

AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL POETS

JUST POETRY!!!

the NATIONAL POETRY QUARTERLY

Vol. 14, No. 3, Spring 2023

Editor & Administrator: Mr. D. Edwards

Subscription Price: \$20.00 per year

JUST POETRY !!!

is published four times each school year

To find out how **JUST POETRY!!!** programs and scholarships can aid students and poetry programs at your school

visit www.JUSTPOETRY.org

Copyright ©2023 by the Live Poets Society of NJ and LPS Publishing. Copyrights to individual poems remain the property of the authors themselves. The poems contained within this compilation were submitted to the Publisher by the authors noted. Such authors have certified them to be their own original work. Based upon such certification, and to the best of the Publisher's knowledge, all poems were written by the authors listed. The Live Poets Society of NJ and LPS Publishing bear no responsibility for misrepresented work, and any such responsibility shall be borne by those who claim to be copyright holders. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form without written permission of the publisher and the individual copyright owners involved. Address all inquiries to the *Live Poets Society of NJ, P.O. Box 8841, Turnersville, NJ, 08012*

JUST POETRY!!!

submissions may be made online at www.justpoetry.org or through the U. S. Mail to the address below. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is required for all U. S. Mail entries. Only one entry per poet, per 90 day period will be accepted. Poems must be 20 lines or less to qualify, not counting the title and any spaces between stanzas. Any subject matter will be reviewed. Our address is
Live Poets Society of NJ, P. O. Box 8841, Turnersville, NJ 08012

“BEST of ISSUE” WINNER
(*\$500 SCHOLARSHIP PRIZE*)

one of us

Everything is made of fans. Hair spilling over plastic silk, rejecting this fanmade history & the lonesome bathroom stall light panning down as *Ayi* folds language into my mellow skin. The white sleeves of the *Hanfu* billow like fans, ink splattering from wrists wrung dry, and *Ayi* wonders if she should pin the sleeves up, wrapped like scrolls and tied in Western cuffs. Instead, I tell her to raise the red flag from the ground, a dress bleeding from her separation from Motherland. Everything is made of fans. A fantastic crowd gathers in the stadium as *the dao* flutters us toward the fanfared parade. Hundreds of other children are dressed like me. We spread outwards, webbed like a fan. Stitched together into the grace of an exotic dancer before the emperor, bejewelling his concubines in a lull of femininity and fanning hair, free of the rigored braids and fancy updos under black crowns. My body is a monture of the *Han*; I wonder how many wars I carried on my back. How many lives? How many eulogies? Everything is made of fans. In the early light of dawn, thousands of years ago, we kept our tongue on the handle and bled battles on the fan leaves, only visible when I am spread thin into the skeleton of Asia, a tapestry of bloodlines in thread veins. Breathe in fresh air walking with the masses & I imagine myself on a cliff over a battle of a million faces I could see today, and I learn to make fans once more, body snapping at the explosion of wings.
Stella Wu, CA, Taipei American School

EDITOR'S CHOICE SELECTION
(\$100 SCHOLARSHIP PRIZE)

Watermelon Seed

the executioner thrusts a crumpled child under the guillotine,
fastens the lunette, and releases the blade. the crowd gasps
as his skull splits against the tile and his blood splashes my dress.
it's the pink one, mother, do you remember? the same color as
watermelon flesh.

my fingers caress the pulp that has tinted the fabric. you used to visit
the town square, wearing nothing but a plastic smile and a scarlet dress.
you would steal young watermelons, sweet and sun-kissed, from the market.
we would carve their craniums and bathe their eyes in brine-water jars,
planting the seeds beneath the floorboards. i wonder if they will survive;
if they will breathe without lamp-light and lullabies and love; if the jars
fell off the shelf as the men spat on your grave and dragged me away.
i imagine my severed head crisscrossing intimate alleyways, bouncing
on broken glass, tumbling towards the weeping willow where i buried you.
i could be your tombstone, your Watermelon Seed.

he locks me up next, facing the green sky, dress fluttering in the wind,
teenage moths jostling to see the watermelon seed bloom.
if i had the chance, i would sit on the cobblestone and
watch it grow. if i had the chance, mother, i would name it
after you.

Kenneth Su, AZ, Hamilton High School in Chandler

Sunflower

I hold a delicate sunflower.

Each petal imbibes the light shed from artificialness.
Wielding this light, they compose music.
Their botanic essence strings together loose ends—
injecting the experience into one cohesive melody.
Their songs circulate, and my sunflower nods in-time with the pump of each vein.

Once the sun makes amends with the moon,
I show to the day's reprise.
My sunflower expels its euphonies like a fondue fountain.
I cup my hands and let its sinuous orchestration embezzle my senses.

I reminisce in its shower and cleanse myself.
The spewing aroma of memory—
it frolics within the pores of my skin.
Its mellifluousness dribbles down my trachea—
I am able to breathe once more.

The world is filled with dissonance, yet,
I bask in the glory of your distilled refrain.

My delicate sunflower.

Mike Whelan, GA, Lambert High School

Hunger

I confess my greed for nourishment. That the hollow of my mouth is always seeking, wanting. Today I echo my sister's gift of lobsters for Baba, which is to say I am defeated again, my cravings cramping my stomach into a fist. Today Baba marks another year off his life and I gain 365.25 days. All my hours are stolen. I need the prattle of applause to sustain me like a fairy, want the bitter pulse of the sun to puddle me more than anything. On the weekends, the bottom of my laptop blares like a second sun, time whittled into the core of every desire: to be something else. Take the crocodile, each second suspended white-bellied. Always lusting for change. Nothing and everything is the same and I grasp for more. I feel so empty that I could swallow the world whole. Nothing about this December can stay still, not the weather, not my hands. Even my eyes tick like shooting stars when I sleep.

Sandra Lin, FL, Bell High School

Held

Blanket of mist sitting like fleece above us, all evening it's been laughing,
 What and *Nothing* between fabric,
as if it isn't just the smoke and the infection of mirth.

We agree that we love the gray, the bruise of the sky, the cloud of your breath.
 This season is like wet glass warping light,
happiness shining and deep.

I keep following the river of time back and back
you ask, all silence, if I don't like your image,
radiation in my gums, I have to crow on and on, no, wrong.
 Hallowed and prolific, December makes a martyr of me
If nothing else, I'm sincere; a fever come to life.

The air has me defining life in only the good and real,
warm flock of delight, like crickets in the dark,
 your shoulder pressed to the hollow of my palm.

I keep feeling for people's pulses, dead of winter and I need
to know we're all alive, molten veins splitting North.
 Hand in mine, the sky this beautiful blot of deep blue,
orange windows traced in navy abyss.

Driver's seat everyday, glass meeting the horizon,
 I'm no good but I love too much to mind.
Emerson Keen, GA, Decatur High School

aubade to origins

& start waking, twisting out of too-warm
duvets. kick away the broken salt lamp's
wires. forget about the bowl of oatmeal
laying in the microwave, untouched, again
& take the longer bike route to school
again. sometimes i feel comforted by
normalcy, this routine's pulse & other times
guilt. but shedding this pattern would be
too much like peeling away myself. in those
moments, where i'm more a vessel
than human, the hunger starts. feverish,
i press lips against pavement, sip from
the sky. turn into a little thief. scavenging
google, i learnt about defense mechanisms—
i wonder if it's me or my body. this farce
of sublimation. maybe it's good to forget
the past, to forget the future. once, in a candle-lit
dream, i tried to bottle the truth in a glass jar,
& ended up shattering.

Emily Pedroza, CA, Lynbrook High School

hourglass

I caught myself in a snapshot yesterday: the
birds flying overhead as I stood portrait-still.
I was waiting, as if for a hand to hold, or for
a passageway to reveal itself. some truths:
they sit heavy like stones inside a pocket,
the future a letter to write before the ink
runs dry. and I still find myself fitting
shoes in phantom footprints,
always one step behind
but today
I ran until the sidewalk
simply vanished—loose dirt
morphing into sun-baked asphalt.
I turned back time, the years slipping
between my fingers, and I became that
child of infinite possibility. I told the birds,
their wings stretched in flight, *I will not fear.*
and the leaves came to dance in my palms.
and the sun shrouded me in its golden light.
I raced into the wind and faced it unflinching

Jessica Wang, VA 20148, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

on mistaking one stage of grief for another

– his body is christened anew, submerged in a baptism of iridescent fire as sticky unease pools near her sternum, asphyxiating as the realization winds ribbon-like upwards, insistent until it comes stumbling out in staggered paces.

dread has its nails at her pulse point; taut with bloodshot agitation, she tallies herself in ones and zeroes: the sum of a life spent in sixpence ru(e)-in, canvassed against the blotchy contours of suburban complacency.

only then will she allow herself the small luxury of sentimentality; wordless reckoning with someone lost to the vagaries of circumstance:

– *here*, she wishes to constellate her memories in celestial penitence – astronomy for a worn and tarried soul; unwind the threadbare nostalgia

of buoyant playground laughter, knee-deep scabs, and ruddy-faced boyhood;

of hushed chatter and muddy tires scrambling down beaten backroads;

of “see-you-laters” and “come-visit-me-soons” and a thousand cygnet goodbyes that would starve to death in the crevice beneath her swollen tonsils before any could unfurl their downy wings in a flight of reversal towards indelible youth

– again, as always, she is left helpless at the whims of someone else’s birthright. indulgence, invariably, is laced with the curare of regret; an eggshell façade that comes undone at the slightest pull for one who has been treading on briars since she was seventeen.

timeworn porchlight dreams, half-swallowed then discarded; as one reunites the callous sinews of their respective histories, breathing elasticity into anesthetic rigor mortis for those still living.

Rachel Xu, FL, Eastside High School

Do Ghosts Cry?

Tears from the ghost of a cherub are in the static after it rains.
Stolid as a memory; ruminate if they allow you to recall the before.
Feel fingernails, dull and streaked red reach over a heart scorned;
sewing between each ventricle earnestly.

Inhale towards the overhead light; a bulb as yellow as insanity

It flickers vehemently and you flicker back.
Exhale down towards the concrete; searing white knuckles around your figure
you smile through your asphyxiation—the moon indifferent to your suffering.

You feel as warm as December
needle kisses by ruby red Rubenesque lips run over each goosebump
Urging you to burst open like sunflowers—golden saliva trickling down your chin
They wistfully congratulate you in a reflection you do not quite remember.
A quick whisk (a memory?) of your mothers' piano
her hands dancing over keys like broken glass.

Do you remember falling through the ether? (Desperate and pining)
Forsaken was a second chance when the clouds dropped you down like a noose
(Pleading and whining) asinine is the hope of salvation.
And when you became the statics' mutilation (an amalgamation)

You leave behind tears as fat as pearls

The moon watches, indifferent.

Mia Pruitt, OH, Maumee High School

iowa planes

I woke up flying this carpet of corn
into the midwestern night with fragile bones in the windchill
with yellow skin draped on white, white bone like
tapestry on the wall of the old apartment
in iowa city, which this morning we moved into,
and I had cleaned the mirrors like I had wanted to clean these skies
the same way kids like me had wanted to clean our skins;
those dreams let us float to
a place where I gasped through thinning air,
like my lungs were filled with blades of corn,
coughing and vacuuming the dirty carpet,
putting clouds in a twister.

down on the sidewalk
a lady with a beanie over her eyes preaches to god,
the veins of her arms soaped in a starchy white
each grain cuts against my tongue,
and leaves the farm smell from which it came.
at night, small red lights of windmills would pop every second,
colonizing the night with a thousand eyes,
writing stories I cannot read.

Michael Liu, IL, Naperville Central High School

Doe

I had seen the gaping pines for myself. Have you ever been a girl in a dark wood?
I had run tenderfooted through the gulping moss and pungent ponds.

I had lost my familiar somewhere in the rows of looming black spears,
somewhere in the space between my heart and the cage of my ribs.
I had felt Pan's hot breath on the nape of my neck. There was
no canopy of willow to crouch beneath, no shroud of chiffon and
perfume to disappear into. I was aimless and alone.

I had pleaded with a man clad in glass. I had begged a quick-fingered
woman for a drink from her spring. I padded after the fishmonger
and sank to my knees at his feet - he'd wanted only to cast me into the sea.
Women aren't worth a cent here.

At my most dreadful a little white hare froze in my path, and my heart
became as limp and feeble as a pup still slimy from the womb.
I had run so long and so far - no one would remember me and my soft,
unblemished intention, my spotted ankle or my crooked tooth.
My phylactery was buried a mile down the river, and I was here,
scorned and moribund. The lily-white creature fluttered its ears and watched
my shape crumple in the shallow beargrass.
Wait for me, little friend. Raise your ivory flag.
Let your skin curl to bark.

Liliana Graves, MT, Ronan High School

the cycle of tomorrow

to the nights where tomorrow looms bright as star-graced eve
and glimpsed from sight, into obscurity and then
out of reach

where we make amends with the moonlight, so hesitant to outshine the sun
or rouse the sleeping child from bed
until dawn

our boats float down the riverbed where we watch them slide through black streams
and water cold and brilliant, passing timely
never stagnant

moving in and out of luminance with the cadence of age
following the maps in the sky there for those seeking though
never quite at place

carrying along the breeze, that shifts through the night
and the kisses of the rising sun before long, tall days
that feel like many

and into that daylight where tomorrow wanes and ripples and rises
like the edge of the horizon, against all that is
still

Sydney Phillips, VA, Glen Allen High School

Persona

Rising from mud, in adversity, at ease in water,
You only stop but ponder its beauty, wisdom, and divinity
Growing to reveal cosmic truths, to bring change

Like a lotus in full bloom, its petals surround you

At dawn, in presence of her celestial beauty,
Essence of sweet sandalwood wafts over you,
Flooding recollections of your hometown,
Lamps lit passed midnight, dancing till 3 AM,
Spirits ascending

Like silkened jasmine flowers, adorned in my hair

Hear thunder roar as she descends from her throne,
My crown, My kingdom, glistening in the horizon
My skin iridescent,
Gold rushing through my veins like sweet poison,
Rising from the east my nurturer glows, draped in glory

For who'll defy the Sun's empire?

Unsolaced, beneath a withering weeping willow, I sit,
While I listen as you boast about being an oak tree

Yet, I pity how you'll never see
The sun and her flowers within me
Lexia Lukose, IL, Maine East High School

Car Rules Car Rules

It has been a while, but I just wanted to let you know that I forgive you now, for that spring afternoon when you showed me your beautiful new driver's license and we drove slow circles around and around our entire world. So pleased with the savage way our saliva dripped and stomachs rumbled whenever the sun dared show herself in our presence, you and I, that even the earth cowered away from under our feet— left us floating, floating, still trapped beneath that perfect sky, and how could we have known? That our scorn would meet no opponent in the wild turkey on its side before us, not even as it lifted its wicked head towards the warm rain, "*come be horizontal with me.*" We had no time to consult each other (for we were busy people with our lives ahead of us, you understand?) but it felt only natural in the moment, only right, and I had trusted you and our vicious laughter all the way back home where we were only girls again, consumed with an absolute hunger as we lay under the open door of a garage neither of us could leave, and we were only girls, only girls. Nowadays I sit in that car and pretend to drive and it goes like this: I bring my feet down on the pedal and twist my arms until they can go no more and it's raining out, dousing all the little fires, and I can scream a million grievances and debts I am owed if you will get back in that goddamn car and drive us somewhere far, far away from here where we can shed all the second chances we have collected and we can lay down under the garage door again,

if you think someone like you could accept that kind of defeat

Seoyon Kim, RI, The Wheeler School in Providence

classical conditioning

before you know it, the church bell rings
and you are on your knees again, praying,
a rosary tangled between your aching joints,
circling knuckles plum-hued by virtue
of bruises—an altar topples in cathedral's center
cracking marble into fragments cluttered
between platters of spilled fruit: no matter,
grate the rinds until they leak anointing oil,
peel the fruit so nectar swarms, a honeycomb,
over fingers starving to dig into flesh,
nails spading down—feasting, festering;
tear that bread and drown the wine with
transubstantiation torn between your canines
tasting like ambrosia. saliva turned to
holy water. seeds crushed between your teeth,
take pollen into your throat, now, the rosary
pulled taut in mimicry of a collar leashed.
listen close: do you hear that sound
trembling through your vertebrae? open
mouth like pavlov's dogs: ever hungering.
Claire He, IN, Carmel High School

for alan who hears what no one remembers

"listen, darkness is not a dog
or a mother. it will not come when called
it does not allow itself to be held."
is what the streetlights were screaming
over the sweetgum trees bent out like open arms
collecting shadows. and also you
with your ear to the earth.
listen, there is an older song
still pooling in the underbrush
it has been beaten back with steel rods and concrete
it has grown small and shy but not unwise.
look, you are calling to it
in an old language. the tilt of your hand
the lilt of your eyes
it is gathering at your fingertips
there must be something gentle in you,
something strong.
Sophia Overstreet, TN, Houston High School

Exam Season

All this morning the rumors.

Like fruit flies, a smattering of freckle juice
upon our lunch table. *She played dead.*

She forgot how to scream. We surrender theories
about the girl & her tide-turned belly,

how it swelled in the thick. The bell rings
undisturbed—we strangle it, vocal cords & all.

She went animalistic, I heard. Three canines,
still teething, scattered. In every sitcom the ambulance
wails louder than the mother, as if an apology.

Our mothers should've named us *human capital*.

Four miles from our school is a crash, a sob.
More students have succumbed to chewed pencil nibs.

Body percussion: our legs jerk in succession,
a chorale of fleshy thunder. LED bulbs scrape
the itch inside my eyelids. *She was valedictorian.*

I can't believe it. A tiger can maul its prey

& still be helpless. Row by row we sit,
chewing our translucent tails, the ruffling of Scantrons
somehow a comfort, a newborn's cradle.

Naomi Ling, MD, River Hill High School

and still I drown

I was throwing mangoes at you, hoping the golden
sweetness would stick to your skin

I wanted you to lick the sugar off your lips and
give me a smile that wouldn't taste of blood but
you drowned under the weight of it instead and
it's another failed meal with the same

people that have sat beside me but now

they wear different faces and when I look

up their heads are bent towards each other like
a couple shielding themselves from the rain
the knife scratches lines into our plates and I
bring spoonfuls of air to my hungry mouth and
starvation is an far cry from love but this
stomach holds the same emptiness
the sun is dripping lukewarm yellow but it
still melts the asphalt and I thought I could
follow you forever before I lost your hands in
the thickness of it

I'll keep myself afloat until

the peat turns to sea again

Shannon Huang, NJ, Biotechnology High School

She isn't a mother but

she asks where the daughters have gone.
She isn't a mother but ghosts sleep
in her garden, too. She doesn't know

how the fruit flies came
in swarms & picked everyone off, kissing
blood until there were only bones left. Taken

by nature's small love. Now,
between us, her fruits sit neat &
bloodred. Cherries, pomegranates,

Roma tomatoes. Hearts primed & pried
open for autopsy. To extract each path
of refraction, why violence

was the only way to be buried
& reborn. Her teeth pierce through flesh.
Each seed spit out like a retort, mouth a compression

spring of forgotten years. I hold my palms
above the earth, towards the sky, collect
each falling vein. A gene, too, is a voice

dug up from the ground: pooling and pitless.

Maggie Wang, WA, Newport High School

Ambiguous Patriot

Remember Mom and the seeds she hid in her blouse across the Atlantic?
Now this green plants its roots in your ribs.
Veiny fingers tap your chest cavity, coat your lungs.
Your favorite color is green, but not green like shards of metropolitan grass;
dignity winces at flat American lawns, and even
the stature of a weary sequoia won't clasp your sympathy.

You pledge allegiance to the green triangular wall in your kitchen,
a flesh breaks symmetry; seventeen white squares split in half.
Your mother chose this color, a mouthful of spite
for ashy suburbia, instead a teaspoon of olive and pickle juice,
white vinegar grooves on the plaster.

Green is Mom's compromise. Primary enough for Them.
Cold enough. Fresh enough. *Conformity*.
Yet foreign. Yet Hidden. *Obscurity*.
And now no one can hurt you because you bleed a defiant shade of green,
a cut in the skin of your nation's dichotomy
pulsing neither red nor blue,
your heart beats
ambiguous patriotism.

Venya Sharda, CA, Washiugnton High School