WHERE MY DREAMING AND MY LOVING LIVE:
POETRY & THE BODY

POEMS BY ALUMNI OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT POETS PROGRAM

ALINE DOLINH  ASHLEY GONG  CHASITY HALE
MILES HEWITT  EILEEN HUANG  GOPAL RAMAN
JOEY REISBERG  MAYA SALAMEH
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“I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul.” Walt Whitman believed that writing about the body was sacred—that understanding the physical is as essential as understanding the ethereal.

The Poetry Coalition, a national alliance of literary organizations dedicated to promoting the value poets bring to our culture, now enters its second year of programming. This year’s theme is centered on “Where My Dreaming and My Loving Live: Poetry & the Body.” The inspiration for this year’s theme comes from the poem “Flores Woman” by current U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith. The speaker of “Flores Woman”—the titular prehistoric hominid—nearly marvels at her own physicality, as well as the many possibilities it allows her. “I want to dive in and drift,” she declares, “legs and arms wracked with danger.”

The poems in this chapbook were written by alumni of the National Student Poets Program—the nation’s highest honor for youth poets presenting original work. They contain a similar fascination with the myriad possibilities of the body. Some poets focus on the body’s strength and immeasurability: “Call me / endless throat with no shape,” writes Aline Dolinh. Some explore its fragility and ephemerality: From Ashley Gong, “she is a building / her rooms are foreign to me.” Other poems also aim to encompass social aspects—from the malignancy of police brutality to the epidemic of gun violence.

These poems are vulnerable and visceral, but they aren’t afraid to fully inhabit the spaces that they take up. “I learn how to make these bones my own,” writes 2016 alum Maya Salameh. These poems make homes out of their own pages: They pulsate with life, bold and electrifying.

**ABOUT MY DREAMING AND MY LOVING**

Light: lifted, I stretch my brief body.  
Color: blaze of day behind blank eyes.

Sound: birds stab greedy beaks  
Into trunk and seed, spill husk

Onto the heap where my dreaming  
And my loving live.

—U.S. POET LAUREATE TRACY K. SMITH, “FLORES WOMAN”

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NAIA

ALINE DOLINH
“The near-intact skeleton of a delicately built teenage girl, who died more than 12,000 years ago in what is today’s Mexico, could help to solve the riddle of how the Americas were first populated … Cave divers discovered the skeleton seven years ago in a complex of flooded caverns known as Hoyo Negro, in the jungles of the Yucatan Peninsula. They called her Naia, after the naiads, the water nymphs of Greek mythology. She lies in a collapsed chamber together with the remains of 26 other large mammals, including a sabre-toothed tiger, 600 metres from the nearest sinkhole.”
– Nature, May 2014

I am the girl that follows
the thing with sharp teeth. Call me

endless throat with no shape:
heart-eater  mouth-hunter  skin-seeker –

always pursuing acts
of small magic: fresh meat

blushing white in hot water,
how my soft wounded surfaces

still knit together. See how
the ridged summits of my hips

still swing. I go into the earth
and hover over the edge

of the false sea, daring a god
to pull me down. Here the rock hollows

into melted stars running
through water, outstretched

into the dark. I want
to burn like that too. Yes –

I could be a string arced taut and let go
against flesh    ringing out forever –

Aline Dolinh was the 2013 National Student Poet for the Southeast.
PLANES
ASHLEY GONG
I float on shore. I am a head
faltering on two sticks why do you
recognize me when my molecules
are only wood cells but capable
of higher scheming? I don’t
recognize me in the mirror,
in the face of a woman on the street
who stares at me
and I stare at her as if she is a building
her rooms are foreign to me.
I stare at my skin and my dead equipment
wind whistles through the cracks
in my brain
until I am a spirit. I float
into the city on four wheels
like a paltry parade. I shop cupcakes
icing whipped like hippie hair adolescent
angst oranges blues pinks
decorations on the same
vanilla body. I am nothing,
really, when you strip away my clothes.
I am probably you leering in the window
my face is only a casing
on your same dull flesh
sparked with feeling when the flint strikes just right
fire crawls in my knees and blooms in my knee
scalps I have a headache
just thinking about this.
I want to have a child someday.
I will love it because it sees me
and I see it a new wave
awakening in my eyes

I will love it when
it hates me and it is perfectly unlovable
every day better humans are made through cloning
a bunch of dolls Dollys with the same
endearing flaws. Why
make more humans when I’d rather

ASHLEY GONG | 5
birth some current ones anew? A plane
drops a bomb—siren streaking through the air
like an umbilical cord—and children run towards it
like their mother. A bunch of dead souls
create more dead souls, they don’t
see what they do, what makes them any
different from the plane or the bomb
or the building that doesn’t know
what passes through it. What passes through me
when I feel something
my body
when an allergy blurs and invades
why do I recognize you
as something good?
Yeast rises in me
like a feeling. My body is broken hardware with the same
inherited virus
family heirloom
will I erupt someday?

If I reach out and touch you

the lingering hem of your dress  an arm
snaking around your rib

I will be more than dumb bliss. Can I crawl
into you and make love with your thoughts? This
is the only touch I need
the surface of your eyes
looking into me
beyond the glass and dusty planes
a siren unfurls
make tenant in me

Ashley Gong was the 2014 National Student Poet for the Northeast.
Stills from a short film made for “Sun Sets Like a Shadow” by Chasity Hale and Gopal Raman. (Photography by Alessandra Diaz)
SUN SETTLES LIKE A SHADOW

CHASITY HALE & GOPAL RAMAN
You are where my dreaming lives—
In the crook of a wooden chair made
Warm by cannibal heat. Our friction keeps us safe.

Our love lives in a dark room,
where the ceiling is starless,
And yet we lie down, gazing at it anyway.

Our love, drawn from dream, takes form
From the spaces between us. Our air is electric.

Our love is the kind you put in the glove compartment
For later.

What if a dream was beautiful first, before it was fake?

I don’t know what I am.
Some days, you call me “darling,”
and others, you say nothing at all.

Funny how the sun never takes credit for moonlight,
For shadow, for color. Fingertips often whisper what words can’t seem to say.

Our love is driving along the coast,
Where all I can hear is the sound of spilling breakers
as they collapse against the seafloor.

And then it hits: love is dream made memory,
Moments made magic and solid, made real.

But Bob Dylan is on the radio. And you are laughing
about something I said. I think this time, you see me—
baby hairs, a chipped tooth smile, loose threads on my sweater.

Eyes flickering, sipping slow from the morning sun.
Fingertip touches touch back, as I give and you take.

Chasity Hale was the 2015 National Student Poet for the Southeast. Gopal Raman was the 2016 National Student Poet for the Southwest.
[ XXIV. VOID — INNERMOST FRACTALINE DARKNESS AMNESIA OF LIGHT ]

Miles Hewitt
Void — innermost fractaline darkness amnesia of light
my body — one hundred golden triangles

now I go back and forth
    turning the mirrors

I’ve found the creek that leads inward then perhaps vanishes
I’ve got a job to do —

here my containers hold them
my gallows of prisoners I can’t drop I never lose the thread hold them

once the perfect notebook
was opened to
infinite susceptibility
once we showed the organizations
how to team up

now there are ways to count in solitude
now a worm crawls where a necklace had been
the song is made to listen
a cup of blood cuts the reaching hand

we control the rations we
milk the goats undress the footprints

I let the notebook tremble in the wind
eight or ten seconds

at 9:00 am the first voice was taken into the sky
our wings leave no shadow

Miles Hewitt was the 2012 National Student Poet for the West.
SLAMFIRE

EILEEN HUANG
A gun walks into a boy’s hands, says, *My form is a filthy type of yours.* The boy is half-fashioned, brewing spit full of hate. The gun begs for holy. *Cain killed Abel with a rock. People kill people.* Boy tongues gun clean, yearning for light.

/.\

*I, Prometheus, bound to eagle-baffled rock, stole grief from the gods, molded it into man—*

/.\

**SCENE 3: EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY**
Lights on pavement. Students out of class, again. Bags scattered, papers like flocks of unruly gulls. Cut to: another body made home by bullet. Cut to: another childless backpack. Cut to: another face more grief than mother. *You can do something, anything.*

/.\

Mother begs me to have a child, but I fear children—their palms dripping with mucus, bellies full of ache. I fear many things: pregnant women, whose stomachs stretch taut and sacred. I fear eardrops. I fear snow. I fear deafness. I fear bruising.

/.\

Boy muzzles cartridge in place. Gun widens its mouth, singing, *In God We Trust.*
I have a daughter, but only in dreams. Each night, I follow her down the hallway. Lie down next to me, she says, and pretend like you’re asleep. I steal flame from Olympus, use it to vanish her. I played dead and he didn’t notice me.

There is so much we can do.
We can gut whole trouts for dinner. We can walk through entire cities in rainstorms. We can bolt our doors. We can shut off our lights. We can pray for silence. I’m already calling
dibs on behind the desk, on the closet.

That was my baby, the father says.
But a father without baby is no father. Let’s try that again:
That was my baby, says the air, says nobody.

On the eighth day, God forgets. I tell my mother that I don’t want children. Elsewhere, a bird pecking at liver, beast springing from its creator. Elsewhere, a flag shrinking down its mast. A boy loading another round.

Eileen Huang was the 2015 National Student Poet for the Northeast.
Stills from a short film made for “Sun Settles Like a Shadow” by Chasity Hale and Gopal Raman. (Photography by Alessandra Diaz)
I am a body encapsulated within the larger, rattling body of a city bus riding through the darting bodies of raindrops leaking forth from a diagnostic sky. There is a jaundice on this bus. A pallor to this mobility some sickliness because it is Tuesday and because it is late weekday afternoon and the whole blue runway of the center aisle is boot-printed with rain-slop and everybody just wants home wants to be away from this swaddled rain-musk scent and Baltimore is a body too, a diseased body pocked with vacancy front stoops sweating absurd growths of broken glass and blood spots and the cyclical, slick-screaming question: WHO EVER DIED FROM A ROUGH RIDE? On this bus is an automated voice that of god or a nurse listing symptoms: Fulton. Sandtown. Carey.

Last stop. I think how small are the borders between outside and in, how easily a breach can occur. Like the bus window left open today, and rain splattering the carnival-carpeted seats with blooms of candy-colored mold. Who ever thought fabric seats on a bus were a good idea? Who decided our bodies should be so breakable that the boy next to me can be shattered by a police officer’s bullet while I ride this rattletrap daily protected by my young and impervious skin. I worry the strands of myself, work at the grit of this city its illness generational its prejudice ingrained and I hear the perpetual dings of stop requests, people stepping off the squealing bus into streets sparkling vials and storm water this membraned city, bordered and bisected, straining as a doctor treating a hypochondriac of himself.

Joey Reisberg was the 2016 National Student Poet for the Northeast.
DIAGNOSIS OF DIASPORA

MAYA SALAMEH
built of stanzas and sibilance,
legs lean and inelegant,
I am hand. hip. wrist. I
rewrite my kneecaps. I drip language from my pupils. I
terrify all the right people. most days, I
say my prayers reluctantly.
sacrament leaves a sour taste in the mouth.
pomegranate-tinted eyelids, I

barter my palms for poems,
redistrict wrists run through with remembrances. I sing my elegies.

ichor licks my fingertips for sugar. I
am always dancing.

I see in my spotted back
my black hair and
my red lips and
my seventy-seven-percent cocoa eyes.
ligaments/tendons/throne/day-by-day I learn how to make these bones my own.

my throat, my thighs. the threat of my neck.

I am not a pretty girl.
I’ve got a nighttime voice in daytime skin. I
accentuate my hooked nose with the deepest darkest lipsticks I can find. I
redraw the sensuality between my brows.

here are my limbs. spell them.
the paper conspires with new ink,
and the poems nationalize my lungs for the good of the people.
my body trembles in tectonic style sometimes but by god, do I
glow like the six-dollar stars stuck to my ceiling.

a skeleton built on sestinas, veins clogged with free verse, a stomach full of prose,

I follow the rhythm to the letter.

MAYA SALAMEH | 19
(maybe someday I will teach myself to breathe better.)

for now, I am all Spanish arches. longing on two legs. a chest full of potholes. hair fracture in my tangled ribs, the wildness to my clavicle.

a glass shard is proudly on display in my spine—I call this contemporary art. my heart partitioned for stew meat, three bullet holes in the wall, and I am the radius.

I have managed to reopen my
divots & imperfections. I lose letters like lashes to be reread with a fine tooth comb.


_Maya Salameh_ was the 2016 _National Student Poet for the West._
ABOUT THE NATIONAL STUDENT POETS PROGRAM

Annually, five students are selected for one year of service as literary ambassadors, each representing a different geographic region of the country. By elevating and showcasing their work for a national audience, the Program strives to inspire other young people to achieve excellence in their own creative endeavors and promote the essential role of writing and the arts in academic and personal success.

The National Student Poets Program—a collaboration of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers—strives to inspire other young people to achieve excellence in their own creative endeavors and promote the essential role of writing and the arts in academic and personal success. The Program links the National Student Poets with audiences and neighborhood resources such as museums, libraries, and other community-anchor institutions and builds upon the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers’ long-standing work with educators and creative teens through the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.