



The Writer's Garret
The Common Language Project: Ritual
2021

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May 2021

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THE COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT: RITUAL | 2021

The Common Language Project is an annual North Texas poetry competition that results in the publication of an online anthology and a reading at a prominent arts venue in Dallas. Our goal is to celebrate diversity in community through the use of thirty shared keywords that spawn a collection 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 nonprofit organization that serves and supports the educational and literary communities of Dallas and the surrounding area. Celebrating its 26th anniversary in 2021, "The Garret" (as it is affectionately known) has connected over 2 million readers and audience members with thousands of writers. A recent recipient of the Community Engagement Award in Fine Arts as a partner of the Dallas City of Learning initiative, the organization has a storied past, including funding from the Communities Foundation of Texas, 20 NEA grants, countless awards from the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA), as well as support from the Dallas Arts District Foundation, the Moody Fund for the Arts, the Zale Foundation, and others. Garret programs have brought Umberto Eco, Barbara Kingsolver, and Julia Alvarez, among many others, to Texas audiences, as well as Texas originals Naomi Shihab Nye, Owen Egerton, and Tony Diaz. As an organization created to support the literary community and bring it together, The Writer's Garret imagines adaptive ways to unite around literature and language-based art, connecting people through the power of language.

For inquiries about The Common Language Project, email commonlanguage@writersgarret.org.

For inquiries about The Writer's Garret, email gen@writersgarret.org.

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About The Common Language Project: Ritual

*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 virtual 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 both a place to come together and somewhere from which we can start — and in which we can thrive.

This year (the project's fourth), we invite you into ritual. What repetitions anchor you in the day? What sacred rites mark your milestones? A candle lit, a coin tossed, a sacrifice to assuage the enraged elements; grand or granular, our lives are framed in ritual. Share with us the secrets of your everyday, map the pilgrimage you're planning to take, bring us into the sacred space and perform your wonders.

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:

assurance	flare	seethe
attend	howling	spatial
blossoming	liminal	sunken
charge	patina	tenets
control	prayer	treason
copper	prey	unspooling
driven	reason	veracity
drowned	rent	wheel
earthen	repeat	wound
eaten	repel	wander

Judges' Comments

Logen Cure

Many thanks to The Writer's Garret and the poets who trusted me with their work. It was an honor to select these beautiful pieces. Each poet illuminated something new for me about the idea of ritual, and, when the poems are taken together, they invite us to consider the contrasts that challenge us and the threads that unite us. I am profoundly grateful to the DFW literary community and proud to have taken part in this project.

Priscilla Rice

It was exciting and invigorating to enter the world of so many private rituals — from the quotidian to the spiritual. Each one was rooted with so many aspirations, hopes, and desires. Having a front seat to the intimate, sometimes secret rituals of our beautiful poets was truly an evocative experience. I dreamt your poems for days. Some of them made me weep inconsolably or filled my heart with ecstasy, as it was evident that you had placed your deepest sentiments into these words. I felt your losses and your joys. You all shook me to the core. Gracias.

Christopher Soden

It was a joy to discover the elegance, ingenuity and originality the contestants brought to The Common Language Project. It seems The Writer's Garret always manages to come up with a couple of words you'd be hard-pressed to find in everyday conversation. The poets who chose to take on this challenge were faced with the quandary (comparable to rhyming) of finding a use for each of the 30 words that didn't sound forced, or worse, outré. The best flowed smoothly as molasses in June. I was surprised by the poignancy and incision some achieved given the demands of this premise. Perhaps what I enjoyed the most was how a poet could blossom in response to the limited diction. Like flora breaking through stone: you can't quite believe it.

Margaret Allyson
Hard Winter

Our goats long ago had been eaten
by the wolves howling down from the mountain.
I'd wound up the prayer wheel, its verses unspooling
on constant repeat but not helping.

We had no assurance that spring would ever come,
no faith in any kind of blossoming.
Blood's copper tang had driven Veracity mad.
Her sunken eyes would wander, never lighting, void of reason.
In truth, what she resembled most was prey.
I prayed I could repel the hungry wolves.

The snow kept on falling.
The drowned man kept waving.
A flare flew out of the earthen chimney.

I knew that I was meant to be in charge,
but I had no control.
My spatial sense was shot to hell, my cloak was rent.
I'd seethe with fear and fury at the slightest sound.

We lived in a liminal minute
where tenets of society were indistinct from treason,
where morals had acquired a dull patina.

Still, there were rituals to which I must attend:
Light candles, stir the soup,
Go out and turn the prayer wheel for the night.

Gillian Barth

Waiting for Toxicology

The Galveston debutante bent
into the blossoming duchess satin.

Her nose in the net of petticoat mesh,
she lay prostrate in that sunken stage

of the Grand Opera House. And we watched
the prey from our perch, in our assurance

and velvet sagging theater chairs.
Our taloned toes curled over the tops

of our high heels, which we used to repel,
pushing off so the seat cushions flipped

up and down on repeat, while she drowned
in her Texas Dip. And I remember this

as I trace a heart on steamed shower glass
every morning after my run with poets

in my ears who talk about the tenets,
earthen and spatial, of speaking for the dead.

It is hard committing treason, turning you,
found cold with your nose between your knees,

into a poem. A daughter bends, like copper
will patina, to keep from being eaten. It's the reason

I'm driven to wander again to that city by the sea,
keep my hands on the wheel and seethe

a prayer to rent this ballgown, its ruching unspooling,
a little longer. Every day I attend the podcasts

of howling poets who charge: I do not need
permission. For my plume to wound,

my steamed heart wears feathers in its arrow.
For veracity, to control the liminal,

I aim the flare at vultures
and watch them scatter.

Lorlee Bartos
Garden Ritual

Asleep...

Too cold... too quiet...
Waking you, alerting you
To attend to the wound
Visited in the dark

Frost like a copper flare
Eaten into the earthen landscape
Drowned blighted blossoming
A charge against early spring

Wander the devastation
Spatial orientation at risk
Can't control, can't change
Fall prey to a liminal state of despair

Patina of reason shattered
Sanity unspooling
Seethe at the capriciousness
And treason of nature

Say a prayer, repeat
Driven to howling
Proof we only rent equilibrium
In this sunken state

Repel ennui
Hope for the assurance, veracity
And promise of the tenets
of the Wheel of Life

Sara Becker

Surely Some Second Coming, part II

Spinning and spinning like a wheel on fire
We attend to their tenets or face treason
Face to face with adversity: driven till we're drowned
Wrestling for control, we work to repel,

then repeat the former pattern
from one extreme to the next
Our pendulum prayer swinging wildly
Unspooling, unspooling a pattern we're too blind to see

Somewhere out on the earthen plain, beyond the grid
There's a patina to things known and unknown
A sunset copper with age, it's flare broadcasting wisdom—
Repeat, repeat, repeat: the sunken wound howling, bleeding out

If you're looking for assurance, know that the rent is due
We've fallen prey to our prayers, eaten the earth

It will seethe, it will bleed

Meet that wound with a veracity of purpose
Full charge forward into her liminal mystery
Replace wander with wonder, Blossoming alongside reason
Spatial and palatial — the earth contracts then expands
Space to hold both death and life.
Contract and expand.

Monica Berry

Visiting

Our family tenets of mourning dictate when we attend your grave
It would be treason to charge toward you on the anniversary of sorrow
Our prayer is driven by celebratory occasions

We have assurance that your copper plaque will gather no patina
The grounds crews have reason to repel tarnish
They care for bodies now earthen but souls spatial
No one lies here with intention to rent

The liminal howling of our grief was on repeat
But we drowned that wound years ago
The blossoming of our control had felt ambitious
From the wheel of time we were unspooling into lives without you

Though the veracity of your flare reminds us to return
We can wander but will forever unite in front of you
Standing with feet bare in the mower eaten grass
Nothing is sunken
We seethe with joyful stories and full hearts
No longer prey to the trap of depression
We leave our stones in tribute
Thankful to be part of your legacy

Eve Castle

Omega: The Final Fall, Eradication

Failure spins — a red wound on the horizon.
Our unspooling driven like a nail through a palm.
Veracity is the name we call our unseeing faith.
Our saving strategy is simply a spinning wheel
without any assurance.

We charge at the blinding flare to attend
to the blossoming outcome advancing upon us.
As if it's not too late already.
Fate's a snake we can no longer repel or control
the apple was bitten long ago.

Our liminal world is rent by erasure.
We wander the copper patina of earth's
spatial surface, even now, as sunken prey.
Shameless criminals in a season
where there's no reason for ecological treason.

Yet, here we are. We encircle our tenets
with a phony prayer on repeat
a howling sermon on the mount
we drift oblivious, heartless disciples
of something that remains nameless.

We will perish. Drowned in rising sea levels
or eaten like frozen ice age popsicles.
Perhaps we will seethe in volcanic magma
end up baked into earthen vessels and scraped clean.
Generation Omega. The earth will heal.

PW Covington

Oxidized

Everything vital
Unspooling from the wheel where I wound
All reason around my blue sky heart and happenstance
Rant, repel, retreat, and repeat
Rent and torn, cast to all directions
Like prey, driven over the earthen parapets
That seethe with the patina of treason
Bison and lumbering beasts charge over,
Beyond control and buoyancy, drowned; sunken in dark waters
All assurance eaten at Seder, as we wander 'mid Nisan splendor

Swirls of molten hopes eddy from Golgotha to La Guardia
Runaways from every kitchen sink in Tulsa
Special spatial awareness returns in stand-by concourse prayer
Attend to the things blossoming in alloy depths, yet
The tenets of this solar flare remain
Veracity, glassy like ore slag
Howling from the liminal spaces at night
The clocks here have no need for dials or integers or real numbers

Empty copper spools of consequence grow green
Like that queen in New York harbor
Seen from shore

dès Anges Cruser
Reclamation

A Virus

With seditious flare,
Flings treason like a gauntlet
At cherished earthen tenets.
We seethe
As daily life succumbs as prey.

Our depleted Daily Bread —
This Odious Microbe has eaten.
We are beaten
Like copper coins sunken
In murky waters of doubt.
Our spatial senses are drowned in petulance,
The social fabric rent asunder.

We spin
On a howling wheel of fear unspooling,
Losing control of reason.
Driven to reclaim charge over fond routines,
We fervently repeat a prayer
That the veracity of science will prevail
And attend to the wound
This Beast has wrought.

A blossoming trust in such an assurance
May empower us to repel
This Vicious Invader
From the liminal space that we wander,
To achieve more
Than a mere patina of normalcy.

Hollis Davis
An Unspooling

Life full of assurance blossoming with each new wander
Though we charge and try to control the wheel
Driven by tenets of veracity

We have no flare to attend the Patina on copper
No unspooling of reason for the liminal prayer
How do we repel those who bring treason

We repeat our spatial howling
For those sunken with a wound
Into earthen fields

We search for the prey to be eaten
Not drowned but shot
We seethe that we are required to rent

And attend this charge
Of words
With no guiding thoughts

Marcia Davis
Daydream 2020

In my room in quarantine, I sense rather than see the copper flare 'round the sun ripping open a liminal subliminal wound against the heavens —

A bruised and bleeding rusted patina sky, the patchy hues applied awkwardly by nature's wobbly paint wheel – an unforgiving solar orb, intent on spotlighting each painful stage and stain of the spatial unspooling of dawn into day.

I find no reason to attend the day, yet I wade and wander through it anyway –
Not as wielder of, nor victim prey for the howling, hollow, lascivious hate-filled scourge of sarcasm seeping, oozing through the cracks of society;

But, unmasked and unmuted, lifting prayer and quoting tenets, driven to override in veracity the sunken pit of equivocation, it's putrid fill drowned and drowning in deceitful dogma of trash and treason spewing from the internet and airways —

Designed to repel us, relentlessly control us, charge us and compel us to rent our garments and shoot each other in the streets and shadows; burn buildings and smoke flags to stoke the fury, as temperaments seethe and smothering rage wraps and whips around us.

I ignore, repeat or vomit up the lies or bury them like earthen artifacts, like mummified and brittle bones — the meat eaten away by media moths and maggots.

There's no blossoming assurance, no beauty, passion or exuberance that beckons me, as this day loses it favor in the dismal hours ticking by toward darkness. With the dusk, my pummeled heart shakes and shatters again.

Still, soul throbbing, I painfully lift my heavy head and stubbornly place my hopes on another dawn, agonize for a future day, yearn for a better time – a coming counterculture in which racial conflict and power politics sit impotent, colorless and quiet, beneath a cacophony of hate fallen deeply asleep and blissfully silent.

I so desire that day that chases neither lies, pain nor power; a dawn not steeped and stained in outrage, but painted in almost translucent pink clouds of peace and resolution that envelop and embrace friendship, kinship and kindness, universal respect and unity, common love and peace.

And so, at dusk, with an ever-aching growing regret, I give up on another day of dissidence and turn my hope in pensive penance toward the promise of tomorrow...

Patricia de Villiers
Come With Me

Come with me, with assurance
To attend this blossoming moment
Let the warm copper glow of peace
Infiltrate your earthen cracks
Till your fear is driven far away
And your unspooling tension is drowned
In the embrace of Wholeness

You tell me you seethe
Howling into the wind
Your hope a sunken relic
Buried deep in the dust
You feel control slipping away
You hide behind the patina of aging beauty
Yet you feel as prey, rent,
Destined to wander
Some spatial loneliness

Linger not in the liminal
But charge forward, unafraid
Doubts devoured
Eaten away by the flare of radiance
Veracity wound together with reason
The tenets of truth countering treason
In the wheel of infinity

Come with me, and be still
Enter the sacred space of prayer
Repeat your words like silent raindrops
Repel the cold fingers that seek to steal
Come with me
Into the presence of Love.

Britain Eggleston

Orison

Lingering in the liminal space
between tenets and treason,
a prayer rises.

Like a flare driven by the assurance
that I am meant for more,
that my spirit won't be rent apart like prey
as I wander this earthen wheel below,
I repel the howling control of this sunken place.

Its spatial grip has not drowned me yet,
though its mark is impossible to forget.
I repeat the lies this world has eaten —
a charge devoured against all reason.

And, unspooling the veracity of my true self,
once timid and tightly wound in a cocoon,
now emerging with the copper patina of time,

I attend the rising of my soul:
a blossoming awareness that smiles
as my anxieties seethe.

Alan Gann
considering a still life by cezanne

brushed with the assurance of a buddhist prayer flag
carafe milk can earthen bowls all empty
so only the blossoming orange draws a hungry eye

when once upon a liminal time minds commit treason
and we drowned in cream from the can
found peace in a wild life unspooling

but after the dance how easily we wander
off the wheel of reason and seethe with laughter
any emptiness the result of grapes and pears

eaten with flare cheese and beaujolais
vanishing tenets of taking charge and control
a body rent with wound

still wearing patina of nonchalance
hunter now prey howling at a copper moon
so now we feast on the veracity of sunlight

scent of croissants driven down from boulangerie
it is all we the sunken can attend
but spatial arrangements repel snarling stomachs

there is no inherent harmony nothing to repeat
or draw the eye and no one can be satiated
by the beauty found in barren cupboards

Christine Horstman

The Long Haul

I look at myself in the mirror, my eyes sunken.

It's not worse than a flare but it is so incessant!

I've been here before — chronic illness my wheel of fortune.

So well versed in the tenets of shelter in place that I was okay living in the pandemic's liminal space.

Better than that, my work life was blossoming.

The world now going at my best pace.

And now all the gains and sacrifice unspooling.

Every post I see announcing yet another inoculation makes me seethe.

I'm falling prey to the negativity and the "if only"s, the "why me"s.

It's a horrible howling inside these thoughts that repeat, repeat, repeat.

I missed it by seven, maybe eight weeks.

I try to repel it with reason — it was out of my control ... but it feels like treason.

Despite our best efforts there was no assurance beyond total lockdown.

And how could we stay wound that tight all Christmas season?

It's a twisting ache in my chest like the reflux that burns whether or not I've eaten.

I have let everything go to attend only to my healing.

I know of course that letting this despair rent so much space in my head goes against my recovery.

That's what no one realizes though when they charge you with feel better soon!

Getting well is such drudgery.

I will myself daily to snap out of it – the positive affirmations drowned by fear, anxiety, frustration.

When all my tricks — candles, baths, stretching — no longer lift me up I know it's time to throw down.

The ultimate energy shift — spatial planning.

The bed is moved, the room expands and so does my breathing.

I walk outside hungry for more space, more air.

I wander my back yard driven to reclaim myself.

I study the giant old pecan tree — solid, soaring, forthright.

I wrap my arms around it — a literal tree hugger — squeezing my prayer down to its earthen roots.

I bow my head and notice the moss at its base like a green copper patina.

I whisper so only we can hear it — send me your strength, loan me your spirit.

I feel my heart beating — pulsing with the veracity that this tree has already survived the long haul.

Ann Howells

Coyote Sings an Old Song

What assurance has he that howling this prayer,
this plea he offers to the copper moon,
unspooling disgruntlement, begging abundant prey
in this liminal corridor he inhabits
(a totally unsatisfactory spatial arrangement),
will be heard? Coyote has not eaten well in months,
driven to nibble roots and berries. (Berries repel him!)
He despises this earthen existence,
remembers when he was a god — in charge, in control —
before the wheel of fate reduced him
to a groveling creature.
He licks a wound on his paw,
tries to ignore hunger blossoming in his belly.
Who will attend him when, fur rent, eyes sunken,
he is too old to hunt?

As for the moon,
she continues to wander heaven, unheeding,
does not ponder coyote's veracity.
Yes, there was treason among the old gods;
coyote has reason to seethe, let temper flare.
Tenets were broken (repeat: broken),
but half drowned in cirrus, her patina tarnished,
little cares the moon for troubles of coyotes
or gods.

Felecia Hunter-Burnett

My Soul's Ritual

My steps of assurance give me charge and control over my life and certainly my soul
I say a prayer and reason that success is rent that is due every day
So, I am driven to attend to the repeat tenets of my life in every way
I have drowned my sorrows in my earthen vessel
As I seethe at being prey and eaten by the howling voice
Of a wound of fear and thinking low level
I do what has always brought me to a liminal moment of happiness and peace
I bathe in a sunken bubble bath of my copper and patina vintage tub in my sacred retreat
Unspooling and blossoming as one can do
When life's veracity wander upon you
The love of self can act as a treason
When self-care becomes your reason
To repel the wheel of commonality or what is fair
And embrace this spatial ritual of my soul with a blinding burst of flare

Paul Koniecki

Liminal wheel wound spatial and unspooling

I am an acolyte's manual
I am a palimpsest written out of
Sixty-one previous souls' control
I am a Black-Vincent Shadow machine driven

A blossoming prayer a sunken lighthouse
A patina howling prey
Veracity wander tenets and treason
Rent rent rent reason & repeat

To charge the driven
To repel control
To prove existence and faith
To attend every earthen eaten flare

The drowned motorcycle racer
The way water transforms metal into color and milk
Snow held in a statue's eye
Copper seethe assurance like lashes and ice

Before morning comes to deliver us again
Octopi are minutes
Can't you see their tentacle-arms
In the hands of clocks

Our hours fodder for suction cups
Essentially I am a palimpsest
A black Vincent shadow machine
I want to ingest a religion that worships

Top speed blossoming in copper assurance
Liminal wheel wound spatial and unspooling
Recalibrate my soul with sixty-one given freely
I want to follow mystics who worship The Sun

Debra Levy

Cold Cream, Cup, Collage or, One purpose of ritual is the activation of memory

How is it that this woman I considered the source of honey-magic, who stooped, cared felt
always undone, incomplete? She told me

Only time someone threw me a birthday party, I'd turned thirty, my whole life.

Insightful, she came to me in a dream, lit the morning with her gaze, saying

Appreciate your love. We'd make her great-grandchildren,

The beginning of wisdom, my own slow decay. Waking daily to joys, Baby Buddha, little feet: the ordinary. Memory, ritual, recital, repeat I bless the Name, when I wake, for everything that is, opens and closes. Deep Wherever you are now, you beg me, sleep, not to think of a body's treason — Hands lathered, drowned in cold cream, always a dollop for me, Nightly ritual, softening the housework away so something would remain, A patina. Hands massage up, powder-rouge, grayscale spatial plane, Cheekbone to cheekbone. Sunken spaces where we meet appear liminal. Just in time to seethe against trespass, tenets, age spots an owner handed, and must hand over to, and lose mid cartwheel, copper flutter, this flare and pop, bronze wheel, continuous self. I pine for this gypsy child, outside bounds of reason, time, seasons. This tumble whirl who comes blossoming into being, now wound, now unspooling: wing to struggle string taut, bound, catching the charge.

Take your medicine, repeat, repeat, bereft, with the inevitable change,

There is no control — you cannot mend the lives once nurtured. Only yield, howling.

Thank God, each morning, no polio! No one drowned without warning, became prey. Afraid of the black-outs, you survive fire, attend the brigade, alive or driven with veracity eaten, earthen: when there's no assurance, you rent, repel, obey,

When you go, golden ear loops become my totem, the round world. A wrist watch, stopped, how I remember. You, walking down Dallas Street, paved inline. One day, you will make me milk lattes, the circumference of your waist, a planet babies, cousins, great grandchildren still orbit. I grew, knew that the nursery-rhyme decoupage dish and spoon, the moon and fiddle you arranged, a cable spool transformed into a play table, would be the desk — altar of my future world: first art, song, prayer, the beginning of memory, courage to practice, wander, ritual obeyed, identity cast, lit, portable.

Kari Lynch

I Read Your Horoscope Every Morning

It is a poet's job to tell the truth.
 You pay no rent in my heart. This is true.
 Where there once was a blossoming love — a flare of attraction —
 now a spatial wound.

Do you remember the summer we got drunk and — howling with laughter —
 we loved, slept, drank, repeat?
 We did cartwheels on the edge of a cliff.
 Sometimes I was your prey. Some days you were mine.
 You loved with such assurance; I misinterpreted it as veracity.
 I dreamed a great love was unspooling; I didn't know
 I had already drowned.
 When I woke up, you were gone. Had eaten the plums. Didn't leave a note.

But the treason started small —
 You forgot to charge your phone. Couldn't call me back.
 You had already driven home. Didn't want to get out.
 Had to attend such and such. *Sorry!* and a stupid emoji.
A valid reason, I tried not to seethe. *Control your feelings*.
 Did my devotion repel you? I know you have always preferred
 to wander. Our tenets were never the same.

Silver and copper are soft metals. Adaptable. Changeable.
 I tried to bend you into a perfect circle,
 but you are tungsten, steel.

Still—

My love has remained, colored by the patina of the years,
 like the sunken Titanic — aged yet suspended — once so full of promise.
 It is not the same. This is true.
 I am an earthen being and, though I do not know your wheel, I know you are made of stars.
 So I read your horoscope every morning,
 suspended in this liminal space.
 Sometimes it is a wish. Most days, it is a prayer.

James Mendur

Labyrinth

I walk the earthen path, (*left*) a form of moving prayer.
Not dancing, no, not that. (*right*) Control of mind and soul
unspooling my reason, (*left*) my spirit a burning flare.
Attend to my steps, (*right*) repeat, and approach the goal.

Liminal, now, on this wheel, (*left*) this spatial oddity I walk.
Enlightenment is my prey (*right*) and I am driven by the tenets of my faith
but my thoughts wander. (*left*) The brain's treason is no shock —
I've wound this way before. (*right*) Was that my seventh turn or eighth?

Distractions blossoming now. (*left*) Have I eaten? Did I pay my rent?
The howling of a monkey in the dark (*right*) trying to repel the sun,
the primitive emotions seethe, (*left*) the grimy patina on a copper cent.
Closer to the end now, (*right*) tempted to charge ahead, but I'm not done.

My ego has been drowned, (*left*) sunken beneath my feet.
The veracity of my belief (*right*) affirmed by the path, each turn
an assurance of success (*left*) as the center, at last, I greet.
One moment of illumination (*right*) and then I begin my return.

Joe Milazzo

spleen

assurance spans the fissure
between absorption and fretfulness when reason
cannot attend its testimonies
it sends its tenets ambassadors
of treason who seethe
in their earthen patina copper
wheel both driven to wound and
sunken in remedy to repeat is to be eaten
is to be drowned is to be inhumed
in idolizing when control cannot choke
its liminal howling it furrows
prayer when prayer
cannot repel the confidences blossoming
wherever the spatial annuls
execution's birthright we would
charge veracity with a prejudice against
rapture that little flare we safeguard
as we wander out of being prey to a lifetime
of unspooling stupor and into a rent
in the remote instance of our sapience

Rylee Moore

Reclamation After Chaos

The liminal process of waking up to a new day
does not always feel like blossoming into something promising.
Sometimes it feels like being drowned by the lack of control in life.
It's a cycle continuing on repeat throughout my journey
like an assurance guaranteed to wound.
Our minds have such veracity that hurting ourselves is effortless.
We're committing treason against ourselves.
My earthen existence begins to seep into my spiritual one.
Just like copper acquires patina after year after year
my mind begins to become entombed in a clutter of negative thoughts.
I've begun to aimlessly wander around my own life
sending up prayer after prayer, red flare after red flare
hoping that someone knows how to help me.
I wish I had the motivation to help myself sooner.
Continuing on with an unknown purpose
doesn't pause life.
It just makes life a predator and I become the prey to be eaten.
What reason do I have for tenets anymore?
I've sunken into a despair I've tried so hard to repel.
Living like this takes so much energy
it might as well be a rent charge for existing.
Here lately though, I've begun to return to my resilience.
I'm rising into a new mindset I've worked hard to get my mind to accept.
The wheel of self-healing has begun unspooling
and I no longer seethe in the things that are not in my power to control.
Instead, I have started making my existence more spatial.
I'm driven by the need for a better existence.
I'm starting to attend to myself as a person and not something just taking up space.
I'm singing my praise, howling my gratitude, and congratulating my accomplishments.
I've started my sacred ritual of reclaiming my life.

Mark Noble

Faith

My father was a believer, so we were too

we learned about fear, the liminal force that brings the lambs into the fold

were taught a series of stories, advised of our earthen guilt and failure, told about the forgiven and the damned, sorted into two groups, warned about a torture, in a fire that would seethe and burn forever

were offered a way out, a prayer, I was 6 years old and I said yes

I accepted the terms of assurance, publicly pledged my blossoming faith in these tenets, began to repeat the words of our rituals, and acknowledged that only God could control my life

I had eaten the bread, I had drunk from the copper violence of the wine, I believed

We were driven to attend church twice each Sunday and most Wednesday nights, the wheel kept turning, I was grateful to be saved, no longer the prey of Satan

The patina of faith was dusted into every part of our lives, the treatment for every wound, and a patchwork frame cobbled onto any challenge to its veracity, any question about faith was regarded as treason, the primary reason we couldn't overcome the difficulties in our lives

But church was not all of my life, I went to school, we moved often, but I made friends when I could, and books filled in the gaps

Maybe more faith would have enabled me to hear beyond the howling call of my doubts. I knew Dad believed, but every year brought more room in which my questions could wander, and my ability to believe began unspooling

I grew into an adult, began to express my concerns to my Dad, and he would charge into stories of the unrepentant drowned man, or the dying thief, or the doubting Thomas who would finally stand before God, with his shirt rent, and ask to be accepted, the charge would be read from the record, righteous anger would flare from the book of life, and repel the newly penitent soul, who had seen the truth too late, and now would be on his way, to the torment of the sunken, the lost, unable to rejoin their deceased friends and family in the holy spatial realms of God's glory. Then he got Alzheimer's and our discussion ended all too soon

Anne Perry

Liminal Blossoming

In a time of unspooling, unchooling, retooling,
 sounds of human howling rise from our throats.
 Our plans rent asunder,
 every day's a repeat of the other.
 News stays sated with those
 sunken in depression; no resuscitation
 recovers drowned hopes.
 Souls seethe in discontent,
 shun this "new normal."
 Spatial rulings keep us six feet separate;
 the pandemic stamps a deep wound
 on our collective, divided psyche.
 For some, going mask-less means treason;
 others repel their masks with fierce reason.
 COVID—a prey of the unsuspecting—
 has eaten our way of life,
 driven us to Zoom our days away.

Yet on this very threshold
 every day's assurance brings
 something new to attend: an elevated conversation,
 a writers' critique group; an international seminar.
 The tenets of faith shine like burnished copper
 against this fractured landscape,
 veracity erasing the patina manufactured
 to surmount the hurdles of this vexed and vexing world.
 Our prayer—a flare to One in full control—
 hits mark. Inspired, we charge into a new reality,
 nourish more lofty commitments,
 dance on a wheel that takes on new vistas.
 Unbound by geographical constraints,
 we wander in cyberspace, locate
 an earthen beauty to match the celestial,
 and flower.

Gayle Reaves-King
Old Home Week

They do not fear the future; they think it dead
 and their maniac charge (mounted
 on cellphones) will win the zombie wars.

We worry about earthen things, the blossoming
 each year, frogs and bees and ocean
 life unspooling. They/we are driven

by control, which they/we lost
 long ago. They are not prey. Their treason
 is against life and green things and those
 that swim. Centuries of madness
 wound the air, repel the sweetness of birdsong
 and reason. We all need home,

but holding tight to *homeland*
 they lose human tenets and worship shiny blood,
 howling scripture from old Funk & Wagnalls, their prayer
 a flare of burning plastic; attend church
 where the patina of veracity has worn off the hymnals,
 repeat the fictions that fit their fist. This ship

is speeding, waters seethe
 along the side, frail hands at the wheel,
 the copper bottom of shared rights
 growing thinner. Mollusks have eaten through
 in tender places. We pass over drowned craft
 and sunken dangers, enter the liminal zone
 of fading assurance. Diverged we may be,

but still we are quilts of us/them,
 sight/blindness, stain and stain. They constitute
 our fingernails and salt our bones. The sails
 are rent, the spatial laws under review. We wander.

Valentina Saldaña

My Own Private Ceremony

I wander wildly to exorcise my fear
To this day the reason remains unclear
Driven by advice I heard in a prayer
I charge with assurance I will get from here to there
Never do I forget words I have eaten
Blessed are the weak tired and beaten
Unspooling veracity and howling I repeat
I seethe under blossoming spells guiding my feet

He said...

Live like the brilliant sun burn away
Love like the liminal moon in phases
Don't give one person total control
Share with this spatial world what amazes

I used to search for earthen sunken drowned vessels
Copper gold and silver were treasures to wrestle
Treason does not rent space in my head
The wheel of justice shall flare instead
I repel all dark forces that attempt to prey
I attend to my tenets every single day
The wound in my soul is experiencing a healing
That is the patina of the hope I am feeling

He said...

Live like the brilliant sun burn away
Love like the liminal moon in phases
Don't give one person total control
Share with this spatial world what amazes

Artie Turner

Morning Rites

With no assurance of this day's repeat,
to what do I attend?
Waking liminal in rent cotton,
driven upright by bladder's nag,
with sunken eyes nudging a prayer across coffee,
I wander barefoot, sipping, and begin the daily seethe before
my liquid crystal flare.
Tethered by miles of wound copper
unspooling howling exabits of pixilated charge and repel.
With sleep's veracity receding,
yesterday's tenets melting,
innocence long since drowned,
I'm easy prey on remote control.
Someone claims the orange man committed treason.
I sip and spin the wheel again.

In the corner of the sunroom, the kolanchoe is blossoming in its earthen pot,
drunk tank patina in two reflections more menacing than spatial.
Surely there is some reason in this madness.
I feel better when I've eaten.

Dinah Waranch
Spiritual Punctuation.

In a blessing before food is eaten,
ritual words focus gratitude and meaning;
connect to this meal's earthen origin.
With this prayer there is comfort in the repeat:
I am eater I am prey
I control it controls me.

No quest for reason in the tenets of this antiquated command but
somehow it succeeds to spark a charge, as through copper, a flare backward to ancestors
unspooling towards a lost veracity
I find may be true for me.

In mourning
I rent my clothes,
seethe with a howling
repeat of the kaddish incantation,
the patina of my wound is scabbed as I
hover
in a liminal place.

Breath of wonder demands another blessing,
For being on life's wheel, blossoming beauty wind water and all.

To acknowledge with ritual is no treason to reason.

As I wander through life's sunken places,
spatial nowheres of disconnect,
I reach back to attend and focus with
assurance of life's interlocking
that will repel a drowned and driven reaching
with a gently smiling peace.

Robert Wynne

Mise en Place

Begin by cracking an egg, at least a full day in advance.
Flare your liminal fingers just wide enough to control the world

and let the white seethe between them into a waiting bowl.
Plop the yolk aside and repeat 3 times. Consider when

veracity is treason, then check the weather. Say a prayer
to the howling wind to keep any blossoming rain at bay

and thank the drowned clouds for their sacrifice.
Repel prey that would wound you by unspooling

all the copper wire in your home, even if you just rent,
because baking preparation is nothing without electricity.

Be sure to gather the rest of the ingredients like tenets
of a new philosophy. Attend to the placement of a #12 tip

in a new piping bag, reason with the scale as an assurance
that all is well, and any sudden charge to your earthen soul

will be minimal. Recall being driven to learn, being eaten alive
by ambition, the sunken wheel of each tiny failure, the patina

of perfection. Remember how you used to wander, discovering
the spatial qualities of desire, the way hope became a thing with feet

that you popped in your mouth, smiling as you chewed.
Now you are finally ready to make the macarons.

Troy Yamaguchi

Electricity Company

A kid tried to control his heartbeat and the unspooling drool-stream of his life-stream;
 And in the day-dream doldrums of perhaps forty howling years,
 He wound up something like A homunculus
 With open wounds instead of skin;
 A walking act of treason waiting for God to attend
 To his banquet now blossoming—Dying—
 Driven to wander empty, illegible, liminal structures
 In search of rent and sugar;
 A monkey with flailing reason doomed to repeat
 The copper-flavored sin of having the Audacity! To expect
 That the freeloader in his head pull
 His near half-century wait;
 To deliver, with swift assurance—and a ten percent additional charge—
 The drowned corpses of all the fattened prey
 That he had indeed prayed for; and that his prayer had seen promised
 In the sunken eyes of his own earthen god.

The only things around were insects.
 The new tenets
 Were impossible to repel; the veracity of their
 Indelible advance into the world—emerging from the mental to erupt unto
 The very-actual spatial Flushed the country.
 The body fell blistered:
 Eaten alive by a flare of copper IBM ants, whose IBM salvos
 Splashed across the copper cabin floor in a quick patina of decay.

Asleep at the wheel
 Surrounded by danger
 And very cold:
 A feverish brain's sole recourse is to
 Seethe—
 Then to sneeze.

About the Contributors

Margaret Allyson enjoyed a long career in publishing as writer and editor, working on magazines, college textbooks, and newspapers. She wrote a few nonfiction books and served as ghostwriter on several more. Now she lounges about and sleeps late. The parameters of The Common Language Project suit her well.

Gillian Barth graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and is finishing her MLS degree at Southern Methodist University with an emphasis in creative writing. She currently reads poetry for *TriQuarterly*, and her writing has been featured in *The Dallas Morning News* as well as various technical, financial services, and education sector publications. In her spare time, Gillian enjoys running long distances, listening to poetry podcasts, and collecting books to add to her never-ending “to read” pile.

Lorlee Bartos has managed local political campaigns for nearly 40 years, worked for various law firms, a five-star restaurant, and as a congressional aide in Washington, as well as creating a recycling program. In her retirement, she has been busily supporting musicians and artists and generally staying safe during the pandemic. She is an award-winning photographer and occasional poet who creates in several other mediums. Mostly she plays in the dirt and coaxes abundant life from her gardens, which were featured in *The Dallas Morning News* in 2004.

Sara Becker is a teacher of Shakespeare and Voice at North Carolina School of the Arts. She is the head of the Voice and Text Department at American Players Theatre in Spring Green, Wisconsin, where she spends summers digging into juicy language with inspiring actors, designers, and directors. She is a member of many book clubs, and has a husband who is a human pun generator and a kid who bends words to his will. She lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Monica Berry was born in upstate New York and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She attended college and law school in the Midwest but ended up in Texas. She's a general counsel who writes in her free time, believes in fairy-tale endings, and eats dessert before dinner whenever possible. She lives in Dallas.

Eve Castle lives in Dallas and writes poetry and short stories. She's a member of Gabe's Poets, a Dallas-based poetry writing group. Her publishing credits include *Illya's Honey*, *Barbaric Yawp*, *Literary Juice*, *Gravel Magazine*, *Fireflies' Light*, and others. This is her third year submitting to The Common Language Project of The Writer's Garret. She hopes to become a full-time poet in 2022 after a three-decade career in administrative management in higher education.

PW Covington writes in the Beat tradition of the North American highway. His latest poetry collection, *malepoet*, is available from Gnashing Teeth Publishing. Follow him on Instagram: @BeatPW.

dès Anges Crusier is a retired research psychology professor and behavioral health administrator, who lives in Arlington with her beloved psychiatrist husband and their two shepherd-lab mix companions. Weather permitting, gardening is a favorite pastime. She also provides guidance and oversight for Medicaid waiver programs in several North Texas counties. She is currently at work on her first novel.

Hollis Davis was born in McClain County, Oklahoma, on February 12, 1931. He lived on the farm until 1945. He went to high school in Fort Worth-Diamond Hill, played football, and received a scholarship to Texas Tech. Hollis has a BS in chemistry from Texas Tech and an MBA from TCU. After two years in the U.S. Navy, he worked as a composite materials engineer. He retired in 1995 after 12 years as vice president of research for Kaiser Aerotech. He now plays the guitar, goes to Toastmasters, and writes poetry and songs.

Marcia Davis has invested her career in making a positive difference through journalism and media relations. In 2001, Davis paired her journalism skills with her media relations expertise in the founding of Freelantz Media, for which she serves as the principal media relations liaison and consultant. Learn more at www.freelantz.media.

Patricia de Villiers and her husband moved from Cape Town, South Africa, to Dallas in January 2000. She currently teaches English in the French Baccalaureate and International Baccalaureate programs at Dallas International School, working with students from all over the world.

Britain Eggleston currently lives in Dallas with her husband and two cats. Drawn to language and the arts from an early age, she earned a bachelor of arts degree in French with minors in classics and art and architectural history from Texas A&M University. She believes that there is more to life than the daily grind we've been taught and seeks to nurture the sense of awe and wonder inherent to human nature.

Alan Gann is a teaching artist-poet who tutors and facilitates writing workshops at Texans Can Academy. He also wrote *DaVerse Works*, Big Thought's performance poetry curriculum. A multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, he is the author of two volumes of poetry: *That's Entertainment* (Lamar University Press, 2018) and *Adventures of the Clumsy Juggler* (Ink Brush Press, 2019). In his nonexistent spare time, Alan prefers to be outdoors: biking, birding, and trying to photograph some of the cool things he sees.

Christine Horstman is a life coach, speaker, and professional development instructor. She is also a chronic illness warrior who now adds Long COVID to her medical resume. She is a former Community Voices contributor to *The Dallas Morning News*. Her first book, *Deal With It, Doll!*, a guide to coping with and overcoming life's many challenges, will be published this year. Christine lives in Oak Cliff with her husband, son, and furbaby. Learn more at www.paperdollcommunication.com.

Ann Howells edited *Illya's Honey* for eighteen years. Her books include: *Under a Lone Star* (Village Books Press, 2016), *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books, 2019), and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky* (Assure Press, 2020), a collection of persona poems in voices of Van Gogh and his contemporaries. Her chapbooks include: *Black Crow in Flight*, published as Editor's Choice through *Main Street Rag's* 2007 competition, and the 2017 William D. Barney Competition winner *Softly Beating Wings*. Ann's work also appears in many small press and university journals.

Felecia Hunter-Burnett is a lover of people and words, a humanitarian, life coach, artisan, interior stylist, event planner, and lover of all things beautiful. Her first book, *My Life is a Song — A Survivor's Memoir of Abuse and the Healing Power of Music*, is forthcoming. She seeks truth and unapologetically believes that all experiences, good or bad, are useful on this journey called life.

Paul Koniecki lives and writes in Dallas. He was once chosen for the John Ashbery Home School Residency. His poems feature in Richard Bailey's movie *One of the Rough*, distributed by AVIFF Cannes. His books are available from Kleft Jaw Press, NightBallet Press, Dark Particle Press, and Spartan Press.

Debra Levy is mother, wife, and nonprofit leader in Dallas who is active in her community and with issues of literacy and social justice.

Kari Lynch writes and teaches in North Texas. She is currently studying applied anthropology at the University of North Texas.

James Mendur was born 50-odd years ago, an event he does not remember asking for, but he's tried to make the best of it since then. Before moving to Denton County he visited and lived in Europe, China, New England, and Indiana. He works for a large corporation and writes short fiction and poetry when he can. He spends way too much time wandering in the maze of the internet and plans to spend more time walking actual labyrinths in the coming year.

Joe Milazzo lives and works in Dallas where he makes things. Sometimes, the things he makes are made out of words. Learn more at www.joe-milazzo.com.

Rylee Moore is 18 years old and finishing her senior year of high school. She loves to read and write, and poetry is something she's incredibly passionate about. Her work was included in last year's anthology — *Fortune* — and she is excited to share her poetry again. She currently lives in Amarillo.

Mark 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 CAMP project at The Writer's Garret, and a retired firefighter for the Mesquite Fire Department .

Anne Perry teaches writing, humanities, and art appreciation at the Art Institute of Dallas and Dallas College. She is currently part of five online writers' groups and sponsors a series of writing workshops and an annual retreat called "The Write Life." She published three books for children: *Magnificent Moles of Mede Meadow*, *Who Makes Knees for Bees?*, and *Unseen Witness: Sarah Farmer & The Portsmouth Peace Treaty*. She has also published various essays, biographical pieces, fictional stories, poems, and reviews. She lives with her husband and four cats in Duncanville.

Gayle Reaves-King is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who started writing poetry about a decade ago. Her work has appeared in several journals and anthologies, and her chapbook *Spectral Analysis* was published by the Dallas Poets Community. A Texas native, she has reported from Asia, Europe, and South America, edited for large and small publications, been president of the national Journalism and Women Symposium, and helped run the Pandora's Box poetry presentation group. She lives in Fort Worth.

Valentina Saldaña resides in the DFW area. She is a published author, actress and artist. You can follow her blog wordsmonstersme.wordpress.com to read more of her writings.

Artie Turner is a long-time Dallasite now living in the Piney Woods of East Texas.

Dinah Waranch has been attending The Writer's Garret Stone Soup poetry workshop for perhaps a year and a half, working towards an expression of midwifery, birth, life, death, memory, identity, and nature in one messy interconnected verbalization. She is a short, aging Jewish, British, Israeli, American midwife.

Robert Wynne earned his MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University. He is the author of six chapbooks, and three full-length books of poetry. His first full-length collection, *Remembering How to Sleep*, was the recipient of the Poetry Society of Texas' 2006 Eakin Book Award. He has won numerous prizes, and his poetry has appeared in magazines and anthologies throughout North America. He lives in Burleson with his wife and two rambunctious dogs. His online home is www.rwynne.com.

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