



# THE COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT TRANSFORMATION

2019 Anthology

The Common Language Project:  
Transformation

March 2019

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The Common Language Project is a spring annual North Texas creative writing competition that results in the publication of an online anthology and a reading at a prominent arts venue in Dallas, Texas. Our goal is to celebrate diversity in community through the use of thirty shared keywords that spawn a variety of poems as diverse in style and subject as the writers who penned them. The Common Language Project is conceived, curated, and produced by The Writer's Garret.

The Writer's Garret is a 501(c)(3) Literary Arts Center based in Dallas offering local and regional programs. In its twenty-four-year history, the organization has connected over 2 million readers, writers, and audience members with quality literature and each other. In that time, the organization has been awarded 20 NEA grants; twice ranked the #1 literary project and three times the #1 literary arts organization by the Texas Commission on the Arts. Many programs, including the Writers Studio, the acclaimed literary series taped for NPR-affiliates, received laurels as "Best of Dallas" and "Best of Big D." The Writer's Garret programs have brought to Texas audiences the late Umberto Eco, Barbara Kingsolver, Julia Alvarez, and many others, as well as Texas originals Naomi Shihab Nye, Owen Egerton, Tony Diaz, Tim Seibles, and more. In 2019, with a renewed commitment to inclusively supporting the community from which it emerges and within which it operates, The Writer's Garret has already laid the groundwork for success in its exciting next chapter.

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## About The Common Language Project: Transformation

*No one sleeps in this room without  
the dream of a common language*

ADRIENNE RICH

### The Premise

Born of a desire to bring the many members of the North Texas poetry community into conversation with each other, The Common Language Project places participants in the same room and turns them loose to dream. United by a list of shared words and confined only by the space of a page, the poems of the project weave a tapestry of radically divergent experiences that sing, simmer and singe. Together, these poems give us a place to come together, somewhere from which we can start, from which we can thrive.

Now in its second year, The Common Language Project invites you to re-enter this shared and sacred space and give testimony to a transformation. Spin for us a story of strange and dramatic alteration: a change in a body, in a world, in a heart or a mind. Growth or decline, mutation or metamorphosis, confusion or clarity—we want to hear about a transformation that sheds light on the uncharted and unknown.

### The Common Language

Contestants were asked to use all thirty of the following words in any order, as they appear, without changes in tense or form:

Shining	Terror
Emerge	Carve
Confine	Obscure
Stretch	Source
Muted	Mystify
Aloud	Field
Reveal	Abandon
Escape	Fettle
Present	Brook
Admired	Figure
Details	Gorge
Render	Crush
Shift	Bound
Sustaining	Scoring
Shadow	Organ

## A Note from the Judges

Darius Ajai Frasure

If poetry could be thought of as the possibility of what a thing can be, then it follows that the exercising of potential is what defines the aim of the artist. The community of this collection, defined by the boundaries of shared language and the space between the words, lines, stanzas, the ideas... effectively exercises this notion. As such, this collection is a beacon for all creatives, exemplifying unity in diversity.

Opalina Salas

It was an honor to be asked to be a judge for the Common Language Project. I was thrilled to be a part of this creative process and in being so I was able to see the interconnectedness of not only this group of poets but see the delicate threads that unite us all as poets in this community. Congratulations to all the entries, you are all winners in my eyes. Thank you for allowing me to be one of the first to feast my eyes on your delicious work.

## As if to Laertes

Margaret Allyson

Burnish the already-shining curve, fettle the edges again.  
Pull your stitches tighter and let no errant thread escape.  
Carve carefully, allowing the shape to emerge,  
    then render details, sustaining shadow, figure, and field.  
Confine your flourishes, abandon witty tricks.  
Reveal — do not obscure for cheap effect.  
Crush the impulse to stretch a metaphor.  
No scoring points for cleverness.  
What can be muted, never shout aloud.  
Cite every source.  
Above all, be present.  
Your work will be admired, might even mystify.

Notice the shift when it comes.  
See where you're bound.  
Pound nine-inch nails into the heavy door  
    and brook no mention of the terror right outside.  
Which organ fails first?  
What name will echo down the yawning gorge?

## A Drive Across the Taos Bridge

Lorlee Bartos

Would she emerge from this experience intact  
Or would it reveal details in her soul  
That would render her unable to stretch  
Beyond whatever was feeding her terror

It would mystify her to see those in such fine fettle  
They could bound to the center of the bridge  
Atop the Gorge and fearlessly peer down  
At the source of the shining brook, watch it meander  
And carve even deeper Into the rock

It seemed to dance in the shadow of the ravine  
As it made its escape sustaining field and farm  
Tinkling and melodious  
From the depths, it sounded like a muted organ

As those admired, hardy souls stared down into the abyss  
She could not contemplate such daring  
She felt obscure thoughts rush in to crush her spirit  
Her soul scoring the deeper meanings of her dilemma

And while those musings continue  
We can confine the problem at present  
To simply driving across this span

She wondered aloud – Could she do it?  
Would they arrive safely on the other side?  
Or would they have to abandon the car  
With its stick shift that her companion  
Could NOT drive

Not glancing to either side  
Straight down the middle – our heroic figure did drive  
oncoming traffic be damned  
No need to call 911 to take the wheel



## Waking Mid Night on a Backcountry Pass in Big Bend

James Bascom

The moon up and sky clear lay the nightscape  
In arrangements of frost hardening  
The cast of light, sharpening the loom of shadow.  
What relief can emerge  
From this dry brook's carve  
Scoring its deeper dark like a gorge bound across  
The stretch of the landscape's lonely frieze,  
What something shift to escape the shadow cast  
Of the moon's muted shining,  
Or silhouette admired in the tangled up crush of  
Desert fettle move to mystify the still?

Then present like a reply not yet aloud  
A sustaining figure congeals from the field  
Of stars and shatter of stones being the one  
Organ of the place still pulsing not to confine but render  
And abandon the obscure night hold of the runoff cut,  
To reveal itself  
A dog taking shape flickering  
From the black brook bed to the claw clutch of yucca  
And terror splash of prickly pear down to its details detaching  
And re-attaching from the dark  
As if it were a source.

## Who I Am

Sandra Martin Benton

When I look at myself in the mirror, to myself I say I am proud  
But it doesn't seem true, when I utter these same words aloud

Overworking myself daily, which causes me to be tired  
Not understanding when others say, that it's me who is admired

Sitting by the peaceful brook, not making a sound  
I'm in my freest moment here, not feeling bound

Looking at my life-there's so many fails; perhaps I'll get the chance, to share the details

Abandon my dreams and escape to where? Would I enter a place of terror over there?

Where they gorge out my eyes, and carve out my heart  
But could I possibly emerge with a fettle new start

Maybe I'd present and reveal myself, as a big bright shining figure  
Should I confine my imagination or stretch and shift to make my imagination bigger

Sometimes my thoughts mystify, crush sanity, and render me shame  
See the only source and organ, sustaining all this data - is my brain

I try hiding behind my shadow, so I can remain obscure  
But I'm scoring touchdowns and field goals with those like me for sure

Wonder what would happen if I muted that little voice  
That reminds me Who I Am, is up to me and totally my choice

## Shining Field

Bonnie Jamison Blackman

Shining field, present brook, do not abandon me.  
Obscure terror lurks in my present,  
But I am bound by this organ that does mystify me.  
I cannot escape.

What is the source, bound in its gorge,  
That will carve away the sustaining figure from my shadow?  
Its details render a muted crush, a scoring shift.  
I may not escape.

Admired fettle, mystify me once more.  
Reveal yourself. Do not confine but stretch forward  
That I might emerge and cry aloud,  
"I will escape!"

## **The After Death**

Eve Castle

### **The After Death**

His escape from life was merely a shift in his seat. A shadow he didn't have time to turn toward. The terror of his death was all mine.

War is ugly. I won't spare you the harsh details of his fettle. A steam hose was used to remove him from his turret. I found a single organ intact – the gunner's young heart.

It lay afloat in a red brook that had begun to coagulate on the hot ground. His remains a collection of pale bits of bone clinging to fragments of flesh. The sun shining in a pink sky.

I bound his heart in burlap. Carried it secured at my hip until dusk when the sky was muted violet and the sound of overhead bombers had ceased.

I envy Death who only deals with souls. Today, I surfaced from a mine field with a soldier's torn leg and booted foot. The sun in clouds. Left behind parts are my business.

When I'm granted a rebirth of my choosing, I pick the gunner to render whole. Except for his heart, I had to abandon most of his remains. It's a darkness even I find hard to bear.

### **The Rebirth**

I carve the gunner from eternity's sustaining confine. We emerge from darkness into light. I present him with his heart and he's made whole. I give him lavender to crush the stench of death and advise him on his obscure nature. Unlike the others, he now sees. The war's horrors are eclipsed by his youthful joy. I'm pleased with this choice.

### **The Gunner**

How bright the sun! My heart so full! Oh, what my eyes have seen! How can this be? I mustn't mystify myself with thinking, what's to figure out? I'm alive! I stretch out my hands, touch the scorching on my palms—hatch marks of life. Mother, do you still wait? Death's source restored me. I know now what I must do. I'll reveal this gorge in my chest like an admired medal. I'll howl aloud against all war, then someday I can die once more.

## A Quantum Experiment Suggests

Dan Collins

-1. Obscure conceit: This spillage  
of being is a sticky lie of the womb,  
a crush to confine making everything  
corporeal escape into light. I don't care to be  
the organ of that message anymore,  
muted by the stretch and fettle of biology.  
I'd be happy just to mystify the causal  
observer now and then. But let's be honest,  
no one can go on shining that long.

2.0. Scoring a shadow: To touch  
is to reveal; to reveal is to render;  
to carve—a figure; an ideal, a silhouette.  
What gives voice to thought?  
Not sounding the language aloud.  
It's a shift in the details of an effluent  
field. Electrifying, yes, but it's nothing  
to be admired for, bound as it is  
to the archive of its nodal  
inconsequence—

$\pi$ . A garrulous brook  
ever changing its source: And  
if I am present, then I am sustaining  
the rift, cutting a gorge like a river  
of mime through a landscape of noise,  
a determinist in chaotic form. Whatever  
provisional terror of tangled abandon,  
algorithm, and floss—I emerge  
as someone, not there.

## Intrigue

Alexandra Corinth

Alexandra, Princess of Greece and Denmark,  
the last queen of Yugoslavia, never set foot in her adopted country,  
bound to the exile she had known since birth.

Her legitimacy was muted aloud like a shift of sound to terror,  
one more distant monarch admired as shining figure  
like sunrise over a brook, babbling and haunted.

Alexandra was familiar with the abandon of sovereignty,  
a vestigial organ all of her kingdoms saw fit to render in shadow  
and so, she armed herself with means to emerge,  
ways to mystify with favor and grace.

She scribbled gratitude in black ink,  
details possessed and scoring, weapons to crush and carve.

History will eventually obscure the present,  
stretch the source in its escape,  
but will it confine her, the complex fettle of humanhood  
that pushed her to the edge again and again?

Or will it reveal sustaining neglect,  
devastated dynasties like gorge of grief,  
a field of almost and too much and  
never, never, never?

## **My Mother**

### **(and Alzheimer's)**

Patricia DeVilliers

Eyes shining, she chose to emerge  
From boundaries that confine  
So she could stretch her wings  
Give music to the muted cries  
Sounding aloud to the horizon  
She chose to reveal her joy  
To escape the sorrows  
To be present in the exquisite little moments  
She was admired, was able to render  
The details significant  
A shift in paradigm  
From shadow to light

And then, the terror,  
Repeating, forgetting,  
Trying to carve out the time  
But the details, so clear before  
Now obscure, a source of distress,  
To mystify the mind  
The playing field no longer fair  
Given over to wild abandon  
No longer in fine fettle, sustaining.  
What brook? Which figure?  
There was a gorge?  
I feel the pain crush my hear as she forgets  
Bound only to retreat  
Into the tunnel of her mind  
The deepest organ pipe, the deepest music  
No longer scoring, no longer  
The vibrant, beautiful woman she was,  
But still my mother.

## Dark Flowers

Steven Duncan

a shining terror  
will emerge and stretch,  
pass muted shadow  
over sunken gorge

figure after figure  
rising in the night,  
a field of dark flowers  
bound up under ice

now from a slow thaw  
they shift, abandon  
a gentleness long admired  
earth no longer to confine

they mystify aloud  
escape the natural source,  
obscure wicked details  
by treading in the brook

scoring crude fettle  
of a graveside view  
the sun's reveal: sharp marks  
to render bodies anew

solemnly at present, though  
they carve and crush  
the vital organ  
sustaining us



## Grieving Mary Oliver

Alan Gann

Look  
 even as shadow falls away  
 I cannot escape the crush, paralytic weight  
 of your absence. Remember when rain  
 would not stop and the brook could not contain  
 the terror, when field disappeared beneath  
 rising water and we were carried away,  
 adrift but together, our greatest stretch and hallelujah.  
 Never bound, every gorge a chance to leap and rise—  
 emerge cleaner than an undefiled premise  
 and like a god you carve  
 another sustaining and horrified glyph into mine.  
 The one thing this shining life teaches  
 is everything dies—  
 successions of days into nights render  
 fragile earth things— consider bristlecone pine  
 and brief mosquito. Organ fugues fettle at jagged edges  
 never completely obscure the scoring.  
 Perhaps what I admired most, envied but never found  
 inside was how no stage could define  
 or confine you— your figure refused gift of anonymity,  
 when least expected would open the trunk and reveal  
 some unexpected present.  
 First and final source always intended to mystify, left me  
 no choice but to rise until shift was obvious  
 and all the muted details spoken aloud— I will abandon  
 our ugly couch, leave it curbside where only memories  
 sleep, and still holding grief to bone,  
 go forward.

## Analog Cum Gnome

Michael Helsem

Almost to the top of houses, shining  
water spreads, to no man's order bound;  
a figure in a kayak, too, is present.

Deep clouds mystify with their intentions  
all day long, this road the final stretch.  
My hopes, though muted, kept me back from terror.

This gate, sign half-destroyed: something "...abandon."  
I linger for awhile, would maybe carve  
that I was here, and once in better fettle.

Gibbets reveal what crowds in their gorge will brook.  
Unto the Caesar of this blood field, render  
a handful of broken words, now good for scoring.

They will not say that we saw no escape  
but waited for some shadow more sustaining  
than fear of losing our baubles, to obscure.

As clear details emerge, the waters confine  
themselves to banks again: survivors tarry  
where something still of shift may be named aloud.

The brain shall crush its source—that admired organ.

## The Red Tent

Christine Irving

*When they carve the womb from your body it leaves a hole  
in your psyche. That the absence of an obsolete organ  
could crush a woman's spirit is bound to mystify the uninitiated,  
but one's ability to abandon creative power is not subject to  
arbitrary scoring. Mourning may last months.*

Our silence muted the afternoon, erasing nature's need  
to shout above the noise we women like to make.  
We do not speak nor read nor write, stay present  
to details of sun and shadow, notice the obscure,  
allow what's hidden to reveal.

My vision expands, landscapes shift and change.  
Hill turns to mountain, the stream's steep bank  
becomes a gorge. Fool's gold shining through water  
sings a siren song. I sink naked to its sandy bottom  
and render up sorrow.

The brook refreshes fettle, washes away despair.  
I want to stretch, escape across a field,  
shout my name aloud. Instead  
I walk mindfully, sustaining equilibrium.  
Confine emotion, court balance.

A figure steps from the forest, evoking terror,  
but it's a woman I've admired. Bound by silence,  
she blows a kiss, gestures me onward. A red tent  
sits beneath the trees. The flap is open, a candle burns  
beside a scarlet pallet.

I lie down, close my eyes, dream the world as if from space –  
a sentient globe with all its rivers running red.  
The planet bleeds menstrual blood. She is the source,  
bleeding for me so I don't need to bleed. I am her. She is me.  
I emerge remade.

## curiosity for the dead

Paul Koniiecki

thirty muted lines on fire we are  
the words we choose

outsiders emerge aloud and pound  
against the terrible membrane

of source details - terror light the pyre  
render moonset and carve totem

admired ineffable shining present  
be willing

a willingness to stretch and shift  
perspective is original love

abandon fine fettle field - brook - gorge -  
figure - crush the scoring organ

bound clock of drumming - clock  
of shadow - clock of could i be wrong

shortsighted heart - confine your reality  
and live through your myth

mystify then demystify the obscure  
escape the moment -,sustain and while

sustaining a corner of blue sky  
in the window like a bruise CRY

hungry feeling come over me  
reveal roy batty and the rings of saturn

glowing the way dust in space  
accumulates more dust

love more love - the lake more water  
in its prison cell

transformation the only proof time exists  
acceptance the heretic's first prayer

thirty lines on fire make a beautiful light

## Origin Stories

Debra Levy-Fritts

### **“Hang onto my faith until yours comes back,” she said**

I grew up thinking, in my one hand, nothingness, dust,  
the other, everything, shining, a universe as glove, essentially, tho’  
a speck, I mattered, source and figure, firm - a fine fettle formed.

But our lives aren’t so easy ... it is not like that/ faith /no-faith /dust/ all  
It is more how a scale, rises and falls, from confine  
a stretch that freedom will reveal, breath by breath  
It’s the shadow of a twister overhead, a narrow escape I carve

Emerge: the wonder of works

Admired, ever-present, the line of clarity, the voice that grows, muted  
Details obscure my source, the fuel set afire by family will never  
Shift, just jive, in shadow. The camera-man lies,  
and the Terror? Who in the hell knew?  
Escape, really only a burial, an underground memory, and  
Denial, a continuity that must, by design, mystify

A field, boundaryless, co-mingled, wide ---  
young ones abandon even the idea of separate iteration  
honey bees with the Queen to defend  
never brook the gorge, fearing it will  
crush, bound to the  
vital organ, lest they die.

Funny. Now, I hang on so fiercely to love, stumble toward safety restored. Create a new heart unfolding...notes  
introduced, are found. Gathered up. This is all. In this other hand, everything.

Scoring aloud present lines, scales, a music, forgiving, realized:

Why not just take a chance, sustaining? *There is not a surfeit of time.*  
Faith transforms, is mine.  
Render. Outrun, shining, old tumbleweed, whirlwind.

The field can exist, exit defined, steadied  
Alone, tho’

it won’t be empty for long.

## Communion

Kari Lynch

I used to love a boy who

could render fat from any source  
until shining, liquid gold would emerge  
hissing the hymn of its soul

but bound my mouth to muted

could carve the flesh from  
a cold, dead thing, terror frozen on its face  
stretch organ meats to abundance, fattening the thousands

but tried to fettle the excess from this figure

could pour pink wine  
and reveal living water  
mystify the masses in the shift to drunkenness

but left me to drown in the shallow brook of want

he tried to confine me to this table  
crush my freedoms with his gospel  
tried to present me with a plate of impotent fruit  
and left me begging for sustaining nourishment

collapsed and starving  
scoring my own flesh until I screamed aloud  
just to be sure I still could  
my lungs begged to abandon the details of breathing  
waiting to die in the scorching field  
vulture's shadow my only shade

salvation remained obscure until  
I was baptized by my own holy tears

I watched my soul escape this skin of subservience  
admired the full hips that allow this vessel to carry divine life  
let my mouth gorge itself on the taste of my own lips  
studied the scriptures these stretch marks reveal

found the sacrament in my own hand

## something

lyrikal777

mystify then ,  
emerge and render something beautiful .  
escape this present  
obscure conundrum .  
shift .  
this is not home .  
bound to figure it out .  
tomorrow i carve  
with the details of this very thought ,  
scoring karmic repercussions  
with each word said or muted .  
shadow my other half  
and stillness a sustaining peace .  
i long for source ,  
like the need for a brook  
in this field of life  
that quenches all thirst ,  
whether marked in shining grace  
or heaped in terror & sorrow .  
abandon the need to know .  
crush the ego & confine the feelings  
of not enough .  
stretch the fabric of imagination ,  
gorge on it's possibilities  
then reveal your fettle self .  
play aloud songs of the heart organ  
and leave the stain of love  
to be admired .

## Laughing Stock

Joe Milazzo

The terror of the average still life lies in its sugary shining. Those yokel apples, as obvious as labor. The pears that stretch the dawn until its warp rips to reveal the golden's yellowed shame. The crush of those blood oranges? The scramble of those schmaltzy melons? Louder than aloud.

The better recommendation marks such a composition's appeal present (if not admired) beneath the half-hearted crop of its basket. Cantilevered by a perspective whose refractions figure the historical shift toward narcissism, eating's details pass as far into forgetfulness as the proper occasion for a slather of myrrh.

So long as we're scoring our bitterness, let's abandon the foreground to render with a different ravenousness. Where are the parsnips and the spinach, the lentil flower and celery's ribbed specter? Where is the fettle of bread, that loamy shadow cast by civilization's most obscure organ: its origins? Where is the muted gorge of an open seat at this private table?

To gush nothing of the roots, that hairy flood of heralding that riddles the field, or the brook meandering so far it bends into a pentimento as vague as rain. To trace these sustaining erasures is to tap escape, which is to mouth the croak that chords another plane. But harvest's heavy scale scrapes up even freedom's pound of flesh. To emerge into mere inheritance

is to confine savor to its source. The honor of appraisal lies in the fruitlessness of its use. That a knife can layer as handily as carve should mystify no one, a dabbler least of all. Wisdom has it that the footprint the earth impresses in each sip of wine never vanishes. But the real master stroke is to taste what galaxies still braid away within the raisin's wizening. In ordinary composure, you're bound to.



## ODYSSEY

Sherry Lou Mills

The crush bound admired the scoring organ.

Shift would render details of carve fettle, but stretch could mystify muted escape.

As shadow present might confine terror obscure, sustaining gorge field could emerge and abandon figure brook.

Aloud, softly, “Source ... Reveal...” pierced the shining.

## Chrysalis

Linley Munson

You confine me in shadow, obscure my vision,  
 Let terror wash over me  
 I try to stretch my limbs, yearning for freedom,  
 To reveal myself to the world  
 It doesn't work; I am bound to you, trapped in this futureless present  
 These incidents leave sad details along my figure,  
 Deep, scoring lines across my ribs and arms  
 My attempts at salvation anger you as you crush me into dust and render me whole once more  
 When I think you aren't looking, I carve myself an escape from the shadows that mystify me  
 Running from the void you imprisoned me in, I emerge into shining light  
 You know I've left; I can feel your sorrow from the other side,  
 As if I twisted a knife into an organ  
 I allow this new reality to shape me into fine fettle, to let me shift into something new,  
 To imagine myself as something other than a prisoner  
 Exploring this strange world, I find many different sights  
 A brook with no source and a gorge with limitless depth  
 I cross through a field and find that it hurts to speak; I try in spite of it  
 It seems I'm speaking aloud, but the words sound muted;  
 Your scars appear to linger after all  
 Still it doesn't matter anymore, they will fade in time as all things do  
 The damage you've done not sustaining the passage of time brings a smile to my face  
 I don't need your suffocating presence, to be admired by you,  
 To be subject to your warped definition of love  
 Your despair is still palpable and yet I am numb to it  
 "Abandon me and you'll regret it" you once told me  
 Don't act as if I need you  
 I don't

## Reclaiming my life

Mz. Jolie

Only interested in scoring, you are a terror who likes to carve out holes in a woman's self esteem.  
My body remained a fine fettle as you used your sexual organ to try and crush my will.  
You became remote as you muted my NOs, as if they weren't said, if you didn't hear me speak them aloud.  
I couldn't escape the feeling of abandon that flowed in a brook of abundance.  
You mystify me with your ability to render yourself a victim.  
I am sustaining these blows but you only saw me as another casualty left on your field to wither.  
You crept in like a shadow trying to obscure your identity.  
I can't believe I admired someone who quickly became the source of my pain.  
I know you wish to confine me to bedsheets.  
You gorge on women like me.  
You're known to stretch the details into something more suitable for you.  
I guess you figure, if I am bound to you then it will be by your narrative.  
But did you feel the shift?  
When I opened my mouth to reveal the real you, that was the best present that I have ever given myself, Speaking up!  
Now I can emerge, shining, and new.  
I am more than the sum of what men like you have done to me.  
I am a conqueror. A Queen.

## Disenchanted

Madhuri Nagaraj

Yesterday I went blind.  
No sudden crush of ebonied night  
Under which fractured stars emerge  
No molten terror that does shift and spit  
over fettle, through weathered gorge  
No such desperate reveal  
No such merciful source

Yesterday I went blind, and it did all to mystify.  
For as a subtle shadow, ennui did creep  
from lateral confine.  
With the ache of a quiet brook  
that did stretch and seep  
over field, over vision of mine  
No means to escape  
present details do obscure.  
To render all that was gold and shining,  
now a muted watercolor gray

Disenchantment, you fickle figure  
You dare look me in the eye.  
That once admired, now mocking organ  
Threatens abandon hope.  
I succumb, bound behind lids wearied  
Scoring walls to count my time  
Heavy heart sustaining...  
beat aloud, carve echoes in silence blind.

## **an accounting**

Mark David Noble

thoughts emerge aloud, unintended,  
launching like a hunting dog set free, with field bound abandon,  
formerly muted details escape,  
mystify other patrons in this grocery store check-out line

what item can I buy to reveal the difference between how i see myself  
and how others figure me? i look for obscure totems, seek what light or shadow shining  
will bring my thoughts to functioning fettle,  
show me first steps toward possible

the sustaining confine that we were is no longer available, the source is  
gone, replaced by shock, broken gears scoring into the metal of me, rough wires that stretch every simple activ-  
ity into barely discernible days, render me immobile, every task ridiculous

can't, couldn't, wouldn't see the forest for what it was, I saw the penny on the tracks, but missed the train racing  
silent beside a gorge, too late

struck awake, i carve a long list of former certainties from my page, into a new present,  
a crush / shift / change of someone special, even admired,  
who can no longer brook the sight of me

we are given our change of station by some stranger in a court room, while a small terror plays jangle with his  
key ring at the next table, sounding like a ballpark organ playing pep rally music, irrelevant to me

and i hear the distant clack of typing down the hall, but no one types here anymore, at the off-ramp from a mar-  
riage, a kind of traveling friendship

what can i assemble with these pieces i see?  
i waver in my commitment to this strange inventory

## All Fall Down

Gayle Reaves-King

Emerge shining, misshapen.

No more can they confine you. Rise and stretch  
the figure once buried, obscure, stinking under history. Escape  
the shadow of decency that bound you, open the huge mouth  
we muted in payment for terror. These details

have faded; the young abandon old scrolls, a forgotten field  
of study. In this present, you glory in gray rain, carve pain  
and ravaging into a new banner. They render unto you

what you will have, which is all — brook, alley, language, bird,  
jungle, sea, air and cloud, every organ  
of renewal, every source of long hope. No longer limited to whispers,

you can kiss, fuck, be admired, worshipped aloud, set loose on the earth  
the same the way men crush insects for blood-red  
to color their carpets. Reveal and mystify

your image with CGI; fatten your children on empire,  
but not for long, though too long. You have learned the wrong math,

have read the red shift upside down. Your teeth crunch  
the sustaining seed you cannot plant in spring. You gorge  
on the future. The scoring mechanism sits rusting in toilet water.  
You feel in excellent fettle, but fettle has left the station. In the next age,

some potter wrapped in hides will fettle the edge of her bowl  
with scraps of silken ties. You always did like the old ways.

## Thanatopsis Redux

Isabella Russell-Ides

*She speaks a various language.\**

Bound in the bardo bereft  
vaguely present, almost dead.  
For fucking shining aloud  
let me

back in. Come again, sustaining terror  
Carve my shadow on your cave walls  
Render me a soul, source me  
mystify, crush, obscure me  
in your deepest gorge  
confine, stretch, reveal me  
Let me wobble  
stand.

Details shift.  
I admired your clouds, your starry nights, dew on  
a green field; I saw a muted future  
a four-legged figure bucking in fine fettle  
a goat girl tramp tramping—  
lost bride veiled in dandelion fur.

I am she who prays you,  
breaks your water—  
a brook sluicing blood song  
scoring your legs, O Organ Mistress  
grant one more red escape.  
Birth me again!

Let me abandon all hope and enter here  
kiss the mouth of the new world, suckle its air  
emerge dark-eyed in a slick white coat, braying—  
a knobby-kneed girl with a pink tongue  
water beading in my beard.

\*William Cullen Bryant, *Thanatopsis* (1811)

## **tHE aRTISTIC vIOLENCE oF hYPOCRISY**

Valentina Saldaña

I welcome all of you to my sumptuous feast, not everyone was invited.

I feel duty bound to warn you that some manifestations are not always what they seem.

I trust that all of your devices have been muted?

Do not speak, just nod your heads up and down and smile.

It is not my desire to render you speechless for the entire evening.

In due time we will all engage in this environment of the spoken word.

It will be a slow reveal, you must remain present, do not attempt to escape.

All of the doors have been locked, not to confine you, to infuse you.

I have created alchemy capable of sustaining your spirits during these times of monsters and the insanity of humanity.

What lies beneath this shining vintage sterling silver tray lid will soon emerge.

It was left at the babbling brook, next to the field of bluebonnets, by the cemetery.

This gift will mystify your senses forever, thus you must worship the source with absolute abandon.

I will carve the flesh and yes it might seem freaky to some in our population, but to others, the illuminated, it shall be a fettle of delicious delight.

We will all gorge on a different organ together in chaotic synchronicity.

It will be my highest scoring achievement ever!

Did you feel that shift just now?

Do not feel terror, be intrigued... relax... stretch out your bones.

Where was I? Oh yes...did you hear that?

I requested that it be served medium rare, but if it is making sounds... it might still be alive.

Perhaps it is seared on the outside, but inside, the crimson blood might be warm, circulating...

The details, about the sideways figure 8, made out of raw chocolate chip cookie dough, that was found slowly baking in the evening sun, next to the body, were obscure.

It means something, but what precisely I do not know...yet.

I shall pray aloud now.

God I believe in me and in you beyond a shadow of a doubt

Crush all who do not.

I have long admired my version of you.

And all of my people said, "Amen."



## from every overemotional teenager with a really bad crush

Alexis Diano Sikorski

you left me bent, gravity-bound to you—

adrenaline scoring her nails down my back, an opera,  
prima donna sustaining a quavering note of such urgency an organ is driven  
through the mouth to spill teenage crush after teenage crush— terror:

confine me to spaces so tight i have no choice but to stretch,  
to break—  
    emerge.

i was never an escape artist.

every day a figure drawing class and i know who your focus is on.  
render me well, dearest pygmalion,  
(paint me like one of your french girls)  
and i'll reveal myself to you,  
you'll carve me out of the obscure  
then abandon me immediately—  
i can't waste a second more swallowing clay when it's all i'm made of.

i imagine a brook and a meadow and a shining field somewhere stupid perfect  
where i'd wear a white shift dress, lay around, and be admired.  
later i ask you to ruin me— left fucked fettle, muted,  
a shadow of the girl who thought she loved you.

make my face into anything else you want it to be as long as you *don't leave,*  
*don't leave, don't leave*— gorge yourself on plums and honey  
ask an old guy what a fig tastes like  
drink water clear from the source—  
no need to mystify the details in the ordinary,  
i promise you, present-tense can feel so good if you'll please,  
*please, stay with me..*

but aloud, you say:  
*hun, my name is limerence, and i'll never be your first.*

## The Burden of Yearning Heavenward

Christopher Stephen Soden

Oh, to emerge in shining fettle,  
abandon the crush of terror,  
bask in obscure shadow  
of bliss. Aching for absence

to reveal the source, the escape  
from chaos. Once I was admired  
like Prometheus, bound above  
a gorge, far from brook or field.

A pathetic figure to mystify  
the curious and clueless.  
A lesson against stealing sustaining  
fire from the gods. Until I stopped

scoring victories, momentous  
and trivial. Until the shift in my  
perception: a virtual stretch  
beyond (present details that confine

frustration to) muted jeremiads  
never uttered aloud. I choked  
on crucial need for intersection  
between activity and purpose.

Whether by accident or grace.  
They say the skin in its  
entirety is an organ. A gathering  
of cells coalescing

to render the spirit sharp  
and sentient during its mortal  
exile, to carve our intrusion  
into a benevolent void.

## TERROR

Carol Stowe

When you are only 3 or 4 the terror will render you frozen  
Muted from the ability to cry out in fear,  
From expressing the horror that would be likely to crush you.

The figure of a shadow could be seen heading down the hall  
Its image would obscure the light from the passageway  
That would otherwise reveal the source of the monster who would emerge imminently.

There is no way for a toddler to escape the ever present threat.  
Without someone to offer protection, the little one is left alone.

From the street no one knows the details of the sustaining stretch of trauma  
Endured within the unprotective walls.

The family is admired, the fettle of the children unquestioned,  
A shining example of good neighbors.

The shift back to reality would render the child silently hysterical  
From the threat to abandon her at the next turn.  
This burden would carve out a cavern in the little one's heart.

She must confine her protective solitude to the safety of her bedroom  
Never speaking aloud or the shift of chaos would turn on her.

She can fantasize a rippling brook seeping through a field of alfalfa  
Soothing swells coddling her to a state of security  
No possibility of danger or love-less-ness  
To remove her from the harsh truth.

But alas, an illusion is all it is  
At any moment the brook can become a flash flood, tearing through a gorge  
As it is bound to unavoidably head in her direction.  
It will reach her, thrash her about, drown her.  
There is no way to avoid the inevitable.  
How can a child battle such power?

Once again the powers of evil are scoring another victory  
That penetrates to the deepest organ in her body.

The scene would mystify anyone who has never been there.

## Reminiscence

Ruth Woolson

The organ played – harshly, sadly and slow  
It would render a solemn tune, muted by a distant black crow  
Alone in the field the bird cackled aloud  
Drawing glares and scowls from the dwindling crowd

The mourners shift and stretch, yearning for the service to be done  
They are sustaining their gaze ahead, toward the bright shining sun  
Now into the shadow for the next ominous course  
They woefully abandon thoughts of escape from any source

It was painful to recall details of the time spent with their friend  
Then, one figure chose to reveal that his heart may not mend  
Each visitor began to share an obscure memory, all their own  
Of how they admired the man, soon to be ashes and bone

What would mystify the guests who reminisced as they spoke it  
Was how each cherished memory drew life as they stoked it  
“We were close as young kids and played ball in the street”,  
Uttered a man who added, “his curve ball couldn’t be beat.”

They did not gorge on stiff drinks to carve an urge to confide  
Nor try to confine the memories that were exploding inside  
There was no terror in their eyes, no scoring of their pain  
They felt the compassion that was present, not an ounce of disdain

Soon their thoughts began to emerge into those of finer fettle  
They could not crush the raw grief but they began to feel better  
No longer were they bound by the shadow of gloom  
They listened and shared with others throughout the room

A guitar played - softly and sweetly they heard  
The melodious tune was accompanied by a nearby songbird  
Splashing with its flock in a blissful blue brook  
Drawing smiles from the lingering guests and warm thoughtful looks.

## Contributors

**Margaret Allyson** works with words and threads, papers and plants, silks and similes. She just cannot stop.

**Lorlee Bartos** is a retired Minnesota Liberal doing missionary work in Texas politics with occasional forays into doggerel poetry.

**James Bascom** grew up in Kansas City. He graduated in 2008 from the University of Dallas with a degree in English. He learned a deep love of poetry from his parents and a handful of influential high school and university teachers. It was while studying under Dr. Andrew Osborn that he first began to write poetry. After a mostly nomadic decade post-graduation he finds himself back in Irving, Texas, with his wife and five children. With a love for exploring human movement potential that rivals his love for poetry, he now teaches Physical Education at a local charter school.

**Sandra Martin Benton** has been writing poetry since the age of ten. In 2011, she wrote one poem a day for the whole year, resulting in 365 poems. Her book of inspirational poems, *Cracked Inside Out*, was published in 2011. She works in the field of substance abuse at a women's facility. Each Friday, she reads a poem composed just for them. She is a wife of twenty-five years and a mother of a twenty-three-year-old son.

**Bonnie Jamison Blackman** is an English teacher and magazine editor. She earned her Bachelor's degree in English/French from the University of Arkansas and her Master's in English at Southern Methodist University, where she studied poetry with Laurence Perrine.

**Eve Castle** writes poetry and short stories. Her poems have been published in *Illya's Honey*, *Barbaric Yawp*, *Bright Stars*, *An Organic Tanka Anthology* and online at *Literary Juice* and *Gravel Magazine*. She's been a member of Gabe's Poets, a Dallas-based poetry writing group, since 2009. She's hoping to become a full-time writer by 2022. You can find her on Twitter @Eve\_Castle.

**Dan Collins** is a visual artist and poet grateful for the creative community of Dallas, Texas, where he also works in the commercial printing industry. Dan's poetry has been published in *Blue Mesa Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Entropy*, *[Out of Nothing]*, *Thimble*, *The Boiler*, *White Rock Zine Machine*, *Redivider*, *The New Guard Volume VII* and *The Blue Moon Observer*. Formerly a 'brain trust' member/curator of Pandora's Box Poetry Showcase, an invitational reading series.

**Alexandra Corinth** is a disabled writer and artist based in DFW. Her chaplet, *DEUS EX DIAGNOSI*, was published by Damaged Goods Press in 2019. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kissing Dynamite*, *Barren Magazine*, *Entropy*, and *SWWIM*, among others. She is also an editorial assistant for the Southwest Review. You can find her online at [pwwriterbelle.com](http://pwwriterbelle.com).

**Patricia DeVilliers** arrived with her husband, Charl, in the US in 2000 from Cape Town, South Africa, where she taught English, French, and Afrikaans. With her passion for languages and bilingual education, she began teaching English at Dallas International School that same year and has been there ever since. She has just been awarded the Palmes Academiques for her contribution to French Language and Culture.

**Steven Duncan** is a poet and medical student living in Dallas, TX. He often spends his evenings exploring new forms of expression (and studying the cranial nerves). His poetry has been featured by *Silver Birch Press*, *Ink & Nebula*, *Utah Life Magazine*, *Prolific Press* and others. Steven was the 2018 winner of the Redrock Writers' Founders Award. You can view more published work by visiting [stevenduncan.tumblr.com](http://stevenduncan.tumblr.com).

**Alan Gann** is a teaching artist-poet who tutors and facilitates writing workshops at Texans Can Academy. A multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, he is the author of two volumes of poetry: his 2018 release, *That's Entertainment*, from Lamar University Press and *Adventures of the Clumsy Juggler* from Ink Brush Press. He also wrote DaVerse Works, Big Thought's performance poetry curriculum. In his nonexistent spare time, Alan prefers to be outdoors: biking, birding, and trying to photograph some of the cool things he sees.

**Michael Helsem** was born in Dallas in 1958. Shortly afterwards, fish fell from the sky.

**Christine Irving** is a poet, priestess, and collage artist who relishes engagement with the world. Her faith lies squarely in connections, knowing she can find them everywhere and taking constant delight in dancing on Shiva's intricate web. She is the author of an historical novel *Magdalene A.D.* and five books of poetry. Her latest volume *Return to Inanna* reveals her profound interest in exploring the relevance of myth to everyday life. Follow her blog at [magdalenesmuse.wordpress.com/author/magdalenesmuse/](http://magdalenesmuse.wordpress.com/author/magdalenesmuse/) Check out her website: [www.christineirving.com/](http://www.christineirving.com/) to find out more about Christine. Her books are available on Amazon.

**Paul Koniecki** lives and writes in Dallas, Texas. His poems appear in Richard Bailey's movie *One of the Rough*. His books of poetry are currently available at Kleft Jaw Press, NightBallet Press, CWP Collective Press, and Spartan Press. Reverie Koniecki and her husband Paul host Meet Me With Curiosity (a poetry experiment) at Klyde Warren Park in Dallas and aspire to attack the paradigm with a deliberate focus of radical love.

**Debra Levy-Fritts** is a mother, community leader, and volunteer.

**Kari Lynch** writes and teaches in North Texas.

**Joe Milazzo** is the author of the novel *Crepuscule W/ Nellie* and two collections of poetry: *The Habiliments* and *Of All Places In This Place Of All Places*. He is also an Associate Editor for *Southwest Review*, a Contributing Editor at *Entropy*, and the proprietor of Imipolex Press.

**lyrikal777** is a poet, painter, photographer, wife, mother, daughter, friend. She's done this and did that. She's traveled here and been there and is blessed know amazing people.

**Sherry Lou Mills** is an award-winning writer and retired filmmaker who now designs and makes jewelry; creates mixed media, acrylic, and fabric art; and rescues and repurposes "junque", vintage clothing, and costume jewelry. She was Executive Director of non-profit organization REEL WOMEN and produced and hosted the radio show "Ready for My Closeup, Ms. Mills!" in Austin, Texas, before relocating back to Dallas five years ago after living in Mexico, Hawaii, Los Angeles, Houston, and Austin the previous 30 years. She is married to David Holt, and they have both had both knees replaced.

**Linley Munson** is a senior at Alcuin School. In her spare time, she enjoys creative writing, character design, and SFX makeup.

**Madhuri Nagaraj** is a young doctor who moved to Dallas to take the next step in her career in general surgery—working everyday with data and numbers and facts, but never able to shake the need to write and create feelings and emotions through poetry. And while work fulfills her, poetry feeds her.

**Mz. Jolie** is a local spoken word artist in the DFW area. You can find her poetry, performances and more at [www.jolieizm.com](http://www.jolieizm.com) where you can come and lay down your burdens and pick up inspiration.

**Mark David Noble** is a writer, videographer, and multimedia developer who enjoys working on poetry, plays and short stories. His work has been published in newspapers, magazines, and as lyrics for choral music. He is also a poetry graduate of the Community and Mentorship Program (C.A.M.P.) at the Writer's Garret and a retired fire-fighter from the Mesquite Fire Department.

**Gayle Reaves-King** is a poet, editor, educator and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. A Texas native, she lives in Fort Worth, has reported from all over the world, and is now managing editor of *The Texas Monitor*, an online government-watchdog publication. Her chapbook *Spectral Analysis* was published by the Dallas Poets Community. For the last several years she has edited the *Best American Newspaper Narratives* anthologies, published by UNT Press.

**Isabella Russell-Ides** is a poet, playwright, and novelist. Her trilogy, *White Monkey Chronicles*, won the 2019 Jemma Prize for Speculative Fiction. The winner of several theatre accolades, including a Critic's Forum Award for *Coco & Gigi*, and Echo Theater's National Big Shout Out for *The Early Education of Conrad Eppler*, Isabella is also the author of a collection of poetry, *Getting Dangerously Close to Myself* (Slough Press), and the creator of the acclaimed Magdalene Mass. Look for Isabella's newest play, *Jo & Louisa*, at the Festival of Independent Theatres this summer.

**Valentina Saldaña** is a native of Texas. She attended St. Edwards University in Austin. She is a small business owner, the author of a series of three poetry chapbooks called *The Moonlight Collection*, available on Amazon. She is currently querying a book of essays and is the contact person for the spoken word room at the Signature event for artists in recovery that will be hosting a celebration event in Dallas this June.

**Alexis Diano Sikorski** is a melodramatic Filipino-American dog mom, and all she wants is a really good massage. Her work has appeared in *The Collapsar*, *Burning House Press*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Vagabond City*, *Bombus Press*, *Queen Mobs Teahouse*, Sigma Tau Delta's *The Rectangle*, and more. She's a bit of a crybaby, reads way too much fanfiction, and likes looking out of airplane windows. There's a 98% chance she's daydreaming right now.

**Christopher Stephen Soden** continues to pursue the improvement of his craft by way of perseverance, exhilaration and grace. He teaches, lectures, reviews theatre, and is exploring the mysteries of writing plays. He is a co-founder and erstwhile president of The Dallas Poets Community. His short plays (*Water*, *A Christmas Gift*, *Radio Flyer*, *Every Day is Christmas. In Heaven.*) have been produced by Bishop Arts and Nouveau 47. His work has appeared in *Rattle*, *The Cortland Review*, *Glitterwolf*, *Sentence*, *Chelsea Station*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, among numerous venues. He shares digs with Chloe and Kitty-Kitty. He loves curry, showers, borscht, naps, live theatre, and the perpetuity of infinite calm. End the Fascist Regime.

**Carol Stowe** is a retired school teacher involved in jail and prison ministry. She is passionate about sharing the love and hope of Jesus Christ with those offenders whom society has thrown away and labeled worthless. She loves to see the light on their faces when they realize someone cares and will share God's forgiveness with them.

**Ruth Woolson** was born in New Jersey but has made Denton, Texas, her home for almost thirty years. Her love for poetry began when, as a child, she read and illustrated her grandmother's poetry journals. Her passion for poetry has continued throughout her life. She hopes to inspire her children and grandchildren to pursue their passions as well. Ruth's poem, "For Now," appeared in the Common Language Project 2018 anthology.