

FALL WINTER 2021-2022

# GENESIS

## AWAKENING

AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITING  
FROM THE ELTU'S CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION



ISSUE #3

EDITED BY DR CHRISTELLE DAVIS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE PROJECT .....	4
EDITOR'S LETTER.....	5
CREATIVE NONFICTION.....	6
The Vanishing of My Good Old Days .....	7
We Are Not of Anywhere.....	10
The Art of Awakening .....	15
POETRY .....	17
Un-girly .....	18
Tribe .....	20
7 years in a dream .....	22
Sleep is just death pretending to be shy .....	24
The currency of fate .....	26
Overflow.....	29
Cyclic Minds .....	32
<i>Leng Neoi</i> .....	33
My Person .....	35
SHORT STORY .....	37
The Reason I Wake Up.....	38
Voyage of <i>Salam</i> .....	44
Coffee Choice.....	48
JUDGES.....	56
AUTHORS .....	57
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	60

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

[The Creative Writing Project](#) launched in the 2019-20 academic year as an extension of the [English Across the Curriculum \(EAC\) Project](#), an institution-wide language enhancement initiative implemented by the [English Language Teaching Unit \(ELTU\)](#) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. With the aim of cultivating a dynamic creative writing environment, the program offers workshops, a campus-wide writing competition, literary events, and publication opportunities for all CUHK students.

The ELTU's Creative Writing Competition encourages students to nurture their creativity, explore a vivid means of self-expression, and demonstrate their skills in English writing. The third issue of this anthology celebrates the achievements from the **ELTU's Third Annual Creative Writing Competition 2021-22** and spotlights CUHK students' broad and vibrant interpretations of the competition theme, "**Awakening.**"

### **Editors:**

**Dr Christelle Davis** (*Lecturer, ELTU CUHK*)

**Ms Natalie Cheung** (*Teaching Assistant, ELTU CUHK*)

## **EDITOR'S LETTER**

*It has been my great privilege to once again supervise the ELTU's Creative Writing Project at the Chinese University of Hong Kong during the 2021-22 academic year. We are now in the third year of this project and I have to admit that every year I am faced with the thought of "with so much else to deal with, do CUHK students really want to learn about Creative Writing in their free time?" And every year I am happily proved wrong.*

*This year we conducted four Creative Writing workshops that encouraged students to leave their comfort zones and experiment with digital writing, prose poetry, memoir writing and more. I was consistently amazed at the work they produced in just a few short hours and the way they so confidently put themselves forward. If one of the main goals of this project was to help all CUHK students be creative, regardless of major, year level or background, then we can safely say that this has been achieved.*

*As always, I would sincerely like to thank the judges who patiently read the many submissions and offered their expert opinions. Furthermore, this project would not be possible without the hard work of the project team who all offered their support, wisdom and practical expertise. Ms Jenna Lee taught workshops and offered a million brilliant ideas, Dr Jose Lai offered her sage advice on the direction of the project and Ms Natalie Cheung brought every crazy idea I had into reality with her passion and enthusiasm.*

*When you read this anthology, I hope you appreciate how hard these students have worked to take risks and put themselves on the page. If, as they say, Hong Kong is a melting pot, then the short stories, poetry and creative non-fiction pieces in this book are a testament to Hong Kong's past, present and future.*

**Dr Christelle Davis**

Lecturer

English Language Teaching Unit

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# CREATIVE NONFICTION

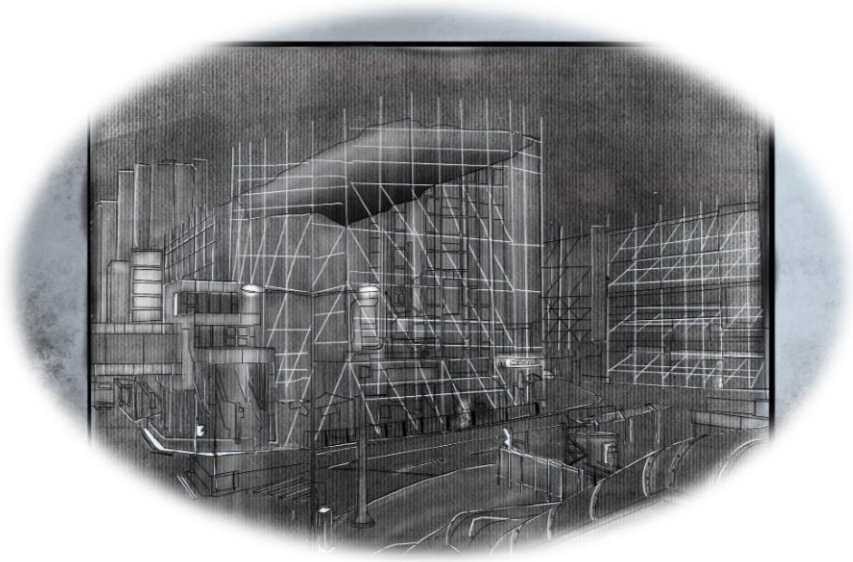


Image credit: Johnny Chan Sheung Chun

## **The Vanishing of My Good Old Days**

Johnny Chan Sheung Chun

*First Prize*

Waking up in the morning to find out that several bulldozers have appeared in your window, slamming into traditional Chinese tenements and smashing them to smithereens. This scenario is now on show, in every corner of my home city – Hong Kong. Kwun Tong, a district of 53,500 square metres in Hong Kong, cannot stand aloof, for sure.

The streets are transforming; the content of the city keeps changing. The Urban Renewal Authority and developers are renewing and redeveloping ten districts this year alone.

Debris, dust, and destruction were omnipresent, but I didn't used to mind. Until one day, when I saw some familiar buildings fenced off and two bulldozers parked in front of my favourite street restaurant, I woke up from my slumber.

“Kiddo, come around! Five dollars for a skewer of curry fish ball. Very yummy,” a street food vendor said. “A special price for you, three dollars for a skewer!” This was what I heard every time I passed the street food store. The vendor was nice; he gave me extra fish balls every time, so I was always enticed by the heart-warming “special price” and the tempting food scent, leading me to spend unnecessary money. But it was worth it; his fish balls comforted me every day on my walk back home from tiring school.

With the bulldozers poised for demolition, I walked back home reflecting on this new kind of death that threatened to tumble my home. My pleasant recollections in this district were going to be wiped off with the urban renewal project.

Every corner brought a new memory. Never had I ever envisaged that they would disappear one day. Seeing other districts being regenerated, I did not feel much. But this was my hometown, the place where I was brought up. My comfort food outlet is now closed, neon signs have been removed and they no longer shimmer. Along with them, Kwun Tong's people, and its surprises, where did they go?

My hometown will brim with shimmering opulent malls, shattering glass-and-steel skyscrapers and tedious chain stores. Doubtlessly, they will be selling dearer and similar items that I can also purchase from other places. Historic buildings and stores will continue disappearing. The kinship, human touch and stories behind the district will also vanish. Foreseeably, this oriental isle will soon be monotonous and gentrified, its districts will also lose their very own characteristics.

One may think I am selfish that I do not want the urban renewal scheme to come as I do not want my good old days to be erased. It is about "individualism" and "collectivism." Indeed, urban decay is an unshakable fact and urban renewal is of looming necessity in Hong Kong due to the dearth of urban space. Yet, when the authorities renew the city, is it still achievable for them to respect and revitalise more parts of the districts in lieu of large-scale reconstruction and gentrification?

The hawker bazaar in my district has gone, and neon shimmers in kaleidoscopic fuchsias, yellows and greens no longer guide me to my favourite shops. But, on my way home from university, I feel that something remains. Buildings are demolished, but the people are still here.

The once stationary hawkers now follow me as I walk the street. Since long ago, they have been selling things ranging from food to newspapers, from economical stationery to daily necessities. They always remind me of the days when I was a child. They still haggle over every penny and scold naughty children who play pranks on them. On the other hand,



they are also friendly. Sometimes when passers-by forget to bring an umbrella in a downpour, hawkers may invite them to stay in their shelters. Sometimes when people want to know more about their products, they promote them with passion and enthusiasm. It is no surprise that some customers befriend hawkers because of their amiable personalities. How can we find these bonds in large emotionless chain stores? Their caring and hardworking spirit has really remained unchanged for fifty years. Whether it is sunny or rainy, they still remain at their post, endeavouring to provide convenience for us. Their relentless presence shines like the midnight sun, coupled with those remaining neon signs, illuminating the streets engulfed by the shade of the new high-rises.

My place is being redeveloped, signifying that the physical components of my memories are being wiped. I used to feel bothered. But on my way home, I still see a lot of familiar faces and scenes that still give me the feeling of home. Yes, something remains—the warmth remains. The reason why we cherish our memories is because we had a good time with other people or on our own. While the physicality of the good old days is disappearing, the ones who created those memories are still here. Catching up with friends and talking with the hawkers, we can always have our pleasant recollections. Urban renewal shall come one day, yet memories can be fluid. We can carry and preserve our best memories in ourselves, in the dimension we can always access, where nothing can be washed away. It will be yesterday once more. The humanistic spirit in Kwun Tong will never pass away.

In 2021, resounding bulldozer noises are waking everyone up, permeating and echoing over the city. Although the current Kwun Tong is laden with construction sites, cranes and motorised machines, as long as we are here, the community will still survive.



## **We Are Not of Anywhere**

Ningwa Shakti Limbu

*Second Prize*

Oi, *fuchchee*<sup>1</sup>. I want to tell you about something very important. So listen well.

Do you ever get annoyed with our father?

I know I do: the constant frugality, despite the money he gives away blithely to relatives; the rigidity of his rules that run on his emotions; the harshness of his voice so that every sentence, even compliments, come out as a reprimand.

Mom, she's always telling us that other fathers are much worse. "At least he's not a drunkard. Better to be shrewd than lavish, better sober than intoxicated."

Of course, neither of us listen to her. I can't help but feel stiff whenever I'm even in the same room as him. I suppose it's the same for you. I wish he expressed his kindness better. But I'm not writing this to shit on our father. There's actually something that he talks about constantly that resonates with me deeply.

Because of the nature of father and son, I've always been averse to anything he said:

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<sup>1</sup> Short/tiny girl in Nepali.

“Stay in Nepal and study there.”

“Go back to live in our hometown.”

“You must learn the names of your relatives and talk to them.”

“Learn about your heritage and your home country well.”

Nonsense. Why should I name the hundred politicians that are constantly squabbling over who-knows-what? I know they’re corrupt. That’s enough. Why should I love a person who treats you differently and endangers you because they see you as a woman, and not a little girl? How can I enjoy a nation with melting mountains, sewage rivers and smoggy skies? How dare he ask me to take care of a country that has never done the same for me?

After all, it was the Hong Kong government subsidies that fed me, the Hong Kong hospitals that vaccinated and medicated me, the Hong Kong teachers who trained and tutored me and the Hong Kong libraries that sheltered and cushioned me. My tongue still shapes the word *Oi* in Cantonese more easily than *Maya*<sup>2</sup>.

My first few years in Nepal, do you remember? I ran away a lot. My ersatz family, my ersatz school, my ersatz friends—I didn’t feel at home with any of them. I hated the way the other kids would exchange suspicions of my secret wealth, or how my uncles and aunts would chide me to ask my parents for money when I was hungry.

Parents enjoy saying this one thing, especially ours— “You’ll understand when you’re older.” And as much as I would like to say, no, I don’t, and our parents are wrong and stupid, and I am smarter than them, they are correct.

Over my years in Nepal, my mother country, I’ve come to realize a fundamental truth about our world. I don’t think I’ve felt at home *anywhere*. I might have been happier in Hong Kong, but that was only because a chick misses the nest when they leave. And it’s not just that.

Sure, in Hong Kong, I can speak Cantonese more fluently, thus passing as a local student. But even then, I was only privy to a certain lifestyle, close-reading receipts and

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<sup>2</sup> Love in Nepali

balancing tongues. Even if I had stayed there with you and Mom and Dad, over time, I would have continued to resent my parents for not being able to give me the same freedoms and tools my peers could enjoy, like cable TV, trips to Japan and birthday parties.

Back then, I found my own heritage primitive and boorish, and perhaps it wasn't just me. You know how Mom is around other South-Asians. She prefers I befriend Chinese people instead of Indians and Nepalis (or at the least, "good" Nepalis, those who are non-violent and non-alcoholic), for fear I would "spoil." I'm only learning now that I shouldn't have ever felt ashamed to be Nepali, to speak three tongues, to carry my 3-tier tiffin box, and to consume pungent lentils and fried vegetables.

My craving for a better life, my desire to change history, especially my own (so that I may have enjoyed a lavish upbringing), is so wrapped around a colonized society, one that indoctrinates its students to crave how the world is whiter on the other side.

History forces precedence upon us.

History, whether colonial or national, tore our societies into broken pieces, and forced those jagged edges into white holes. Our country, Nepal, has never been colonized by the British, but you can feel the history of oppression pushing in, can't you?

The poison treaties that trapped our people between borders.

The caste system that legalized the stamping of our boots into the faces of arbitrary ethnic groups.

The myopic monarchs that stole hundreds of years of education from our people.

The well-meaning bureaucrats that wore away the hundred indigenous languages and cultures in an act to make our country "Nepali."

We are Nepalese, yes. But when was the last time you even saw a word of our indigenous Limbu language?

I hope you don't misinterpret this as an appeal to live in Nepal. There's no beauty in suffering in a shit place.

No. What I'm trying to say is: I tried to come back to Hong Kong. I tried so hard to escape the circumstances of my existence until I forgot to enjoy the simple joys of being a Nepali. Something you can't find anywhere else in the world.

The metallic breath of a freshly lit firework.

The clay seeping in from the colors on your face during Holi.

The rain petrichor—so different when you're not next to the ocean.

The itchy fragrance of a wreath of bright flowers put around my neck by you on *Bhai Tika*<sup>3</sup>.

The acrid sourness of piss from our wet and playful puppy I raised on open roads and an open roof.

That isn't to say we must stand headstrong against history to preserve Nepali society either. Remember the corrupt congressmen and sexist societies. Remember the cult castes and the "Nepali" education. Remember that cultures and nations are ocean eddies that push into each other, writhing and changing the other, as much as they themselves have changed. But all of it happens through the combination of both ocean currents. We can't reject our indigenous Limbu history, or our Nepali culture, or our Hong Kong upbringing.

Sometimes I can feel my father's fears. That we, his children, will stray too far from home, that we will spend too much of ourselves and morph, too changed to come back to him. My mother's fears too, that we will drive ourselves mad with our search for success and schooling.

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<sup>3</sup> A Nepali Festival that celebrates the relationship of siblings.

I worry too. What if Father is right? What if my tongue is too set in colonial ways?

But our family, even Father, have always pushed at the outskirts of society.

Whenever we thought we reached an ending, there was always more. The Kirati-Limbu dynasty that settled in Eastern Nepal, that descends to our grandfather in Taplejung, to our father in Kathmandu, to me in Hong Kong. From Sikkim, to Kathmandu, to Hong Kong. From Limbu, to Nepali, to English. We have always invaded everywhere. (Or were we the ones invaded?)

So, wherever you decide to go, it's okay. I just hope you hold a memory of home.



Image credit: Audrey Wong

## **The Art of Awakening**

Audrey Wong

*Honourable Mention*

The meticulous mixing of colors to concoct the perfect shade, the delight of gliding the sleek brush down the smooth white canvas and watching the paint seep into the fibers, the satisfying transfiguration of hues as they amalgamate, the gradual evolution of the picture. I too, had once been fixated on the endless pursuit of grasping the fine skill of perfection—however, not anymore.

The striving for impeccability always ends up futile. It is every outline that doesn't fulfill my expectations, every shade that simply isn't precise enough, and all the aggravating subtle flaws that I somehow cannot look past. Every slight brushstroke becomes an agonizing frustration as I conceal my inconsistencies under yet another fresh layer of thick oil paint.

It is the layers of dyes on the canvases over the years which compose who I am today, who is inseparable from the blankets of knowledge, experience, and emotions. From the time I shockingly realized the fallacy behind the tooth fairy's existence, to the moment I fell out with my first ever best friend, to when I first failed to pass my high school biology exam; all these trivial moments in life have left dark crooked lines and messy blotches on the canvas I so painstakingly attempt to keep unblemished. At the same time, they have unlocked new, vivid colors on my palette which I unsparingly overlay to form yet another spotless layer for me to begin on. Perhaps under the facade of magenta and cyan, I have learned how to dwell in

fantasies before my innocence runs out, how to cherish every friendship dearly, and how I am not considered incompetent because I failed. The possession of my blunders and struggles reestablishes my identity as the artist of my life.

As mesmerizing as it is to watch the colors fill up the void of the blank canvas, I often find myself reminiscing about every arduous brushstroke, every wonky composition, every unintentional smudge. Feelings of true delight were not attained the moment I finally got to lay down my brush, because instead, enduring the difficult elements that constitute my finished piece was what filled me with bliss. It was the simple sheer exhilaration of deciphering what went wrong and the rush of confidence I felt when I was able to make it right again.

Inevitably, the realization dawns on me that the struggle is what makes the destination worth the journey and the specks of imperfections are what make my paintings wholly mine. It's the perseverance to withstand the tedium, doubt, and frustration so that my perfect color is discovered to create my masterpiece.

Clutching my paintbrush between my fingers, I paint out my new awakening.



# POETRY



Image credit: Ariel Wen

## **Un-girly**

Ariel Wen

*First Prize*

Currently, what you want to buy the most from TaoBao are removable manicures,  
Pink ones. The color that society assigned to you when you were still a baby in diapers.  
Your mom would wrinkle her nose to make a funny face at you  
While the nurse in a white suit held your chubby feet. She turned you over carefully like  
Turning a melting strawberry gelato, wrapping your wrist with a band that  
Looked pink. Pink signified girls. You are a girl. Congratulations  
You little stubborn piece of gum, sticking to the world around you  
For every second. You would not let go  
Of your mommy's sleeve on the first day of kindergarten  
And that blue Uniqlo shirt in the menswear area.  
Why can't you wear it? *It's for boys. It does not suit you.*  
*Try on some dresses, don't you love looking like a fairy or princess? Here, go play*  
*With the girls.* You bare your tiny teeth, and in return, a  
"Don't stomp your feet" from your teacher, "So un-girly!"  
That word sounds like "ugly." You do not like ugly. Because kids in school  
Wave their feeble fists at ugliness as you remembered.  
Deep breath. Blend in. Find your position. *Do*  
*Honor your hair*, they said. Grow glowing, white skin, grow  
Taller, stay slim. *Well, perhaps, skinnier would be better*, they said.

It looks good on you! *Trim your eyebrows, sis. O-my-gosh, isn't that boy cute?* Your extended eyelashes flinched at the word.

Boys do not want themselves to be *cute*, do they? But cute is complimentary.

How does that work? Don't think. *Don't say too much*, they suggested, *be stupid*

*But pretty*. Don't be *too* pretty. People feel threatened if you are too

Confident; hide your light. Try on that pair of earrings; isn't that *lovely*.

"I am thinking about getting a new lipstick," your friend tells you.

The whole point of making lips redder is to have that radiant look. You look down

At your long, pink manicure. At one point, it's gonna scratch you, for sure.

So shimmery, so skinny, so senseless. You can't play basketball now because of them,

Staying stubbornly over the flesh. So supposedly, you should like them.

Society supposes many things.

Suppose you change.



## **Tribe**

Ben Chu

*Second Prize*

You will learn one plus one equals two from Mr. Lee  
while one plus one equals three from Ms. Kwan,  
both expressed in the simplest of beauty  
about the essence of truth—  
both mathematical and biblical.  
Surely, you will be confused  
and wonder how these two can even be lumped together.

They say you're lucky to ponder over all this  
since they were young,  
time not spent bringing home the bacon was merely a luxury.  
You say this ain't a luxury, but a necessity.  
Or is it? —  
you will ask yourself this  
after finding the mistakes that your predecessors have made.

Among many other signals,  
glacier blood is just another canary in a coal mine.  
As the Doomsday Clock ticks by,  
rather than mushroom clouds,

your families will probably fret more over rain bombs and bonfires.

Fixated on red herrings somehow,  
they're just playing the blame game,  
as if it could resolve the gaping schism  
similar to what we have seen in the Crusades.

We are again walking on a tightrope  
as that little man in the East freaks out  
about what was once an omen of good fortune.

You will demonize him like many others,  
but let's not forget the story of that mustached man in the West  
who was pushed off the cliff into the abyss of craziness  
by what others thought was justice.

You will learn that precious lesson in History class.

That particular Christmas night,  
against the extra nip of coldness in French trenches,  
you will sing "Silent Night",  
which guides you the way back home.

Against all odds,

You will play football with your brothers and sisters,  
who have become enemies since the Tower of Babel toppled.

Three to two—

a decisive result that would have ended the bad blood.

Yet, by mistake or by destiny,  
your tribe leader will order you  
to lay your siblings at six feet under,  
a place which you will visit as equals.

Peaceful, fair and borderless.



Image credit: Eva Chong

## **7 years in a dream**

Eva Chong

*Honourable Mention*

“the world will keep turning,  
no one will be waiting”  
but I'm standing there  
wondering just where  
I can stare without leaving

what is life without meaning?  
yet everything's fading  
years of chasing flights  
crying till midnight  
we were right there burning

we spun in the stadium  
screaming "we are the champions"  
buzzing through the streets  
beaming in the heat  
stars gleamed with radiance

it's probably just me  
stuck with these memories  
fireworks in Sydney  
the way you looked at me  
when the sun shone in my dreams

the crowds were roaring  
my heart's simply soaring  
crystals reflected light  
as you hugged me tight  
I swore I had everything

why does it feel numb?  
is it pain I can't heal from?  
billion tears in a team  
seven years in a dream  
what have I even become?

jacket on my shoulder  
it was a slightly cold evening  
tied up my hair  
emptied dresser  
perhaps the end of all the endings.



Image credit: Rabindra Gurung

## **Sleep is just death pretending to be shy**

Rabindra Gurung

*Honourable Mention*

Sleep is just death pretending to be shy  
With its scythe the Reaper is keeping score  
Wake up in time before the end draws nigh

Ev'ry night into the abyss I cry  
“How long before you ever realize your  
sleep is just death pretending to be shy?”

Hypnos descends as Thanatos's spy  
Our ev'ry dream taken to sweep Hell's floor  
Wake up in time before the end draws nigh

The cosmos leaves us no choice but to comply  
with our carcasses vanquished evermore  
Sleep is just death pretending to be shy

Even the toughest Bull Moose bid goodbye  
A mirage of peace with no chance to roar  
Wake up in time before the end draws nigh



The laws of nature one must dare defy  
Fight for each waking hour I implore  
Sleep is just death pretending to be shy  
Wake up in time before the end draws nigh



## The currency of fate

Janice Lam

*Honourable Mention*

Merry Marry on the wall;  
hopeless joy, and an itch to run  
before the marigold blooms, eyes kept  
shut, so are her legs, her throat, her fists:  
“Freedom is lust, prosperity is good, but only  
for a prude; you are a lady, don’t go asking for it

“Live in the dream,” they say, “*Wing wah fu gwai*  
all you need fed to the rim of your lips, you lucky girl, you are  
living the dream.” She keeps her eyes closed,  
incense smoke dancing daintily around her head.  
Through the dark behind her lids, all she sees is red,  
bright lights blaring in her face, close, anticipating  
for nothing but a “Yes, I do.” *Yes, I do*, she thinks, *I want nothing  
more than this, my contractual fate, twenty-five years and the end  
of a life of childish pursuits*. Her thoughts drift in the empty red, in familiar faces she sees  
glaring eyes and baring teeth, preparing her. The seven outlets on her face sealed  
by incense fog. She tries to raise her hands, but finds them bound in fists;  
She tries to kick, her calves molten, melding up to her thighs—it’s the shawl! the heavy red  
gold-embroidered shawl is holding her, melting her, spitting silks around her, congratulating

her. She tries to scream, but the incense blocks her mouth, her nose, taunting from the dark,  
“You’re too loud, my child.” Pathetic wheezes and whimpers get stuck at the top of her  
throat,  
voices that used to be hers fizzling, clamouring to stay  
ringing and swelling in her head,  
whatever is left over from the good old days

With all her might, she wrenches her eyes open, finally, to see  
dewy, flesh-fused eyes in the mirror, lips adorned, barred with gold,  
blood-bound, gushing, gurgling—Sign of a desired bride, draped hair to the ground,  
striding smooth like ink, celebratory strokes on red papers. Eyes enthralled  
by the crimson banner soon to be—  
falling, falling on her neck  
on her hands  
cuffs of gold, cuffs of red:  
dowry from our riches and the dead.  
What a sight  
she wants to see no longer, and snaps her eyes shut.  
Motherly hands land on the spinning crown on her head

“Comb your long hair and see  
for as long as you live, child after child drop from your womb,  
fall onto the land, spring  
off their heads; Oh, they will walk and laugh just fine,  
living in a time of bliss and unknowing.

“Comb your black hair and watch it  
dull, white strings that will embellish your mourning gown.  
Bow once if you understand, twice when you get scoliosis,  
scurrying and scavenging alleyways for sustenance,  
thrice when you drop dead.”

“Comb your hair through to the end-less end.

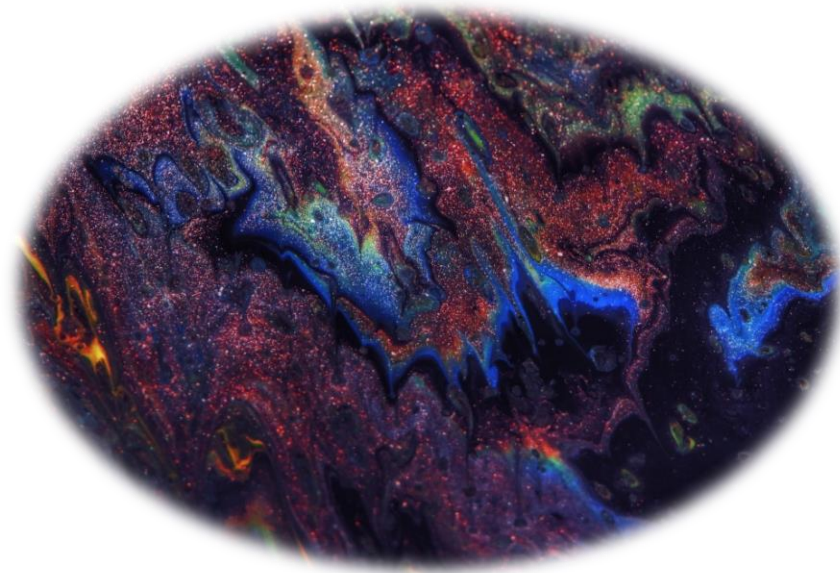
There's no need to fight. All you young ones do is fight and bite,  
yes, we've all been there: when the day is young, you just want to run, you think,  
*How unfair it is to live a ruled life.* A life you don't want is a life you're deprived of.  
But you will grow up; the day you realise it is good what we want for you, it is a privilege  
to settle, to have a family, to be a part of something bigger than yourself,  
to march to the beat of other people's hearts instead."

*You want this.* Any chance there was was lost when she stopped running and closed her eyes.

*You want this.* She would rather have her eyes gouged out, that way she doesn't have to see  
what she has become—what a fun detail to add to her gnarly looks.

*You want this.* Strange how one only wants to plunge deeper after they have taken the fall.

*I want this. Yes, I do.* There's no other choice. You've paid your entrance fee. Now enjoy your  
last good dream.



## **Overflow**

Dandelion Lee

*Honourable Mention*

“One sheep, two sheep, three sheep, four,”  
I count as the wind rattles the door,  
Under which the breeze creeps into the room, with Hypnos in tow,  
As He nudges me into a doze,  
A chilly boon.

I dream of the TV show I watched a few hours ago  
Of the anti-hero so desperate to prove his worth.  
He drowns in his sorrows,  
Prays for better tomorrows,  
And wishes for fearlessness and mirth.

What would I tell him if I was there?

“You have been to Hell and back,  
Lost your family, lost your faith  
It’s the adults that were supposed to care for you  
And now the bad guys are using your pain as bait  
To lure you into darkness...”

Darkness.

In the canvas of my mind,  
The anti-hero and his tears fade away  
As black smoke sweeps in  
And takes his place.

Is it the starless night sky?

But other colors soon intrude on my dark serenity  
With flashes of orange and pink and metallic blue  
Pulling my attention away from  
The pure, calming black hue—

The cacophony of colors corrupts my peaceful gloom and  
Dances around the room  
Forcing my mind to race  
To match the swirls' rapid pace.

The whirls then straighten and turn into shapes  
While the tints adjust their shades:  
Pastel, drab, neon, bright,  
Flashing like a flurry of cheap motel signs  
In a rotating kaleidoscope...

Am I well-rested yet?

The pigments then wash away,  
Leaving a blank canvas:  
White, simple, and elegant,  
Like the ice rink of the Winter Olympics...

The Winter Olympics  
Which takes place despite the winter's frigid burn  
When the ice skaters leap and turn  
As the crowd's enthusiasm churns  
Against the backdrop of the milky frost.

The glacial gale turned its head and  
Threatened to blast me into icy oblivion—

I snap awake as my shadowed little bedroom comes back to me.

All is as it should be.



Image credit: Anas Nadeem

## **Cyclic Minds**

Anas Nadeem

*Honourable Mention*

My thoughts, as an irregular pattern  
Of daunting lines, crossing on a dead  
Sunset,  
Remain entangled on a dewy night.  
Stale by the silent winds,  
Wailing in a cheerful manner,  
Guiding through an untrodden path.  
There remains but a few  
Creeks of the weary sideways  
Rustling of the dried leaves,  
Crumbling under the unceasing weight  
Of time.  
Tears of an angel with melted wings,  
Who sighed but in utter exasperation,  
Drowned all but my rumination.  
Till, at last, a stray beam of light,  
Adjourning my desolation,  
Declared the daybreak—





Image credit: Ariel Wen

### ***Leng Neoi***

Ariel Wen

*Honourable Mention*

Sometimes I really hate wearing short skirts in public because when I sit down,  
I have to remind myself to keep my knees close together.  
Their heads bump against each other like two guards  
Of dignity. Legs locked together.  
I shut them to shun away glances.  
I wish I could just sit. Sit comfortably. But no. Back straight, thighs sheathed  
With, usually, a jacket, sometimes a bag. A boy strolls pass by  
And sits down in one smooth move,  
His legs are open, but nobody stares at his  
Spread sections. Nobody cares. Yesterday I  
Walked down the street wearing a camisole and a skirt.  
I put on a cardigan too, even though it was 30-degrees-burning-hot  
Outside. I don't know why I am feeling  
*Hot*. I didn't know that some people think  
That's *hot*. In that ordinary outfit, I walked and  
Got cat-called thrice. One whistle. Amongst them  
There were bikers who just flashed passed by, and others  
Whose cars sounded like "*honk-honk!*" This is Hong Kong.  
They call you *leng neoi*. "What? This is a compliment" that

Crawls on your body like itchy vines. I wanted to throw up but  
Nothing came out. Ahead of me, a runner, a topless man  
With all his tanned muscles breathing in bare air. He had only  
At most, two pieces of clothing on that flesh. But nobody cat-called  
Him. Nobody stares at a topless man. Nobody cares.  
On magazine covers, you see girls modeling slip  
Dresses. Their skin shimmering in the summer  
Sun. Their smiles—beaming. Summertime  
Is the time to unleash: *You are free to dress*  
*However you like*, say advertisement slogans.  
They have the time to promote products but no one  
Ever stands out and says: Hey, do you feel safe? How  
Can we make the world a better place by helping half  
Of the population feel safer when simply showing  
A little bit of bare skin? Nobody ever does that. They care about  
Showcasing imaginary bodies. The real ones? Nobody cares.  
The next day, I stroll the streets wearing pants.



Image credit: Stephanie Wu Sin Yan

## **My Person**

Stephanie Wu Sin Yan

*Honourable Mention*

Once 10,217 miles apart  
Now you are here  
I have always been here  
The city of seven million

*Arroz al horno* was your childhood companion  
The Queen of *TamJai-SamGor* has been my honorary title for a decade

The burning of *ninots* in Fallas  
Making my room dust-free on the 28<sup>th</sup>  
You celebrate the arrival of Spring love  
I welcome the Year of Tiger

Beautiful dark-brown eyes you say I own  
A smile that ignites fireworks  
“Flirtatious” was what generated from my Ms. Think Tank

Acknowledging your quite-good face on WhatsApp  
“Flirtatious” was what I teased myself with for ten minutes straight

My *hou2 aah3* becomes *si*  
You turn *vale* into *ok-la* effortlessly  
I like how you mess up the nine tones  
You love how my mind is messed up whenever you whisper *cariño* into my ears

Two transparent minds  
Two connected hearts  
Two tiny hands within one gigantic palm  
An interlocked embrace

Awakening  
*Amor, oi3* –  
The VLC-HKG-chemistry dissolving our differences  
Melting the labels  
A *gweilo* here  
A *\*china* there

Imperfect humans we only are  
Getting ready to board on the Train of  
Life and Love

---

*\*china* does not mean the country “China” (/ˈtʃaɪ.nə/) in this poem; instead, *china* (/ˈtʃi.nə/) here is a Spanish word that refers to girls that are of Chinese descent.

## SHORT STORY



Image credit: Himson To

## **The Reason I Wake Up**

Himson To

*First Prize*

“Hey, why are you like this? You always make this promise, but you never keep it,” said one of the muscle cells in my right hand.

“I planned on keeping it and I will keep it today,” said I, with my eyes closed.

“So why won’t you get up then?”

“I don’t know. And I’m not even that tired. I slept so well last night.”

“What’s the problem then? You’ve made us press the snooze button four times already.”

“It hurts to wake up. My muscles feel tired. My eyelids feel heavy. And my throat feels like a desert.”

“That’s just excuses. You’ll forget about these inconveniences once you’re awake.”

“But I feel them now and it’s overwhelming.”

“Once you start doing things, you won’t even be bothered with satisfying these pains.”

“What can I do? I’ve got nothing to do.”

“Yes, there’s plenty. You can submit your work early. You can study for exams. And you can apply for a part-time job.”

“I mean; I don’t have anything immediate to do. Those deadlines are too far away. I can do them later.”

“You can charge your phone. Make your bed. Draw a timetable for today. Stretch. There’s so much to do.”

“But none of those things are important enough. I won’t have the motivation to do them.”

“Then do something important and immediate. Like eating and hydrating yourself.”

“I can’t find the desire to do it, and I don’t know why.”

“You’re just procrastinating, like you always do.”

“Why do you know so much about me?”

“We pass down stories about you; from head to toe, past to present, inside and out. And stories about your transition from sleep to awake are the most entertaining.”

“So, you’re just here to laugh at me.”

“Of course not. I want you to wake up.”

“How come?”

“Because I want to feel alive.”

“Here. Does this help?” said I, while rapidly squeezing and relaxing my hand.

“NO. This is artificial. I want to feel the rush of oxygen into my body. And please stop. You’re shortening my life.”

“Fine.”

“Thank you. See? It wasn’t so hard.”

“Stopping my hand?”

“No. Getting something done.”

“Oh, that was short and simple. The things I’ve set my mind to do are complex and time consuming.”

“How hard can ‘finishing the short story’ be?”

“Very hard. Sometimes, I discover a good subplot. Sometimes, my theme changes. And most of the time, the words don’t want to flow out of my hands.”

“Don’t you plan for everything? I’ve heard that you have an elaborate plot map pinned on your walls.”

“Yes, but you can never predict every problem that exists, to its tiniest detail.”

“Fine, what if you do something that won’t change much? Like studying. You just need to understand the course material and memorize it. Nothing unexpected will happen.”

“True, but no matter how perfectly I organise the information, I just can’t get it to stick in my head. Sometimes, it vanishes within a minute. Sometimes, it refuses to stay. And most of the time, I’m unmotivated to study.”



“Then find better ways to get it in your head. You’re infamous for solving the most difficult problems.”

“I’ve tried. I’ve convinced myself that this information is important for my future. I’ve rewarded myself many times. I’ve used colour, doodles, anagrams, everything. But nothing works. I think there is a limit to my memory.”

“Why not just satisfy your body’s needs? It’s just eating, drinking, going to the toilet, walking. Nothing can be more straightforward than those.”

“Living can get complicated. Food is expensive. Cheap food doesn’t have enough calories or nutrients. Water is tasteless. Unless living gets easier, I’ll struggle with living my life.”

“You’re just making everything sound complicated.”

“But it is.”

“But it doesn’t have to be.”

“Easy for you to say. You’re assigned a role. All you have to do is twist my one finger.”

“Your hand has hundreds of muscles and moving one finger requires a lot of effort and co-ordination.”

“That’s the brain’s job. You only have to respond to a signal. But I’m not bound to do anything. I don’t have to finish my work, satisfy my bodily needs, interact with other people, obey the law. But you don’t have a choice.”

“I do have a choice. I can choose to ignore the signals. I can choose to be cancerous. I can end my existence prematurely. And my life is more than just listening to the brain or obeying your command. I need to prepare for the unpredictable alerts, synchronise with my

community, and duplicate myself precisely.”

“Fine. Maybe I don’t know everything about you, but I live longer than you and, thus, experience more possibilities and complexity. Every day, a life-changing event can occur. I can get sick. I can lose a friend or family member. I can find my destiny or miss a great adventure. But the events in your life are limited. And I’m probably in charge of them.”

“Wow. So you’re complaining about having opportunities in your life. I want to do something meaningful in my lifetime, something more than just live in a black box, drifting through senseless actions. I might be made perfectly designed to do my job, but I see no point in constantly stretching and relaxing.”

“So, what will you do if you had my choices?”

“I will just do things, go to places, experience the world.”

“Anything specific?”

“Nope.”

“Even if you have a giant burden to carry?”

“Absolutely.”

“A million of your friends to nourish and maintain. A hundred-dollar price tag on every second of your life. An uncertain future to control.”

“No problem, I can handle that.”

“Living up to social expectations. Fighting for your dreams. Treating others the way you want to be treated. Replenishing your soul.”

“That’s the price of freedom.”

“How are you so optimistic? What’s your secret?”

“When I can do anything, doing something is already better than doing nothing.”

“But that something will keep piling up, like snowfall on a glacier.”

“Well, it’s better than waiting for the snow to melt or for the glacier to crash.”

“You’re sure that removing one snowflake will make a difference?”

“Yes. It’s like me and my friends. You will never notice our hard work, but our repetitive actions animate something a million times bigger than us.”

“I also want friends to help me achieve my goals and keep me sane. Can you be my friend?”

I waited for a response, but the dark abyss remained silence. After waiting for an eternity, I opened my eyes, stood up, reached my hands towards the ceiling, and took in a deep breath. I then looked at my phone. 08:01. Dammit. I was one minute too late. I broke my promise. With adrenaline pumping through my veins, I ran to my desk, sat down, and started doing something.

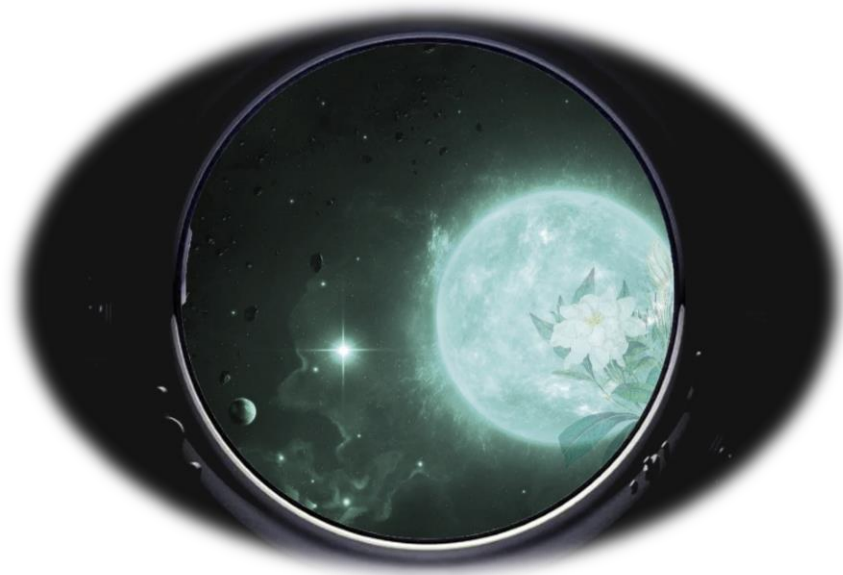


Image credit: Rabindra Gurung

## **Voyage of *Salam***

Rabindra Gurung

*Second Prize*

Today is 23 Ramadan, 1443 AH. It has been 6 months since *Safinat al-Salam* first took off from Planet Earth and became the first spaceship in history to bring humans outside the Solar System. The launch has become a symbol of hope in the eyes of the Islamic scientific community, that the seeds of humanity can be spread afar and eventually be sowed across the galaxy. The greatest milestone in exploration history since the discovery of new continents across the oceans, nonetheless, appears flash-in-the-pan for the grounded population.

While for most crewmembers of *Salam*, the vast new ocean has become their new constant to appreciate God's creation, yet the feelings are mixed for Yasmin bint Hakim Tesarkee. This young, aspiring scholar has had her fair share of personal experience in this regard. Being a prominent *Mujtahida* means that one practises *ijtihad*, as she has always believed in independent legal reasoning as the key to understanding God. Whenever she recites the Qur'an, the idea of scientific inquiry occupies her mind, many times, even over religious knowledge. After learning about the stars and ancient humans at school, Yasmin became fascinated by the cosmic scale of history in comparison to the Golden Age of the current era. She left her home and studied in a prestigious university in Cordoba, putting her mind into the fields of study concerning astrobiology. She is certain that if God is truly almighty, surely his wonder is not limited to one place at one instant of all of space-time.

Therefore, it pains her to admit that this notion is not shared by many *mullahs* back on Earth, who insist on solely the interpretation of the Qur'an. Yasmin always scratches her head whenever she hears such arguments from the Old World. Perhaps it has to do with her Cherokee upbringing in the New Dar al-Islam. Being located far away from the centre of power often grants some liberal freedom for varieties to take place. In Yasmin's case, she had definitely enjoyed her early years under liberal flourishing of bold ideas. Still, she had to erase her birthname *Citlali*, meaning a star, in order to fit in a more Arab-dominated land when she crossed the ocean for overseas study. Now, she thinks, she is once again doing the exact same thing: abandoning her home for an exciting unknown. This time, she prays not to be reduced to a tamed jasmine once again.

The objective of this mission is to explore a particular planet that, some astrologers at home found, gives off incredible life signals similar to Earth's conditions: liquid water, plenty of oxygen, warm and steady temperatures, and so on. They named this new promised land *Masaw*, meaning "equal". Yasmin has been one of the key proponents of the off-world research due to her field of study. She saw some light for this especially when she learned of the generous funding from billionaires worldwide and support from Muslim governments for such a project. She exclaimed to her husband and kids how God had finally answered her prayers, kissing them with passion. This might be one of the few times when her spirit overpowered her scientifically wired brain.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century is marked by a growing contradiction between rapid technological breakthrough in various aspects and resurgent religious conservatism that threatens to tamper with progression. When Yasmin was told how the sheiks were grateful to invite her over to Project Masaw to start a new chapter in Islamic civilizations, as well as her own lifelong pursuit of astrobiology, she instantly realized how it was a ploy to send staunch *ijtihad* supporters off world so that they would have an easier time establishing a new world order. Still, her curiosity and her astrobiological background beat her to it. She was surprised to even get to hear the news, considering how she is, after all, a woman. It was as if she was staying in her Cherokee motherland once again, where women stand side by side with men in any important decision. Moreover, this spaceship project serves as a last-ditch attempt at garnering support for empirical evidence before it fades out of fashion. She is adamant that the struggle between science and religion can only grow fiercer back home after this. But for

now, she can only pray for her side to emerge victorious.

An announcement has been made on the ship that it is praying time, which is convenient for Yasmin. In the early days of the travel, praying proved difficult due to the rotating nature of the Earth, causing some devout followers to be confused with the location of Mecca. But now that they have been lightyears away thanks to FTL travel, they can all simply pray to the direction of a blue dot. All the teachings of Muhammad, all the wonders together made by God and man, as well as all the cultures of various states, have all been reduced to the size of an atom. Yasmin finds it ironic at first, before a colleague reminds her that everything around the dot is always part of His work, too.

As the opportunity presents itself, she tries to clear her mind for a brief moment during the prayers, hoping for some guidance, even if it might not be exactly what she has been encouraged to prioritize. Yasmin was never the most pious when it comes to religion. Her rebellious nature might come across as arrogant, if not ignorant, to Him. But in this moment, Yasmin feels a connection previously unfelt with God in the middle of the darkest desert she has ever been to, and she cannot help but devote her praise and beg for forgiveness. Reminded of home, Yasmin starts praying for her families as well. She hopes that her husband will be able to handle the domestic affairs all on his own, as well as the healthy growth of her two beautiful daughters. She also begs for her parents to live a prosperous life back at the Cherokee lands. She hopes that the political situation does not turn hostile towards anyone back home, especially to her loved ones. Yasmin quickly rubs her eyes, before continuing to hope for a successful voyage to *Masaw*, secretly yearning for the discovery of alien lifeforms, although she claims to be content with the mere exploration of a whole other planet across the stars. She wishes for *ijtihad* to linger on when she returns home, if she ever does.

The past half year has been, suffice to say, the loneliest period in Yasmin's life. She did not feel like it even with most crewmembers in Cryosleep until the designated date of arrival and decided to put down her thoughts in writing to kill off time. She has been indulging herself in it ever since she set foot on *Salam*, crafting thought experiments on astrobiology, occasionally commenting on the current political state back home. She expresses wishes of true equity and continued *ijtihad* all around Dar al-Islam, even if it sounds like an

insignificant cry from a sand grain. Nevertheless, she wants to make a stance from outer space no matter how futile the attempt may be.

The more she writes, however, the more she second-guesses her arguments. Yasmin never thinks, even for a second, to support backwardness of any kind. What she is doubting though, is whether she should continue treating religion as separate from science. After all, *ijtihad* is complementary to God's words, instead of opposing it. Yasmin comes dangerously close to entering the zone of absolutism, be it on either end. The advancements they enjoy are a product of early Islamic religious teachings; the Universe remains a living proof of God's might. Yasmin is still a believer in a world created out of benevolence instead of chaos. This is what she chooses to believe. She starts reviewing what she has written beforehand, making sure to clarify that religion is not the enemy of science, but an indifference to the world that they all live in.

Meanwhile, *Salam* detects some rather peculiar radio signals from deep space. Yasmin puts down her ink pen to check out the anomaly. There is a slight hint of a pattern, but she admits not being an expert in radio waves. However, she does hope that the message is from some intelligent beings like themselves sending *assalamualaikum* to the incoming ship of peace. She does not know what lies beyond the stars, but she prays that it will be worthwhile, as she is ready to start collecting empirical evidence to admire the beauty of God's creation once they arrive in *Masaw*.

As Yasmin is walking towards her own chamber, she finally makes peace with herself and decides to go into Cryosleep like the rest. Before she is to awaken again, she has a vision of a sea of sweet white jasmine flowers growing all over a bright, burning star, each more dazzling than the other.



Image credit: Ariel Wen

## Coffee Choice

Ariel Wen

*Honourable Mention*

“One iced black coffee, please,” said the wife, “and a...honey, what would you like?” she turned to her husband, who raised his eyebrow.

He replied:

“Oh, a hot grande caramel latte, of course. Also in a mug.”

The barista signaled to the coffee machine with his chin. "Ut'of black ones. You'm wanna get another."

"It's okay. I can wait."

The wife snatched the receipt off the table with two fingers, red nails scratching against the white paper. The two tired adults walked away from the counter to find a seat. She walked faster, in small steps that resembled the proud trotting of a winning racehorse. On the other hand, her husband shuffled as if his khaki pants had devoured his legs. It was a hot summer afternoon, and they were waiting in the hospital cafe for the printed test results. An hour ago, they were settled in separate examination rooms, where doctors poked sloppy tongues and drew tubes of blood from chubby arms. Here, numerous couples like them were



waiting. Each face was different—on some faces danced delightful colors, while others were covered in shadows.

The wife waved her husband forward. "It's so hot today," she grumbled.

"Really? The air-conditioning here is freezing," replied the husband, sinking into the sofa. The wife left to pick up some food. He sat there awkwardly, rubbing his nose while squinting at other tables. She wobbled back, clutching a massive plate of apple crumble topped with vanilla ice cream.

"Sho—" she began, with a mouthful of food, "I paid the electric bill yesterday. Forgot to tell you."

He nodded with eyes barely open. A guy next to their table lit up a cigarette. The husband sniffed; he rolled his head.

"Ugh, my neck. Must have slid off the pillow yesterday. Why do they always invent these useless things? I mean, an *electric* pillow. Who thought one day you will need to charge a pillow, huh? These maniacs. First fake trees, then canned air, and then this stupid DNA test. What next? They're goin' to ship us to Mars?" he said.

The wife scooped up a spoonful of vanilla ice cream and stuffed her mouth. Her husband continued:

"I mean, can you believe how they accessed me in that room? Like a chipmunk. Two doctors lift a grown man's arm to poke at his, uh, *bi bra* thingy."

"Biceps brachii." She muffled.

"Yeah yeah, *tomato* tomato," he sipped the coffee but did not swallow the mouthful of liquid until his cheeks looked like those of a nuts-storing chipmunk's.

“Say,” the wife tutted. She had finished the whole plate of ice cream during his ramble.  
“Why do you drink like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like a *woman*.”

“Duh, I always drink this way.” He rolled his eyes.

She shifted her crossed legs. “I know. But can't you, can't you...”

“Can't I what?”

“Well, I mean, can't you change? It's like literally 87 degrees today and here you are, sipping on your hot caramel milky drink with your pinky poked out and your legs crossed, you are always like this, you never consider my feelings and you behave...behave...unlike a man!”

The husband choked on his drink.

“Wut-”—he laid down his mug—“honey, did I do anything wrong?”

“If you had listened to me and gone to the gym more, you wouldn't have failed the test.”

“I did not *fail* it. It's just a te-”

“What, you think the hospital will let a guy with no BABY license have a kid? Believe it or not, they will literally ask me to push the baby back into my stomach if we ever have one.”

The husband rubbed his mouth.

“Well,” he murmured. “Didn't expect they would not let me pass—I seem all—I am healthy.” His voice shrank near the end of his words, melting into his latte. The wife pulled a pamphlet out of her purse and shoved it toward her husband. On its cover read:

### **2050 Government Planned Breeding Project (GPBP)**

“Eugetown, with a population of around 150,000, is the largest city in Old York State. With the new GPBP policy emphasizing marriage Restrictions and birth Control, our community thrives on perfection. The GPBP protects your future children from diseases and physical defects, granting everyone equality: straightening the starting line, and making the world a better place. The Official Birth Office (OBO) will certify qualified candidates with a temporary Beneficially Aesthetic Being to Yield (BABY) Certificate by evaluating your desired heritable characteristics.”

“You heard what the doctor said when we were taking that test. How can I marry a guy if he is not even allowed to have children?” squeaked the wife.

She paused for a moment, then said: “Maybe, we should—I should get a divorce.”

She said it slowly. Words, like a set of cards she picked out, were wiped out into an arc on the table. She laid them down, exhibiting her evidence. Surely, he had no chance of rebuttal. This was how society worked; he had to accept that.

On the counter, the coffee machine made a long squeaking noise.

The couple sat in silence.

“Look at him,” thought the wife, “Spinning the coffee spoon again. Why are his fingers so long? He has frog fingers. Don't they make him look like a frog?”

The barista knocked on the coffee maker. *Toc, toc, toc*. But no liquid came out. He struck again. Hot white steam gushed out from inside the machine. With a flick of the handle came the aromatic liquid, sloshing into a row of mugs.

“Can't believe this,” mumbled the husband after a long, suffocating moment. His face shone under the afternoon sunlight in pork-liver red. “Divorcing me over some stupid paper,” he said with a growling voice, pulling his tie loose with one finger.

“Jesus. Have some sense. It's a government certi-”

“You are leaving me just because—because I cannot have babies!”

The wife tilted her head and rolled her eyes. She leaned towards her husband, squeezing the words out of her lips:

“Quiet down!”

The husband sank back into the sofa.

None of them said anything until the cafe door slid open. A nurse stepped in with a stack of paperwork. She began to call out names. Suddenly, the cafe was filled with voices—some excited, some shivering with anxiousness. The wife found all these noises quite annoying, so she went to wait by the door, hoping to get her result ahead of others. Her husband followed in his sluggish walk.

“Why do we need to wait for so long when they already told us the result during the test?” she grumbled, crossing her arms. “Oh, stop weeping.” Red-faced, she scolded in a whisper to her husband, who let out a loud sob. “I'm just divorcing you, not *killing* you.”

The man pulled a handkerchief out of his jacket pocket to blow his nose, wobbling on his feet like a piece of paper that his wife had crumpled up into a ball.

The nurse's voice rose beside them:

"Oswald and Amah Wordsworth, report 1709-"

"That's us," said the wife, rubbing her hands together.

"-09873. Two applicants, one passed." Finished the nurse, handing a green-colored card to the couple. The wife took it over in a swift move.

On the card says:

**Beneficially Aesthetic Being to Yield (BABY) Certificate**

Name: Oswald Wordsworth

DOB: July 4th, 2022

Card Publication Date: June 1st, 2050

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"They must have made a mistake," chuckled the wide-eyed wife. "That's my husband's name on the card. You see, the doctors told us *I* passed." Her glance shifted back and forth from the printed name to the nurse, who shrugged and replied:

"Meh. They were probably bluffing. Don't trust the tongue. Trust the paper."

The couple looked at each other.

Amah was a short, chubby, red-haired lady with a pair of gigantic spectacles hovering over a slightly crooked nose and a faint mustache; wearing spectacles for years had caused her dark eyes to bulge a little. She wore a decent dress and had put on earrings that matched the dress's color. She had hairy fingers and a knee problem that bothered her on rainy days. She was hard-working but had few talents. Though she cared for street animals, her itchy rhinitis nose prevented her from adopting any of the furry creatures.

Oswald had soft, watery blue eyes that angels must have descended to kiss. Otherwise, he looked nothing special. He was born rich. He had not spent much time reading books but was intelligent enough to pass all school tests. He was six feet tall and gleaming white. His nose was angled in a perfect arc, while his ears—neither protruding nor drooping—were in a

delightful pink color that added a hint of boyishness to his sharp, angular face. He was a bright man.

They were good humans.



## JUDGES

### *Creative Nonfiction*

#### **Dr Patrick Holland**

Patrick Holland was born and grew up in outback Australia. He is the author of seven full-length works of fiction and creative non-fiction, including the novel *The Mary Smokes Boys* and the travel essay collection *Riding the Trains in Japan*. His work has been published in Australia, the USA, Italy, Japan, Ireland and the UK. He is Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Hong Kong Baptist University.

### *Poetry*

#### **Dr Antony Huen**

Antony Huen is a Research Assistant Professor in the School of Arts and Social Sciences of Hong Kong Metropolitan University. He writes about contemporary poetry and creative writing and he is the winner of the inaugural Wasafiri Essay Prize. He has taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, and the University of York.

### *Short Story*

#### **Dr Suzanne Wong**

Suzanne Wong is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she teaches creative writing courses on short stories. She is a winner of the Hong Kong Youth Literary Award and has published some of her works in *Hong Kong Literature Quarterly*.



## AUTHORS

### **Johnny Chan Sheung Chun**

Johnny is a first-year English major. He likes history and is fond of sharing with people in his spare time. He wants to raise people's awareness on the disappearing local history. Although he is not good at anything, he is always there for you if you want to find someone to talk to.

### **Eva Chong**

Eva is a first-year undergraduate student majoring in business and law. She is particularly drawn to poetry because of its unrivalled ability to transcend time and convey unique meaning; it can be mundane and cliché to some, but it can also be sacred and dear to one's heart. She sees it as an art form through which she can reflect on moments, heal, and put memories and fantasies into place. Design, painting, and artistic swimming are some of her other passions. Dive into her art @getawavez on Instagram.

### **Ben Chu**

Ben is a trilingual student who takes a particular interest in politics, cultures, languages and literature, despite his major being business. He once studied English Literature in Harvard Summer School on a scholarship of \$150,000 and vows to be a novelist based in Hong Kong.

### **Rabindra Gurung**

Rabindra is an ethnic Nepalese born and raised in Hong Kong. From a young age, he has been fascinated by history, biology, and language. Inspired by the scientific fiction genre, he wishes to incorporate elements of all his interests into his future works of imagination.

### **Janice Lam**

She writes because she can. She keeps writing because she can't swim. If you unfortunately want to see more from Janice, please feel free to come over to her desolate [blog](#), where she will hopefully update more diligently in the future.

## **Dandelion Lee**

Dandelion is a YA novel enthusiast. She also spends a lot of time watching thrillers, sitcoms, and random Instagram reels.

## **Ningwa Shakti Limbu**

Ningwa enjoys books, words and knowledge. In his free time, he complains about human society, broods about the end of the world, then distracts himself with reality TV.

## **Anas Nadeem**

Anas would describe himself in the words of Eliot as “a classicist in literature.” Beginning from romanticism and meandering through impressionism until finally diving into modernism, his poems contain the remnants of each as he shares a deep interest in the tradition of literary criticism.

## **Himson To**

Himson is an unpublished writer, but not without experience. He began writing as a hobby when he was twelve and has written several poems, song lyrics, short stories, and one novel. His writings cover diverse topics, including romance, horror, friendship, absurdity of life, and comedy, but he is best known for exploring characters’ inner desires, struggles and reasoning. In his poem, “Helium”, he writes about two people drifting past each other every day, knowing that the other person was the only one who understood their respective struggles. And in his short story, “The Price of a Good Meal”, he writes about a girl who unexpectedly sympathized with a waiter and his failing restaurant, which resulted in life-changing consequences for both characters.

## **Ariel Wen**

Studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Ariel majors in English Language and Literature. She has written two poetry collections and is working on a novel currently. She has been studying in the United States and, in high school, established a poetry society named “Trace Under Roof” (檐下履) with her friend. She publishes her other poems [online](#).

## **Audrey Wong**

Audrey is a rising sophomore majoring in psychology. Between curling up with a Murakami novel and honing her painting skills, she attempts to leave some time for writing.

## **Stephanie Wu Sin Yan**

Proudly an introvert, Steph likes spending time in her shell watching dramas, savoring her *Tamjai-Samgor* with her new favorite E.TEA, while occasionally poking her head out to spend quality time with her loved ones. As an English teacher-to-be, Steph believes that language should not be bound by exams. For her, English is a shimmery key allowing her to open the door to a world that she has never imagined. Once Steph has stepped into her little world, she knows there is no way back—and she has been thankful for every daunting and joyful adventure in it.

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