

Preface

The winning poems anthologised in this volume represent to a certain extent the consciousness of today's youth. They tell numerous stories of struggle, of battles between humans and nature, and of fights within many innocent and passionate souls.

In previous years we received entries that explored environmental topics, but which were sometimes too broad and/or lacked concreteness. This year, our poets focused heavily upon the pandemic, a crisis with which they have direct experience. Their work encompasses a variety of perspectives. Hope Amidst the Hopeless, for example, profoundly illustrates the psychological impact of the virus. Of the most vulnerable group, the poet writes: 'Counting the only mask that remains/ An old man pondering whether to go out/ His medication box nearly empty, he complains/ How long can he hold out?'. In a departure from this realism, The Ambition of COVID-19 throws ironic bombs at the reader: 'Cheers gluttons! The hunger for wildlife!/ Helping us to mutate into a stronger life./ Patient zero is a mystery,/ No one knows our history'. These lines contain rare combinations of composure and rage, astute observations and hyperbolic feelings, compelling us to reflect upon our relationship with nature.

Compared with the struggle against the pandemic, perhaps the battles within the poets' young souls are more complex and lasting. In their writing, we witness some powerful reflections on friendship, loneliness, and self-perception -- all of which are important topics to think through during adolescence. Words from a Victim of Bullying describes the subject's feeble attempts at finding their place in the world: 'I was lonely/ they bloomed in clusters and I bloomed alone/ oh, oh, they squeal, don't come near/ we can't share the soil nutrients here/ I turn my petals to the sun, hoping to feel some sort of sensation, but/ nothing'. The poem uses juvenile language ('oh, oh') and sophisticated metaphors (petals and sun) to convey the depth of their isolation. Even so, the poem does plant a seed of hope. Though they are alone, the subject still blooms, eventually transforming into a more mature and sensible person. Such introspection may not be accessible to people who grow up within the crowd.

There are many other fantastic observations about the growth of a young soul which I cannot exhaust here. The Mirror, a classic literary motif, describes living opposite to popular expectation. Looking into a mirror does not reify identity, but challenges it: 'For only you shall tell the truth,/ And display the bottomless pit of guilt and insatiation/ Within me, within anyone, who seeks/ Their value in the sight of you'. In Requiem for a Buried Friend, the funeral is not depicted negatively, considering that negation is inevitable in the process of maturation: 'I buried a friend today, but when I had to/ carve her name on the gravestone,/ I realized I'd forgotten it'.

Not all the entries this year are marked by such heaviness. We also wish to uplift some excellent works that are overflowing with hope. Hopes for Nature, for example, narrates an epic story about seasonal change. As winter leaves the stage, a new cycle begins: 'Winter has passed in his sombre majesty, /Having brought us skies of beauty./ As strands of thin light come from the sky,/ A blackbird cries as he soars by./ In this time of newness, Spring fills our lungs,/ We hear her urging us to run'. Last but not least, I shall close this preface with praise for The Mariner, an ode to a hero who perseveres in the face of unforeseeable challenges: 'I have seen a mariner spring from the rim/ of the starless black, bowl of the sea -/ His ship was assailed by foul wraiths of despair/ but from him I never did flee'. The name of the mariner? In the opening, the poem states clearly: 'His name was Humankind'.

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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 co-organised by The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education and the Gifted Education Section of the Education Bureau. The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong was commissioned to host the competition, adjudication and related training workshops for the fourth 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.

Self-learning Materials

To better equip participants with some key skills that would assist them in their writing, several workshops were to be hosted by the academic staff of The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong. Nonetheless, the workshops were cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak; self-learning materials with instructions were uploaded for students' self-study. Primary students could explore the musicality of poetry to gain a greater appreciation of how tone and rhythm influence meaning by focusing on song lyrics. Secondary students were offered notes related to poetry and imagination, which focused on stimulating their creativity and developing their analytical thinking through a wide range of poems.

Adjudication

Entries were assessed on originality, use of language, artistic qualities, expression of the theme and construction. After two 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.

Poem Recital Videos

The joint award ceremony and educational event were also cancelled this year due to the pandemic. In its place, Gold Awardees of each section were invited to record recital videos which were later edited by professionals. After the post-production phase, the videos were uploaded to the websites of the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education and the Department of English of The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong to showcase the spectacular success of the brilliant budding poets.