,  
Or when you secretly turn my newspapers into fire starters,  
And when you're behind and your arthritic legs couldn't close the six feet gap between us anymore,  
So I had to close the gap otherwise.

I used to hate you mumbling in your sleep even when the tube on your mouth was still inserted, making  
you difficult to speak—

I hated your words while you were talking subconsciously about the days when you could still strongly  
throw saucers at me, and when I could still manage to dodge those;

When you were talking about the moment when you were victorious to find out that I had more lines on  
my forehead than yours,

Or the day when you didn't hold back your tears from laughing at my baldness.

But now, when all left to hear are the resemblance of your voice from your children and grandchildren's  
weeps,

I couldn't hate you more today.

You're too selfish to leave.

Your legs suddenly became too healthy to climb the ladder up there.

But honestly,

I missed every mumble you make while you lay on your bed.

I missed every strand of your hair on my cereal.

Or even the ink on my forehead.

And for your information,

The mountain high newspapers are turning into termite hills,

And my white hairs are as itchy as my back.

I want to walk with you again, around the world—

Hand in hand, heart by heart, head to head.

Wake up from that sleep where you find peace because I just started loving you all over again.

I wanted everything to repeat like this never-ending repetition of the sorrowful days without you.

I love you more than the crossword puzzles on my newspaper.

I love you more than the rainy days.

And I love you more than the couch and the television set.

But I'm sorry,

I can't close the gap between us anymore.

Because Darling, you aren't six feet behind—

You're six feet underneath.

— Lhance Karl Caratao

**Bio:**

Lhance Karl Caratao is currently studying Bachelor of Arts in Literature major in Cultural Studies. He is a senior feature writer in their school publication. He believes that writing isn't only for escape, but it's a place to be found as well. He wants to be a successful writer someday wherein his main goal is to inspire many by the hurt, and be the voice of those who kept enduring.

## Kansas, Old Abandoned House (V4)

House, weathered, bashed in grays, spiders,  
homespun surrounding yellows and pinks  
on a Kansas, prairie appears lonely tonight.  
The human theater lives once lived here  
inside are gone now,  
buried in the back, dark trail  
behind that old outhouse.  
Old wood chipper in the shed, rustic, worn, no gas, no thunder, no sound.  
Remember the old coal bin, now open to the wind,  
but no one left to shovel the coal.  
Pumpkin patches, corn mazes, hayrides all gone.  
Deserted ghostly children still swing abandoned in the prairie wind.  
All unheated rooms no longer have children  
to fret about, cheerleaders have long gone,  
the banal house chills once again, it is winter,  
three lone skinny crows perched out of sight  
on barren branched trees silhouetted in early morning  
hints of pink, those blues, wait with hunger strikes as winter  
that snow starts to settle in against moonlight skies.  
Kansas becomes a quiet place when those first snowfalls.  
There is the dancing of the crows—  
that lonely wind, that creaking of the doors, no oil in the joints.

*Jasper (V4)*

Old Irving Park,  
Chicago neighborhood  
Jasper lives in a garret  
no bigger than a single bed.  
Jasper, 69, clouds of smoke  
Lucky Strike unfiltered cigarettes.  
He dips Oreo cookies in skim milk.  
Six months ago  
the state revoked  
his driver's license-  
between the onset  
of macular degeneration,  
gas at \$4.65 a gallon,  
and late-stage emphysema,  
life for Jasper has stalled out  
in the middle lane  
like his middle month  
social security check, it is gone.  
There is nothing academic about Jasper's life.  
Today the mailbox journey is down  
the spiraling stairwell; midway,  
he leans against the wall.  
Deep breathes from his oxygen tank.  
Life is annoying with plastic tubes up his nose.  
Relief, back in the attic, with just his oxygen tank,  
his Chicago Cubs, losers, are playing  
on his radio, WGN, 720 AM.  
Equipment, enjoyment at last,  
Jasper leans back in his La-Z-Boy recliner.  
He reaches for a new pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes.  
Jasper grabs a lukewarm Budweiser beer from his mini-fridge.  
Deep breathes, a match lite, near his oxygen tank.

— Michael Lee Johnson

**Bio:**

Michael Lee Johnson lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era and is a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. Today he is a poet, freelance writer, amateur photographer, and small business owner in Itasca, DuPage County, Illinois. Mr. Johnson is published in more than 2033 new publications. His poems have appeared in 41 countries; he edits and publishes ten poetry sites. He is the administrator of six Facebook poetry groups; he has several new poetry chapbooks coming out soon. He has over 533 published poems to date. Michael Lee Johnson has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards poetry 2015/1 Best of the Net 2016/2 Best of the Net 2017, 2 Best of the Net 2018. Two hundred thirty-one poetry videos are now on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/poetrymanusa/videos>. Editor-in-chief poetry anthology, Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/1530456762>; editor-in-chief poetry anthology, Dandelion in a Vase of Roses available here <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1545352089>. Editor-in-chief Warriors with Wings: The Best in Contemporary Poetry, <http://www.amazon.com/dp/1722130717>.

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<https://www.lulu.com/shop/search.ep?keyWords=Michael+Lee+Johnson&type=>. Member Illinois State Poetry Society: <http://www.illinoispoets.org/>.

## Three Chairs 2

Angles meant a lot in morning shadows,  
As did angels in flight, no matter the time,  
(the parrot in my brother's hand and straight)  
(wings and things outstretched surround)

Balances unbroken in the size of squares,  
And handstands steady, long and strong,  
Maybe it was her warm red clothes,  
Or the flames that sparked from her hair,  
That gave her the blazing courage to pull the cat's tail—

(the cat complained-- wouldn't you?)  
(even the dog knew better than that)

The men were the ghosts of her life,  
(glowing)  
But it was her who seemed to go unseen,  
An invisible girl, always reaching between them,  
Waving her hands and perfecting her light,

Before a father who told too many tall tales,  
About Egypt, automobiles and effects of acid rain,  
Too much to be heard and be said between them,  
Too much to see there besides the likes of her.

— Michelle M. Mead

## A Man Called Red

I saw him,  
A hand to his brow,  
Searching,  
This man called Red,  
Looking for the next tide,  
The winds,  
You,

He wore a blue cap,  
Casting shadows over his rounded face,  
And I thought he was swimming,  
But he wore too many clothes for such a thing,

And I knew he was lost,  
“Yes, you can be lost at home,” he said,  
He’s lost at home, and just about everywhere he turns,  
But he does at least turn— (We turn with him)

Turning over and over in my bed,  
Shifting into where his footprints  
Pressed into soft ground,  
Tracks he left for me,  
To foresee the way of things now,  
Here, in this place,  
Foreign, even to an experienced traveler,

He knows I never wanted to be here,  
Never wanted to confront  
The possibilities of temptations,  
Wearing both faded house dresses  
And sparkling ball gowns,  
Yet unsure of the occasion  
For either anymore,  
A body too broken to care for such things,

Red turned then,  
Into the sea,  
Wearing the Atlantic round his shoulders in blue,  
And that cap upon his head,  
But in the space where he used to be,  
Only air hung now,  
Long and swift it swung,  
And he was breathless and timeless again,  
With earth on his soles,  
And the gold coins he collected  
When I was just a girl,  
Hanging off  
The edge of his wings.

— Michelle M. Mead

**Bio:**

Michelle M. Mead is a writer from NY's Hudson Valley. She's edited two zines, and been published in various print (Polluto, Trespass, Words@Deakin Press, Capsule Stories, Montana Mouthful, Chronogram, Blinking Cursor, Planisphere Q, Thirty First Bird Review, Renascence/Yellow Arrow Pub., etc.), and ezines (Fahmidan Journal, Tigershark, Last Leaves, Apparatus, EMG-Zine, Under the Juniper Tree, Gutter Eloquence, etc.) and her work, and an interview, can be seen at [@MMMeadWriting](#) on [facebook.com](#).

## HANGOVER

You wake  
and see

linoleum

a yellowed toilet base

a beach towel  
bunched on a vomit-hardened  
T-shirt sleeve.

And as the shame  
sends up familiar waves  
you recognize that same old  
semi-conscious stream:

laughter

stumbles

insults

threats

screams

punches

concrete

blood.

And now you're back  
remembering your latest final promise

sworn on the life of your infant son  
and knowing that your wife  
has packed and gone

as you've been lying  
in some stranger's bathroom where  
the Tito's finally bowed your legs  
bent you over a chipped commode  
and wrung your stomach  
jerking out the strings of  
blood and bile and teeth  
and yes, those same unshakable

unspeakable

incessant

waves of sickness.

— Ray DiZazzo

**Bio:**

Ray DiZazzo has published fiction, poetry and criticism in commercial and literary magazines, newspapers and books. He is the recipient of the Percival Roberts Book Award and the Rhysling Award and is a Pushcart Prize nominee. His work has been anthologized in "Contemporary Literary Criticism" and other publications. In addition, he has published four books of poetry: *Clovin's Head*, Red Hill Press, 1976, *Songs for a Summer Fly*, Kenmore Press (Chapbook), 1978; *The Water Bulls*, Granite-Collen, 2009, and *The Revlon Slough*, 2Leaf Press/University of Chicago Press, 2018. His newest book, *Tropic*, will be released from 2Leaf Press in March, 2022.

## Mystery of the Soul

This life this earth this mystery of the soul.  
That anoints me daily with whispers in the dark.  
With all who have gone before that inhabits me.  
And to whom I am related.  
To Persephone wandering forever in the land of motherless love.  
To animals lost in pain and the eyes of the forgotten.  
To the faces of the lonely and the old.  
To the windowless houses of the marked and the scorn.  
To those who bow down to idols and sing their praises.  
To those who meditate in peace.

— Sandra Schachter

## What Was

I a ten I am twelve with flowers in my hair.  
my skirts search the air as I twirl in my sleep.  
Spellbound by promises my parents would keep.  
Guided by dreams of words never spoken.  
Of lakes full of dolphins that swim by my side.  
My hair with red ribbons that accompany my smile.  
Of changes unwelcome and needing repair.  
Of ten and of twenty we meet at the door.  
Of wisdom exchanged.  
Of hearts never touched.  
Of what was forgotten and left at the door.

— Sandra Schachter

## Bio:

Sandy Rochelle is a widely published poet.

Publications include:

Black Poppy Review, Lothorien Poetry Journal, Ekphrastic Review, Wild Word, Spillwords Press, Formidable Woman, Every Day Writer, and many others.

<http://sandyrochelle.com>

## Aftermath

The storm has stopped,  
but damage remains.  
Wind split tree trunks,  
bones of living plant.  
Rain submerged fields  
planted to nourish.  
Mud carried rocks,  
debris, and old cars  
down and through  
cracked walls.

In time, sunbeams will  
dry the soaked fields.  
Mud will yield flowers  
from swept-along seeds,  
and walls will be rebuilt.  
When will my heart stop  
aching from the storm  
of your loss?

— Sheryl Guterl

### Bio:

Sheryl Guterl, retired from her New Jersey teaching and counseling career to enchanted New Mexico, where there is more sunshine, higher mountains, and less ice. Sheryl enjoys all things outdoors, including hiking, biking, and walking her dog. When forced to be indoors, she will bake bread, read anything in print, do jigsaw puzzles, and write. Her poems are informed by landscapes of New Hampshire, where, in summer, she kayaks, hikes, and writes poems about woodlands and water, and the contrasting desert of the southwest with cottonwood forests, roadrunners, and pink-and-purple mountains.

Poems by Sheryl have been published in *The Teacher's Voice*, *Months to Years.org*, *Workers Write!*, *The Raven's Perch*, *Bethlehem Writers' Roundtable*, *Songs of Eretz*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Deep Wild Journal*, and several local anthologies.

每个人都是一座孤岛

清晨，她从岛上出发  
梦中醒来的母亲  
送给她今天的第一朵花  
黑色的叶子和螺旋花纹  
让她早点回家。

她自海水上划桨  
翻滚的盐浇灌她  
延伸的脊背，隆起的节  
海燕掠过浅浅的天际  
对岸树立无声的屏障

漫长的旅程，在海上  
她和自己和爱人说话  
逐字逐句的读诗  
她问他杏子里的核，关于  
床头的秘密，破晓里  
潮湿的嘴唇和滚烫的眼睛  
动情的应该是海燕，她说。

路过沉默的游轮，她说  
她带着六月的橘子和父亲  
忧郁的眼睛，他把时间的  
锁链绑在她的手腕上，  
让她早点回家。

路过落魄的渔人，她说  
母亲的花梨过时间，  
浅浅的坑前，她早已自由，  
羽翼是坚强的胛骨，  
海燕束缚白云  
她自天空上划桨  
她的衣衫完好



傍晚，她推翻昏沉的船  
杀死了无知的爱人  
母亲的花，微微打着卷  
螺旋花纹是锁链的密码  
她解开了，枷锁，带上了  
花朵，那自由的屏障，  
她自海上归来，  
她从岛中不复返。

**Winter's song is a dirge.**

shadows lengthen as the world  
sinks into snow & the  
sun is exiled.

sweat overflows from a man's brows  
somewhere on Lagos' streets  
where the sun is a tyrant still.

beneath my quilt, the world is a song.  
my bones sing songs of home along  
with the wind while my demons  
play under the starless sky.

every night, the wind chimes sing  
to me as i walk past the house on  
the street corner—

songs without words, reaching into  
my throat to pull up a groan.  
i lost my voice in this white ocean.

night after night the chimes coax me:  
dance, they say, let your body speak  
the words too heavy for your mouth.

do you know how a body sets itself on fire,  
dance its way into freedom  
& become wind?

tonight, my body becomes a monument.

— Tope Ogundare

## Silent death

a boy walks into his father's grave backwards.  
his body is a graveyard—the resting place of  
his ancestors. at night the ghosts come out  
to play catch. in the morning, his shadow  
winces from the lances inflicted on his soul.

at the bar, his first drink is a libation to the gods.  
drunk gods are kinder & gentler—drunken ghosts  
are docile. when the ghosts in his body dance,  
the boy sways, wobbles, zig-zags & slurs.

it is easy to get lost in a graveyard—  
there are no maps for wandering  
souls looking for redemption among the dead.

death is silence, distance, isolation & the many  
other synonyms for being alone. there are demons  
that even the light cannot vanquish, but death  
conquers all.

in the still silence of death, the boy  
walks backwards into his father's grave—  
into the resting place of his ancestors—  
into his own body.

— Tope Ogundare

### Bio:

Tope Ogundare is a Nigerian poet and short story writer. His writings have appeared in online and print magazines such as Sentinel Literary Quarterly, Kalahari Review, Brittle Paper, Snapdragon, Aquila, Pangolin Review, TinyTim Literary Review, Argot Magazine, Intima: a journal of literary healing, and elsewhere. He is also the author of 'The Book of Pain' a poetry collection.

A photograph of a utility pole with power lines against a sunset sky. The sun is visible on the right side, partially obscured by the pole. The sky is a mix of orange and grey tones. The text "The End." is overlaid in a white, serif font on the left side of the image.

*The End.*