 

Ledbury Poetry Competition

Young Person Winners, 2016

First Prize:

Zoe Moore

Zoe Moore lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA, and attends public high school, where she actively participates in the poetry club. Her interests have included art and art history, dance, theatre, singing, ceramics, Spanish, and of course poetry. Her biggest inspirations in poetry include Sylvia Plath, E E Cummings, and Andrea Gibson. She is grateful for her hometown support and this opportunity to share her thoughts to a worldwide audience.

**for the birds**

her mother tells her not to eat those cherries because they are for the birds

and she reaches up to touch her hair and feels more feathers than fur

the cherries in the tree are speed bump small but she gets stuck on them

because they are not for her

is anything for her except the music she can hear tiptoeing out of other people’s headphones?

her mother tells her not to eat the cherries because x is for y

and she is for beautiful things that nobody is willing to show her

how do the cogs turn in a world where everything is for nobody

and nothing is all anybody carries even with a full stomach?

she can feel the gears moving like earthquakes

but cannot find the source of their motion under her feet

everyone else has learned to walk in strides that match the machine’s pace

but she is standing still and she still feels more feathers than fur on top of her head

is anything for her except a sky that forgets to ask how her day was when she comes home to it?

her mother tells her not to eat the cherries

because they are for the birds and they are for the birds and they are for the birds

and the words march along like the world walking backwards

and she wonders if she will get any closer to where she is going

if she only watches everyone else crawl away from that place

is anything for her except binoculars? because the world she is plotted in says do not touch

because everything is worn out by now but everyone claims they would have tried better

to take care of the air of the past if it meant they could still live in it

everybody loves their artifacts and everybody marches back to them but she stands still

and looks at cherries and her mother says no

is anything for her to put her hands on?

or will she have to stare at the cherries until they turn brown

and there are still no birds to be seen

Second Prize:

Jessica Wang

**Diaspora**

i’m chinese. “can you speak chinese?”

i can.

i mean, if i tried to, i could. (probably)

i could open my mouth, try to summon sounds and characters thousands of years old

listen and wince as they awkwardly fumble around, clattering against my palate

attempting to dance their way into existence with my broken-legs of a tongue

i could try, and i do. i go "home" for a few weeks at a time, inhale

(where is home? is it the place with my favourite italian restaurant, three blocks from my best friend's house, a ten-minute walk to school? is it the place where hundreds of thousands of years of my ancestors lived and died and are buried? is it both? is it neither?)

exhale

smile and greet my relatives, all 1.357 billion of them

we have a conversation: how are you? how is australia? how are you doing in school?

i'm good. australia is good. i'm doing alright

the conversation continues

i speak in slow, children's sentences. my answers are short and simple and basic and there is so much more that i want to say but i can’t

their smile falters - something isn't right

i shrug helplessly, 对不起. i turn to leave and their disappointment slices into my back the way my mother chops ginger, harsh and purposeful

a woman asks me to fill out a survey as i walk down the street

pushing a neatly-typed a4 sheet of paper swimming with chinese characters into my hand

i recognise nothing

smile awkwardly, apologise for everything

my parents laugh loudly and talk loudly at the dinner table that night

i can see that they want to stay. they are happier here

it occurs to me that i am making them unhappy

i go "home" again

my friend purses her lips as she tells me she was followed and called ching chong on the train ride home

my mother talks to her friend in rapid-fire mandarin inside the store that she runs

a woman enters, throws up her hands

"they don't even fucking speak english!" and zips away

a girl in my class tells me i'm "her favourite asian", her friend adds that i'm "funny for an asian girl"

i cling onto china, onto a culture that i don't feel completely a part of, that i will never be completely a part of, where i can’t even speak the language – because i have no other choice.

"too foreign for home

too foreign for here

never enough for both"

ijeoma umebinyuo

Third Prize

Sarah Ang

A 16-year old professional daydreamer, Sarah resides in the city-state of Singapore, an island one degree north of the equator where life moves at a rapid-fire pace and the weather is consistently sweltering. Sarah often spends time staring off into the distance at nothing in particular. When she's not furiously trying to transcribe her reveries into an intelligible work, she enjoys reading, baking and online window-shopping. Sarah attends Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), where she studies Literature, History and Economics. She is a member of her school’s Debate Society and Interact Club, and writes for her school magazine. Sarah sees writing as a way to give voice to untold stories – part of her inspiration for new work lies in taking well-known myths or legends and re-imagining them from the perspectives of minor characters in the original story. Her works have been or will soon be published in literary journals such as the Claremont Review, Cultured Vultures and Page & Spine, and LITRO Magazine. She was the winner of the IGGY and Litro Young Writers’ Prize 2015/16.

**Snow White’s Lament**

When was it, mother,

That things began to change?

It’s hard to pinpoint the moment

When you first shunned my company

When your eyes began to darken

When your smile turned to ice.

Was it when the mirror started

Whispering poisoned nothings in your ear?

Or when the lines around your throat

Became too pronounced to ignore?

Born in a kingdom that valued beauty above all else,

You feared age would steal your crown.

You murdered your sisters for power,

You thought I might do the same to you.

To your fevered mind,

My ebony hair became your noose,

My cerulean eyes; pools of death,

In my ruby lips, you saw your blood.

Jealousy shriveled your soul,

Stripped away your layers

Until there was nothing left but hate.

Know this, then-

I recognized you instantly,

When you turned up at my door,

Gnarled and hunched like a withered tree.

Of course I accepted your gifts.

I wanted you to lace me up,

Run a brush through my hair,

Offer me an apple from your hand,

As you had when I was young.

When you whispered in my ear

As I drifted off to sleep

I could almost pretend

I was your child again.