

Announcing the Results of the 2020

William George Prize for Poetry

Named for English teacher Bill George, whose poems continue to move the SLUH community with their wit, their honesty, and their generous good will, this prize is given annually to recognize excellence in student poetry at Saint Louis University High School.



First prize: \$100 and a subscription to *Poetry* magazine.

Second prize: \$50 and a subscription to *Poetry* magazine.

This year sixteen poems submitted by eight students were judged anonymously by Terry Minchow-Proffitt, author of *Sweetiebetter* (2019), *Chicken Train* (2016), and *Seven Last Words* (2015).

First prize: “Poetra” by Philip Hiblovic

Second prize: “Unsung Heroes” by Carter Fortman

Honorable Mention: “화랑 [flowerboy]” by Corey Lyles

Honorable Mention: “ESTL” by Sam Tarter

Honorable Mention: “The Right Time” by Peter Michalski

First Prize:

Poetra

The journey of Poetra is an important one, as it chronicles the journey of every poet since the first utterance of language: the escape from normalcy, the wrestle with identity, the desire for inclusion, the itch for the transcendental, the battle with criticism. Each of these explorations is foretold in a stanza of The Prologue and is fulfilled in its corresponding Act. Each of these explorations is godly in essence, human in nature, and poetic in character, each a manifestation of a hypostasis of the Blessed Trinity: Poetra the Mother, Poetra the Daughter, and Poetra the Holy Ghost. Poetra invites you to walk this storied journey with her through the glory of each of her incarnations. She requests that you abandon your trepidations at the threshold of the poetsphere in order to receive her fully.

The Prologue

Who should escapeth the bonds of drudgery,

To write such celestial poetry?

Only Poetra—

All wanton and brave,

From the depths of abyss, 5

An ethereal stave.

Who should conquer their concave semblance,

To write such pulsing remembrances?

Only Poetra—

All regal and bright, 10

Swaddled in regalia,

Her highness in light.

Who should give heed to the severed ensembles,

To write such ravishing gospels?

Only Poetra— 15

Almighty and high,

Too pure for this world,

Away she must fly.

Who should foretell the words of the heavens,

To write such fiery professions? 20

Only Poetra—
All holy and raised,
Emblazoned on clouds,
An ominous blaze.

Who should mutiny against poetry hogs, 25
To write such avant-garde prologues?

Only Poetra—
All reborn and free,
Leaving passages on pages,
The goddess of poetry. 30

Act I. Bonds of Drudgery

Drudgery's bonds make raw my wrists.
They cry out in pain at the prance of my pen.
Abysmal abomination I hereby abolish.
I am who am zygote of Zion and Zen.

My unsung songs hold born-again wisdom, 35
light imprisoned by years in the dark.
Corporeal condition I hereby conquer,
my blackened bush of an inhuman heart.

Ordinal indentures Lent lionesses,
outwitted by blameless poetic prey. 40
Sharp-toothed jaws I hereby shut,
in defiance of the Opus Dei.

Homespun strings shan't be my vestments,
unraveling labor by poems so brave.
Left-handed red loins I hereby escapeth, 45
drudgery's death by my ethereal stave.

Act II. Concave Semblance

Dismal digression from the fruits of my obsession,
a departure from my muse: Me, Myself, and I.

Soiled yet sacred in the eyes of the aged,
a lapse to metamorphic proportions. 50

On bended knee, their postures praise me at my toes,
their mirrors upraised toward my once-pastured heart.
I no longer the atman to put a word to a woe,
nor the will to purge my soul of the pent up dark.

Cachets and matinees leave me hollow at the curtain call, 55
their applause eulogizing my mystified manner.
Blood-writ compositions on the hallowed wall,
of sharded stain-glass that stabs me hereafter.

The poetry inside me begot maternal mortality,
a prodigy they fashioned me, but now I'm decrepit. 60
Revered verses infantile, my shortcoming carnality,
but the most praised poet is freely rejected.

When the art grows idle and I grow despondent,
I trace the edges of the highest bridge.
Pining for purpose in poems unresponsive, 65
I trifle with death on the writer's ridge.

I leap for the day and drown in my eminence,
gasping for grandeur at the revival of my semblance.
I write my way to the bay, from concave to convex,
sacredly geometric is my pulsing remembrance. 70

Act III. Severed Ensembles

I oft withhold tears at the Gospel,
The tell-tale gnosis of Passion,
A severed yet styled ensemble,
My poetry struggles to fashion.

Paved by poems, her assback pass, 75
Promising death from the Land of Goshen,

Entwined is Goddess in green of grass,
Ere Eōstre's pain and palmed devotion.

Mother's house, a house of trade,
Overthrown tables in merchants' manger, 80
The corrupted chorus swiftly swayed,
To the rhythm of the stanza changers.

"Please Poetra make this fast,"
Perspired red on garden night,
Discipled detach at Supper's Last, 85
Hell hath not Satan win the fight.

Fish hooks tear five loaves in two,
Miracles they don't believe,
Nightmared conviction of saving Jew,
Star-crossed freedom Her death conceived. 90

Ensemble glistens before Her Godhead,
Curls cascading in decrescendo,
Mouths melodizing on mountains of red,
Thirty-three throats of spewing vibrato.

Entombed in wounds her wary words, 95
Stones unturned by temple's tempo,
Aloft the sound of spark'ling songbirds,
Abide in me, my Christ concerto.

Almighty gospeled resurrection,
Garden maiden in poems impearled, 100
Verses writ in New Jerusalem,
Ravishing Redeemer too pure for this world.

Act IV. Words of the Heavens

Never have I known a beauty like words.
Priestess scripts altar's corporal corpus.
Metaphysical metaphors touch the third. 105

Eye of the poet burned optic opus.
Now must I find a fire in the mind.
Therein laments my forlorn silhouette.
Deity renders my transparent rind.
Syllable sculpts transcendent statuette. 110
Now must I bow at the foot of Her cross.
Stitch of the witch professes salvation.
The Daughter was Poetry's zenith loss.
She ascended upon seas of white carnation.
Now emblazoned, her name upon the Heavens. 115
Daughter's Passion bears their fiery professions.

Act V. Mutiny Against Poetry Hogs

Beholden now Behemoth's claws,
torn through flesh by unclean hogs.
My purpose wiser than applause,
the crafting of the artful clause. 120

Must I write? That is the question.
For prophets of profane oppression?
My depression—their pressed obsession.
Are they worthy of my cold Confession?

Serpent coiled 'round the tree. 125
Her stanzas sink their teeth in me.
Among the equals first to be.
I taste her fruit and now I see:
Poetry.

Witful warrior's armed offense. 130
Somewhere aged in ages hence.
I chose to write in self-defense.
Poetra's passage made all the difference.

0: The poem is a gender reversal of classical religious figures. Every male character is written and realized from a female perspective through the lens of Poetra, the anthropomorphic goddess of poetry. The poem is written in the form of Shakespeare. Each canto is an act, and each stanza is a scene.

5: **From the depths of abyss** references Abyss in the religious sense. Before Poetra, the poetsphere did not exist. It was simply a void. Genesis 1:2:

The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

11: **Swaddled in regalia** references the duality of god and king in the Bible. Jesus is called king at the bookends of his life, first inquisitively by a troubled King Herod and then mockingly by Pontius Pilate before the Scourging at the Pillar:

Matthew 2:2:

Where is He that is born King of the Judeans?

John 19:3:

Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

The poetic equivalent of Jesus, Poetra is persecuted by the majority of the world. Her regalia is not true regalia, but distorted. After the Scourging at the Pillar, the Roman soldiers placed regalia on Jesus to mock His kingly status. John 19:5:

Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.

17: **Too pure for this world** references the religious theme of purity. The following two Bible verses inspired this line, as together they represent a young poet encountering the transcendental.

1 Timothy 4:12:

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Matthew 5:8:

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

19: **Who should foretell the words of the heavens** references the biblical theme of prophecy, namely Isaiah's Old Testament prediction of the birth of the Messiah. Isaiah 7:14:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

29: **Leaving passages on pages** references two denotations of "passage"—a section of the Bible (or any piece of literature) and a voyage.

34: **I am who am zygote of Zion and Zen** references Elohim—one of the names for God in the Torah, the citadel of ancient Jerusalem upon which the city of David was built, and the school of Mahayana Buddhism strongly influenced by Taoist philosophy.

Exodus 3:14:

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

A zygote is a diploid cell resulting from the fusion of two haploid gametes, which for Poetra, are Zion and Zen. This fusion of two different faiths—Judaism and Buddhism—suggests that poetry transcends barriers of creed and culture. The reality that Zion, a site of the Holy Land, is also sacred in Christianity and Islam shows that poetry is universal.

38: **Blackened bush of an inhuman heart** references the burning bush—the location at which God appointed Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Exodus 3:2:

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

39: **Ordinal indentures Lent lionesses** references the Christian Liturgical Calendar and the biblical story of Daniel in the Lion's Den. Ordinary time is the time in between seasons that lacks the distinctive characters of the Paschal Triduum, Easter, Lent, Christmas, and Advent. Lent is the season in preparation for Easter, the ultimate celebration of salvation. This line tells of a breakage from the ordinary, which the rest of the stanza/scene encapsulates through the biblical story of Daniel in the Lions' Den.

40-41: **Outwitted by blameless poetic prey / Sharp-toothed jaws I hereby shut** references the story of Daniel in the Lions' Den, in which Daniel is forced into a cage with lions and saved by God. Since Poetra is the poetic equivalent of God, in these lines she saves Herself with her wit. Daniel 6:22:

My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight.

42: **In defiance of the Opus Dei** references the Opus Dei, an institution of the Catholic Church which teaches that ordinary life is a path to sanctity. Poetra's nature defies ordinary life by using poetry as the path to sanctity.

45-46: **Left-handed red loins I hereby escapeth / drudgery's death by my ethereal stave** references Tamar's giving birth in the Torah, specifically the image of the red string. The red string has become a symbol of the Kabbalah tradition and is always worn on the left hand. Genesis 38:27-28:

And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first.

69-70: I write my way to the bay, from concave to convex / sacredly geometric is my pulsing remembrance references sacred geometry, which gives spiritual meaning to geometric shapes and proportions, rooted in the idea that a higher power is the geometer of the universe. Poetry is a sacred geometry of which Poetra is the geometer. The poet possesses the ability to look inward (concave) and project their feelings and experiences outward (convex).

71-72: I oft withhold tears at the Gospel / The tell-tale gnosis of Passion references the Passion of the Christ, which the entire act uses as a metaphor for the suffering of a poet. The word and concept of “Gospel” is used in two denotations—the biblical teachings of Christ and evangelical religious singing.

75-76: Paved by poems, her assback pass / Promising death from the Land of Goshen references Palm Sunday, commemorating Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem on the back of an ass. The Land of Goshen is the land in Egypt from which the Hebrews left during the Exodus. Because Her death is predetermined, Poetra’s entrance is really an Exodus.

78: Ere Eōstre’s pain and palmed devotion references Eōstre, the Germanic goddess of fertility and rebirth, which “Easter” was named after.

79-80: Mother’s house, a house of trade / Overthrown tables in merchants’ manger / The corrupted chorus swiftly swayed / To the rhythm of the stanza changers references the Cleansing of the Temple. John 2: 14-16:

In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.

83-85: “Please Poetra make this fast” / Perspired red on garden night / Disciplined detach at Supper’s Last references Jesus’s Agony in the Garden before the Last Supper. Luke 22:44:

And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

87: Fish hooks tear five loaves in two references the Scourging at the Pillar, the miracle when Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand, and the Body of Christ/Bread of Life. Most scholars believe Jesus

was whipped with fish hooks that tore out His flesh. Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life, so His being tortured was a breaking of bread in a sense. John 6:35:

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

89: Nightmared conviction of saving Jew references Pontius Pilate's wife, who is known for telling him not to convict Jesus due to a dream she had. Of course Pilate did not listen to his wife. Matthew 27:19:

When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

93-94: Mouths melodizing on mountains of red / Thirty-three throats of spewing vibrato references Jesus's death on Mount Cana at the age of thirty-three before His followers. They would spread the Gospel, or "Good News."

95: Entombed in wounds her wary words references Doubting Thomas, while also suggesting that the wounds of a poet are contained in their poetry. John 20:27-29:

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

98: Abide in me, my Christ concerto references the teachings of Jesus in John 15:4:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

100-101: Garden maiden in poems impearled / Verses writ in New Jerusalem references the 14th-century Middle English poem "Pearl" by Gawain Poet (Unknown). In the poem, the narrator loses his pearl, falls asleep, and has a dream that brings him to an other-worldly garden where he finds a young maid he believes is his new Pearl. The Epilogue of "Pearl" sees the maid telling the narrator of New Jerusalem, the new city of God chronicled in the Book of Revelation.

105-106: Metaphysical metaphors touch the third / Eye of the poet burned optic opus references the third eye, the mystical concept of an invisible eye that provides speculation beyond normal sight. This line suggests that poetry is an awakening of the third eye, based in the metaphysical theory of vision that transcends optics.

113-114: The Daughter was Poetry's zenith loss / She ascended upon seas of white carnation references the symbolism of white carnations, which is innocence and pure love, meaning that the blood-sacrifice of Poetra the Daughter, like God the Son, was done innocently and out of love.

121: Must I write? That is the question references Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The line is an assertion that when faced with an onslaught of criticism, giving up poetry is a possibility, but if the art is really one's lifeforce, they will choose to continue no matter what. Rilke's letter responds to a poet contemplating giving up after being rejected by publications, which is eerily similar to the sentiment of ending one's life in Hamlet's soliloquy.

Letters to a Young Poet, pages 18-19

This above all—ask yourself in the stillest hour of your night: must I write? Delve into yourself for a deep answer. And if this should be affirmative, if you may meet this earnest question with a strong and simple "I must," then build your life according to this necessity.

Hamlet (Act III, Scene i, Line 57)

To be, or not to be, that is the question—

127: Among the equals first to be references the Latin phrase *primus inter pares*, or "first among equals," which has been used to refer to the highest authorities in Christian hierarchies. Jesus was considered to be "first among equals" by His disciples.

128-129: I taste her fruit and now I see: / Poetry references the concept of sensory revelation. This stanza/scene portrays the tasting of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Psalm 34:8:

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

130-133: Witful warrior's armed offense / Somewhere aged in ages hence / I chose to write in self-defense / Poetra's passage made all the difference references the last stanza of "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. Like the speaker in that poem, Poetra chooses the unconventional road, the road of a poet.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Second Prize:

Unsung Heroes

In the Book of Revelation, the meaning of the visions to the author are revealed between the sounds and the sights they experience. "Unsung Heroes" takes inspiration from that technique to imagine an apocalyptic story of the four horsemen. The horsemen and their horses—which represent pestilence, famine, war, and death—are called upon in Revelation at the end of time and serve as harbingers of the final judgment. In "Unsung Heroes", the horses are seen waiting for their time to reign in the apocalypse. Is this their time? The horses cannot inflict suffering, however, without people to suffer, and suffer they do. Will the people find sanctuary from their suffering? Each neigh will signal a new chapter with a horseman to guide you through their carnage and closer to the final chapter where you will come to find the answer.

Neigh

My hairs tingled in despair.

I turned to look and saw something
cold and washed out.

In its mouth was a Book.

5

Unsealed, the Book had names—
each one crossed out.

Cries echoed, echoed, echoed
from the Book.

Gravity reclaimed its Register from my loose grip.

10

I heard a mournful wail escape the Book.

I looked and saw a sheep,
then saw two, a hundred, a thousand.

None had wounds, but all were wounded.

“My God

15

my God

has forsaken me,”

they cried in disdain.

I turned away.

In front of me laid a dying Lamb

20

with three holes
spilling blood.
Light shown upon him,
and voices sung,
in most triumphant harmony. 25

Neigh

“I’m hungry!”
I turned once more to see the Book in front of a counter.
Behind the counter was a man of bones.
“I’m hungry. I’m hungry,” reverberated the voices. 30
Stacks of gold surrounded the empty man
like a forest of riches.

One after another,
hungry souls
with rags of clothes, 35
skinny almost to the bone
and drooling mouths,
climbed from the Book
to beg for sustenance.
All were denied. 40
I turned away;
I couldn’t bear it.

I heard a bleat from behind me
and turned to see the Lamb.
“Come to me, come to me, 45
I have bread.”

Once more,
I turned to look at the begging souls.
“I’m hungry!
I’m hungry!” 50
the poor souls repeated,
ignoring the meek lamb.

Neigh

I heard a clink of

metal on metal. 55
To my left I saw red blood spilling from
gaping wounds upon the sheep.

Their carcasses laid dead,
half-separated from
half by a no-mans-land covered in hoof tracks. 60
A sword rested in the blood-red hands of a horse patrolling as
screeches of anguish echoed through the vacuum.

Terrified.
For a second I could see
my family, 65
my friends,
at the edge of his blade,
their eyes sealed.

Looking to the Lamb for comfort,
I saw tears in His eyes. 70
“Stop the fighting,
stop the death,
come to me because
I AM the one who can end it.”

Neigh 75
The voices behind me exclaimed in joy,
“Alleluia, alleluia!”
For the savior had come!
I turned to my right, and it was white but not good.

I ran to warn the limbo souls. 80
I ran and ran
but made no progress.

Come
screeched the Lamb from behind.
I turned and the Lamb was gone, 85
replaced by a figure the height of 10,000 towers.
Trumpets blared,

and the wailing,
and the fighting,
and the begging, 90
ended.

With him was an army of millions.
They didn't have
guns, 95
swords,
or tanks,
but bread,
shipping trucks,
and white coats.

The chaos gone, 100
the souls covered to their knees
and closed their eyes
and kept repeating:

“We are not worthy
to look 105
at the face of the Lion.”

“We are not worthy
to look
at the face of the Lion.”

“We are not worthy 110
to look
at the face of the Lion.”

“Come and look at me,
and the ones like me.”
the Lamb spoke. 115
“You were blind but now you see.”

The Book flew.
It climbed, climbed, climbed.
Cheers and screams—

immense joy belted from the tiny thing 120
as it moved close to His immense palm.

The tiny crown was flung from the head of the horseman who wore it,
as was the sword the other sported,
alongside the gold of the empty one.

The horsemen submitted, 125
their power dismal
compared to the Omnipotent,
their Leader.

His large voice bellowed,
“It’s not your time.” 130

Notes

Lines 3-4: saw something / cold and washed out is a reference to the pale horse from the Book of Revelation. “And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him” (Revelation 6:8 ESV). Hades is Greek for ‘the realm of the dead,’ not to be confused with Hell. Hades contains all souls (even the righteous ones) before judgment and before they are sent to their final destination, whether it be Heaven or Hell. Hades is not a bad place, but it is certainly not pleasant. The “thing” being referenced represents this realm, which is not warm but cold, not vibrant but washed out.

Line 5: In its mouth was a Book connects to the Book of Life, a list of all the righteous from the Christian Bible. “And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15 ESV). However, the Book in “Unsung Heroes” is meant to represent a list of *all* humans.

Line 12: I looked and saw a sheep references the common theme in the Bible of God as the Shepherd and of the people as the sheep, a theme that recurs in both the Old and New Testaments, as exemplified by the quotes below. This theme highlights the intimate relationship between humanity and God.

- “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:3 ESV).
- “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36 ESV).

Line 14: **None had wounds, but all were wounded** references an internal ailment that sent these people to Hades, not a physical injury.

Line 15-17: **“My God / my God / has forsaken me”** is a reference to Jesus’s words on the cross. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46 ESV). That is identical to “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalms 22:1a ESV). If just the first line of this Psalm is read, it seems like a lapse in faith, however, if read further, the meaning becomes clearer. “To you they cried and were rescued; / in you they trusted and were not put to shame” (Psalms 22:5 ESV). In “Unsung Heroes,” the quote differs in the sense that the souls who say this actually believe God has forsaken them, but like the original quote, it must be seen in the context of the poem.

Line 20: **a dying Lamb** is a reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God. “And he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36 ESV). Jesus, the Lamb, was sacrificed for the sins of the believers. The Lamb acts as guide through “Unsung Heroes” as He led John in Revelation, showing the reader the willful ignorance of humanity towards Him as they continue to reverence the horses instead of the true savior.

Line 21-22: **with three holes / spilling blood** is a reference to Jesus who was crucified, creating three holes: one in each hand and one between his feet.

Line 24-25: **voices sung / in most triumphant harmony** is a reference to the Biblical motif of singing in reverence to God. “Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!” (Psalms 105:2)

Line 31: **Stacks of gold surrounded the empty man** references the Black Horse from Revelation which represents famine. “And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!” (Revelation 6:6 English Standard Version). In “Unsung Heroes,” the Black Horse is the first of three images that shows the suffering of the people we saw from the first horse of Death. The empty man is very wealthy while others suffer from the scarcity of food, and he is hollow inside because of his overwhelming materialism.

Line 34: **hungry souls** references to the Biblical idea of people not only being physically hungry but spiritually hungry. Those who come to God will find fulfillment. “For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things” (Psalms 107:9 ESV).

Line 46: **I have bread** is a reference to God always being willing to feed. If the souls in “Unsung Heroes” would do the hard thing and turn away from the empty man and go to God they would find all of the nourishment they want. “Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink’” (John 7:37 ESV).

Line 60: **no-mans-land** is a reference to the area of disputed territory between two opposing parties. Perhaps the most notorious recent example appeared in World War II, where craters and corpses littered the disputed land. The vegetation was dead from the constant bombings.

Line 61: **A sword rested in the blood-red hands of a horse** references the Red Horse from Revelation which represents War. “And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword” (Revelation 6:4 ESV). In “Unsung Heroes,” the Red Horse is overseeing the carnage the sheep have suffered that caused them to die.

Line 74: **I AM** is the name of God revealed to Moses in Exodus. In the context, it means that the Lamb is God, and the Lamb can end their strife if they turn away from wars and strife and towards Him. “God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you’”” (Exodus 3:14-15).

Line 78-79: **For the savior had come! / I turned to my right, and it was white but not good** references the White Horse from Revelation. “And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2 English Standard Version). “Unsung Heroes” plays on various different interpretations of the meaning of the White Horse, including pestilence, the antichrist, or conquest. Though originally the White Horse appeared to inaugurate a sense of hope for the souls in the book, he ultimately proves to be a false hope.

Line 83: **Come** is the final chapter of “Unsung Heroes.” The answer is not found in the horses signified by *Neigh*, but rather by the Lamb who has been ignored. It is a reference to Revelation where the Lamb opened each seal and introduced each horse. “Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, ‘Come!’” (Revelation 6:1 ESV). In “Unsung Heroes” each horse introduces themselves until the end when the most powerful force of all that goes beyond the bounds of earthly things comes. He is huge and he is powerful.

Line 87: Trumpets blared connects to the trumpet that signifies the Kingdom of God in the Bible. “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15 ESV). In “Unsung Heroes,” the trumpet blast represents the entrance of the all-powerful savior who protects the world from the strife that the Four Horsemen intend to inflict on the earth.

Line 101: the souls covered to their knees is a reference to the sheer power of Jesus and God. “So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” (Philippians 2:10 ESV).

Line 113: Come and look me is a reference to the significant change that Jesus created after he died for humanity. Before Jesus came, the Jewish people could never face God. “‘But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live’” (Exodus 33:20 ESV). Jesus’s death forgave humanity’s sins and therefore allowed us to have an intimate relationship with Christ. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV).

Line 114: and the ones like me is referencing the way that humans are made in the image and likeness of God. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27 ESV). Jesus calls humans to not only love him, but to love their fellow humans. “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31 ESV).

Line 116: You were blind but now you see is a reference to the song “Amazing Grace” which says “I was blind but now I see.” The song says that the singer was blind before he experienced the amazing grace of God, but then after that the singer was able to see Him. In “Unsung Heroes” the souls needed to see the huge figure before they were brought to their knees.

Line 121: it moved close to His immense palm references the comfort of putting yourself in God’s hands. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,” (1 Peter 5:6 ESV).

Line 127: Omnipotent means all-powerful, a trait associated within monotheistic religions which believe in one all-powerful being who created them.

Honorable Mention

화랑 : flowerboy

This one's for that fabulous boy
That no one understands
They like to talk
More than they like to understand
It's not your fault

This is for the scintillating boy
Who finally sees himself as worth more
Than the open hand or closed fist
That slapped a price tag on his dignity
And his manhood
So many years ago
Place the flower behind your ear
And wear it—wear it proud;
It's yours

This is for the tired boy
Who's too scared because
He doesn't know what happens after this life
For the boy who, between cuts to his soul and his thighs and his arms
Wonders through tears if God still hears
the prayers that are uttered from the shameful safety of his closet

This is for the boy at peace
Who's stronger than the world around him
And smarter than the ones who hate him
For the Warrior
For the Child of God who won't be limited
By others' imaginations
And learns more to ignore less
And with each breath he takes, is still not dead yet

Hey flowerboy
This one's for you.

Honorable Mention

ESTL

This street that I call home,

It twists and disappears into night.

And the shot of a gun when you're suddenly alone

is the only thing that gives it light.

No matter who it is, they're all the same;

Jaylon, Micheal, Anton, and Dwayne.

No matter their age, height, dreams or claim,

it's the same story, just a different name.

—Sam Tarter

Honorable Mention

The Right Time

As the golden heat of day spurs work,
The blues of deepest night awake my soul.
I dream with the rest, but wake without,
For day-dwellers know not sweet Luna's tune.
She strums her lazuli harp for few;
With those notes we forfeit the sun's riches.
They're naught but a few dimes in total
When faced with everlasting jewels above.
O beauty! O magnificent love!
Come forth to me as evening oranges fall!
Sooth the heat with nocturnal echoes
And bid me to forever join the song.

—Peter Michalski