

Announcing the Results of the 2023

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 forty-seven poems submitted by twenty-five students were judged anonymously by Shane Seely, director of the Master in Fine Arts program at the University of Missouri St. Louis and the author of several books of poetry, including his most recent, *The First Echo*.

First prize: “atomic Theory” by Paul Thibideaux

Second prize: “And Still I’ll Walk” by Paddy Jones

Honorable Mention: “[In halls where chatter rings...]” by Simon Edgell

Honorable Mention: “Morning After the Encounter” by Cody Cox

Honorable Mention: “All the Time in the World” by John Bytnar

atomic Theory

i am filled with empty space.
and no matter how hard they try,
despite their tubes and rays
and sheets of golden foil,
they will never comprehend how
small i feel.

there is something in you, though,
that excites me, sets me off balance.
i can tell that you see me,
and in a single moment
i feel bigger.
I feel the buzzing, the energy,
and I know we are preparing to bond.
In my head, all I want
is to give all of myself
up to you. And you tell me that
we can share, actually, because
you are sweet and kind and don't ask for too much.
You tell me that I need things too.
But what if I tell you
that you could never truly
touch me? That I am scared
of what would happen if we collided?
Or if you would push past
the shells that surround me
and be disappointed by the
cluster i am?
Worse, what would happen if you threw
yourself at me without warning?
Tried to toe the line
between fusion and fission?
Would I collapse in on myself, or
would I split open,
my ruined self leaving us both in pieces...?

for now i will stay isolated with myself.
if you come and break my bonds, then
maybe i will be pulled to you. but i warn you,
for i do not know the power of
my unstable heart.

—Paul Thibodeau, 1st Place

And Still I'll Walk

Im headed for a road out of here, they don't believe in me, but I'll still walk,
They say that the road is rough and uneven, and still I walk,
They say the road has no shade from the suns overwhelming glow, and still I walk,
They say there is no water on this desolate road, and still I walk,
They say there are few other travelers on this road, and still I walk,
They say the road becomes ink black at night, devoid of warmth, and still I walk,
They say there are no maps of this road, and still I walk,
They say people like me don't get to see the end of the road, and still I walk,
I don't know where the road is going, or how long it'll take to get there, and still I walk.

—Patrick Jones, 2nd Place

In halls Where chatter rings like birds in a tree or bees in a hive
There exists a silent thing - or three, four, or five.
A head-down-walker, fast talker,
Quick to leave and last to to arrive
Spying their plus one, other half, or lover, sparking a fire and starting to thrive
A ball-dropping, hideout-hopping
Small creature no matter width or size
In silence they stand, as if planted by hand,
another wall flower on the vine.

—Simon Edgell, honorable mention

Morning After the Encounter

The throaty call of Xanax haunts my sleep
Then I wake
drink inky grounds and whet my hunger for emotion
Steel chorus clangs at 6:30 A.M.
“Time to leave” I think,
and I shiver with this lack of feeling.
But my life has been reduced to a statistic
a scholarship to commercialize my skin for
a stereotype for your convenience
a job to be boxed into someday because my hair is “unprofessional.”
What aspects of me are most appealing to you?
My music?
My body?
My clothes?
My culture?
My names?
I have a lot of names.
Am I Suspect? Thug? Criminal? Faggot? Wetback? Nigger?
Is that why the officer told me I “looked threatening?”
A rail-thin, anxiety riddled student
in a wet cardigan and slacks.
I got a ticket for speeding.
Am I the monster under your bed?
How does my ancestry, my brown skin, put you on edge?
Do you feel panic creeping in your bones like I do?
Is that gun you finger nervously your Xanax?
How will I be like my brothers and sisters?
Will I rise from ashes?
Or will I die a victim?
Will you live with my blood on your hands?

—Cody Cox, honorable mention

All the time in the world: An imagined fragment of Dante's Paradiso

The lights around me joined chorally, bringing
Praise to God. *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* did their
Voices demand, of the Lamb's flesh they were singing.

“Oh wise and gentle master, you who have great care
For my feeble mind, hear my question.
Why do the souls choose the hymn they now blare?”

“The hymn they sing calls to mind their holy progression,
Nourished by continuous viaticum did they
Transform their slow wills to have great obsession.

Obsessed now with holy things, no longer did they stray
But remained on course to feast their starved soul
With the Bridegroom on His infinite wedding day.”

“O sage, now I realize these saints had but one goal,
The goal I often flee, excusing my spirit
By thinking salvation is in my own control.

Am I not too young to fear it,
The Death that decides where we spend eternity?
Surely I still have time before my life I quit.”

—John Bytnar, honorable mention