

Preface

This year the Department of English continues with the theme, *Of Our Time*, asking students to generate new poetic expressions about our increasingly complex society. Under the theme, the poets are invited to write on three topics: 1) #something, 2) Cityscapes, 3) Errors/Lapses/Imperfections. Our objective is to encourage students to reflect on their unique experiences in these topics, express themselves artistically, and eventually becoming conscious of their individuality and the world.

Today, a hashtag means nothing and everything. How does the sharing culture change the way we understand our friends, teachers and parents? What kind of role can poets play in today's social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram? We want to learn from our poets the impressions and anecdotes generated under this explosion of figures and imagery. To our surprise, only a few entries this year directly address the Internet. Most of them are seemingly irrelevant anecdotes. But who knows, perhaps this is the most befitting angle to talk about the topic. For instance, one poet talks about the dissemblance and disguises in reality, poignantly capturing the disorientation of the modern world: 'Reality is a briary blue rose/ Hiding in the bushes/ So small/ So much pain' (Yeung Hei Ching).

In Cityscapes, we want our poets to articulate their unique urban experiences. It turns out that these experiences are not necessarily pleasant. Many of the entries dig into pressing issues, such as the wealth gap, space politics, work-life balance, pollution, etc. They provide a refreshing and sometimes inspiring perspective in understanding cities. One of the most powerful entries is an impressionistic Hong Kong from the point of view of a 'cardboard granny': 'she trundles through the empty streets/ with a rusty cart that groans,/ pushing past gilded buildings/ and the gates of wealthy homes' (Chew Jingyu).

In Errors/Lapses/Imperfections, we hope our poets will reflect on the ways they cope with mistakes, be they committed by themselves or others. We all make mistakes. And it is okay to talk about them. In fact, as Brené Brown, the renowned professor in social work, has demonstrated, the courage to confront our vulnerable self is the key to a successful life. We are very happy to see many 'confessions' this year, where poets share their feelings hidden in the past. Some of them are heart-rending words spoken to parents and friends. Some of the entries address mankind's 'structural guilt', the things we have done wrong as a whole, including the damage done to our environment. One of the entries aptly captures mankind's vulnerability in face of a degrading world: 'But time flies and the future is unravelling,/ Too quick, too fast, too dangerous to control./ Mankind like the rest is too, evolving,/ And soon, bowing down, I surrender my soul' (Advani Melanie).

This anthology is a collection of gems. They may not be perfect, but they are full of the potential to become masterpieces. More importantly, they represent the unique stories of many burgeoning poets. These gems resemble flame-like biographies of our time, of our youth. Congratulations to all the budding poets. We look forward to reading more inspiring pieces in the year to come.

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About the Hong Kong Budding Poets (English) Award

The Award

The Hong Kong Budding Poets (English) Award is a territory-wide competition open to local primary, secondary, international and ESF schools. It was organised by the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education with the Education Bureau as the supporting organisation. The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong was commissioned to host the competition, adjudication and related training workshops for the third year in a row. The competition aims to provide a platform for more able students of English to extend their imagination and passion for writing and engage them in further training in poetry writing. It also serves as a channel for teachers to recognise and identify students gifted in English learning.

Workshops

To better equip participants with some key skills that would assist them in their writing, several workshops were hosted by the academic staff of The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong. Primary students could participate in *The Musicality of Poetry*, which aimed to provide students with a greater appreciation of how tone and rhythm impact meaning by focusing on song lyrics. Secondary students were offered *Poetry and Technology*, which focused on identifying poetic elements of the modern, technology-rich world.

Adjudication

Entries were assessed on originality, use of language, artistic qualities, expression of the theme and construction. After 2 rounds of preliminary and final adjudication by frontline English language teachers, poets, writers and/or academics in the field of poetry and creative writing, at most 20 entries from the Primary, Secondary and Open Sections were recommended for awards.

Award Ceremony

On 31 May 2019, a joint award ceremony and educational event were held to crown the winners and commemorate the work of all the finalists. The educational event comprised a specially designed poetry workshop hosted by renowned local comedian, Mr. Vivek Mahbubani. The award ceremony was attended by students, parents, representatives from the Education Bureau and The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education, as well as staff from The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong. The speeches in the previous section were taken from this event.

A Note on the Topics

The three chosen topics come under the theme, *Of Our Time*. The organising team felt that this theme, which was also used for the 2017/18 competition, provided the students with a broad canvas for expression, while encouraging them to reflect on their ideas in relation to a specific time. The ideas behind the individual topics are explored more fully in the Preface.