



## 5 Questions To... Julian Matthews

Julian Matthews is an emerging poet from Malaysia and a mixed-race minority, who is published in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly* and *Borderless Journal*, among others. He stumbled onto poetry by accident six years ago at a writing workshop. That happy accident has turned into a rabid compulsion. He is still extricating himself from the crash. Welcome to his recovery.



### 1. What's the best poem / poetry collection you've read in the past 12 months?

Two anthologies have provided solace and held me in good stead through the last year of processing grief and loss of dear ones and of close friends suffering major illnesses: 1. *Vital Signs: Poems of Illness and Healing*, edited by Martin Dyar, and 2. *Life Support: 100 Poems to Reach for on Dark Nights*, edited by Julia Copus. The first was a gift from Dr. Anthony Cummins of Ireland who ran the Medical Humanities programme for student doctors in Malaysia, and an enthusiastic supporter of my poetry which he used in his teaching. Both collections contain courageous and powerful words from both traditional and contemporary poets and are heart-rending, yet comforting.

### 2. Which poetry collection should be on everyone's nightstand?

Anything by Kahlil Gibran. I return to *The Prophet* over and over again (“Your children are not your children”) through different stages of my life and find new gems with each re-reading in this and other collections. His lyricism is profound and haunting, but also joyous and even humorous: “You talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts... And in much of your talking, thinking is half murdered” and “Half of what I say is meaningless, but I say it so that the other half may reach you”.

### 3. What's the best writing or poetry tip you've ever gotten?

Go for a walk. I don't know how many other poets and writers I have heard this from and it always works. When I am stuck or down or tired, walking without any real direction, up a hill, down a jungle path, along a beach, or even in a part of a city, or smalltown, that I haven't been to, really invigorates the mind and heart and is a soothing balm for the soul and can be inspiring. Being outside, opens up something inside.

### 4. Which poem of yours are you particularly proud of? And why?

*Falling Men*, published in *The American Journal of Poetry*. It stems from my background as a journalist, speaks of my ‘othering’ as a mixed minority from Malaysia and uses Zoom as a contemporary metaphor on grief and loss. It is a validation of my practice as an emerging poet.

## **5. Which poetic form would you like to try out some time?**

I am excited to try out the duatrespentasrep, invented by Singapore-based poet Jennifer Leong, aka Soy Avocado. An explanation can be found here in the poem *The Worm's Story*:  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/singpowrimo/posts/5857302484384954/>

and the Panku, invented by New York-based poet Elizabeth Sophia Strauss, aka Deadpan Lizzie. A panku is a poem with either nine words or nine lines with nine words each.