



THE COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT TRANSFORMATION

2019 Anthology

The Common Language Project:
Transformation
March 2019

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

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

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: Transformation

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

ADRIENNE RICH

The Premise

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

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

The Common Language

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

Shining
Emerge
Confine
Stretch
Muted
Aloud
Reveal
Escape
Present
Admired
Details
Render
Shift
Sustaining
Shadow

Terror
Carve
Obscure
Source
Mystify
Field
Abandon
Fettle
Brook
Figure
Gorge
Crush
Bound
Scoring
Organ

A Note from the Judges

Darius Ajai Frasure

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

Opalina Salas

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

As if to Laertes

Margaret Allyson

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

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

A Drive Across the Taos Bridge

Lorlee Bartos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Waking Mid Night on a Backcountry Pass in Big Bend

James Bascom

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

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

Who I Am

Sandra Martin Benton

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shining Field

Bonnie Jamison Blackman

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

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

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

The After Death

Eve Castle

The After Death

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Rebirth

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

The Gunner

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

A Quantum Experiment Suggests

Dan Collins

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

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

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

Intrigue

Alexandra Corinth

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

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

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

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

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

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

My Mother (and Alzheimer's)

Patricia DeVilliers

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

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

Dark Flowers

Steven Duncan

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grieving Mary Oliver

Alan Gann

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

Analog Cum Gnome

Michael Helsem

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

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

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

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

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

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

The brain shall crush its source—that admired organ.

The Red Tent

Christine Irving

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

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

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

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

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

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

curiosity for the dead

Paul Koniecki

thirty muted lines on fire we are
the words we choose

outsiders emerge aloud and pound
against the terrible membrane

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

admired ineffable shining present
be willing

a willingness to stretch and shift
perspective is original love

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

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

shortsighted heart - confine your reality
and live through your myth

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

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

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

glowing the way dust in space
accumulates more dust

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

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

thirty lines on fire make a beautiful light

Origin Stories

Debra Levy-Fritts

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

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

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

Emerge: the wonder of works

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

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

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

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

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

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

it won’t be empty for long.

Communion

Kari Lynch

I used to love a boy who

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

but bound my mouth to muted

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

but tried to fettle the excess from this figure

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

but left me to drown in the shallow brook of want

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

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

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

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

found the sacrament in my own hand

something

lyrikal777

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

Laughing Stock

Joe Milazzo

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

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

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

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

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

ODYSSEY

Sherry Lou Mills

The crush bound admired the scoring organ.

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

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

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

Chrysalis

Linley Munson

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

Reclaiming my life

Mz. Jolie

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

Disenchanted

Madhuri Nagaraj

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

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

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

an accounting

Mark David Noble

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All Fall Down

Gayle Reaves-King

Emerge shining, misshapen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thanatopsis Redux

Isabella Russell-Ides

*She speaks a various language.**

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

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

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

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

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

*William Cullen Bryant, *Thanatopsis* (1811)

tHE aRTISTIC vIOLENCE oF hYPOCRISY

Valentina Saldaña

I welcome all of you to my sumptuous feast, not everyone was invited.
I feel duty bound to warn you that some manifestations are not always what they seem.
I trust that all of your devices have been muted?
Do not speak, just nod your heads up and down and smile.
It is not my desire to render you speechless for the entire evening.
In due time we will all engage in this environment of the spoken word.
It will be a slow reveal, you must remain present, do not attempt to escape.
All of the doors have been locked, not to confine you, to infuse you.
I have created alchemy capable of sustaining your spirits during these times of monsters and the insanity of humanity.
What lies beneath this shining vintage sterling silver tray lid will soon emerge.
It was left at the babbling brook, next to the field of bluebonnets, by the cemetery.
This gift will mystify your senses forever, thus you must worship the source with absolute abandon.
I will carve the flesh and yes it might seem freaky to some in our population, but to others, the illuminated, it shall be a fettle of delicious delight.
We will all gorge on a different organ together in chaotic synchronicity.
It will be my highest scoring achievement ever!
Did you feel that shift just now?
Do not feel terror, be intrigued... relax... stretch out your bones.
Where was I? Oh yes...did you hear that?
I requested that it be served medium rare, but if it is making sounds... it might still be alive.
Perhaps it is seared on the outside, but inside, the crimson blood might be warm, circulating...
The details, about the sideways figure 8, made out of raw chocolate chip cookie dough, that was found slowly baking in the evening sun, next to the body, were obscure.
It means something, but what precisely I do not know...yet.
I shall pray aloud now.
God I believe in me and in you beyond a shadow of a doubt
Crush all who do not.
I have long admired my version of you.
And all of my people said, "Amen."

from every overemotional teenager with a really bad crush

Alexis Diano Sikorski

you left me bent, gravity-bound to you—

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

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

i was never an escape artist.

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

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

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

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

The Burden of Yearning Heavenward

Christopher Stephen Soden

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TERROR

Carol Stowe

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The scene would mystify anyone who has never been there.

Reminiscence

Ruth Woolson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contributors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kari Lynch writes and teaches in North Texas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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