



the

life

of

words

ANTHOLOGY 2017

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The Life of Words  
Poetry Anthology

VOLUME II

2017



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## Preface



*The Life of Words* is an ongoing research programme that investigates the mutual influences of poetry and dictionaries. Each year we hold a poetry competition, open to all Ontario high school students, with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation and the English Department of St Jerome's University. The broad theme this year was "Write a Poem About Language" and the challenge was to think primarily about the languaginess of language, over and above all the various things that language expresses and conveys. We received several dozen poems from across the province, and read them all with interest and admiration. Here we present the fifteen poems we thought best answered the challenge of the competition. My thanks go to all the students who wrote in, and to the teachers who advised and guided them. Special thanks too to the members of *The Life of Words* research team who helped in spreading the word, adjudicating the competition, and assembling this anthology: Cosmin Dzsurdzsa, Aarjan Giri, and Danielle Griffin.

David-Antoine Williams  
May, 2017

Michael M. Raczkowski's poem was selected as the winner of this year's competition. He receives \$100 to spend at a national book chain, and both he and his school's library receive copies of *Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry*, and a one-year subscription to *The New Quarterly*.



## Green and Blue

I know that you know  
That green is green and blue is blue.  
Green is the colour of grass,  
And blue is the colour of sky.  
Colour is nature's gift, innate to us.  
If you see a green, and a separate  
Blue, then all the world  
Will see the tree as distinct  
From the river and the lake.  
And therein lies the misconception  
Of a universal language.  
Travel across the ocean (blue),  
And visit Ho Chi Minh City.  
Ask the first person you see  
The colour of the sky on a clear day.  
They will answer *xanh*.  
Ask them the colour of trees in full foliage,  
They will answer *xanh*.  
The Vietnamese find no problem  
With blue and green sharing a word.  
This idea might seem odd to you,  
But think of all the cases  
Of bluish green, and greenish blue.  
Now, if you believe you have figured out  
The linguistics of colour, take  
The next flight to Moscow,  
Where a person will say  
The sky is *goluboy*  
And the ocean *siniy*.  
Or read the *Odyssey*  
Where seas are *wine dark*.

MICHAEL M. RACZKOWSKI  
Grade 10, York Mills Collegiate Institute

## *Walls*

Two Ls in parallel,  
strongly forced together.  
Tension radiates through  
those who build them.  
Several, multiple, many;  
layer after layer of concealment.  
The W standing as a warrior,  
fending off the threats,  
ready for an attack.  
Five letters to defend,  
repel.

JESSICA RICE  
Grade 11, Resurrection Catholic SS

*Jessica Rice's poem was selected as a runner up. Both she and her school's library receive copies of Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry and a one-year subscription to The New Quarterly.*



*a word with life: maa*

there is life in words  
they fly in my ears with wings like birds,  
one such word is carved on my heart  
it comes out of my mouth in pain, in joy,  
it sucks my sorrow, heals my wound,  
it fills the empty me from top to bottom,  
without it i am never *Me*

it effaces itself to make **me** bold  
it imprisons itself to make me free  
it falls letter by letter,  
giving up all of its serifs,  
to make me stand strong  
it leaves out full stops to make space for me  
it crosses out ~~all fears~~ in my mind,  
fills in all the blanks  
with passion and inspiration  
there is nothing i can give more than a thousand thAnks

it raised me <sup>high</sup> when i felt so <sub>low</sub>  
because i couldn't do much, except spill the ink  
leaving dots after sentences i couldn't complete ...  
my life is written with small letters,  
but there is only one word that mAKes my life big

SEEMA KHARAB  
Grade 11, Lincoln M. Alexander SS

*Seema Kharab's poem was selected as a runner up. Both she and her school's library receive copies of Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry and a one-year subscription to The New Quarterly.*

## *Pain*

Set apart from the world,  
I could not fathom the beauty  
of being able to sing  
in a sweet chorus with the world.  
My life,  
just as everyone else's,  
was just me singing to myself,  
and what was the point of having my own language,  
when I was my only friend?  
It drove me mad —  
madder than a man's yearn for revenge,  
so as a predator chases its prey,  
I chased after mine.  
And because the odds are never in my favour,  
and the world is just a mistaken world of misfortune,  
I could not find  
what I sought so desperately.  
Engulfed in an unpleasant misery,  
I struggled to swallow my bitter cup.  
In agony,  
I looked at my reflection in the well and cried,  
"I am in PAIN!"  
I could truly understand those words.  
A woman at the well,  
who possessed some kind of profound light,  
responded to my cry.  
"Pain?" she whispered.  
In total defeat,  
I nodded.  
And to my surprise,  
she understood.

The angelic soul,  
as strange as it seems,  
handed me a loaf of bread.  
“Voici le pain de la vie,” she said.  
Unfortunately,  
my incoherence restricted me  
and I could not understand her.  
But fortunately,  
I did not need a translation to comprehend.  
So I ate the bread,  
and my loads felt lighter,  
I had caught my prey.  
After curiosity began  
feasting on my soul one day,  
I searched for the translation  
of the woman’s words.  
“The BREAD of life.”  
That is when I realized,  
I did not have to worry about  
singing a sweet chorus with the world,  
because linguistically,  
the world was already singing  
the sweetest choruses together.

The BREAD of life.

PRECIOUS NWAKA  
Grade 11, St. Marguerite d’Youville SS

*Point Blank Range*

A single sentence can be a loaded gun,  
Any thought, the trigger,  
Any word, the bullet.  
When it hits point blank,  
I see the blood pool at her feet,  
Drowning her in red.  
I see it buried inside,  
Shrapnel deep in her brain.  
Drunk, I feel the power of her pain  
On my tongue.

ARIENE DELA CRUZ  
Grade 12, St. Joan of Arc Catholic SS

## *The Power to Cut and to Heal*

'Tis but a breath of passing air,  
A simply difficult task to dare;  
They pierce the heart and shatter the mind,  
Yet heal, and bless, and cure the blind.  
Life is in them, death no less,  
Consuming minds with the power to possess.  
Though not tangible, we are under their control,  
Imprisoned by their ability to steal the soul.  
Granted they are beasts that haunt the mind,  
They are also angels, ever so kind.  
Paving the path for liberty and peace,  
Their role in this world will never cease.  
Acceptance and joy dance in their wake;  
Agents of refuge, expressers of love,  
Abolish hate, and bandage the ache,  
For they allow us to please the heavens above.  
Though they may kindle strife,  
Or wreck a life,  
They express love, and grace; freeing us like birds,  
This is the mighty power of words.

VICTORIA TUCCI  
Grade 11, Robert F. Hall Catholic SS

## *Coram Deo*

God created the world  
with a language unknown.  
His words are Faithful and True  
as God Almighty has shown.

With His Hesed, His mercy,  
He sent Jesus His Son.  
Jesus died for all of my sin,  
“It is finished!” The battle is won.

In God’s deep Agape,  
His wonderful love for me,  
He broke all of my chains,  
and He set me free.

Let my words be pleasing to God  
and my language reflect His love,  
until I am finally Coram Deo,  
Before the throne of God above.

MICHELLE NOORDAM  
Grade 12, Hope Reformed Christian School

Hesed – Hebrew for “mercy,” “grace,” and “love.”  
Agape – Greek, signifying God’s sacrificial love for humanity.  
Coram Deo – Latin for “in the presence of God.”



*Bizaan*

Only seen with the comma in a sentence,  
Only heard at the end of a statement.  
Lurking with unsuspecting pupils,  
Attacking before the adrenaline of the fight.

The one to drive you crazy  
And the one that calms us down,  
The flower blowing in the wind,  
The leaf falling off the branch.

Sometimes he leaves you alone  
Either ironically or by chance,  
But please keep watching for him  
As the quiet never rests

LOGAN SAVOIE-HVORUP  
Grade 9, Eastwood Collegiate Institute

*For the Inaudible*

On the topic of including spirits  
who feel excluded  
from a conversation  
of disconnection,  
mirroring a tired telephone,  
or a tulip in the heart of a forest fire,  
and of feelings  
caught at the throat,  
caged and unwilling  
to fly free between ears,  
it was decided  
that three periods in succession  
would suffice.

The ellipses would eclipse  
and provide dialogue for  
the lonely, the irrevocably angry;  
those at loss for words,  
and those who believe  
words will never be enough.  
When the fundamental frequency of silence  
is described in place  
of the overtones of words,  
we let it be known  
that a muted voice has spoken up,  
or a proud voice has died down,  
to make way for the thunder  
of literary stillness.

NANCY ROS  
Grade 11, Louise Arbour SS

*Walan and Bana*

They both mean “rain,”  
But does rain really need two names?

I think it does:

It walans in the first kiss of a movie,  
It walans on a spring walk to the park,  
It walans to water the flowers,  
It banas when the summer ends,  
It banas when the clouds are grey,  
It banas to flood the streets.

Walan and bana.

NAOMI KATZ  
Grade 11, Eastwood Collegiate Institute

## *The Fluidity of Languid Persistence*

Contributing to the diverse  
Art form of language — a trait  
Which has, ironically,  
consistently been a  
Simplistic expression  
Of mine —  
Being inherent of charisma  
That modestly lacks,  
Language remains an infinite  
Personification of gaping  
Introversion, where bleakness of  
Analytical processing  
Predominates  
Over moulding into the  
Likeness of ideal  
Comprehension  
And behaviour,  
Articulating the allure of  
Pulsating magentas,  
Prepossessing soft hues,  
And crisp, earthy greens,  
With the peculiar allure  
Of an inky-navy ballpoint  
And an evenly-lined  
Eight-and-a-half by eleven,  
Immersed and flourishing  
In the versatility of naturalism  
That the divine has eternally  
Suffused Earth with,  
Is the authentic personification  
Of perceived “valiance,”  
And embodies  
Within the preferred  
Method of personal identity  
And expression  
In the orbs of one  
Lacking adjacency to

Mediocre normalities,  
Whilst not grasping the  
Common core of conformity,  
As well, outstanding reluctance  
Of self-expression,  
The fluidity of languid persistence  
Is the sole convention  
Of immense personality  
That overcomes what is in  
The ideal intent of the  
General consensus;  
Language —  
An identity that is  
Often disregarded  
And worthy of  
Abrupt dismissal;  
Language —  
The identity  
That I withhold  
To the best of my  
Personal advantage;  
Whether written,  
Internalized, fragmented,  
Vocalized, or foreign;  
The fluidity of embodying  
The exoticness of  
Conveyed language is the identity  
Often perceived in the purest  
Temple which produces  
The augmentation of the  
Entitlement as the most  
Functional formation of  
“Home.”

NATASHA D'ALESSANDRO  
Grade 11, St. Michael CSS

## *One Word to Connect the World*

One word  
The ear wants to hear,  
The tongue wants to taste,  
And ink wants to shape.  
A word that can silence wars.  
Everyone's desire  
To cease the fire  
To win, without loss:  
*Shanti*, for one world.

A word born in Sanskrit  
Spoken by yogis and poets.  
A dead word,  
But alive in the depth of our hearts,  
A word for reconstruction, to stop all destruction.

*Shanti*, for soldiers in grave  
For the dead, the raped, the injured,  
Victims and slaves.  
The world is desperate to hear *shanti*.  
No guns, no bombs, no words which rip hearts.  
The power of *shanti* to stop the *kraanti* —  
*Shanti* for everyone, starting with me.  
So *shanti, shanti, shanti*.

NANCY KHARAB  
Grade 12, Lincoln M. Alexander SS

# 2017 Competition Flyer

APRIL IS POETRY MONTH!

## POETRY COMPETITION

### 2017 COMPETITION THEME

Write a poem about some aspect or aspects of

*language*

T H E  
L I F E  
O F  
O R D S

### IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- Aspects of language may include words, phrases, sayings, grammatical features, and sounds. Think about what makes these special, significant, or meaningful.
- If you know another language than English, try to convey the true meaning of a favorite word or saying in that language.
- Write a poem about a word or saying with an interesting double (or multiple!) meaning.
- Research how a word has been used in literature in the past.
- Research how a word came into English and the changes in its meaning and/or pronunciation over time.

### RESOURCES

- The *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- Regional, dialect, and foreign-language dictionaries.
- Etymological dictionaries.
- Poetry collections and anthologies.

\* Note: by submitting a poem you agree to its publication, online or in print, under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Submission does not guarantee publication. No correspondence will be entered into.

Questions regarding this contest may be directed to Prof. David-Antoine Williams (St. Jerome's University).

### PRIZES

- Winner: \$100 gift-card to spend at Indigo.ca, plus:
- Runner(s) up: Inscribed prize copy of a poetry anthology, and a 1-year subscription to *The New Quarterly* for you and your school library, plus:
- Honorable mentions: Publication of your poem in *The Life of Words Anthology 2017*.

### HOW TO ENTER

- Email your poem\* by 21 April 2017 to: [thelifeofwords@sju.ca](mailto:thelifeofwords@sju.ca)
- Include in your email: your full name, school, and grade.
- All participants must be students at an Ontario high school to be eligible.
- For information and news, and to download a .pdf of this flyer, visit [thelifeofwords.uwaterloo.ca/competition-2017/](http://thelifeofwords.uwaterloo.ca/competition-2017/)
- Follow us on twitter @thelifeofwords.

