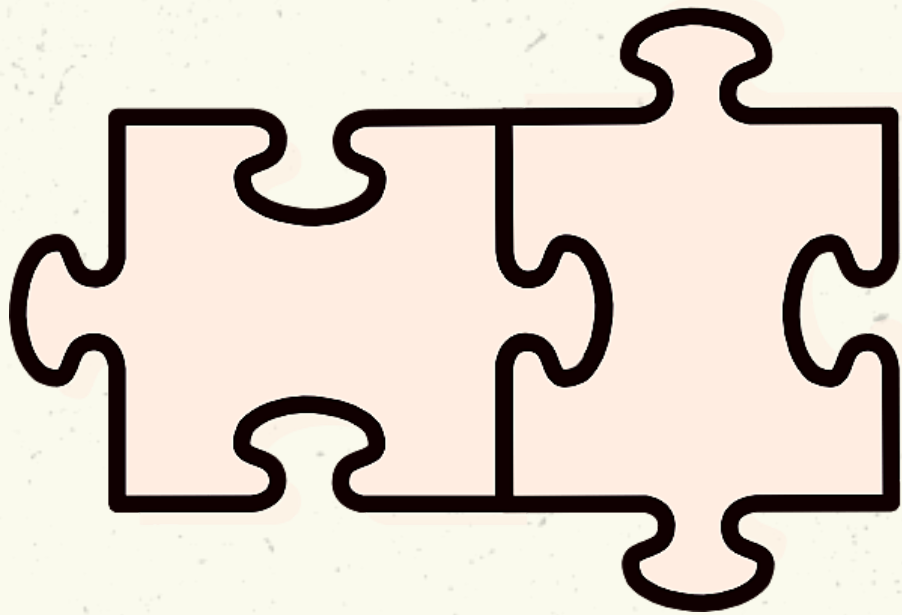


# CONNECTED CULTURES

A Collection of Original Poetry



Daileny Guerrero, Shinsig Kim,  
Aliya Shaikhina

# **Connected Cultures**

*A Collection of Original Poetry*

*by Students at Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Daileny Guerrero, Shinsig Kim, Aliya Shaikhina

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*Cover Artwork* Daileny Guerrero

*For our classmates at Harvard Graduate School of Education.*

Poetry is thoughts that breathe and words that burn.

*Thomas Gray*

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## Preface

It is not often that we take time to get to know what a person from another culture might be thinking or, in fact, how their thought process is evoked by the environments that shaped them. The environments that are hard to grasp if you are not part of that community.

This first Connected Cultures collection of poems comes from a number of international students, who had never met in person. They all met online every day of the past year. We wanted those of them, with a talent for a written word and rhyme, to be placed together for us all to be able to travel into the hearts of our peers from across the world to enjoy their gift of poetry.

This e-book is part of our wider project: a digital collection of classic, children's and diversity and inclusion movies, books and poems from across the world that students at Harvard Graduate School of Education recommend as a way to gain insight into their cultures.

We came up with Connected Cultures through our class Designing For Learning by Creating with Professor Karen Brennan at Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Encouraged by our own love for culture, we created a collaborative project that our classmates can take part in by sharing books, poems, and movies that they enjoyed growing up and that they feel best represent their cultures. The HGSE global community represents over 50 countries—our website [www.connectedcultures.org](http://www.connectedcultures.org) reflects 25 of them. We wanted our classmates to feel like they have ownership over the narrative they want to share about their own cultures.

All three of us are students at a Masters program in Technology, Innovation and Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education and are keen on creating this digital space to get together and interact with each other. We want to help our classmates, who have never met, understand one another better and to have a lot more points of reference and discussions about cultures from around the world.

We hope you will enjoy reading these poems as much as we did and get in touch with the authors as well as join our digital community at Connected Cultures.

## Acknowledgements

Connected Cultures project would like to thank Professor Karen Brennan, whose course on *Designing For Learning by Creating* inspired the project. It is in her exciting and memorable class that we created a digital cultural platform [www.connectedcultures.org](http://www.connectedcultures.org) featuring movie, book, and poetic recommendations provided by our international classmates from a myriad of backgrounds.

We would like to thank Andrea Le, a Senior Program Coordinator - International Student Support at the Office of Student Affairs at Harvard Graduate School of Education, for her enthusiasm and encouragement for the team at Connected Cultures as well as her passion for bringing international students together. Thank you for believing and supporting our project.

We would like to thank Rebecca Y. Martin, an Associate Director and Scholarly Communication and Collections Librarian at Gutman Library, Harvard Graduate School of Education for her professionalism and advice, ensuring our authors' rights are duly protected as well as helping us navigate copyright controls.

This e-book would not be possible without the help of our friend Andy Howe, who helped us bring it together, editing and publishing support he provided. Thank you, Andy.

Last but not least, we want to thank our classmates at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the authors of the poems you are about to indulge in. Thank you for sharing your pieces with us all and allowing us to feature your work with the world. You shared the most precious gift with us - your sincere vulnerability that a truly poetic expression often is, and we cherish this gift with all our hearts and are confident that so will our fellow readers around the world!

It has been a pleasure for our team to work with all of you, and we hope to continue to stay in touch as we explore more creative ways for cultural exchange, expanding it further into the series in the future.

Until then, culturally yours!

Aliya, Daileny and Shinsig

## **Con los pies descalzos en Harvard Yard**

*By Marisa Ayala*

I feel  
the discoveries of my own amalgamation,  
the mingling of my Indigenous, African, and European roots.  
In that nexus,  
I find the intuition, the rhythm, the knowledge  
And  
I also find the pain, the strain, the malice.

I can sense the wishes of my father,  
the wishes of my mother,  
valiantly coating my stem.

These multiple layers of identity  
grow rare, variegated leaves.

I'm the heir of a queendom no one else can claim,  
I am also a botanist and to preserve my being,  
I walk, con los pies descalzos,  
en Harvard Yard

**Girlhood is**  
*By Madeline Brancel*

girlhood is  
a glowing line drawn  
with crayon between salt  
pond and sky

if you let your  
eyes go hazy in the rain, even  
overgrown  
you can  
catch the  
scent of the sun's head  
on her pillow after  
she's gone

my bony knees used to stand brazen  
beckoning the flash of sky over  
the fairgrounds. i could run when it came.

i can no longer hear the chatter of  
the grass blades evergreen  
needles taste the  
dropping barometric pressure

storms are where i live now. they say there was a before.  
before my storms, maybe  
but what of the  
first storm?  
before bodies were something to carry?

i mostly hear to dos now, to make yourself forgets

yesterday, Ma'Khia sang into the storm for help and instead, it struck her.

who am i but one man shooting bullets into a hurricane?

## **Dawn fell like a feather on the Earth**

*By Madeline Brancel*

dawn fell like a feather on the Earth

the moment of impact was so loud  
for the bees and the mice, it was as if the sky  
had dropped the sun upon a meadow hill and it rolled  
summersault, upside down, right side up,  
down 100 yards until  
it slowly  
ever so slowly  
rolled to a  
stop.

The birth of each day was like this for them, the bees and the mice.

When dawn crowned on the horizon,  
the fuzz on their ears would stand at attention,  
anticipating the sun like an egg on the pasture hill

every day they would yawn and stretch their miniature joints,  
revealing soft cavernous underarms

smack their lips and blink  
smiling at the first sights  
of one another as the giant sphere let out its  
final creak

## Why you?

*By Devika Harlalka*

Heart rate rises.  
Anxiety takes over.  
Tears soak up my cheeks.  
I ask God why you?  
You never smoked, never drank, always ate clean.  
And yet your kidneys seem to give up.  
Dialysis goes from once a week to twice a week and now thrice.  
Seeing you lie on that hospital bed is faaaar from easy.  
Watching the nurse gently stab your frail arm makes me feel terribly queasy  
And just then memories swarm through my mind  
I remember the bedtime stories you'd tell me teaching me always to be sweet, sincere and kind  
The ping-pong games you'd beat me in  
The chess tournaments you'd always win  
The motivational pep talks you'd give me before any big event  
Or the numerous time you'd listen to me simply vent  
BEEP BEEP!  
And just then the blaring sound of the dialysis machine wakes me into reality  
My heart pounding  
Anxiety storming through my veins.  
But this time I hold back my tears for I do not want you to see.  
As the nurse swoops in to detach you from that blood sucking machine  
I sit there desperately wishing for a donor to come through  
Scared of not having enough time left with you.  
But I guess I can't complain  
because when I was blessed to have a grandpa like you  
I didn't ask God why you?

## **Nakusha**

*By Devika Harlalka*

Nakusha GO AWAY!

Nakusha SHUT UP. You are wasting my time.

Nakusha you are useless.

Nakusha you are a waste of space.

Nakusha your own parents never wanted to have you anyway.

Nakusha you are and always will be a burden.

Extra hard-earned money that will go down the drain; for we'll have to pay your dowry.

Why are you still talking? If only we could have taken care of you earlier.

Don't you get the point?

Your name, Nakusha, literally means UNWANTED.

You are unwanted like the ugly scars that cling to your body after a painful and unpredictable  
injury

You are unwanted like the grief that follows after being robbed of loved one – suffocating you  
with nothing

but hopeless misery

You are unwanted like a thunderous smelly fart that escapes your disgusting little human body

You are unwanted like the mold that festers

Stop.

Hold on.

Someone please explain to me.

What did she do wrong?

Was being born a girl indeed such a horrific crime?

## Are we really living in the 21st century?

*By Devika Harlalka*

Just like you breathe to survive, we women menstruate.  
If we did not menstruate our humanity would cease to exist.  
Instead of thanking us for what we have to go through.  
It is ironic that we are made to feel shame. Called Impure. Called dirty.

So how much longer till we normalize the fact that we women menstruate?  
I am tired of “whispering”  
I am tired of being made to feel embarrassed.  
I am tired of having to smuggle sanitary napkins as if it were a crime.  
I am tired of feeling awkward to ask a male shopkeeper for a tampon.  
I am tired of mindless taboos and stigma that come along with menstruation.

So tell me? Are we really living in the 21st century?  
Why is that I cannot enter the kitchen?  
Don't you know that menstruation is just another bodily function?  
Why is that I cannot enter the temple?  
If god found me to be “impure,” why would he create this bodily function?  
Why is it that girls I know even today are made to sleep on the ground in isolation?  
Made to eat on paper plates? Still made to live in confinement? or even called untouchable?  
Made to feel disgusting? As if menstruating were a crime.  
As if it were our choice.

So tell me, How am I supposed to ‘stay free’?

You should be thankful.  
Thankful for it is not you, but we who endure the pain monthly  
Take on this noble cause of ensuring our human species can stay alive.  
But no instead Hatred.  
Disgust. Shame. Double standards. Misogyny.

So tell me? Are we really living in the 21st century?  
For I remember representing my country at the Judo Nationals  
Fighting. Sparring. Winning.  
Although it was my second day.  
Are you still going to tell me I'm dirty? Or make me feel like this win was less-worthy?

So why are we still holding on to these ‘so called traditions’ disguising it in the name of  
‘religion’  
When I know that my God would not want to inflict such pain, stigma or call his child dirty.

Yes, I know that in the olden days women may not have had this luxury - multiple options  
May not have had medication or sanitary napkins but, hey  
Times have changed and isn't the 21st century?

**Someday**  
*By Maria Haqqani*

Someday, she said.  
Someday, will be the day.  
The soul whispers secrets;  
the pen bleeds ink, staining  
the pages of the present  
with the past.  
Overcast and broken.  
On days like these  
I forget what it means to dream.  
Till wisps of hope rise  
up from the tip of my pen,  
from the warmth of my breath;  
rise up through the heavens and stars —  
to Him —  
bursting into stardust,  
powering me into  
another heart-  
beat.

*The wound is where the Light enters you.*

**Rumi**

**Not The End**  
*By Gleb Lantsman*

When there's nowhere to hide  
And you're stuck on this side  
And you can't carry on,

When you're losing your mind  
With no future in sight,  
And you don't quite belong

Except here in the song:  
We can right every wrong  
And leave the past behind.

When your soul needs a mend,  
Please remember, my friend,  
That this is not the end.

Make yourself a promise that will keep your spirits high  
You've had enough of all this, but you can give it one more try  
Not the end — overcome your fear  
Not the end — run away from here  
Not the end — things that you hold dear  
You will carry inside you

Days of terrible cold  
When you had to behold  
How your life falls apart

This you could not evade,  
But it is not too late  
To save your ruined heart

At least here in the song:  
The music's changing its tone,  
We'll leave the past behind.

Though your soul needs a mend  
After years misspent,

No, this is not the end.

Make yourself a promise that will keep your spirits high  
You've had enough of all this, but you can give it one more try  
Not the end — overcome your fear  
Not the end — run away from here  
Not the end — things that you hold dear  
You will carry inside you

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## **A Small Town Mindset**

*By Carrah Olive-Hall*

The dominant stare  
The privilege of being able to look up  
    To speak up  
    To be heard  
To think I would never give this up  
I fought everyday with the people in my classes  
Painting them a picture of their harm  
and wrong actions.  
Yet never once did I put the brush on paper  
and paint me.  
To look and see that I needed to develop my own image  
To be able to not compare and center everything  
on myself.  
That my page was white too  
and the colors I would want to use,  
we're not for me to choose.

It would be then,  
that sparks could begin.

## Versos como diáspora y protesta / Verses as diaspora and protest

By Gustavo Rojas

Pasar la noche dentro del átomo germinal de mi mismo  
es una idea que me persigue  
como el policía al ladrón  
que le robó la alegría,  
como el perro persigue su cola.

To spend the night inside the germinal atom of myself  
it's an idea that haunts me  
like the policeman to the thief  
that stole her joy,  
as the dog chases its tail.

Proceso instantáneo como aquel café  
sucedáneo existencial  
que reconforta mañanas con olores y sabores familiares,  
que mantiene ojos abiertos en las noches eternas,  
que cuesta un poco más barato que el original  
en todos los sentidos en que se pueda aplicar el concepto de economía  
¡Menos en uno!

Instant process like that coffee  
existential substitute  
that comforts mornings with familiar smells and flavors,  
that keeps eyes open in the eternal nights,  
which costs a little cheaper than the original  
in every way that the concept of economics can be applied  
Less in one!

*El yo moderno es un hoyo imposible de llenar*  
¡cuidado con tropezar y caer al salir a la calle!  
Si sueño con esto estando despierto  
¿qué pasará estando dormido?

*The modern self is an impossible to fill hole*  
Be careful not to stumble and fall when going outside!  
If I dream about this while awake  
What will happen while asleep?

Y no es como en las obras viales  
no hay carteles de colores llamativos  
nada brilla en la oscuridad  
nada refleja  
todo está hecho para simular  
que esos hoyos no son tales.

And it is not like in road construction  
no flashy color posters  
nothing glows in the dark  
nothing reflects  
everything is made to simulate  
that those holes are not such.

Debería haber invertido en un globo aerostático  
o algún medio de transporte un poco más abstracto  
maldito el día en que decidí hacer caso  
y volverme uno más.

I should have invested in a hot air balloon  
or some more abstract means of transport  
damn the day I decided to listen  
and become one more.

Insisto:  
si todo cambia y nada permanece  
todo y nada son invento,  
que permanecen mientras cambian  
de nada se está seguro

I insist:  
if everything changes and nothing remains  
everything and nothing are an invention,  
that remain while changing  
you are not sure of anything

salvo de la inmaterialidad o de la  
insustentabilidad de lo argüido.

Y entonces por qué gastar palabras  
hablando con idiotas que ven esto como algo  
fijo  
como daguerrotipo de la vida  
cuadro por cuadro  
¿y el movimiento?  
¡No al sedentarismo vital!  
¡No a las conversaciones estacionales!  
¡Sí a las hojas de los árboles,  
cayendo sin esperar al otoño!  
Para reír entre los cerros con el aire puro en  
los pulmones  
siguiendo los juegos de luz  
a medida que los objetos  
se desvanecen en el horizonte.

No a lo superficial, porque nada es lo que  
parece  
Sí a lo que entiende que en el fondo no hay  
mucho que entender  
sino mucho que cuidar y disfrutar  
en respetuoso y humilde silencio.

No confundir:  
no es la la palabra lo malo  
sino el desuso que no hacemos de ella.

except for the immateriality or  
unsustainability of what is argued.

And so why waste words  
talking to fools who see this as something  
fixed  
as a daguerreotype of life  
frame by frame  
And the movement?  
No to sedentary life!  
No to seasonal conversations!  
Yes to the leaves of the trees,  
falling without waiting for autumn!  
To laugh among the hills with pure air  
filling the lungs  
playing games of light  
as objects fade into the horizon

Not to the superficial, because nothing is  
what it seems  
Yes to that which understands that there is  
not much to be understood  
but a lot to be taken care of and enjoyed  
in respectful and humble silence.

Do not confuse:  
the problem is not with words  
as it is with the disuse we do not make of  
them.

## Utopía del siglo veintiuno / 21st Century Utopia

*By Gustavo Rojas*

Sesenta y cinco metros cuadrados  
no tan finas terminaciones  
aquí construiré mi utopía personal.

Sixty-five square meters  
not so fine endings  
here I will build my personal utopia.

Al margen de los grandes relatos,  
y de acuerdos en la opinión pública  
sacaré mi cabeza por la ventana  
y abrazaré al aire no privatizado  
antes de recorrer sin prisa la súper autopista  
del conocimiento.

Aside from the great stories,  
and agreements in public opinion  
I'll stick my head out the window  
and I will embrace the un-privatized air  
before riding slowly along the super highway  
of knowledge.

Al margen de dominios ejidales,  
en el sucinto prado de mi terraza  
cultivaré semillas de justicia  
y las regaré con gotas de esperanza  
para avanzar de a poco  
hacia una solidaridad libre y genuina.

Outside of ejido domains,  
in the succinct meadow of my terrace  
I will grow seeds of justice  
and I will water them with drops of hope  
to advance little by little  
towards free and genuine solidarity.

Utopía como superación  
del alucinado autoconvencimiento;  
de la consigna ciega y sorda,  
como reconocimiento de la propia limitación;  
como pensamiento crítico de uno mismo.

Utopia as overcoming  
of the hallucinated self-convictions;  
of the blind and deaf slogan.  
As recognition of one's own limitations;  
as critical thinking of oneself.

Utopía como el anhelo de cuidar a mis hijos  
cada día un poco mejor.

Utopia as the yearning to take care of my  
children  
every day a little better.

**Pedro Páramo**  
*By Gustavo Rojas*

Yo soy a México  
tanto como es  
Preciado a Comala.

I am to Mexico  
as much as Preciado  
is to Comala.

El ritmo asfixiante  
de sus versos me atrapó.  
Y no fue necesario decir más.

The suffocating rhythm  
of his verses caught me.  
And it was not necessary to say anything  
else.

Después vine aquí  
donde vive mi madre,  
una tal poesía.

Then I came here  
where my mother lives,  
the so-called poetry.

Esas letras juntas  
en un verso  
son el hemistiquio de otras de antes  
escritas por un huérfano  
desértico y errante  
y también mías.

Those letters together  
in a verse  
They are the hemistich of others from before  
written by an orphan  
desertic and wandering  
and also mine.

En este acá desde el que emerjo  
sólo platico con almas y espectros.  
Preciso es perder el miedo,  
después de todo no somos tan distintos  
los vivos de los muertos.

In this here from which I emerge  
I only talk with souls and specters.  
Necessary is let go the fear,  
after all we are not so different  
the living from the dead.

**Dis/ability**  
*By Sam Scheetz*  
(Inspired by T560 Week 3 readings)

Everyday experiences are critical in how we perceive the world.

We've constructed neural networks that know apples  
As apples  
Even in a dark room.

What we see is what we believe.

Dis/ability is therefore  
not an individual trait  
But a product of cultural, political and economic practices.

The assumption is  
It is better to be normal than disabled

Resulting in cultural beliefs  
About what bodies should look like, be and do.

Historically we were complicit  
with notions of intelligence  
that served to oppress, stratify and pathologize.

Race and dis/ability have been constructed in tandem  
And have origins in their attribution  
of otherness  
and deviance.

The problem is not the person of color or  
The person with dis/ability

But the ways normalcy and whiteness  
Are constructed to generate certain groups  
As problems.

How do power and privilege shape and block learning opportunities?

Teachers of course  
Cannot do this alone.

**Oppressive Inclusion - no thanks**  
*By Sam Scheetz*  
(Inspired by T560 Week 4 readings)

The problem with the terms 'include' and 'inclusion'  
is that they assume the goal is to be included into an oppressive system  
instead of transforming it.

Those who are in power create the rules of the game  
those who are not in power don't know the rules.

We must move away from compliance to brilliance  
And lead with honor  
Where every person has the opportunity to make decisions  
for themselves.

To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them.

We instead  
Must invite members of the learning community into positions of  
authority,  
power  
and decision making  
even if that means taking ourselves out of power to do so.

To think in 3D technicolor pictures instead of words  
should be characterized not only by deficit  
but by talent.

We must learn to mine  
for the gem of brilliance  
in every learner  
in our environment.

**The Places I've Never Been**  
*By Sam Scheetz*  
(Inspired by T560 Week 10 readings)

Emotion and cognition work  
in parallel  
in subtle  
and powerful ways.

We can no longer view emotion as a more primitive way of thinking,  
It is harmful to understanding ourselves as human beings.

Being human is  
To experience anxiety.  
To acknowledge  
Sadness as an inherent part of the human condition.

We have tended to shunt this aside  
in the modern medicalization  
of human problem.

Educators must realize that  
Brains do not distinguish  
between actual physical threat  
and psychological danger,  
That  
we may be saddled  
with equipment  
that may be dated for survival  
and  
is responding to the loss of coherence in our culture.

Believing in your ability to succeed  
matters just as much  
as having the cognitive skills to succeed.

Let's go inward  
Feel more  
Do less.

In the end  
I find value in having been to the places I've been.

**Homage to Robert Burns, a Poor Poet**  
*Translated by Li (Jerry) Xie*

O, tilling churl, lone is your fruitful lot  
Beset with naught but uninvited yield  
Unsung by those who only searched and fought  
And spoiled and bartered in life's battlefield!  
The worthies sank with all their lofty lies  
Of worthless profit, jarring to the ear,  
While you in humble tillage softly rise,  
O, priceless prophet! Let us all you hear!  
"If there for honest poverty that hings  
His head an' a' that?" You do nobly shame  
In word and deed the mitres, robes, and rings,  
That pomp of power! Poet is your name,  
Undimmed though worldly players come and go  
Upon the spectred stage of endless woe.

*Epiphany*

By Zhang Jiuling (T'ang Dynasty China)

Translated after the style of *Lines Written in Early Spring* by William Wordsworth

*Translated by Li (Jerry) Xie*

Delight in spring when orchids sprawl,  
And fall, when cassias brightly blow,  
And you will find yourself in awe  
With every here and now.

Who cares if any hermit will  
By scented breeze be overwon,  
When grass and leaves stand beautiful still,  
Be there a man or none?

The original in Chinese:

《感遇》

朝代:唐

作者:张九龄

蘭葉春葳蕤，桂華秋皎潔。  
欣欣此生意，自爾為佳節。  
誰知林棲者，聞風坐相悅，  
草木有本心，何求美人折。

## The Bonny Banquet Made Us Seize the Day, From Nineteen Poems in Ancient Style

Anonymous (Han Dynasty China)  
*Translated as a sonnet by Li (Jerry) Xie*

The bonny banquet makes us seize the day  
In buoyant spirits. So lame is my tongue  
When zithers strike a newly-fashioned lay  
Defying spirit's dullness, sweetly sung  
By sires chanting noble lines. But hark!  
These hearty notes and cordial numbers deep  
Conspired to out of bosoms drive the dark,  
A visceral passion which we scholars keep  
Within: this lease of life, this speck of dust  
By strong wind winnowed, though it flimsy seems,  
On coursers gallop up its trails we must,  
And let our hearts set sail to chase our dreams.  
For "toils obscure" are labour lost in vain,  
And "honest poverty" but life in pain.

The original in Chinese:

《今日良宴會》

朝代：兩漢

作者：佚名

今日良宴會，歡樂難具陳。  
彈箏奮逸響，新聲妙入神。  
令德唱高言，識曲聽其真。  
齊心同所願，含意俱未申。  
人生寄一世，奄忽若飄塵。  
何不策高足，先據要路津。  
無爲守貧賤，坎坷長苦辛

## Epilogue

There are no words left for us to add. If we were all in a physical setting of some sort, we would have showed our authors our appreciation with applause they deserved. Instead, we are left to quietly admire their talent, and reflect on it. If you wish to express your thoughts, exchange ideas, discuss some elements and share your impressions, then, we encourage you to become part of our community at [www.connectedcultures.org](http://www.connectedcultures.org)

We would like to continue expanding this anthology of original poetry and also, classic: well-known and not-so-well-known poems from around the world, that would not only help you explore the diversity of cultures but help us all shine light on the authors, whose original poetry has, perhaps, been overlooked and merits your attention.

We would also like to bring together these excellent authors, organizing poetry evenings online and allowing you to hear their pieces in their own words and get a chance to ask them what inspired them to write their pieces.

So if, like us, you are in awe of what you read, and would like to meet the authors virtually, please follow the updates on our website and social media. We look forward to seeing you and our authors at our virtual events some day.

Connectedcultures.org

