

Handwritten Chinese characters in yellow ink, appearing as a background or watermark. The characters are highly stylized and somewhat illegible, possibly reading "以质取胜" (Quality wins).

Large, stylized Chinese characters drawn in purple ink, set against a yellow background. The characters are highly decorative and appear to be a stylized version of "以质取胜" (Quality wins). The characters are filled with yellow and have purple outlines. The first character is a tall vertical stroke, the second is a circle, the third is a large swirl, and the fourth and fifth are complex, angular shapes.

ROYAL GRAPHITE PENCIL H

word (the remix)

by Charles Monroe-Kane

Love. Grief. God. Birth. Death. Religions have been founded, wars waged, and epic myths created in response to such words. Words like these can evoke great passion; they are bigger than linear, logical, or grammatical explanations. Sometimes certain words call for further, deeper exploration—to be torn apart and put back together again. Like the Siren Song they entice us, though threatening, to obsession.

If I gave you the word "light" what would you do?

I gave five area poets that word. Each poet wrote a poem inspired by LIGHT. I recorded them reading their poems and remixed them together. I took that audio and layered ambient sound and music under during a live performance. In addition, a graffiti artist painted a mural inspired by LIGHT behind me during the performance. A sketch is on the cover of this booklet.

Here are their complete poems before the remix.

LIGHT

There have only been
two kinds of light in my life

The first light
Is the one I can see with my own eyes

And the second light
Is the inner light
That can go unnoticed
If you are not looking real carefully

Back in the 1960's
After growing up on the city streets
Of Racine, we played "Ditch" which
Is a Wisconsin version of "hide and go seek"

There was always a street light on
Or a back porch light
Or light from a living room window
It seemed dark enough
But each time I was caught
I secretly wished it could have been
Darker
Pitch black where someone could be right next to
you
And still not see you

In the 1980's
I built my first home in Racine County
Eagle Lake Manor to be exact
And the two lane highway

Had just enough streetlights along the way
To ensure you would get lost
At some point.

Any English street using the name
Of Manor or Court or Boulevard
Was being pretentious
And let you know you needed to be leery
Of what the name actually meant

One Tuesday night
After driving home on Highway C
From Milwaukee
I noticed an eerie glow in the air
As I drove closer to my home .

It wasn't a flash light in your face light
It was subtle and subdued
But strangely very noticeable

I had recent seen the movie ET
And worried that this might be a good time
To be visited by aliens
Flying in UFO vehicles

Something was definitely off
I was not quite sure what
But wanted to make sure I wasn't seeing things
Or going crazy

The next day, the co-worker

Who is usually talking non-stop paused
said "Did you see the full moon last night?"
the moonlight was glowing and amazing"
Before I had a chance to get embarrassed
I realized I had lived in a city most of my life
Never went camping, or the few times I did
I was enthralled by the campfire and forgot to look up
Or we picked the weekend during the middle of the month
And there was no full moon.

Suddenly all the stories I had read
About the light of the moon
Now made sense
Because I couldn't quite figure out
Why they had been writing about
Something I didn't quite understand

The second kid of light in my life
Has been the inner light
A glow, a spirit
a sense of hope in the midst of darkness
a light that someone carries inside themselves

My mother Micaela Mireles
Had that kind of light
I noticed very early in life

She was always smiling
Always reading my mind
knew exactly what to say or do
To change me right in my tracks
Even when I was mad
and had temper tantrums

She had figured out
At a very early age
that her life
was going to be a struggle

Worrying too much about it

Or being upset
Or angry all the time
Would serve no useful purpose

Even though I had ing 12 brothers and sisters
She always made me feel
Like I was truly a very spoiled child
With a sense of entitlement
Like I had been an only child
Which is mathematically impossible
With twelve children

She was a great conversationalist
Even though she only had a third grade education
And spoke little English
Because she had become such a great listener

She was able to transfer that light to me
During our conversation
As she was preparing tortillas
And dinner at the stove

And I remember always
Being in the kitchen
Not really helping much

But trying to be the first in line
For dinner
And get a chance to nibble
before everyone else was served
She carried this light
And passed it on to her grandchildren
Several of whom
were not quite sure where it came from

and when they were struggling through
their darkest days

they would keep walking towards the light
that their grandmother
had placed in their hearts
before they could speak or understand anything

this inner light has served
our family well
and I wish my children would
have had more time to experience her beauty
and love

but sometimes just a little light is needed
to find your way
home again

OSCAR MIRELES

Oscar is the Poet Laureate of Madison. He has been the Executive Director of Omega School for the past 22 years. Omega School provides adult basic education services (GED Preparation).

RENAMING THE DARK

(a poem about Light)

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.

To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,

& find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,

& is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

~ Wendell Berry

Do not cure me, the Darkness said. I am not sick.

Come lay your body by mine & stroke my wet head.

Sing the secret song we made up. Gibberish & bad words:

the one that made us laugh too loud, our teeth showing—

I'll call you by our shared nickname & make the ugly face

you make in the mirror, no one looking. And I'll confess:

Yesterday, I tossed your underwear onto the lamppost & park bench.

I sprayed, in glitter-paint on the sidewalk & the tall billboard

at the corner of East Johnson & Sherman

every last one of your passwords.

I hid your car keys inside red candy-boxes under the sofa, then shouted,

My name is Pockets, & Drawers. Call me Closets & Diary!

Yelled *Let's play hide & seek You are It Go!*

I knew you'd remember all our secret spots.

I brought your garbage bin in from the curb to the dining room,

pulled out the wet scraps of food & paper & braided them into flowers.

Filled vases with inky water & placed the bouquets by your bed.

When finally, exhausted, you came to lie down there,

You asked, a bit timidly, if you could call me *Candle*.

You said you'd always been scared of the Dark.

You couldn't remember me, really.

Our gibberish, bad words, or secret spots—

Come to me blind, I answered. We are part and parcel.

Do you understand this? If you want to see me,

don't make yourself an Eye. Lose your sight.

Make your body a candle. Light the dark wick of your hair

til you are burning, burning,

luminous. Til you are all soot & cinder, then light.

About this poem:

This poem is about the gifts of darkness, of the 'dark night of soul.* It's about what blooms in the dark despite our awareness. It's about what lives in the places we would repress or forget in our shame. The 'sample' comes from Wendell Berry, who tells us to lose our sight and fully enter the dark to know its gifts: 'the dark too blooms and sings.'

Other silent samples in this poem are probably Leonard Cohen's 'there is a crack in everything/ that is how the light gets in' and Simon's 'hello darkness, my old friend,' which is about communing with one's shadow (who in this poem, is in your bed, anyway.)

Like these songs before it, the poem wants to seduce us to submit to the dark and broken we fear, especially our own, to find a special kind of seeing, a powerful kind of 'Light.'

*(*la Noche Oscura del Alma*-San Juan de La Cruz, 16 C. Spanish mystic)

DANA MAYA

Dana has been published in *Feminist Formations*, *Volta*, the anthology *Listen to Your Mother*, and more. She is active in public writing projects such as the *Spontaneous Writing Booth*.

DEAR GRAVITY

This morning I heard the *bird in burden*—the song of it—and remembered something about light—the speed of it, yes, and the separating of it from darkness.

But I thought too of how lucky fireflies are to be of little economic importance. I thought about human beings—a clever way water devised

to move itself around the planet—to defy you, dear gravity. Water using star dust as vehicles. We are watery stars that you hold close,

so close we believed we were wholly yours but this morning a little bird reminded me that we are really creatures of light,

light which is a millionbillionbillionbillionbillion times stronger than you, dear gravity. Even when you've pulled us down into our graves,

we will escape your grasp and become the light inside of flight—

RITA
MAE
REESE

Rita's poetry has been widely published, including the books, *The Book of Hulga* and *The Alphabet Conspiracy*. She serves as co-director of literary arts programming at Madison's Arts + Literature Laboratory (ALL).

SPEAKING LIGHTLY

We all are light in this world we live/
Different arrangements and colors like Roy. G Biv/
We all can shine, let us view life in that pretense/
All of us with our own diverse wavelengths/
Whether that is radio, gamma, micro or X/
We come in many different contexts/
All shining, with different types of interactions/
Sometimes life bends us like refractions/
The amount of light shown depends on the actions/
Or the Kaleidoscopes of our emotions that show our compassion/
We hope the that our lights will provide common semantics/
And demonstrate real life quantum mechanics/
Cause there are two sides to every story/
But shine places both in one category/
How do we glow? Better yet how do we illuminate/
I say love is at the center the how we jubilate/
So much hate in the world has become so intense/
And love is the only thing to help get back to our inner radiance/
The twist and turns of life can make one shimmer/
Time is guaranteed to no one so these are the times to glimmer/
A simple flash, as we go along our way/
Might be the bright spot in someones day/
And if we work to help one another it gives all of us a gleam/
That is the true basis of our American Dream/
So twinkle twinkle little star/
Shine your light so the world can know who you are.

ROB
"DZ"

FRANKLIN

Rob Dz is a hip hop artist and poet who has worked with the likes of Nas, Common, Talib Kweli, and Blackalicious to name only a few. His work for the Madison Public Library won him the prestigious National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the award was presented by First Lady Michelle Obama.

AT THE WALL

Արև ջան, լույսով ներկեմ պատը քեզ համար
Արև ջան, իմ շոգով սիրելի մաշկը ներկեմ
Կասեմ ուր ես գնացել

Կասեմ տեսնել, քո նուռը քո Pomegranate քո ءوض քո light

Կասեմ دعي walk the way of aerosol & empty walls

دعي parse the darkness from motion my body gives to the spray can

دعي live in the flick with a fingertip

after escaping the traffic in the laughter of Vartan

Արև ջան let me paint let me

Լույսով էս պահը ներկեմ

լույսի հատակությունը բերում եմ պարելով ու պտտվելով ու թափթփելով
ներկի գույներում

լույսը ձերքի շարժումում է

սրտի օջախում է աչքերի կենտրոնանալում է

طئاح الیلع تاقوالا غازجأو غارمحو غارضخ غقووث
رظانلا نويغ یلع
غامال بوب أن لالخنم اهذعصن يتال تافوقسئل الیلع
يسمش يببيبح اي **Արև ջան**

Let us tall in the blaze

Let us sing into bricks & cinderblocks

Let us mix compressions in the can

دعي spin our imaginations then rhyme it on the wall

دعي release through paint scent & blunts

دعي transform in the public body into curve and kinetic

دعي lean into the gathering at the wall

Dear Sun, let me paint the wall with light for you

Dear Sun, let me paint my lover’s skin with my heat

I will say, where did you go?

I will say, to look your pomegranate, your pomegranate, your light, your light

I will say Let me walk the way of aerosol & empty walls

Let me parse the darkness from motion my body gives to the spray can

Let me live in the flick with a fingertip

after escaping the traffic in the laughter of Vartan

Dear Sun, let me paint let me

Paint this moment with light

I bring the light’s clarity by dancing and gyrating and slipping

in the paint’s colors

The light is in the hand’s movement

in the heart’s hearth in the eyes’ focus

Green and red and the parts of time sign the wall

The eyes of the spectator

The roofs we climb to by water pipes

O, Lover, my sun, dear Sun

Let us tall in the blaze

Let us sing into bricks & cinderblocks

Let us mix compressions in the can

Let us spin our imaginations then rhyme it on the wall

Let us release through paint scent & blunts

Let us transform the public body into curve & kinetic

Let us lean into the gathering at the wall

ALEX VARTAN GUBBINS

Alex Vartan Gubbins’ poems have appeared in the *North American Review*, *WLA Journal*, and *And Here: 100 Years of Upper Peninsula Writing, 1917-2017*. His Arabic poetry translations are published in *Metamorphoses*, *Diode*, and *Asymptote Journal*. He’s lived in Armenia and the Arab world.

Graffiti Artist – James Gubbins. James is the owner of Momentum Art Tech in Madison, a graffiti art-centered supply store. He also connects area graffiti artists with businesses to create murals. His clients include Promega and Food Fight among others.

Sound Designer – Charles Monroe-Kane. Charles is a Peabody award-winning interviewer and senior producer for the national public radio show *To the Best of Our Knowledge* and author of the memoir, *Lithium Jesus*.



Our culture has evolved into one that seemingly no longer cares about words – what they mean, if they are true or false, or if they are beautiful or not. Words have become things that are bought and sold, shoved down our throats, and diminished to mere letters. Fuck that! We rise up, the poets and the artists, to remind our sisters and brothers that words still mean something!

Join us. Share YOUR light. [instagram.com/lightpoetrymadison/](https://www.instagram.com/lightpoetrymadison/)

So, I beseech thee: let there be light!