



The Writer's Garret
The Common Language Project: Passages
2022

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May 2022

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THE COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT: PASSAGES | 2022

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 30 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 27th anniversary in 2022, "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 National Endowment for the Arts grants, countless awards from the Texas Commission on the Arts, 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.

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About The Common Language Project: Passages

*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 we invite you into the liminal space of passages—of time, of space, of thought. What shadowy corridors have you entered or emerged from? Which voyage in your life's journey brought you into a new age? How have you arrived where you are, and where did you arrive from? Lead us through hidden tunnels, paint portals to revelations extraordinary and mundane, beckon us beyond the next threshold to reveal the treasures that await.

The Common Language

Contestants were asked to use all 30 of the following words in any order, as they appear, without changes in tense or form:

ambiguous	extract	reclaim
arrival	figured	roundabout
asylum	forbidding	startle
bundle	meandering	trim
bracing	migratory	undaunted
clamber	outpace	underneath
consuming	provisioned	unmapped
course	pulled	unto
dampen	quantum	wearied
dusty	reckless	will

Judges' Comments

Tarfia Faizullah

I am struck by how “passage” can connote a page of a book as well as a process of moving through and across. This seems particularly fitting given how much we have all been through these last few years. A worthy aim of The Common Language is to unite us in the process of writing through a shared vocabulary; I find it fascinating that for me, that occurs most resonantly through individual stories. I was drawn to and moved by poems that were able to tell a specific story while also making use of the words more generally. After all, it is through the celebration of our singular stories, and the ways in which we are distinct from each other, that we find true solidarity.

Lisa Huffaker

Thank you for the opportunity to read these poems. It was fascinating to see how the thirty words brought the poems into conversation with one another, and how the poets responded to them and deployed them in similar or different ways. The theme of Passages feels so perfect for this moment, with our world in so many types of transition. It was gratifying to read about journeys ranging in scale from deeply personal life-shifts to global migration. The best thing I take from my reading experience is the feeling that these journeys are connected within a larger human story. I'm grateful to the writers for giving me the collective gift of that vision. Here are the poems I believe addressed the challenge most skillfully and artfully. And I would like to add that while they may not be included in the anthology, there are poems I could not select due to competitive space, that will stay with me because of the great human stakes the poets brought into the work. I'm grateful to every entrant for contributing to this conversation. I'll be thinking of many passages for a long time to come.

Sherrie Zantea (Candy)

This year judging the poems submitted for The Common Language Project was inspiring. Each poet provided a unique approach within their life's experiences metaphorically through their own passage of time.

Some poems were very personal, as we were limited to 10 poems to choose for the anthology, each poem was written beautifully.

A Note on the Text

Due to the constraints of the standard trade paperback format, certain poems may appear longer than 30 lines. When a composed line is longer than the page will allow, the remainder of the text appears indented. Text in prose poems wrap as dictated by the space of the page. As originally composed, submitted, and selected, all poems were 30 lines or shorter.

Archie Abaire
I Am Nature

I am Matter, I am Odyssey, I am Spirit.

I am each quantum of your substance.
You pulled elements from underneath my skin
and devoured them to fend off your hunger.
Have you figured yourself able to extract from me
without debt? What you are consuming I will reclaim;
your dusty remains are your payment.
I will bury you to feed your offspring.
You are their asylum from want.

I am each quantum of your quest.
As you travel through worlds of mind and spirit
bear a trim bindle; little that you provisioned
avails you on this journey.
Whether you outpace others with undaunted stride,
whether you clamber over boulders in dull pain,
whether your course is straight, is roundabout
or meandering in this unmapped world, you endure
a migratory life with no place of arrival.
Every asylum lies behind you.

I am each quantum of your soul.
I give you bracing for this dusty world.
Fellow migrants may startle you or dampen your spirit.
Reckless or wearied, forbidding or seductive,
relate unto them like unto specters.
Press on with undaunted will.
Embrace the ambiguous.
Madness reigns in that asylum called Certainty.

Beth Barron

Immigrants Who Guide My Journey

Before Bartholdi's lady graced the harbor, Grandfather Carl tossed
his bindle onto a ship.

Unaccompanied minor, underneath the deck, he reeked of fish
as he took a meandering trip.

In the Big Easy, he provisioned his family stitching suits others
bought.

Let them come legally like him, I once thought.

Two decades later Berda Jo's daddy shivered, walking on water,
across unmapped Lake Erie.

After his arrival in the bracing cold, with his will and with fear he
wandered down to the Mississippi Delta, undocumented but
undaunted.

His daughter Berda Jo figured Chinese should be hidden, not flaunted.
Pulled from the white school, Jim Crow sentenced her to a dirt floor
class; and,

the Supreme Court let bigotry outpace justice—separate, unequal
the law of the land.

In 1941, just before Berda Jo's husband broke a race barrier at
Rice University,

Pearl Harbor introduced my friend Alice and her family to adversity.
Rocking over clacking rails, taken by force, only one suitcase allowed,
of course.

Living first in a horse stable, an extract from her home living in
a shack.

Seventy thousand U.S. citizens and fifty thousand residents, Asian
eyes dripping salt tears.

Before they could reclaim their lives, reckless rules detained many
for years.

After all, Dr. Seuss said those forbidding eyes made them saboteurs.
But white laborers like my trim and slight daddy and his father were
entrepreneurs—

Their German roots failed to dampen their welcome while they supported the war their way.

A quantum leap to today:

Eleven million undocumented residents provide our country with affordable labor—friends without benefits, not consuming our wealth, but generating more.

My friend Alejandra's life travels an uncertain course, her ambiguous DACA status unstable.

Thousands clamber across the roundabout border or swelter in dusty tents awaiting a new status.

And the needs of Ukrainians startle us, distract our attention from others wanting intervention.

More migratory crowds will seek asylum, but only the flavor of the month may enter and apply.

Come unto me all ye who are wearied, heavy-laden, Lady Liberty cries.

Oh, wait, that was Jesus.

Gillian Barth
Translation

Yo soy Guillermo, he says at my arrival in Papagayo, that
 almost-island hanging
 like a nest. A bundle of ficus & fig,
 extract of moss & vine, tied
 to the provincial limb, Guanacaste. Shoulder of Costa Rica,
Father, he says, palm pressed to his chest, figured against
 the sun. Oropendolan,
 he tells me this, driving
 each roundabout down
 meandering fields of cane. I am here
 to outpace the bray. That ambiguous breeze
 kicks up dirt & I am dusty, wearied
 from stem to root. I've lost track —
 pulled underneath forbidding heat consuming
 my trim & pane. I have come to reclaim
 with sticky thighs bracing the wind. I am tinged
 at the end but feeling like I've begun. Speaking the language,
Cuántos niños? I understand Will
 when he says *perdí uno*, I lost one.
 Words you are forced to use, how they clamber
 on your back — migratory, unmapped. Undaunted by claps,
 they startle. *Eres Católica?* he asks.
No, no más.
 His eyes dampen. *Yo también.* But I have faith
 & that's enough for me.

Yo, tú, me, you, it's quantum, how much hangs
 & how to avoid being reckless. We say oropendola, not grackle.
 Will delivers me
 unto that almost-island, asylum, Peninsula Papagayo,
 my course provisioned with sugar.

Lorlee Bartos

Like a River

Car accident, sepsis, brain tumor
while love and memory abide
underneath the devastation,
each loss is consuming

Meandering the forbidding path of grief
seeking to extract meaning
wearied, you assume
grief like a river
must flow in one direction
a path like that of migratory birds
with a beginning and an end

HA!
the road is unmapped, ambiguous, dusty
not figured for comfort
akin to the halls of a deserted asylum

Just as you reclaim a quantum of equilibrium
a memory, photo, a card will appear
to startle, dampen, outpace your recovery
you are pulled into an endless roundabout

Courage will need bracing
reckless actions avoided
undaunted, you must summon the will
to clamber back onto the course

Pick up your bundle
trim your expectations
hope for arrival unto the place
where you finally understand

healing is not linear

Provisioned with this understanding
your journey resumes

Bonnie Blackman
Death is Not Ambiguous

Death is not ambiguous.

It announces its arrival without ceremony, just a final tiny bulge
of pulse in the neck.

In its wake comes a terrible asylum from suffering.

This asylum carries something new in its bindle, a yawning hole
impervious to bracing, impossible to clamber out of, consuming
dreams in its course.

Try as we might to dampen the dusty horror, it must extract our joy.

Even if he figured to protect us from the forbidding path he had
to follow, its meandering progress enlisted us all in its unrelenting
migratory march.

Gambling to outpace it, provisioned, prayerful, he pulled another
quantum of poison in reckless hope.

Trying to reclaim time he wanted to hold, he continued, in a
roundabout way, to startle us with his love of life.

Even as we watched the disease trim him away, he remained
undaunted.

Underneath his wasted shell existed unmapped reserves.

Unto whom, now, do I cast my wearied, weeping will?

Melinda Buchanan
Unmapped Journey

A reckless assurance of health
Shattered by the startle of lost balance
and slurred words

Not provisioned for this journey, we clamber
Through tests and acronyms: PSA, MRI, ECG
Seeking asylum in ambiguous
Results
Wearied from bracing for another hit

Then:
That diagnosis consuming
Hope
Stage Four
Metastasized
A parallel universe; quantum subatomic realm
Where a disease worms underneath

Migratory, meandering, lost
We dampen our ideals
Trim our dreams; forbidding the future we figured
Working to outpace fear

Packing our will into a bundle
An extract of hope pulled from faith
Setting out on a course
To reclaim our joy on this unmapped
Unwilling journey

Finally, dusty but determined
Our roundabout arrival unto
acceptance of uncertainty
Spirits undaunted

Brian Builta

**The Loss of a Child Is Like Another Womb,
Another Dark Birth into Uncertain Light**

All these trim, well-suited skeletons underground
Their bodies pulled from sparks
Even reckless sex can't fix
A roundabout way to say
Surely there's a better way to bury a body
Than all these dusty dark boxes
Prayers meandering the graveyard in search of
Ears fixed and figured for a fall
Eternity will always outpace a bloodstream
The arrival of oxygen just in time for the funeral
Your heart the little bundle stiff bouncing along the road
One thumb hitched for a ride off course, the clamber
Never getting easier despite the roadside
Asylum offering a clean restroom
Dragonflies abuzz despite the language barrier
And ambiguous directions, the start and startle
Of going anywhere to reclaim your spark
The quantum suicide rate barely a blip
While the migratory pattern of radical politicians
Steals the headlines, provisioned as we are
For reality television – just once I'd like to extract
A rainbow from a thunderstorm instead of this forbidding
Dark mass that threatens to dampen my getting older
Bracing for a fall while consuming
More than my share of Nilla Wafers
Underneath which my system creaks and moans
Unto the end of time or at least until
My will will falter, this clever little machine of definite heft
Wearied by the world, but motoring along
The unmapped path anyway, stupid yet undaunted.

Alex Chand
the poet seeks asylum

wearied let me rest
in the shallows underneath the trim

and wake of the waves. in mykolaiv
a man is ravaged in the wreck.

he presses his palm unto the sky
but feels shadows, ambiguous, startle his dusty fist.

this is the world: a body
holding its chest, its ribs

figured into the crags of cosmic
rubble. if the stars exist,

quantum, their explosions
unsettle like the inverse

of rockets consuming tiles of ocean
beneath my feet; they clamber and sing

like turtle-doves the man
sees beating their plumes on the wing

of migratory dawn. there is weight bracing to a body,
pulled, reckless, and with the arrival of war, undaunted

by the course of unmapped tides
meandering to the depths.

a body will outpace the smoke of guns
forbidding at day. fractured

let me reclaim the bone,
extract the flesh, and suture.

let me dampen my throat with the bindle
of hearts provisioned in a roundabout of rubble.

Helen Chandler
She Bothers Me

She has
well provisioned and forbidding running feet
that
outpace and startle asylum seeking migratory
creatures
as they clamber furiously so as not to be
pounded underneath – smashed
too indistinguishable for any kin or friend
to extract and reclaim their dusty bodies,
suddenly fossil-like, some supine,
buried next to or underneath
trim bindle bundles carting only
the most necessary
things.

“We are not
sure,” a Polish woman said yesterday.
“Some say two million. Yes?
No, we are not yet figured out how
to help them when they make arrival. Women, children — they are
wearied,
making way unto a course known before like back of hand
now ambiguous and forbidding.
It is consuming to all refugee.”
Meanwhile, hers is an undaunted, reckless, unmapped daily
meandering
fixed first into a bracing pulled tight ponytail
now swishing oddly roundabout in defiance of quantum
will.
I dampen my mouth with water
and admit, with guilt, that
she bothers me.

Elle Chavis

This Responsibility of Mine

My ancestors came here against their will.
Shackled and wearied by a meandering journey.
Their course unknown to them unmapped.

My grandmother tells this story of our migratory arrival as she does
all things:

Her voice bracing and undaunted by the darkness of our tale.

“You must work twice as hard. Outpace everyone, reclaim our
heritage,” she says.

“You must have a greater quantum of ambition than everyone else.”

I look up and nod, at age five, refusing to let the fear underneath
my facade show.

“We had no bindle, no luggage. No Ellis Island or asylum for us,
Just death and work on the dusty ground.”

She means not to dampen my spirit or startle me.

She knows not her words are consuming me.

They will consume me for years to come as I clamber to prove,
Prove that I truly am my ancestors' wildest dreams.

But, how can? How can I extract this part of myself?

This part of myself I do not think exists.

Duty has pulled my heart into conflicting directions.

The reckless, forbidding pull of a thrilling life lived,

And the harsh duty that has been thrust unto me.

“What if I can't, Grandmother?”

She laughs loudly in a harsh sort of way,

“There is no can't for our kind of people.

We have no ambiguous journey, no blurred lines.

Our path is clear. Figured out for us long ago.”

She never answers me in a roundabout way, nor softens the blow.

She always says to trim useless fat.

Our ancestors could not afford to be useless.
Nothing came prepackaged or provisioned for them.

I stand on the precipice of the future and the past,
unsure of my place in either.

Britain Eggleston
Tending the Ruins

I've been feeling my way along as if
this place were some unmapped territory;
I startle when the light reveals it's not.

In these halls I've danced undaunted
to resounding melodies unheard,
but with time I felt my joy dampen as
the song of my heart became blurred.

I always figured I could outpace
the inevitable weight of the world until
its reckless arrival threatened my course.

Underneath the hurried routines lies
a consuming wave of despair telling me
I've been pulled too far from my purpose;
too busy bracing for impact to fall into grace.

Now I'm drifting between two realms,
meandering in a roundabout way.
The path is ambiguous, overgrown
with dreams too long undefined.

As I clamber along a trim but steep footpath,
I learn to extract hidden treasures from
the wreckage: a bindle evidencing former awe.

Wearied by the forbidding journey, and
seeking asylum from this dusty wasteland,
I will myself on like some migratory creature
provisioned by a glimmer of hope, of home.

With a quantum sense of unearthed wonder,
I reclaim the vision prescribed unto me.

Brenda Gaba
Leaving Slovenia, A Quantum Leap

Pa pulled out two shirts, a pair of pants, two pairs of underwear,
twisted
into a blanket to form the brown bindle,
which he and Ma placed underneath little John's bed,
beside another provisioned bundle, dry food, mostly, and the sign,
to hang around his young son's neck,
a cardboard calling card he was to wear upon his arrival,
in an unknown, ambiguous world.
He must never forget who he was.

He would extract the bundles once he figured out
when they could leave for the ship.

They weren't the meandering kind,
not migratory like birds, and so
against his wearied will,
Pa prepared for the course,
so many would come to clamber for—
the startle of America.

Reckless, yes, but hunger can be very consuming.
If left unto itself, it will outpace reason and lead to insanity.
Much like the war, so forbidding, the bombs dropping, the guns
shooting.

When your children have no chance
in this dusty, unmapped world,
it's time to dampen down.
He sought to reclaim for his son, a chance for a better life
bracing for the worst, hoping for a safe arrival.
What do they call it, asylum? Isn't that for the insane?

Oh dusty grief, trim my ashes, I am not undaunted.
This is a roundabout way of saying upon your arrival,
my beloved son, please forgive me for sending you away.

Alan Gann

The Numberless Card

ignorantly fearless
well provisioned with coin and credit, I lived wide-eyed—
meandering and reckless— pulled from mountain to unmapped
desert
shadowed backstreets to pulsing disco.

Now I sit on these steps picking through my bindle—
dusty affairs and forbidding caves, driving all night
crashing through the roundabout
crouched underneath the stairs uncertain
if I crave capture more than escape.

What a thing to startle the sun—
reclaim and extract every quantum of joy and grief
wallow in erotic rage and consuming curiosity
trim the sails undaunted
as if by will we set our course.

Once thought I figured out desire and how
to dampen the sidelong glance, imagined self
free to focus binoculars and track migratory birds
arrival and clamber to fulfill every bracing urge
but certainty is just another excuse for laughing gods.

And none outpace the hour glass
so when everything that once seemed ambiguous
finally seen with awful clarity
these wearied bones beseech unto the ferryman
asylum across the darkest river.

Michael Guinn
A Migratory Moment

Its ambiguous, undaunted arrival became a meandering asylum of
extract emotions.

Its dusty pretentious presence must have brought a consuming of
quantum proportions.

It was not my intent to startle you.

The reckless clamber of my clumsy attempts failed to reclaim what
once was.

This provisioned bundle of boldness provided a bracing that pulled at
my longing.

And...

here I am.

My will is trim now.

A lean portrayal of hope that has given way to this weakening.

A forever captive of a wearied forbidding.

Despair's relentless onslaught seems to outpace this soul's unmapped
roundabout.

Because without you, I am lost!

My heart does not know how long to stay this course.

As tears dampen leaves beneath forever's futile footprints.

Wringing hands give unto this migratory moment.

And now fear hides underneath layers of lies.

Full figured reminders of yesterday's pain.

And still...

I would've loved you.

Layla Herod

To all my unsolved problems

A cluster of consuming, aggravating situations dampen
the non-purgatory state that digs and pries at my already reckless
migratory mind
A collection of meandering will, taunting, irrational thoughts whose
mere presence brings fear
A longing feeling of dread following an endless course within
underneath a bindle of guilt, want, and desire
Trapped within an Asylum of mind, the combination remains
wearied, angry
Pushed and pulled along an endless roundabout, a never ending
cycle, a constant prison
I'm not undaunted, even in the face of a slight extract of my
thoughts, whose very conception is tested
I figured they'd be left ambiguous upon arrival, the amalgamation
of different assumptions and notions
An unrecognizable feeling, which, when pried into, leads to dozens
of more appearing in an instant
The sounds of quick, trim whispers outpace them; muses followed
by a slew of dusty apologies have long since faded
Surrounded by the presence of what seems like randomly generated
bodies that startle and are unknown to me; wandering, thinking
Bracing for impact as they clamber and reclaim unto each other
Competing for a single word, which is unheard in the mass crowd
spewing out things as loud as they can
Provisioned by madness
TV static, the deafening, forbidding quantum reality of
An unmapped mind

Christine O'Brien Horstman

Ride or Die

I figured this would be like all the other times.
But it was reckless of me to keep ignoring what was brewing
underneath.

I was wearied by so many trips down the rabbit hole.
The meandering and swirling conversations.
The retelling and retelling and retelling that was consuming our
relations.

I was sucked into a quantum shift of place that seemed to outpace
the moment.
I slip into a space so old I forgot it could still exist.
My emotions seek asylum somewhere beyond my mind and body.
I have to extract myself – something is not right – some part of me
awakens with a startle.

I'm fragmenting into a disco ball – matching the spinning, reflecting
back all this chaos.
I see my own light just above the surface – splintered and distorted –
beckoning me come back.

With a clamber to reach the side, I pulled myself out.
There she is popping in and out like the Cheshire Cat.
The forbidding thoughts pulling me back into the murky waters of
my mind.
I have to get out. I have to get back. I have shrunk one size too small.

My heart is pounding. From the effort to climb out?
Or the hazy realization that something is broken? Something has run
its course.

When I try to distill what happened it's like trying to trim a long
flickering movie
into a 60-second Instagram reel – the essence is lost unto all but me.

How do I explain our arrival at this unmapped place? Thick and thin
had provisioned us against
any storm until the years were flying by, and, suddenly, I had hit the
point of no return.
A crash landing where I had to put on my own oxygen mask and save
myself.

Undaunted I keep moving forward through the wreckage.
My new awareness a bundle I drag with me.
Ballast for when my migratory patterns pull me back to the same
old roundabout.

I will myself to keep my own counsel.
To step forward with a bracing breath and let the sun set on this
season.

Dusty pink, yellow, and orange – still a familiar sparkle – still an
ambiguous longing.
But I know I can't let that dampen my resolve to reclaim myself.

One day I'll spill the tea. Right now, I'm off on my own adventure.

Ann Howells

I Am Little Red's Sister

Red married the woodsman just last May,
now spends hours before her mirror:
twirls blond curls, paints pouty lips, admires
her trim figure. She's made a quantum leap
into middle-class respectability, considers me
reckless, a migratory bird, because I travel
a roundabout route to Grandma's house:
clamber over boulders undaunted,
crawl underneath low branches, reach back
to reclaim the well provisioned basket.
Wearied, I still pursue my unmapped,
meandering course. The forest is forbidding,
path dusty, but wind is bracing, fails to dampen
my spirits. Rather, it kindles a consuming will
to press on. Today, I make excellent progress,
outpace even the sun. My arrival will be early,
so I pause, extract a blueberry scone
from the basket. (I've always figured I deserve
a reward for my labor – nothing ambiguous
there.) At that moment, the wolf appears,
unkempt and drooling, utilizing pulled branches
in an attempt to disguise himself. Perhaps
he escaped an asylum, bindle over his shoulder.
I startle. What to do? I cannot surrender myself
unto him, prove my sanctimonious sister correct.

Charles Kesler

My Trip To The Asylum

My ambiguous arrival at the Asylum had me bracing for a consuming course of dusty meandering pulled reckless from my migratory unmapped and the wearied underneath of my life. “You have a roundabout undaunted Soul. It will startle all of us, no doubt,” said the Doctor. There was some lipstick on his collar. Pink, I think. I was impressed. About the Doctor. O.K. About the lipstick too. There was a lovely young woman who seemed to float around behind him. And then a Nurse said, “Put your bindle down. I will extract anything in it not provisioned here.” I was not impressed. My mind did a quantum clamber to reclaim some small trim of dignity. The Nurse figured she could dampen my spirit, forbidding me to outpace her, but she was so slow, and angry. So I said, “Unto You I bid You adieu. I will pick up my bindle and go on my way.” I hope the floating young woman will wave to me.

L.J. Keys

Divorce

The course I've chosen feels reckless.
Meandering, ambiguous.
A dusty, migratory trail
Wearied women must reclaim.
Holding a bundle full of sins
We didn't commit
To memory.

I am undaunted.
I am bracing for impact
With an unmapped quantum realm.
Underneath this new, forbidding soil,
I find a Provisioned Will.
Now, all I must do
Is outpace the consuming fear
That this place is an asylum.

The roundabout questions haunt me:
Did I trim the fat or the bone?
Did I extract meaning from the ground
Covered in blood?
Or just dampen my hair
Running through the rain?

As I clamber into the house, I startle.
My hair finally pulled
Back from my face,
My eyes figured with hard-earned tears,
I meet the gaze of the crowd.
My arrival was foretold.
But now I know how to survive
The Sickness unto Death.

Paul Koniecki

Starving for words or bread or distillation

We are not what we eat or kill
For sport or war or sonnet
To startle the dusty trim of peace
Wearied bracing and unmapped as any will

We are what we keep inside
The common asylum of our uncommon mind
Shared forbidding meandering migratory
Everyone is a migrant for love

These three dollar words
Are possessing me
Provisioned to outpace the passages
Empathy must clamber dampen and reclaim

Consuming course history is a torn bindle
Unto this we are undaunted only
Underneath the shroud
Until death is figured

Until we are pulled through
The final reckless quantum roundabout
Ambiguous and unknown as our arrival
The only extract left to drink is love

Debra Levy-Fritts
The Perpetual Qualities of Time

In my room roundabout, the turntable played the voice of the singer, long dead "*In the passage from the cradle to the grave, we are born madly dancing,*" It was Dan Fogelberg, who, someone called arrogant. I figured it was fame, undaunted. His chords stilled, lament, somewhere off in mountain air. This was my Senior year, and I was consumed by flight, how to escape. ARRIVE. Leaving shore, I sang Sugar Mountain (Neil Young) or Cat Stevens "I know, I have to go." Siblings, reckless, startle sputtered. I used to walk down the hallway at five, **they** were afraid of the dark. They sent me, so trim, slight, ahead to turn on the light thinking I'd cringe and cry. I would plunge into the darkness, certain that at the window's edge, pulled unto God. Nothing ambiguous about stepping on the cracks on sidewalks, I **wasn't** going to break my mother's back, but bracing, learn what she taught me without intention, just being, sharing: **God is everywhere, watching. Do right.** I was not her favorite. I stood outside, the other birdies would extract me from the flock. Always a migratory lot Cast head first into the pit. Pulled toward the hard center, the rock at the core of creation. Depths passed through on knees, to arise, reclaim my will To lay there underneath it all with you wise, fringed eyed. Looking up at the stars mapping geological time evidentiary strata More a layering-consuming than a passage, is earth this twinkly sky, explosive, quantum light, of Planck, slivered light-o'-mine energy proportionate, unmapped Dusty unto dust sludge mud meandering, Crystalline pine sap, snap, ignite, fire Reforming refining wearied Do we sit Atop the mud? Or are we formed by the cooling striations? How quickly we clamber, provisioned. Into the rhyming of the passage. The passage **of time to** a new place, when all the passages are closed The passage from bondage to freedom, forbidding—hope protruding burdens enslave, trapped souls, seek asylum bindle, staff in hand, beneath the eye of the universe outpace — steady, tell the story of human frailty: Arrival is sometimes a course from darkness in the shoes always worn. Slipped by the binding of mothers, who bound up daughters, the indifference of fathers, of casual cruelty unconcerned: nothing is clear. Layers cloudy the burden and stars in us forever.

Susan Mardele
Homecoming

A fledgling at 18, I am no longer welcome at home.

I load my bindle into the trunk of a dirt-colored '67 Pontiac
and begin my meandering course.

I'm terrified underneath but outwardly reckless,
trying to reclaim a sense of self.

The struggle to survive is consuming, the goal ambiguous,
my unmapped course plagued with roundabout detours.

As a migratory young adult, I seek asylum and belonging
in one forbidding corner or another, surviving by grace or will.

Provisioned with various scenes and actors,
I still seek that quantum leap forward
in something, somewhere or someone.

Undaunted, I clamber over anyone and anything in my way,
pulled forward by fear and longing, yet wearied by the struggle.

I think I can somehow extract joy and satisfaction
from people, places or things in the dusty echoes of my past
or the blurred contours of a shadowy future.

Into this driven existence, I startle to a whisper of quiet.
I trim my sails and dampen my wanderlust.

Standing still, bracing myself for disaster, I listen,
unclear about how quiet can outpace peripatetic seeking.

I begin to hear whispers guiding my steps and my heart.
One by one the wants fall away,
leaving me standing naked and alone but unafraid.

Arrival doesn't look like I thought it would.
I figured there would be fireworks or a marching band.

Instead, there is peace and a sense of homecoming
in stopping the striving and coming home unto myself.

Rylee Moore
Altering Reality

I'm announcing my arrival
For I have been awakened in my isolation.
I've turned my eyes on the true center of all my perceived
shortcomings.
I could start with the past, but frankly, I'm wearied by the idea.
I've been buried underneath it for so long, feeling myself slowly
sinking into oblivion.

Lies have begun consuming me. I've been reckless with myself.
Always bracing for the worst, I sabotage my own opportunities
for success.
No one knows all the ways I've been failed, and no one knows
how many times
It was me who failed myself.
The quantum of rectification I owe myself is immeasurable.

So, I've decided to grab my bindle, consisting of my abandoned
Resilience, spirit and passion,
And begin the forbidding migratory pattern of coming out
of the deep depression winter possesses.
An unmapped path lies before me. The sign says: choose yourself.

I'm no longer seeking the asylum my fears and doubts so
readily provide.
I don't want to continue to clamber around in survival mode.
I don't want to dampen my mind with false beliefs anymore.
Oh God, let my will be done.

Spring brought clarity. It's time I figured out how to reclaim
my identity.
I'll add another tally to the dusty collection of all the times I pulled
myself together.
Will I be able to outpace my ghosts this time?
The course is dark and meandering. It's never easy to trim away
pieces of yourself.

Redemption is earned after all.
Bestowed unto those who conquer a roundabout path of their
own making.
It's time to extract the woman I'm becoming from the girl
who got me here.
I was provisioned for this journey long before I was prepared
to make it.
My declaration is not ambiguous. I don't startle at the thought
of failure.
I stand proudly, basking in the glory of the future I'm creating
for myself.
I am undaunted.

Christopher Stephen Soden

Circe

When the elder Gods discovered I was
a sorceress, I was anathema. Leaving undaunted

on winged dragons, my belongings a bindle
in my lap. Banished to Aeaea (unable to reclaim

privilege) an unmapped island my dubious asylum.
My arrival solitary. Though I knew it would dampen

my frock, I took a bracing plunge in the ocean.
The geography was meandering and forbidding.

An endless quantum of root and bone and shell
and serpent skin. Essential to extract ingredients

for elixirs, necromancy, jinx. An unknown benefactor
conjured a palace, brimming with savory morsel.

Attentive to any whim. Months after I woke
to shouts of wayward sailors. Ambiguous

behavior from the outset: reckless nature lurking
underneath. Their ship had gone off course,

progress wearied and migratory. No longer
provisioned, half-starved, clothes dusty.

They were still in fine trim. Delighted to feed
as I watched them clamber over one another

like monkeys. Consuming stew and roast goose
and chops I lay before them. Careful not to startle,

two caressed my cheek, my thigh, roaring
when I smacked them. They moved too quickly,

pulled at my gown of cornsilk and cobweb.
My spells are not written, but figured with care.

I am daughter of sickle moon. *Come unto me
goblins, wielders of dark will, outpace the comet,*

bind my enemies roundabout with thunder.
Then the room reeked of wailing hogs.

Artie Turner
scene from a bridge

Sorry. I didn't mean to startle you, but
you seem wearied and poorly provisioned for this.
Sit here. Sip this. Humor me.
Consider, we were all migratory once. Undaunted by time.
Trim, like those soldiers in the street.
Now see, our old outpace the young,
meandering shell-shocked into unmapped territory,
goaded on by reckless holy instinct,
without the smallest hope of arrival and less for asylum,
bracing each tentative step against the last,
and each new stop a world of suffering unto itself.

But don't let this tourist dampen your spirit. Listen...

We met this tattered traveler, see,
underneath the highway's course,
forbidding eyes guarding a dusty bundle.
And from that bag of rags he pulled:
a shaman's box of figured oak.
Inside, a lock of quantum hair
floating ambiguous in mid-air.
With this, the traveler spoke,
"Reclaim all sacred ground!"
And gave us stern instruction
for consuming this ceremonial extract.

Wait, if you will, one more suggestion
before you clamber 'cross the concrete vale;
when you enter the devil's roundabout,
stay in your lane.

Pamela Victoria
Diptych: Dallas 2022

I.

Can a list of words from strangers help me sort this bindle out?
I'm in Dallas and must choose my next road from this roundabout.
My arrival here was charted, but the course ahead—who knows?
I've raised children to adulthood; now it's time to change my clothes.

From the contents of my blanket, I've pulled items to reclaim
And piece a cloak together that will fit for this new game.
Then, from underneath a skirt suit and a dark green baby sling,
I extract a small grey box that holds a rose-wrapped wedding ring.

Houston long was my asylum: Rain-tinged memories remain
Of bayou walks meandering through years of joy and pain.
My children grew through hurricanes, undaunted, on the coast
Yet struggled for safe harbor from the man we loved the most.

Whatever “unto death” meant, that book's lost along the trails—
Now I'm bracing for tornadoes, but I've learned to trim the sails.

II.

Was I reckless to move north? Can I build a home anew?
Dallas seems a quantum change when the guides I have are few.
I clamber up a creek bed and drop my heavy pack—
Wearied by the steep terrain, I consider turning back.

I startle at my doubts, but I miss the coastal plain:
Here my hopes outpace my feet—am I too old for this strain?
Still, my years in humid Houston served to dampen all my dreams;
Can I lighten up my load, forbidding though that seems?

A dusty old dupatta from my migratory youth
Wraps my last surviving volumes of poetry and truth:

Science fiction, Sanskrit kavya, Urdu ghazals, English verse.
I'm provisioned for this trek—have my books just made it worse?

Consuming food will help. Books, I figured, must be read—
Guides ambiguous in meaning for the unmapped road ahead.

Ruth Woolson
Taking Flight

The sky was gray and the clouds were thick as I heard the thunder
crack

I felt like I was trying to clamber out of a dusty hole with a bindle on
my back

I kept bracing myself for the thunder that was booming
My course was ambiguous – somewhat reckless but at all times,
consuming

Maybe I needed to trim some weight so no one could outpace me
Though wearied by this journey, I pushed on as they all faced me
I figured I could reclaim the lead if my spirit began to dampen
But if I dared to extract myself, our V would be misshapen

I was weaving through the clouds when I saw a roundabout
No one was forbidding me from taking the unmapped route
I was undaunted by the path I chose yet underneath it all
I could feel my body tremble and unto sheer will did call

Dismissing the quantum theory of gravity, I skillfully formed
A cadence while meandering through dark skies unexplored
I do not startle easily but as the lightening flashed so bright
I imagined all the dangers on our migratory flight

We weren't heavily provisioned since our trek was loosely plotted
Strength and courage from within was presumed but not allotted
I flapped my wings and strained my neck and said a little prayer
Then soared ahead and pulled my flock swiftly through the air

The land we left, ravaged by human and storm
Looked not unlike a town war-torn
Uninhabitable land we've left behind
Unforgettable images filled my mind

Like refugees, we forge ahead, contemplating our arrival
We'll find asylum, once again, ensuring our survival
We explore our new land with grounds fertile and ponds clear
Greeting our new home full of hope and without fear

Robert Wynne
A Memory

At 8 years old, I would clamber a course between pale bales just to be alone. Huge bricks of hay could dampen sound so well the dusty air in the barn was silent, shot through with late light. Clutching a thermos full of Tang, provisioned for space flight I waited undaunted for the present to finally outpace the future. But when I actually pulled myself out into unmapped territory it was 10 years later, and I emerged from a fortress of wardrobes into my brother's living room, the past a trim bindle tucked away underneath the surface of another reckless Wednesday.

Adulthood is an ambiguous idea, an asylum unto itself consuming expectations like plankton, hunger unabated. I opened the front door at the arrival of another earthquake, streetlights ribboning migratory to startle the still horizon. My wearied will, bracing for impact, was meandering there, a roundabout way to reclaim the innocence of a straw fort. Time is a bitter extract, forbidding so many of our desires. I always figured quantum entanglements would blow my mind but nothing prepared me for such nostalgia, let alone humankind.

Troy Yamaguchi
Clover Boy

Amidst the insect-footed clamber and bracing pelt of five billion
 or thousand million trim
 Years kalpas of meandering erosion and evolution,
 The Arrival Body washed itself—of all unmapped
 Blemishes; all telic whispers of an inviolable asylum for killers; all
 Ambiguous tributaries for rivulets of sweat; all roundabout, vestigial,
 Rhetorical mountaintops piqued with Coke-can seracs and
 forbidding gods and with
 Consuming desolation sporting its very own tin halo
 it emerged from
 The molten drawl of vacuous space unto the fatuous black
 Dromions of the city: jailhouse for screamers.

The wearied will—hypochondriacal and jejune—
 Languished in the sun; it leapt upon impact;
 With a startle it produced slaver: migratory thoughts and deeds
 meant to extract an
 Exact quantum of warmth and meaning.
 It fixed its glasses. It said something short, as if that could reclaim
 An iota of dignity—or at least dampen or perhaps evaporate the
 impact of its
 Reckless spatter.

When Dad died we provisioned space
 To absorb the incoming alluvial surge of
 “Shit we had inherited.” This was insufficient, small,
 Dusty and pathetic. We packed away his pale bundle of garbage.
 We pulled
 Plastic over the cases. We held vain hopes—that these
 Half-weighted measures could outpace the skeins of time
 And slashes of sun
 That each slipped undaunted through the curtains.

When our souls exhausted their cosmic course
 We came to reckon with

Our Last Reptile; and he laughed. He figured,
“I have nothing to fear. I’ll not be upturned. You cannot touch me.
There is
“No vulnerability; I have
“Nothing underneath.”

About the Contributors

Archie Abaire is a retired jack of all trades, having survived passage through the worlds of chemistry, theology, varieties of day labor, social work, and information technology. He is a life-long amateur musician and, more recently, a poet. His poems have been published in *Tokens Magazine* and *Mad Swirl*.

Beth Barron has worked cross-culturally for 32 years, first in the Middle East and now in the U.S. She teaches English to refugees and uses her writing skills to advocate for them. Beth enjoys writing, indoor gardening, and connecting heart to heart with other women. She and her husband Richard have three adult children, two daughters-in-love and three precious grandsons. Beth graduated from Rice University in Houston. She is committed to lifelong learning and has written for *Fathom Magazine*, *Richardson Living*, *DTS Magazine* and bible.org.

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, 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.

Bonnie Blackman is a mother and grandmother. She edited a weekly magazine for 30 years and taught English as an adjunct at Richland College for 20 years.

Melinda Buchanan has been an English teacher for 25 years. She is fascinated by words and loves to play with our language. Her husband of 42 years was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer, and they are navigating this unexpected twist in their lives with some trepidation and a lot of humor.

Brian Builta lives in Arlington and works at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth.

Alex Chand currently splits her time between Appleton, Wisconsin and Southlake. Originally from California and Kentucky, Chand is currently a student at Lawrence University, where she studies physics and English. Upon graduation, she will study English literature at the University of Leeds on a Fulbright.

Helen Chandler is a writing instructor in English/First Year Writing at the University of North Texas, Denton campus. She also has taught college writing and world literature at the El Centro and Brookhaven campuses of Dallas College. Her poem “Lunchroom Ladies” was published in the 2021 edition of SMU’s literary journal of the Graduate Liberal Studies Program, *Pony Express(ions)*. Helen lives in Dallas with her partner, Dena, and a Chihuahua named Daisy-bo-baisy.

Elle Chavis is a rising senior at The Hockaday School in Dallas. She enjoys being involved in the Hockaday drama department and acting at Young Actor’s House. She is also a member of Jack and Jill of America Inc., where she serves as the Regional Teen Programming Chair. In her spare time, Elle enjoys creative writing, reading, and biking.

Britain Eggleston currently lives in Fort Worth with her husband and two cats. Drawn to language and the arts from an early age, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in French with minors in Classics and Art & Architectural History from Texas A&M University.

Brenda Gaba is a poet and essayist whose work has appeared in *The Texas Observer* and *Amarillo Bay*, as well as in a book of poems, *Pete’s Book and The Friends of Pete*. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico with her husband and their dogs, Newt and Sawyer.

Alan Gann facilitates writing workshops and afterschool programming at Texans Can Academy, and wrote DaVerse Works, Big Thought's performance poetry curriculum. A multiple Pushcart and Best-of-the-Net nominee, Alan is the author of three volumes of poetry: *Better Ways to See* (forthcoming from Assure Press), *That's Entertainment* (Lamar University Literary Press), and *Adventures of the Clumsy Juggler* (Ink Brush Press). His nonexistent spare time is spent outdoors: biking, bird watching, and snapping photographs.

Michael Guinn has 20+ years hosting open mics, acting, voice overs, spoken word performances and workshops all over the U.S and Canada. He is a published author, actor, activist and former two-time National Poetry Slam Finalist, Toronto International Slam Champion and four-time AIPF Slam Champion. Michael most recently won the Irma P. Hall Black Theatre Award and is the 2021 Texas Story Slam Champion. Michael also serves on the NAACP Image Awards subcommittee and continues to coordinate and host upscale open mics and showcases that promote messages of awareness in safe and supportive spaces.

Layla Herod is a junior attending Alcuin School in Dallas. They're an aspiring animator and filmmaker who spends most of their time drawing cramped up in their room. They intend to apply to SCAD Atlanta and California Institute of the Arts (CalArts).

Christine O'Brien Horstman is the author of *Deal with It, Doll!: Coaching Yourself Through Crisis*. Her book was inspired by the pandemic and her experiences as a chronic illness warrior. She is a life and career coach, corporate trainer, and professional speaker. Christine is a former Community Voices contributor to the *The Dallas Morning News*. Her poem "The Long Haul" was published in last year's anthology. She lives in Oak Cliff with her husband, son, and fur baby. Connect with her on Instagram: @chris.horstman.

Ann Howells edited *Illya's Honey* for 18 years. Her recent books are: *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky* (Assure Press, 2020). Chapbooks include: *Black Crow in Flight*, Editor's Choice in Main Street Rag's 2007 competition, and *Softly Beating Wings*, William D. Barney Chapbook Competition winner (Blackbead Books, 2017). Ann's work appears in small press and university publications including *Plainsongs, 1-70*

Review, and *San Pedro River Review*.

Charles Kesler lived in Dallas for 30 years before moving to East Texas with his wife, Janelle, to be close to family.

L.J. Keys grew up in Western New York and moved to Texas in 2017. She began writing seriously in 2018 and published her first book of poetry, *Before I Sleep: Poetry, Prose, and Peculiarity*, in January 2022. Her next book is already in the works.

Paul Koniecki lives 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. Paul proudly sits on the editorial board of *Thimble Literary Magazine*. His poems have appeared in *ENTROPY*, *Gasconade Review*, *As It Ought To Be Magazine*, *Trailer Park Review*, and many more.

Debra Levy-Fritts is a community leader living in Dallas.

Susan Mardele has been a poet since childhood starting with "My Sister Is a Spoiled Brat" at about the age of 11. Her contest and publishing credits include NFSPS, Collin County Poetry Contest, Waco Wordfest, the Texas Poetry Calendar, The Common Language Project, the *Home* anthology, and *Forces*, a literary publication of Collin College. Susan is a freelance writer living in McKinney.

Rylee Moore is a poet, aspiring author, and full-time college student. She was published in The Common Language Project 2020 and 2021 anthologies and is thrilled to be featured in 2022. She is currently working on her first book, but until it's released, more of her work can be viewed on her Instagram: @r.m._poetry_

Matthew Nelson has an MFA in creative writing from Texas State University. He lives in DFW.

Christopher Stephen Soden received his MFA in Poetry in January 2005. His first collection, *Closer*, was released by QueerMojo in June 2011. Christopher lectures, teaches, performs, writes plays (including *Water*, *A Christmas Wish*, *Radio Flyer*, *Every Day is Christmas In Heaven* and *Queer Anarchy*), theatre, film and literary critique. His work has appeared in: *Rattle*, *Cortland Review*, *Gay &*

Lesbian Review, *A Face to Meet the Faces*, *1111*, *The Texas Observer*, *Glitterwolf* and *Borderlands*. He loves David Lynch, David Rabe, Joni Mitchell, The Easybeats, The Zombies, Bastille, borscht, chicken curry and tiramisu.

Artie Turner lives in the piney woods of East Texas with his wife, Robin.

Pamela Victoria recently moved to Dallas after decades in Houston, where she birthed and raised three children among the freeways and bayous of her adopted hometown. She holds a BA in linguistics from Rice University, an MA in South Asian languages and literature from the University of Texas at Austin, and a day job in corporate communications.

Ruth Woolson was born in New Jersey but has made Denton her home for over 30 years. Her love for poetry began when, as a child, she read and illustrated her grandmother's poetry journals. Her passion for poetry has continued throughout her life. She hopes to inspire her grandchildren to pursue their passions as well.

Robert Wynne earned his MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University. A former co-editor of *Cider Press Review*, he has published six chapbooks, and three full-length books of poetry, the most recent being *Self-Portrait as Odysseus*, published in 2011 by Tebot Bach Press. He's won numerous prizes, and his poetry has appeared in magazines and anthologies throughout North America. He lives in Burleson with his wife and their German Shepherd.

Troy Yamaguchi is a writer of short stories and poetry. He is currently living in Los Angeles, California.

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