



THE
COMMON
LANGUAGE
PROJECT
FORTUNE
2020 ANTHOLOGY



the writer's
garret

The Common Language Project

Fortune

April 2020

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THE COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT: FORTUNE | 2020

The Common Language Project is an 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. 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 25th anniversary in 2020, 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, 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: Fortune

*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 — from which we can thrive.

This year (the project's third), we invite you to enter the realm of fortune. Strike out and make it, or seek and share what is already prophesied; the choices along the way are yours to make. Can you chart a course avoiding tempests, literal or figurative? Will you hold or bet it all? Be prepared to be enchanted by works of risk and reward, promise and peril, decision and destiny. Fortune favors the brave.

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:

agony	echoing	revelation
ascend	filter	scanned
behest	fool	stand
cadence	fulfilled	stumbled
chance	grace	surge
clear	heel	thrive
crystalline	last	timing
daub	plundered	totem
design	prevail	trying
destiny	rasp	venture

Judges' Comments

Tamitha Curiel

Yeah, words have the power of life and death, but from an incunabulum of thirty words these poets tease out a mirror, a balm, a warning, a blessing, a myth that's a ladder to more questions, magical spells and more. Here poets individuate and commune in the same breath and remind me why I put so much stock in the written and spoken word.

Princess McDowell

The poets who produced the most compelling and arresting work were not only in conversation with each other by using the same words, but with writing stories of strength and discovery. Any jumble of words can become something coherent, but the storytellers who submitted let fortune shape the narrative and delivered stunning work during a pandemic. I'm honored to have been asked to judge, and even more proud to share community with them.

Mark Noble

Thank you to all the writers who participated in The Common Language Project this year. It was my pleasure to read your work and see all the life and energy that everyone brought to this project. Also, thank you to everyone at The Writer's Garret who has supported this contest, and thank you to the sponsors who have made this and so many other projects possible.

Marisa Adame

social media: a lament

agony of the echoing fool,
fulfilled only by the revelation of plundered grace.

with such crystalline cadence, you design my destiny.
you can't stand on stumbled heel, yet you somehow thrive within the timing
of my trying to find totem within your last behest.

I spend my days hoping to defy you.

without your filter, I prevail.
my dreams become daub upon the canvas of life's infinities.

once rid of your rasp of scanned creativity —
through which each discovery
becomes less vivid than the last —

my clear voice has chance to thrive:
each surge of idea a venture into a new unknown,
a proposal to ascend that which has been seen.

Katherine Baxter

And Thus, We Lived

In the midst of infinity, (was it destiny or chance?) emptiness bore its heel into itself and spoke to the void:

“A perfect world may only prevail in silence. We’ve borne nothing, yet we’ve created a crystalline empire. However, we cannot become anything more, only a clear reflection akin to a deceased heaven; echoing for eternity, with no mountain to ascend. I will die for the sake of being fulfilled for once in this unmoving realm.”

And thus, emptiness took his stand and borne agony, a creature of design devoid of grace.

Emptiness caved in on himself and was swallowed into a sea of darkness — the first movement ever made — and ceased to exist.

His death rang like a revelation.

In the absence of the vacuum, he had mothered creation.

And it began!

Like a totem of ultimate sacrifice, creation began to surge through space, a daub of light that seized everything she touched.

And she grew!

Her children scanned over eons, across the timing behest by teeming life, like a pandemic that plundered over every faint rasp of their ancestor’s legacy; feeding on the kingdom emptiness both encompassed and shattered in his wake.

But creation was a fool;

neglecting her older brother as he stumbled through her tresses,

staining her elegance and prosperity with a filter we named tragedy,

only trying to catch a glimpse of his father’s figure before he faded from time’s memory.

Creation and Agony began to thrive, braiding into each other like balance;

overcome with power and greed

until they became known only as the wide force who slowly spreads the universe

and resonates within every form, dancing to a cadence that will last forever;

An unachievable venture without end.

I am their daughter.

(was it destiny or chance?)

This is the tale of our fortune.

Gayle Bell

Solomon Contemplates

Bold we scanned introspective
this thrive to venture
trying to affix totem and meaning

Does the shallow fool
prevail assured of grace fulfilled
stand now at heel after the panic surge
when our dream last plundered

Is there chance walking in our shadows
Does folly clear forward sight
Do we daub our flaws
making crystalline thought
certain of the design we build

Has destiny gotten there early
echoing the congratulatory light
the behest of humanity filter our grace

Is there agony in anticipation
Do we ascend from point of need
to a cadence of want

Timing the last rasp
stumbled into the revelation

Kshounish Bhadra-Bhaduri

</3

the agony of my clear, crystalline heart
which i daub with the echoing tears of our release
i stumbled away from our destiny
the design of my soul plundered by your behest
a revelation i reached far too late
the interminable timing of your laugh,
once a thing of grace, now a rasp
as the cadence quickens alongside my pulse
the pitch will ascend
for the reprise
with a surge

as i scanned the last of the shards
shattered under your heel
i fell upon, by chance,
a token that passed through your filter,
a declaration of tenderness and love,
a totem that you forgot to consume,
a memento of our ill-fated venture,
a blissful souvenir of what could have been,
a hopeless reminder that trying to thrive, trying to stand, believing that we will prevail

only opens the role of the fool to be fulfilled.

Eve Castle

Fate of the Granaliero

A crystalline totem towers overhead. The Dame of Fortune marks the Granaliero's face with the Daub of a Falsifier. It'll thrive like a bad case of shingles until his destiny is fulfilled.

Like a fool, he stumbled onto the clear platform to await revelation of his sentence. The Dame poses a choice, "Grace or agony?" He thinks, Will I prevail, is this a chance to deal? With a self-centered rasp he replies, "I've scanned my options. At your behest I'm ready to bargain."

A surge of laughter scuttles, echoing along the walls. The Dame turns to leave. He shouts, "Wait, wait, you fortune cookie." She snaps back, "You'll pay for your mouth's lack of filter." From behind something licks his fingers, he turns and sees a wolf. He curses, "Heel son of a bitch." The wolf locks its sharp teeth onto his wrist and together they nose-dive to Hell.

For this part of his venture, the Granaliero is forced to stand hog-tied in the middle of sinners and heavy boulders. They all move in a chaotic cadence of Tag You're It. After a partial eternity, bruised but with ego intact, he finds himself again at the Dame's feet. She says, "Have you guessed? In Hell's design, reasoning and timing are at my discretion. The minute you think eternity will last forever you ascend, or descend, at my pleasure." He opens his mouth to speak but his tongue is tied. She laughs and yells, "To the pits with you!"

On the scenic trip to the pits, he thinks, I will get the worse punishment, I'm more terrible than all the others. He hears her voice say, "Whatever."

At the pit, a lick of flames swallow him, he cries out, "I'm the best thief, I plundered millions." The Dame replies, "Thievery is a different pit you dim-wit. Here you'll be a voiceless flame for your life of lies." He cries, "I'm the greatest liar!" but it was just more hot air. Nobody in Hell stops him from trying to be best.

In this eternity, the Dame roasts marshmallows over his flame and itemizes the lies he benefitted from. The other flames laugh at him. Sometimes she shows him the keys.

Dan Collins

Disclosure (I remember fireflies fondly)

I feel like a tall shadow, a penumbra
but my spirit totem is a firefly;

a firefly timing a spackle of light, replacing in snatches
what remains of the goddamn diminishing
sun.

A firefly fading—and finding itself caught in its own strobe-like
understanding, blinking in and out of some half-lucid world; a firefly

that lit, only wishes to ascend
in a surge of semaphore, echoing signals to venture its own transitory
credos in light—first one, then another. A penumbra

that asks

“What is this,
if not the cadence of grace?” A firefly revelation—(I remember, as
I stumbled in the dark, set back upon a heel.)

plundered

at the behest of a child
bound to prevail and then stand
fool arms flailing, flaunting their daub of destiny in a jar,

fulfilled. for that moment like a drunk

I have scanned
the enclosure, I am trying to filter through glass
to rasp a quickening

a last clear flash
in ecstasy
or agony

from this crystalline cage—I am beginning
to suspect that to thrive
(by design or chance) is not

what I had imagined.

PW Covington

The Cadence of Revelation

The cadence of revelation is echoing
From DNA to Do Not Disturb
 as clear as destiny
And we ascend the crystalline totem without filter

We scanned the heavens and horizon
We struggled to stand in the fulfilled grace of agony
 and plundered the last behest of the ancients
With a daub of design forced upon the tragedy

A fool surge in timing
This high tide of chance will prevail
Where confusion and delusion thrive
The rasp of dry cough cacophony
 trying to venture beyond
Coming to heel

Marked and marred by the daily trauma of trust

CJ Critt

RETIREMENT FREEFALL

Timing or the lack thereof — leading to the revelation —

“A fool and his money are soon parted”

The agony of loss — watching markets surge, thrive, soar, to ascend forever

Despite the inner knowledge

Such growth could never stand — could not prevail indefinitely

The totem of prosperity now brought down, fully stumbled, under the heel of cruel destiny

Chance laughing in quiet corner, the filter of good manners and grace a thing of last season

Rough prophesy fulfilled

Hope plundered by a bat bite creating a daub of deadly mist as nature's design is ever altered

Collective voice reduced to a rasp trying to make its cadence heard

“Adapt, endure, do not forget me”

Sound scanned for grains of good news, of fresh supplies, or just the joy of making noise

Aural waves that must now bravely venture forth at our collective behest

Echoing valiantly across vast empty plazas, clear and crystalline skies,

Scanned for a sunrise and the promise of life tomorrow.

dès Anges Cruser

Decision

As I scanned my options to prevail,
A crystalline memory did ascend.
Agony, with a clear lugubrious cadence,
Raked like a rasp across my soul.

Echoing from a portend
Of a destiny not fulfilled,
A call to grace does bubble up,
That I, a fool, do daub and filter.
I will not let it thrive or surge.

But at my daemon's persistent behest,
I must venture a solution.
Timing nipping at my heel,
Revelation out of reach,
I stumbled at last on a plundered totem
From a distant past moral stand
That I had taken by design.
I seize it now, trying to leave
Nothing to chance.

Patricia de Villiers

Venture

Is it worth the agony,
Just to have a chance to ascend
Above the echoing throng?
Listen to the clear behest of your destiny,
And surge ahead, unafraid, fulfilled,
Dancing to the cadence of grace.

The truth is your totem, your filter,
Even though it is plundered by the fool
Who stumbled across it,
His rasp a foil to your crystalline calling.

Remember when you scanned the horizon,
Searching for revelation,
Trying to stand tall when life beat you down?
The sun threw the clouds into fire,
The design displayed magnificently across the sky,
Calling you to thrive,
The heel that trod hard lifted,
Perfect timing, perfect love, at last.

And then you were willing to venture it all to prevail,
To daub the dappled sand of the earth
With your light.

Clint DeCamp

Journey

It's the agony of this venture,
I'm trying to ascend.
Behest, the totems call.

Love's cadence has perfect timing.
One more chance to thrive.
So clear my urge to surge.

Crystalline path, still I stumbled.
Daub in blood, still I stand.
Change design, mistakes scanned.

Is destiny my revelation?
My work echoing under rasp?
No filter can make prevail pretty.

Like any fool I've plundered.
Fulfilled only by my grace.
Head to heel, from first thought,
To my last step.

Alan Gann

Graffiti

for Emmitt

If your destiny is all rasp, concrete, and broken glass
 If you never venture to the mountain top
 never hear your own cry echoing or stand alone
 with all the grace and agony laid out before you—
 well imagine yourself
 scanned through the storyteller's filter
 your journey clear, the hero who never dies
 trying to ascend jagged cliff, but must prevail
 only after teetering on the edge
 why not thrive and spray your name in giant neon

If you've never stumbled barefoot along a sandy beach
 plundered seashells and laughed
 at revelation of salt wind, never been tumbled
 in last breaking wave
 If you fall asleep to the pop-crack cadence
 of a small caliber lullaby
 never lain in itchy grass trying to count a night sky
 If you've never carved a totem of stars, never been a fool
 lost in the woods, If you've never slept in a tree fort
 of your own improvised design

Born at the behest of chance, casual victim of timing
 why not paint your canvass sky crystalline blue
 daub cotton clouds and with a stroke
 tame the surge of wildest rivers and run fulfilled
 through lemon-yellow cornfields—
 why not let the wolf lick your bleeding heel?

Olivia Hadams

When Black Magic Lives

With agony, she stumbled
Scanned the crystalline shoreline for a venture of her design
To behest her potential
Surge her chance into Fate's heel
Stand firm in destiny fulfilled
A dream birthed from purpose revealed
Revelation to thrive,
Echoing voices from the afterlife
Grace placed blessings on her ancestor's totem
Timing told them
She's the last to prevail
Filter her cadence through a humble film,
Sporting a plundered grin
And it's clear she's trying to ascend
Past the evil existing within
Desperately striving to rasp liberty
When racists daub demons to melanin
Adhering sinister nature to her skin
Classify her as another fool who wasn't afraid to dream big,
She smiles bright in spite of their doubt
Knowing she already had what she needed,
In her infinite Black Magic pouch

Ann Howells

Circe Reflects Upon Her Life

Here on this mythic island, sirens ascend
to the cadence of beating waves.
I tell you I am but a spectator,
one who stumbled into this,
but I recall the timing,
trying to control the rasp and surge.

I stand, gather grace about my shoulders.
Porcine beasts snort and snuffle —
echoing, echoing. Pale skin
translucent, crystalline
as a half-measure of sea water.
It's destiny, I think; it's revelation.
If all tomorrows became agony by design,
would I?
Would I daub my blistered heel with salve
and venture on? Thrive? Even prevail?

I burn, dream fever dregs, names
powerful as demi-gods,
but names I've scanned all seem my own.
My totem is gauche, empty,
both plundered and fulfilled.
This is a last desperate chance;
I filter my hubris until it runs clear.
I arrived here a fool, but tell me,
at whose behest?

Lisa Huffaker

Still Trying

In case you stumbled into a sort of sightless grace;
in case the crystalline arrow piercing your heel might be poisoned
with revelation, like a fiery daub of venom, clear and sure,
forking a final surge of lightning through your failing limbs, you ran.

In case the ancient hope could still prevail,
in case the thing you lived for could stand,
and because you would venture your life for it if it could;
because having scanned the world for what you loved, you found it
missing, because through the filter of black noise nothing had yet emerged
you could point to and say *it was worth it — it was worth it for this*;

in case destiny could still be governed, or the design shaped even a little,
or if by ordaining yourself a fool, by reducing yourself
to a flapping shred of meat the echoing maw
could itself be fed, made at last to thrive, if hunger itself
could be fulfilled — not *hunger for* — but hunger
as being, as totem — hunger the seeing eye, hunger the dog
running beside you, always invisible and gigantic and loyal, always loyal,
timing your breath, clocking the cadence of your stride
as the music of its own want, want, want, you ran,
panting until you could hardly rasp its name: want,
and you threw it a bone, and a bone, another bone, all your bones,
for running, they say, is really a controlled fall. So bone on bone
on plundered bone, plummeting at the behest of want
you fell and you fell, in case through the skylight of exalted agony
you might suddenly ascend, in case falling inverted suddenly
into flight, in case by any chance at all
there was somewhere, anywhere
left to go.

Paul Koniecki

fortune favors the rich

My totem is a picture of the dead. Agony
can ascend at the behest of a crystalline
heel. Design stumbled in a surge like
artificial destiny. Paycheck to paycheck

chance is a repeated dirty word.
Their revelation is a bankrupt spell
bone-cast and putrefying somewhere
on a laugh-track for a laugh.

Their revelation is a capitalist venture.
Their cadence is a last rasp
echoing FOOL take me for a clear
and beneficent daub of grace.

Stand in the timing of our filter scanned
for your protection and thrive. Cacophonous
cadence called America forego the words
trying and plundered and you shall prevail

fulfilled. Fellow Earthlings read the previous
lines and know what we are up against.
They are a ball peen hammer carrying an
overpriced 'script. Hunger follows form.

Fortune fulfilled favors the felonious rich.

Kari Lynch
we used to sing, America.

i am watching a virus ascend on a country,
live on television, like everything else
“a one in three chance of catching it” the newscaster says,
echoing the expert he has just interviewed,
the agony of those suffering reported third hand

Men who live in crystalline houses busy themselves
making decisions for those in daub and wattle huts
assuring us that grace and health will prevail
“this sickness will not thrive!” They rasp
to fool after fool whose destiny is already clear

see, our lack of fortune was never just a flaw in timing,
but simply the system’s design
it turns out that the definition of wealth
was never a question of who is trying the hardest
but instead who has the most access

yet the best of America is always last in line — the heel of the bread —
those who stand at the checkout counter, at the bedside
who fulfilled requests from the Haves
stocked plundered shelves, braved the surge —
Essential

after i scanned my body for symptoms hoping for no new revelation,
i put on my work shirt and stumbled out the door
at the behest of the rent that’s due in two days
knowing this totem around my neck
would be the only protection i would have

you may hear the soft cadence of non-slip shoes and prayers
as we venture onward,
but there will be no singing.
because a broken system will filter away every song
and fortune does not always favor the brave

Adam S. Mahout

The Last City of Pomegranates

Chance the clear cadence of destiny echoing
past the last city of pomegranates
plundered by grace; stand as a fool, fulfilled,
at the edge of this agony and ascend its twisted stair
like those who stumbled among the stars
only to fall again into the sea.

What of this venture could prevail
in the muted rasp of the nightingale
timing her revenge upon a Thracian bough,
a totem asking of us more than we can bear?

Underneath the dark revelation of sky,
this realm of suffering, its design,
specific and irreducible; the wound
trying at our heel through the surge of the past
appears to us a cruel filter
at the behest of which we live
on the expectation for the daub of compensation.

Nothing scanned beneath the tyrant sun is crystalline,
but this infinite distance, this tearing apart
through which its echo flies
weighing its body against the silence:
this, our fortune, the wound of our lives...
When we have learned to thrive, to hear the silence,
this is what we grasp more distinctly through it.

Susan Mardele

Prescience

Decision timing is my greatest challenge.
It is an agony trying to get clear.

I have stumbled so many times,
impulsiveness my Achilles heel.

Am I a fool, jumping too soon,
or do I stand fast hoping for the grace of certainty?

Will my decision surge forward beneath me
or rasp roughly over the harmony of my life?

Sometimes I believe I have a destiny,
a design to my life...

A divine cadence daily being fulfilled.

Other times I believe I'm the last thing
on any divine being's mind...

My total Godly behest a mere daub of prescience
rather than a sumptuous, crystalline revelation.

Is God a mere totem,
representative but with no power?

I want to know for certain that in any venture
I will thrive, not only today, but far into the future.

That I will prevail, ascend to the heights,
my success echoing in my life's chambers.

I have scanned everything I know
to filter for answers.

I have plundered the ideas of others,
searching for peace.

And yet I do not find answers or peace there.

The only peace I find is in a power
who gives me the freedom...

To take a chance on my own imperfect choices
and carries me safely through the tempests of fortune.

James Mendur

Saying Goodbye to My Dog

You came to heel one last time, with fading grace,
stumbled a little, came to stand in your place
by my side 'til I crouched so you could lick my face.

No one else saw me with such clear, crystalline gaze
until time, a pirate, plundered your too short days
and took you, the totem of all my praise.

Good boy. You led me out of my own depths to ascend
every hill, and we walked to see just beyond the next bend.
We scanned the horizon trying to chase the rainbow's end.

For a while I dreamed that the two of us might prevail
and cheat the timing of our fates, and stay hale
and thrive until we *both* would one day fail.

Now I daub my eyes with tears and the agony I feel,
the echoing in my heart, is all too real.
A surge of sadness. I will never truly heal.

The cadence of my life, disrupted, now you're gone.
Your breath's last rasp seemed to chase away the dawn
but still your love does filter pain, so I can carry on.

Destiny was a fool to design one such as you,
such a short-lived revelation to me and to all who
would chance to see all the things that you do.

That you did. A friend to the last, you came at my behest,
a companion ready to venture with me on any quest,
my life fulfilled by, of all Man's friends, the best.

Sherry Lou Mills

DECEPTIVE DISRUPTION

In AGONY she STUMBLED into another horrendous VENTURE.

Was it CHANCE,

Was it DESTINY,

Was it by devious DESIGN,

Would it be, could it be a REVELATION?

Must PREVAIL,

Must make this STAND,

Maybe this time a possibility to THRIVE,

To ASCEND the obstacle that PLUNDERED all confidence

And FULFILLED the expectation of a FOOL.

A LAST SURGE, a HEEL dug in,

The irregular CADENCE set at the BEHEST of her unreliable TOTEM.

She SCANNED for options but no FILTER could CLEAR the rampant ECHOING of repeated failure,

The RASP of unfortunate TIMING continuing to DAUB her memories.

She has no CRYSTALLINE answer,

Only a hope for GRACE in a life of TRYING.

Rylee Moore

A Disclosure On Life

Life is hard by design.

Thrown together like a daub painting, life is short of grace. The innocent are plundered of all the means they had to reach their destiny. Left with no chance, it's clear the only solution is to venture further into the depths of the unknown.

I am a fool. I was born, made to live, at whose behest? I've been trained to heel to all who have the illusion they are above me.

The agony one can endure from the ones they've trusted to love them is far greater than the strength they'll have to reverse the damage. Being taught you come last to a false totem is hard to unlearn.

What makes God a god?

Taking back a life you've barely known, one of freedom and happiness, is like jumping into a lake not knowing how to swim. What's right and what's wrong? There's no filter for the good and the bad.

I've made a stand determined to prevail. I've stumbled upon a crystalline purpose demanding to be fulfilled.

I've scanned my ticket to ascend into greatness. In my future there's a rasp of a revelation, a means to thrive.

There's no such thing as the perfect timing.

A surge of inspiration. I'm doing my best. I'm trying my hardest.

A song that is sung with an echoing cadence.

I'm trying. I'm trying. I'm trying.

Matthew Nelson

Window of Opportunity

Amidst traffic's rasp stolid glass towers stand splotched in shimmering
pre-dawn lustrous pink crystalline
glitter mingling with some new color, some
sublimely elusive gray wane—street-level
revelation
of cadence of echoing square windows that simply ascend and
numb, some
sleek clear wattle and daub filter
scanned for the fateful grace of the fulfilled
fool whose clockwork rucks surge and thrive
driven to a stumbled crush by the luminescent translucence of a stellar mirage
pocked with silhouettes:
ad venture sirens' insidious rhythms trying to heel
destiny to the timing
of a blasé jingle lauding the newly
plundered—regardless, thralls
prevail and at the behest of the neon green
totem of agony
bow down. Dare I
chance it?
Dare I
at last
buck the design?

Sir Lawrence Pickens

The Unforeseen Journey

It was clear to me I was in agony as my screams shook the sky.
His arrival was great but my timing was late and as a fool I stood wondering why.
His behest was fast, the echoing torment was rasp and my destiny was now fulfilled.
The revelation was swift but His grace a gift if only I accepted the truth and lived.
My excuses wouldn't prevail and my trying a fail as my soul continued to cry.
I stumbled from grace, left my soul at stake and didn't know that day I would die.
His Eyes scanned the earth looking for the worth in man He would call to ascend.
My ears were the filter to receive and decipher the truth from a life of sin.
The design of life is to stand and thrive as a totem while we exist.
Until from head to heel we lay crystalline in fields and our time is turned to mist.
If I could get back what I plundered I would save the world from the hunter of men and eternity in hell.
But that prayer has past and I'm left at last with the memories in this fiery cell.
His cadence finally came and my venture in vain as chance ran out of days.
Now I daub my face in great disgrace as the surge of flames announce my shame.

Gayle Reaves-King

A Vocabulary For The New Age

Begin with A for agony.

True, other ages have had their pains — torture,
slavery, Holocaust, hunger, war, but this we feel deep
in our pockets. Behest — that's like gifting. At the behest
of CEOs and bankers, masks and guns, we forget
the plea for simple words, ascend
the ladder from clear nature to leaky vessels parked
in virtual garages that do not keep us warm
at night, our language swelling like something trying for release
from pressure. Destiny

is a good one — an old term echoing
with new meaning, no more sense of design fulfilled, but now
a revelation of plundered grace, horizon scanned
for totem signs, no chance
that the great auk or saber-toothed cat will come back
to add their splendid paces to the stuttering cadence
of this rattletrap planet. Crystalline — how rivers flow

when humans stand at a halt, brought to heel
for a moment by their own exhaust, filter to the
blue-green daub of waves on canvases, little birds, iridescence
of a dragonfly's wings, timing of a seedling's
emergence from the dirt. So many

of the repurposed syllables are forgettable,
where meaning has leached out — Surge. Thrive.
Venture. Prevail. Prevail, the ultimate hollow win, all of them
corporate cartoons, soggy cartons into which
our mouths have stumbled, cardboard vaults
for our fortunes. And the last rasp of one that means
the same as always: Fool.

Priscilla Rice

Loba (Self-Sacrifice, Self-Love)

It was the night my totem appeared in a dream
 A she-wolf, una *loba*, who stood outside the door
 I was inside with my ex, and I could hear the rasp of her voice
 The agony, echoing in the dark and the howls of lament and *rabia*,
 The cadence of her heart, in sync with mine
 She was either trying to call to me — or kill me
 I, a stubborn woman by design, in a house with her *ex-amor*
 An unmerciful, unfaithful man who had plundered all the logic that once existed in my brain
 But I had to filter out all the bad people, *las malas influencias*, from my life
 I had a choice — I could stay here with this *fool*
 Or I could open the door, ascend into the dark, into what was waiting for me
 Was I willing to take the chance, and venture into the unknown?
 I scanned his face one last time, looking for any sign of humanity
 I felt a surge of emotions, but destiny was calling and she wasn't going to wait for me
Ciao amore, I said, leaving a daub of lipstick on his lip
 One last stand, before giving in to my *loba*
 Rumi said to gamble everything for love
 And I was — for self-love
 My destiny was to be fulfilled
La loba behest me to make a move
 It was clear that I had to show her that love would prevail, and I opened the door
Y la pobre had blood in her mouth, as if she had been in a terrible fight — *conmigo*, with me.
 But she stood there in all her grace
 This was no accident or chance encounter I had stumbled into — this was my *destino*
 I dug one heel and then the other into the Earth, firm in my position
 I looked her straight in her crystalline eyes, and I saw her revelation
 I then woke up, with the corazon and the courage of a loba

Christopher Stephen Soden

Icarus

My papa, Daedalus, the first architect,
vowed I'd thrive, inviting me to follow
at his heel. Intoxicated by the lullaby
of his rasp and hammer, echoing

through my slumber, I'd stand beside him
while he scanned each design, trying
to make certain his mechanisms
would last. He'd never filter discourse,

but spoke to me as an adult. Clear
and direct. His totem was the crow. Cunning
and devious. Unable to resist the glint
of the forbidden. Who thought he'd venture

the wings I imagined? Laboring months,
convinced he'd prevail. He'd daub each feather,
plundered from falcons, with tallow. When we
found the perfect mountain, he was

meticulous, timing for the strongest updrafts.
Perhaps if I'd ever felt actual agony.
Perhaps if I'd enlisted to obey
the centurion's behest. The cadence

of warriors gleaming, in buffed bronze.
Perhaps if I'd stumbled, I might have
ignored the surge, the revelation
of velocity. I would have hesitated

to ascend to a destiny so sadly fulfilled.
Who could have known the grace
of swimming infinite blue, crystalline
sky, was a game of chance? My father

will always be remembered as the genius
and I, the fool.

Kristan Taylor
Tiny Goldmine

You scanned the area as if it were the first time you had plundered

Your timing was crystalline: the last moments of light, the broken bulb on top of the totem

A surge of parking lot birds echoing in the crisp summer air announced the magic hour

These were trying times, so said a fool who never really knew agony

You watched as the man stumbled, lowering himself from his car. Distracted, he emitted a rasp of air into the curve of his elbow and armed himself with a cloth mask, flimsy as the filter you use (and reuse) for your morning coffee. You analyzed his cadence as he faded out of sight.

Now is your chance.

You stand next to the passenger door — these older cars, by design, are so inviting — with a clear view of the fruits of your venture. With swift grace (no hesitation, no nervous glances), it would happen like this:

Open the door, grab the parrot, close the door, allow the sizable daub of oil on the pavement to glide your heel as you pivot away.

The parrot squirmed and you loosened your grasp at its piercing behest, then quickly slipped him up inside your t-shirt, where he scratched the narrow folds of your belly. It'll be worth it. You know it will happen like this:

Call your guy, sell the bird, your family will thrive (for a week, at best)

It was no revelation, just the way things were

You make it to your bike, the one you share with your daughter, the one that embodies what it means to prevail. Like a prophecy fulfilled, it starts to rain. You tighten your fist around the fringed handle. The parrot manages to ascend your thin chest and peck your chin with his generous beak. He's far from silent. More than once he almost escapes out the neck of your t-shirt. *Don't be stupid; you wouldn't get very far.*

The back tire, misshapen, slaps out a rhythm as you hum

This

This is not

This is not my

This is not my destiny.

Clara Bush Vadala

what we mean when we say passionate

We were just trying to fool ourselves.
The last time, our cadence was off,
and the chance to clear our throats
came too late. Instead of using a filter
for our water, we listened for the dirt particles
echoing in our glasses and scanned the liquid
for dog hair, cat fur, tiny pieces of dust. We fulfilled
our thirst with the kind of grace that ignores
the incoming argument to stand up and gulp
anyway. We didn't look at each other.
It wasn't agony, exactly.

At each other's behest, we wanted to ascend,
to make crystalline the rasp of our voices,
to turn on our heel toward revelation,
but instead we stumbled and yelled. The old fights,
which thrive and surge each time we think
we might prevail, venture out again
and leave us feeling plundered. Our faces turn
blood vessel red, as if we daub them with paint,
and we each become, in those moments,
a totem of anger. In every destiny
there is design. Ours is all about the timing.

Troy Shizuo Yamaguchi

Islanders

We always gambled the quality of New Year's Eve; it was
 Agony or victory, no exceptions;
 Except I was too loaded to care that year: fat, sated, fulfilled —
 A fool dropping filter after filter on the carpet;
 The cadence increasing as the ball drops in New York... Chicago... Los Angeles;
 And as we ascend towards God's greater grace;
 Our once crystalline minds now a daub-a-Daisy-dollop of lustrous chemicals.

At 10:45 it's about that time. Before we pursue destiny we must
 Prevail over what's left of our shoelaces. Okay. No.
 That's the heel of the thing; you've got it on backwards.

We venture: clear air; the late-night totem store fifteen minutes away; but that
 One mile of wasteland, God's great design, stretches out, and expands.
 It's enormous and lightless and empty. And we
 Stumbled in place. And we scanned the sloping horizon for our future. And it
 Was so difficult to stand
 When the night stayed dark.

It's same pre-recorded ceremony in the store.
 It's the same behest tugging at the poor counter boy;
 It's the same end-of-the-line on the way back but we
 Surge
 Our voices echoing from one side of this plundered rock to the other.

Then — ten seconds — scratching furiously for
 The chance to kill something that was once alive; to thrive is
 Timing your final hit to the last rasp of the year; it's
 Trying to hold your breath and scream simultaneously; it's
 A feeling like agony, or anxiety, or the revelation that dear God your
 \$4000 has just become \$1400; and okay —
 That's not so bad. It's a death left to the dregs of the old year.

Champagne.
 Cheers.

About the Contributors

Marisa Adame is a storyteller/creative from Dallas. She is founder of Colibrósa Productions and has acted internationally. Manuscripts include *girl becomes collateral // neurotica* (2018 Andrés Montoya Poetry Prize semifinalist), *butterfly bombs* (2017 Lorien Prize finalist), and the forthcoming chapbook *reconquista*, which explores heritage, time as an unwelcome capitalist construct, and mental health through the imagery of the Southwest and ghost-roots of Native American ancestry. Published by *Mad Swirl*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Red Savina Review*, *Hold the Line*, and elsewhere, Adame can be found on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube @marisaadameofficial.

Katherine Baxter is a 16 year-old with a passion for creating art in all forms. She hopes to share her feelings, ideas, and views in a way that will reach hearts.

Gayle Bell's work has been featured in numerous anthologies, print, and online publications. In 2018 she performed "Black Betty, That Thang's Gone Wild," with *Cara Mia's Storytellers*, *Building Communities*. In 2013-2014, she heralded LGBTQY achievements as a co-docent for the "My Immovable Truth—A Dallas Lineage" exhibition at the African American Museum of Dallas. Her book *Blue Jazz Sunday Brunch* is available on Amazon.com.

Kshounish Bhadra-Bhaduri is an 11th-grade student at Alcuin School. They are an Eagle Scout and have earned a black belt in Taekwondo. A guitarist, vocalist, and writer, they enjoy video games, STEM activities, logic challenges, and puzzles of all kinds. They aspire to be an architect, building solutions for the world's problems. Find them on Instagram: @kshou_nish.

Eve Castle writes poetry and short stories. She sometimes enjoys anagrams. Her work has 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 hopes to become a full-time writer by 2022. You can find her on Twitter @Eve_Castle.

Dan Collins is an artist and poet grateful for Dallas' creative community. His poetry has been published in *Blue Mesa Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *The Boiler*, *Entropy*, *[out of nothing]*, *Redivider*, *The New Guard*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, the *White Rock Zine Machine*, *The Blue Moon Observer*, and a previous edition of The Writer's Garret Common Language Project. He is a Cloudworker and former curator for Pandora's Box Poetry Showcase. He is co-owner and operator of Tree House Studio.

PW Covington writes in the beat tradition of the North American highway. He is a Pushcart nominee and his 2019 collection *North Beach and Other Stories* was named a Finalist in LGBTQ Fiction by the International Book Awards. Covington lives in New Mexico, two blocks off of Historic Route 66.

CJ Critt is a lifelong performing artist who has appeared on and off Broadway, at the National Poetry Slam, Stage West, Dallas Theater Center, Theatre III, PS 122, and the Nuyorican Poets Cafe (in NYC). She was a staff writer and voice artist for Disney Radio, created *The Angry Girl Sextet* — described as “the all-chick cocktail of liquid language” — is the voice of 170 audio books as an ace narrator and narration coach, and is the writer/producer of *The Pollinators*, the save-the-bees/save-the-world rock musical.

dès Anges Crusier was born in Washington DC and holds degrees in French, public administration and psychology. She has served as a commissioned officer in the US Navy, practiced as a psychologist, and worked as a senior manager of behavioral health systems. A retired associate professor of research in the mental sciences, she currently lives in Fort Worth, and works in healthcare consulting. Although she has published in scientific journals, Crusier now appreciates having the time to develop her creative literary life.

Patricia de Villiers is from Cape Town, South Africa, and has lived in Dallas for the last 20 years. She teaches English at Dallas International School.

Clint DeCamp is a 44-year-old poet from the Pacific Northwest who now resides in Hurst. He has recently rediscovered writing, finding it a great source of healing over the years. He is happy to share his work on his blog decampwords.com and on Instagram @decamp.words.

Alan Gann is a teaching artist-poet who tutors and facilitates writing workshops at Texans Can Academy. He is the author of two volumes of poetry, *That's Entertainment* (Lamar University Press, 2018) and *Adventures of the Clumsy Juggler* (Inkbrush Press, 2014), as well as *DaVerse Works*, a performance poetry curriculum (Big Thought, 2013). Alan's nonexistent spare time is spent outdoors: biking, birding, and trying to photograph some of the cool things he sees there.

Olivia Hadams is a third-generation Jamaican descendant born and raised in Dallas. Her thirst for poetry fueled her passion to become president of a collegiate poetry society (the Brainy Acts Poetry Society) at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, LA. Since her graduation from NSU in 2015, where she obtained her bachelor's degree in biology, she has competed in poetry competitions such as Texas Grand Slam in 2018 and the Women of the World Poetry Slam in 2020. Her ultimate goal is to encourage and heal all those who hear her poetry.

Ann Howells edited *Illya's Honey* for eighteen years. Her books are *Under a Lone Star*, the anthology *Cattlemen & Cadillacs* (as editor), *So Long As We Speak Their Names*, and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky*. Her four chapbooks include *Black Crow in Flight* and *Softly Beating Wings*, which won the 2017 William D. Barney Competition from Blackbeard Books. Ann's work has appeared in *Spillway*, *Little Patuxent Review*, and *The Langdon Review*, among others. She has received seven Pushcart nominations.

Lisa Huffaker writes poetry and essays, sings with the Dallas Opera, and makes art. Her poems have appeared in *32 Poems*, *Southwest Review*, *The Boiler*, *Able Muse*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. In her micropublishing project *White Rock Zine Machine*, she transforms vending machines into sculptures offering tiny books of art and writing. She offers workshops on writing and book arts at the Nasher Sculpture Center and was recently C3 Visiting Artist at the Dallas Museum of Art. Her installation, "Code Room," is currently on view at Ro2 Art.

Paul Koniecki lives and writes in Dallas. He was once chosen for the John Ashbery Home School Residency. He is the Associate Editor of *Thimble Literary Magazine*. His books of poetry are available from Kleft Jaw Press, NightBallet Press, Dark Particle Press, and Spartan Press.

Kari Lynch writes, teaches, and performs in North Texas. Her work has appeared in *Honey & Lime* and *Crêpe & Penn* literary magazines. She enjoys teaching kids that writing can save their lives. She has been featured in both previous Common Language Project anthologies.

Adam S. Mahout is an undergraduate at the University of North Texas. His poems have been published in the *International Human Rights Arts Festival*, *North Texas Review*, and *Spiderweb Salon*.

Susan Mardele has been writing poetry since she was 11. A member of the Mockingbird Poetry Society and Poetry Society of Texas, she works in website management, does freelance writing and continues to write her award-winning poetry. Having spent much of her life in the country, she now lives in McKinney.

James Mendur has visited and lived in a number of strange and exotic places, including Ireland, China, New England, and Indiana, before moving to Texas. He works for a large corporation, which doesn't give him a lot of time for writing, but he writes a lot of flash fiction and a bit of poetry when he can. His website is seekingthewayout.wordpress.com and he can be found on Twitter as @JamesMendur. He currently lives in Denton County and still wants to get a new puppy. Yes, even after writing that poem. He says it's worth it.

Sherry Lou Mills is a retired award-winning filmmaker and active writer and artist. She had both her knees replaced in 2015. She is married to David Holt and is a doting mother to furbabies Chloe dog and Jasper and Woodrow kitties.

Rylee Moore is a Texas girl born and raised. She's 17 years old and finishing up her junior year in high school. After high school, she plans on to go to college and study forensic psychology. She is currently at work on her first collection of poetry.

Matthew Nelson is a Dallas native. He has an MFA in creative writing from Texas State University and currently teaches college writing in Dallas and Collin counties.

Sir Lawrence Pickens is a long-time local writer/poet who has performed in several venues in the Dallas area and is known for his inspirational messages. He was a member of the music group ALTAR that produced the album *At Last*. He started an international men's call in 2016, to build up and encourage men worldwide. He is currently working on his poetry album *Take Me Away*, to be released later this year, and believes we are all here to change the world not just by making a difference but by being the difference.

Gayle Reaves-King is a poet, editor, educator and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. Her chapbook *Spectral Analysis* was published by the Dallas Poets Community, and her poems have appeared in various journals and anthologies. In four decades as a journalist, Reaves-King has reported from all over the world, for papers ranging from *Fort Worth Weekly* to *The Washington Post* and for magazines such as the *Texas Observer*, *D*, and *American Way*. For the last several years she has edited *The Best American Newspaper Narratives* anthologies, published by UNT Press. She lives in Fort Worth.

Priscilla Rice is a Pleasant Grove-based poet, storyteller, and actor. She has performed in shows by Cara Mia Theatre, Bishop Arts Theatre Center, Dallas Children's Theater, and Artstillery. Priscilla is also an interpreter in the education field, as well as a traffic reporter/producer for KRLD radio. She co-founded "Verse & Rhythm" with B. Randall and Rafael Tamayo, and is a member of Tejana Cosmica, an experimental poetry collective. Priscilla currently represents District 5 on the City of Dallas' Arts and Culture Advisory Commission.

Christopher Stephen Soden received his MFA in Creative Writing (Poetry) in January 2005 from Vermont College of Fine Arts. His poetry has appeared in numerous venues including *Rattle* and *The Texas Observer*. Short plays of his have been staged at Bishop Arts Theatre Center, The MAC, and Nouveau 47. He's also written film and theatre critique for Examiner.com, Dallas Art Beat, and sharpcritic.com. A dedicated and energetic contributor to the literary community of Dallas, he teaches and lectures on craft, theory, genre and explication. Christopher's poetry and critique collections *Closer* and *Delicate Tiger. Ferocious Snowflake.* are available through Amazon.

Kristan Taylor is a bilingual teacher who dabbles in translation, editing, and experimental prose. She recently created a poetry table game, which is currently in development. She lives in Oak Cliff with her husband and three dogs. She does not own a bird.

Clara Bush Vadala is a North Texas poet and veterinarian. Her poems have appeared in *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *SWWIM*, and *Okay Donkey Lit Mag*, and have been featured locally as a part of the Pegasus Reading Series and Poets on X+. She has published two books of poetry, both available from Finishing Line Press: *Beast Invites Me In* (2020) and *Prairie Smoke* (2017).

Troy Shizuo Yamaguchi is a writer of short fiction and poetry living in Dallas. "Islanders" is his first published work.



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