



**THE COMMON
LANGUAGE
PROJECT:
TIME**

The Writer's Garret

The Common Language Project: Time

May 2026

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THE COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT: TIME | 2026

The Common Language Project is an annual poetry competition that results in the publication of an anthology and a public reading in Dallas, Texas. The project was created to bring poets into conversation with each other 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 literary center based in Dallas, envisioning a literary culture that acknowledges the intrinsic creativity of all people, welcomes and encourages diverse perspectives and lived experiences, and recognizes Dallas as an emerging leader in state, regional and national literary conversations. The organization is the recipient of the 2023 Dallas City of Learning Superintendent Award and the 2018 Community Engagement Award in Fine Arts. Over the years, Garret programs have brought to Dallas literary luminaries like former U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, Javier Zamora, Junot Díaz and Marion Winik, as well as Texas originals Naomi Shihab Nye, Bruce Bond and Tim Seibles, among dozens more. Other published writers and poets featured in recent Garret programs include award winners Bahar Momeni, James Davis, Tarfia Faizullah and Lynne Golodner. As the longest continuously operating literary nonprofit in Dallas, The Writer's Garret celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2025, illuminating the literary landscape by connecting people through the imaginative power of language.

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

—Adrienne Rich

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About *The Common Language Project: Time*

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 illuminate a collection 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.

The Theme

The theme of this year's Common Language Project is Time. Impartial or racing, stretching away or frozen, the very measure of existence can be simultaneously cosmic and instantaneous. We invite you to wield the power of its wheel, bend a universal arc, capture a single moment; hide a secret within history or shine a light of truth that only time can tell.

The Common Language

Within a poem of no more than 30 lines, each poet must use all 30 words in any order, as they appear, without changes in tense or form:

ache	crack	meter
axis	dial	quicken
binding	dragging	rush
blue	drawn	setting
branches	extension	tarnish
breaking	fallow	threshold
bright	fold	veer
catastrophes	friction	wasted
clocked	interruption	woven
closing	marks	yield

From the Judges

Matthew W. Baker

These poems treat time like “a wave that keeps breaking into itself again and again.” Sometimes it moves quickly, other times the speakers of these poems want it to stop and let them linger in the space between. I admire the narratives strung together through these disparate words and how the resulting stories don't romanticize life but meet it head-on. In images and language that invite the specific and engage my ears, these poems confront me with complicated, messy, but ultimately tender worlds. Though we can't turn the clock back, we can learn from how we've lived. Come read these poems. Give yourself a moment to slow down until the night recedes and the branches grow “bright blue” before you.

Amanda Johnston

Poetry has a way of holding and expanding time. The moments we remember or imagine are slowed down syllable by syllable to allow the reader to sit inside a time capsule and excavate layers of meaning. The poets featured in the Common Language Project are anything but common. They show us the many ways to consider and construct time in our shared communal existence. I am grateful for their generous seeing and sharing, moment by moment, on the page.

Hannah Smith

In poetry, time does not move in one, linear direction. It bends, leaps, reverses, speeds up, slows down. The nature of lineation asks readers to move backward—to the left margin—then to move forward through a poem. The poems in this Common Language Project rewrite the boundaries of time. They anticipate, they grieve, they memorialize. I was struck again and again by the specificity of image, narrative, and memory, particularly for poems engaging with such a wide-ranging theme. Whether examining the toll of aging, the anticipation of a future life, or the absence of loved ones, these poets move between present moments and the expanse of time with dexterity and care. The hands of a clock suggest that time is something we might hold. These poets ask you to reach out your own hand, and hold it.

Poems

Beth Turner Ayers

Ripening

Born from an ache for more than touch, we were drawn to each other.
The friction of our love, that meter of time binding us together,
forms an extension of our desire to quicken with proof of life.

The threshold of change is woven into every breath I take.
Buds are breaking through the bark of our family tree,
changing two branches to three. Our future is bright—

Until precious thoughts veer to fear and catastrophes rush to my mind.
I try closing the door to unwanted thoughts but the unknown
reaches through a crack, keeps dragging me back into doom.

This interruption of my optimistic nature must not be allowed.
I cannot yield to fear, cannot let it tarnish this moment. Fear must be
pushed into a fallow form and I will cling to hope and wonder.

Setting the course for birth, contractions are clocked and counted.
Nature's dial is set. Time takes us—together—on this trail to
the inevitable. "We" takes on new meaning.

Ceremoniously severed, the blue umbilical cord marks a new
dependence, a new responsibility. She is ours. No moment can be wasted
as we fold our arms around this new, living, axis of our future.

Adriana Barker

Angel

For Lydia

at your funeral last week your father said your birth mother / also died
at twenty-five / I see her, woven blanket on her chest / limbs blue
like yours / bones like thin white branches / bright blonde hair

your father said he believes you were an angel / that hair / those eyes
the setting: across an axis / Russia / no father named / your mother gone
you crossed the threshold from above / dragging your twin along

your father said you never sinned / you were an extension of the heavens
but I knew you boy-crazy / cussing / fighting / breaking promises
middle finger drawn / friction between friends / all of this is normal

nothing was normal / the catastrophes began / you fell off a stool
in class / felt an ache in your stomach / no yield from the tests / a dial
ticked down / a meter read: error / your heartrate began to quicken

an interruption / a before and after / a door closing in the distance

first, the feeding tube / a translucent coil / red marks on tender skin / then
the central line / slip through a crack in the chest / white gauze binding
more tubes to your body / a rush of fluid / later, there would be sepsis

I write as if I held your hand / instead, the updates came through a
screen, a slow scroll, a swipe / friendship lay fallow / the tarnish of posts,
likes, stories / public illness / a problem shared / a problem made distant

at your funeral last week your father showed us your final moments
on the screen behind him, an AI-generated angel / brown floppy hair
blue eyes / white skin / white wings / your perfect man, he claims

in the next slide / you were in his arms / he carried you back home
a veer from earth to the heavens / no time wasted / record time clocked

one moment, stepping from the car / the next, you were smoothing a fold
in white linen / your human form crumpled like tissue / no longer needed

Cameron Barth

Arrival on Violet Waters

You start as a tarnish on the horizon,
nearly blocked from view by breaking waves,
your oars dragging through blue friction.
Features shadowed and name unknown,
your personality is woven together by “Imagine” and “What if.”

I lounge on the sand and yield to the meter of ocean sounds,
drawn breaths an extension of chosen family.
Moments wasted are clocked but dismissed.
Life's catastrophes ache like a long laugh.

You come closer,
waving branches of a warden tree
that crack against placid water
too far out to be turbulent, your bright laugh

familiar and unfamiliar, an axis
binding hemispheres of x's and y.
She sees you first, marks your distance
with a dial counting the days she lets herself lie fallow.

I watch friends leave as you near.
They fold their towels and rush into the forest in pairs,
trees closing in on them as they cross the threshold
where family becomes an interruption of community.

Your rows quicken with my pulse,
the setting sun a reminder of a nearing dawn
where I can't see my chosen family through the trees.
But she rests a sun-kissed hand on my leg and I see
eyes you'd be lucky to have,

so I look back at footsteps in the sand that veer into
woods unknown, where I know
you'll take me by the hand and lead me somewhere
I'll never want to leave.

Monica Berry

My Time

I feel an ache rise as I cross the day's quiet axis,
life's pages binding themselves in shades of blue.
The years stretch like branches,
sometimes breaking under their own weight,
sometimes strangely bright in the middle of small catastrophes.

I've clocked so many hours closing old chapters,
listening for the crack beneath each turning dial.
Some days move slow and dragging,
my memories drawn out like an extension
from a season gone fallow.

Other times, everything seems to fold into itself,
the friction of interruptions—each interruption leaving new marks,
measuring me like a quiet meter
that threatens to quicken without warning.

There are mornings that rush,
evenings setting into soft tarnish,
moments where I pause at another threshold,
wondering if I'll veer toward hope or regret.

I think of hours wasted,
of choices woven through decades,
and the courage it takes to finally yield
to whatever time is trying to teach me.

Barbara Blanks

The Longest Distance

"Time is the longest distance between two places."

—Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*

We quicken in darkness, burgeoning
in an enveloping cave, skewing the axis of the host,
dragging down some organs, binding others within
the fold of the body. Mothers endure—the extension
of the belly, the stretch marks, the interruption of sleep,
the drawn out ache of expectation. Yet,
it is all worth the months of waiting. Eventually,
the cushioned, warm cave will yield a tiny creature.
There is no rush—not at first. But once the meter
has clocked its final tick, the cells woven together
in that perfect blackness will veer headlong
down a canal much like a vertical cave chimney
connecting below to surface. No side branches
leading to dead ends—just a high pressure system
setting friction and fluids in motion, thrusting
that cocooned growth towards the threshold
of bright breathing life. And as that creation
continues to grow, it will find no guarantees
against catastrophes, against wasted moments,
against tarnish plating a breaking heart, the crack
of a spirit turning so deep blue its brokenness becomes
an absence, a solid *nothing* closing in, all enveloping.
Too often, life lies fallow, but time ticks relentlessly,
and like the face of the moon, the clock dial
never turns away—at least,
not until the plug is pulled.

Helen Chandler

Five More Minutes

She clocked an egg on the lip of a blue bowl and exhaled as Breaking News caught her eye. A dull crack – a familiar ache – formed in her chest. Uvalde, Ukraine, Palestine, Camp Mystic converged as missiles sailed like frazzling lollipops in the Iranian sky.

How long, she wondered, could she endure these catastrophes rattling the dial and meter – the very axis – of her mind? Sometimes she felt so drawn, worn, wasted, and fallow that she could only slump into a task, like separating viscous whites from yield-sign yellow-yolks for a cake. A flourless chocolate cake, she decided. The first time she read the recipe, she said, “I have to try this.” This being the deft technique to fold stiffly beaten whites into the batter – the binding agent, in place of flour. She ushered the batter into a nine-inch round pan, its armor-like marks and tarnish making her even more affectionate toward it. She gave it a wiggle – setting the batter – and transferred the pan to the oven, softly closing the dark-glassed door.

She tapped the timer to twenty-five minutes and turned to the kitchen window from where she observed, just as she did every day, the green and yellow ribbons still dressing the neighbor’s tree – an old oak, its trunk and branches a reminder of the river’s choice to quicken – its flood waters dragging entire houses, trees, cars, trucks, and bright little Mystic girls, hands woven together, into the extension of time and being.

She remembered the nothingness she felt then and sometimes feels now. How she wondered if more time – more minutes – would have mattered. How she felt her own hope crack and collapse, followed by a near-total veer into chaos. How the friction between faith and reason rumbled and crashed across the threshold of her woven existence.

The timer had already sung twice when the third interruption prompted her to rush from chaos to cake. She touched its smooth skin and decided: five more minutes.

Karen Cline-Tardiff

It's Okay to Admit You Were Wrong

Crack the binding, step over the threshold
into a world breaking all tilt-a-whirl
on an axis setting uncertainly, not on
north or west, but blue and bright light,
magical friction the hub of the bearing,
your eyes finally open to the rush of
wasted time spent closing your mind.

Awaken yourself from the fallow fields
strewn with broken branches of peace,
let your heart ache for the catastrophes
you allowed to be woven into your story.

Quicken your heart, open the drawn curtains,
dial your friends and fold them into this
new extension of your newfound love.

The tarnish on your heart and mind can be
cleared, a brief interruption in your full
story, no more marks against you.

Do not yield in uncertainty, do not veer into
second-guessing, no time for what-ifs
dragging you backward; that time has
been clocked and is now discarded.

The new meter of your heartbeat?
The potent smell of possibility?
Welcome to your awakening.

dèsANGES Crusier

All in a Moment –

A soul without tarnish
Passes
Through the threshold of light
Dragging a patchwork blanket of memories
Woven from threads sleeping deep in the skin
Of fate's branches,
And drawn from promises that will quicken
As her journey rotates on its proprietary axis.

She shields her sight from the bright breaking dawn
With a fold of the blanket's blue silk
And enters the stream of life.

In the beginning, nothing is binding – nor restricting in any way.
But, while others on this journey might – right off their marks –
Rush headlong into a false moral friction,
Or abruptly veer from introspection,
She uses otherwise wasted moments
To meter her own self-worth.
And while her life flows on, like seconds clocked on a dial,
She plants seeds of community in a fallow but resilient landscape,
Adding extension to her value.

And despite her tendency to yield to the pressure
Of imagined future catastrophes,
No interruption of her intentions
Could ever irrevocably crack
Her mirror of self-reflection.
And she eschews any ache of regret, steadfastly,
To the closing bell
And the setting of the sun.

Lauren Dowdy

A Grand Canyon

Don't go near the edge, pleads my thirteen-year-old,
 an anxious crack in his voice;
 though I'm drawn to the edge, I yield. He's read a book about
 catastrophes, death in the canyon, and the rush of his anxiety breaking
 in this setting, fallow rock framing the edge, makes his pulse quicken.
 Looking over the rocky extension, the scappy desert trees
 binding dry soil make him hesitate before we walk on, our steps
 on the trail matching the passage of geological time.
 The canyon is comprised of time: a palimpsest,
 clocked layers, the physical meter of eons,
 woven rock, an axis of blue and limestone formed by the dragging
 of water, the veer of the river. It's not linear, this young canyon:
 each wavy layer of ancient rock marks
 the opening and closing of an era—
 the canyon is carved by elements beyond its control, earth history that
 came before, forces natural and unnatural working, the dial of the clock
 moving as the canyon stood on a new threshold,
 every year a becoming.
 As we walk along the rim, each vista recounts a new story,
 a new version of the canyon's story,
 how the branches of the river fold onto themselves, how an
 unconformity, an interruption in the steady layers of rocks,
 leaves a gap in the timeline, a space for the remnants of
 mountains eroded by shallow oceans as the earth layered on.
 No work of the river is wasted:
 it tells the story of friction, erosion, patience,
 revelation.
 And my son walking beside me, as tall as I am with his new shoes—
 He is bright, a bright light, a bright ache, no tarnish,
 a young canyon formed from old rock.

Annie Christine Freshwater

Memoriam

Let me transgress: a return to the threshold, the purpled
ache, the event horizon where past
meets present. Here, a friction burn that marks the temporal

shift—nothing more than dislocated meter. Forestalled
catastrophes aside, could you
step through a crack in the mirror behind my eyes? Memory
must yield to dream: bright
sparrow, wasted years. I clocked the distance
between grief and forgetting; I turned back the dial
to quicken your pulse. See the flowers
drawn in chalk across the fence? Rush towards

this interruption of blue breaking along certain
highways, where the binding of earth's axis
wears thin. Let me fold you inside
the palms of my hands and carry you to a setting
death cannot tarnish. If I could

veer towards a closing door—if the sky
could open, if the fallow ground inside my rib-
cage could birth snapdragons,
marigolds, lupine—

I followed the branches of each silvered
oak, dragging my wounded
shadow behind me. Your heart-

strings are woven into my veins,
my arteries. In my lungs I hold

your breath. Grant me
this extension: just one more
day with you.

Josie Gepulle

a memory from 1 AM

the parking meter clocked one hour over
the closing sign swinging on the door.
our stomachs ache as we crack a joke
about future catastrophes and test marks.

dragging you outside, i say the night is young.
concrete becomes branches, breaking underneath our shoes.
you dial music as loud as it goes
sparking friction in the air
and i fold a receipt into a bird
with crooked woven wings drawn for flight.

tomorrow, you'll beg for an extension.
today, we shrink underneath the stars
as bright as city lights.

you whisper *we are at an axis*
or maybe the threshold of our potential.
will our dreams veer and turn fallow?
or yield a field of blue and silver?

i can hear your breath quicken.
an interruption is what you need.
binding our pinkies
and setting my bird free, i say
i will not let you tarnish your fate
no matter what form it will take.

you blink.
and laugh.
those pretty words are wasted on me.
yet you squeeze my hand tight
with no rush to let go.

Valentina Gnuv

The Rush of Hours Holds Music

We'll always want another day, even to ache,
or to replay catastrophes that made us ache.

Morning air, the blue of a child's watercolor,
a closing of moonlight, taunting night's ache.

The sky's low clouds turned to silver poetry,
like the fallow friction of an old clocked ache.

We tarnish God and yield the wasted minutes,
we are branches breaking, sentenced to ache.

In a quiet town, the dial and meter of a hymn
ring like a murmuration of starlings, an ache.

Escape the snow buried beneath your surface,
veer toward heaven's axis and dispel the ache.

Allow this sweet coda, this time we may have
left, to crack open the long Januaries of ache.

Yes, another war, but at home a grandmother
sings, she'll fold an infant into arms that ache.

A black and white photo of a setting season,
a sad memory drawn from a bouquet of aches.

The rush of hours holds music, yellow apples,
and the slow dragging reins of a horse's ache.

We pay with our bodies, their binding marks,
joy's brief interruption in a woven aria of ache.

We no longer wait for our breath to quicken
and release the bright threshold of love's ache.

Oh, Valentina, isn't your whole life an extension
of your passion, that sublime and terrible ache?

Emma Pearl Johnson

I Think of You Most in Spring

when the grass begins to green again
 when hope and expectation quicken
 in the friction of bloom and storm.
 How long now we've lain empty and cold,
 alert on winter's threshold, dragging behind us
 a prayer for interruption
 of this loss after loss after loss. I dream
 a dulled memory: closing the oven door,
 turning the timer dial—five minutes to listen
 to the crack of butter melting, to the ache
 of branches against the window,
 five minutes to fold napkins, counting: *how many
 bright faces around the table?* How close
 I hold those fallow memories, the bittersweet fruit
 drawn from images grown dim
 at the end of a distant brainstem. I wish
 I'd clocked it, the blue rush of catastrophes
 setting in along the axis of our lives,
 binding our joy irremovably with sorrow.
 We were losing everything
 and we didn't even notice. Every new loss
 an extension of our first—of you. But who marks cracks
 as they emerge? Who watches dry ground
 as wrinkles form in wasted earth? Too busy
 watching the blue sky: tumult of unfolding clouds.
 Too late did I veer back toward the earth,
 see the yield of ache and tarnish
 woven in green vines across my feet.
 Too late did I try to match my hope
 with the meter of our breaking.

Paul Koniecki

(Signature) Elliott Time

“people you’ve been before that you don’t want around anymore”—E. Smith

Count the drawn faces you see in the sky.

I'd like to propose you are still the river
and time is a terrible rock.

Perpetual singer. Motionless body. Knife
pumping in your chest like a gnomon. My life began
the moment I misunderstood “gnomon” for “no man”.

The mistake a wasted ache, an axis binding my pain
to you as friction interruption. Tarnish marks meter and quicken. The
rush setting into the sound of blue branches breaking grey skies like
ribs. I'm reborn every time I

cross the threshold of misunderstanding. Learning a word's
true purpose, meaning always ready to veer into the nearest fallow
fold, too long silent – your ear – your eye, hand and heart, pick and
fret dragging an extension of my ego along – wasted if not woven with
empathy (assuredness) willing in a moment to yield
dropped to your knees in the kitchen clutching all your songs. Gnomon
breaking bright catastrophes of light.

Clocked closing crack your chest is a dial and an awkward of silence.

Karen Krotzer

Awaiting the Sunrise

There it is! The setting
Before me marks the first

Interruption to the surrounding darkness.
With the closing of the night

Comes a thin crack of
Light slowly dragging itself across

The threshold of the horizon.
Not one fallow moment exists;

No wasted time at all.
I sense the ache of

Friction quicken in the fold
Of dawn breaking, the tarnish

Binding land and sky no
Longer woven together at the

Seam. A gradual grayness grows,
Eventually evolves into an extension

Of branches of bright blue.
They yield to the sudden

Rush of brightness as the
Dial on the meter of

Light expands even further heavenward.
Meanwhile, the earth's axis will

Continue to veer through space
And time on its daily

Routine tilt, clocked at its
Normal, regulated pace, and drawn

Like a magnet without consequences
Or catastrophes around Father Sun.

M R Longoria

Corro

These shoes don't fit. They fold.
The heel is dragging and the bright
Soul, no, sole is breaking beneath my weight.
The ache in my heel is a default setting I'm used to now.
Friction marks on my toes at the end of the day after walking in puddles.
We use pairs until the woven binding breaks apart. Crack.
Walking catastrophes that show tarnish and bad luck. Fibers that come
undone like branches.
Looking at me, at my axis, from the top down and people yield.
Stare at my feet as if it's an interruption from my beauty.
A sad extension showing the reality behind my private school uniform.
Another wasted potential from someone they veer around.
I quicken my steps and run. I want to rush the threshold that I'm drawn
to.
Tear it down. Beat it black and blue.
The one that shows success. The one that makes me look like fallow
compared to my peers.
I catch the bus and meter by meter I can feel this mask slipping.
I don't belong here and need to dial it in. Reel it in. Sound like them.
Look like them. Smile. Be nice.
My uniform is clean, but my shoes can talk and they clocked me from
the moment I arrived.
They know.
I am not one of them, but I will graduate among them. I don't care if that
door is closing.
I will make it on time.

Paulina López

Nine Months

Blue whales are pregnant for 12 months. African elephants gestate for 22 months. A frilled shark's pregnancy lasts 3.5 years. And here am I, only 6 months along and feeling roughly the size of a planet about to fold

into its own gravity, too tired to spin on its axis. On mornings when my dragging body wakes to the ache of every bone below my hips, I let myself cross the threshold into fantasy: What if instead, I was a pregnant

koala, clinging to tree branches for only 30 days before the relief of my water breaking. I could be a mouse, carrying for just 21 days until I delivered on a bright, fallow field. Or an opossum, ready to give birth

after I clocked a mere two weeks, not another night's rest wasted. But before I can yield to these daydreams, I catch a glimpse of my older children. The sockless feet running along our woven rug were stretching

my belly from the inside out only moments ago. The heads of untamed hair measured with pencil marks drawn on the wall, now a meter from the ground, were nestled in the palm of my hand just yesterday. I feel

the urge to quicken my 9-month sentence veer in the opposite direction, and my heart pleads for an extension, something to rip the dial from the clock, anything binding me to the creature jabbing its tiny limbs into my ribs before it can rush out and away from me. For a moment, my wait

feels less like an interruption or a series of catastrophes that tarnish my plans. Instead, it becomes a 40-week window into the questions expectant members of every species must all have carried within.

If I ever meet a mother whale, elephant, or koala, this is what I'd ask:
Did your sense of time also irreparably crack

from the constant friction
between a future that can't arrive soon enough
and a present that won't let itself be held? Once the weeks, months,

trimesters of waiting were through, did it leave you breathless—
how the opening and closing of two sleepy, milk-drunk eyes
could contain the setting of a thousand suns?

Budd Powell Mahan
A Hunger for Immortality

I ache for more than this small allotment of time,
 my brief interruption of the continuum
 full of wasted devotion, catastrophes of decision,
 the quicken of senses, tarnish of a thousand goals.
 The axis of the planet spins a dervish of years
 the meter of heart counting hours
 that veer from bright promise to something less.
 Each sunrise breaks on the fallow furrows
 that enumerate what was given and what was spent.
 I am judged by the tally marks woven with indelible thread,
 my wink of days, this breath too short to be clocked.
 Like asteroids breaking, I am drawn to the blue earth,
 burning with a friction to leave a legacy.
 Yet, the rush of decades keeps closing doors,
 binding me to the whip-crack of the clock.
 Every setting sun pulls toward the threshold of *after*,
 and dragging heels that will not yield
 fold the earth like plows, fingers grabbing
 at branches of the dial to slow momentum.
 As tomorrow looms, my face grows implacable,
 the redemption I seek unnegotiable as I pray another week,
 a day, an hour, any extension of the adventure.

Ximena Montemayor-Luna

Time Traveler

I'm looking up through the branches of a grand magnolia tree, blooming, against the clouds resting in a stark blue sky.

Except, I quicken to realize, it can't be, because in this fold of history it no longer stretches its limbs, growing tall meter by meter. But twenty years before, and forty, and more

It freely gave its shade to four generations, where I listened to the tales of my parents, grandparents, and great-grandmother, my ears young and untrained to recognize the beauty of a tale that traverses universes and warmly embraces me at the threshold of time's door.

Now it's a familiar ache, looking back and wishing my small hands would have drawn a map to their stories, carefully preserved each detail, and withheld the naive urge to rush into the future. I now push against the friction of the clock's race forward, closing in on the present.

I veer, and I'm transported. Dragging my mind to a screeching halt, I am at a standstill. But it's only a brief, fallow interruption, before again —

The seconds filling the silence of the past, the present, and the unknown do not yield. Each muted tick of the dial marks the release of a moment captured by smiles, deep-belly laughter, an extension of bliss

Clocked against whispers, tears, and heavy reminders of catastrophes that evoke a feeling of the world tilting on an unsteady axis.

Defeat floods through me, feeling the unspoken words wasted when we were incapable of setting down hurt, or anger, or fear of vulnerability, refusing to give it a place to rest, to exist, and to make room for healing.

Yet the voices of those who have passed on lovingly remind me: though the echoing crack of branches breaking tarnish our story, its memory is a testimony of our binding, both loving and sorrowful, even if we can no longer see the shadows of dancing leaves woven together.

Like the grand magnolia tree, though it has been uprooted, each generation remembers its branches, blooming, against the clouds resting in a bright blue sky.

Qua Moore

The Body Remembers the Way Through

There is an ache that hums beneath the skin,
 not pain, but a quiet axis turning like a womb of time.
 The world keeps binding me to its noise,
 but I remember the language of blue silence, ancestral and deep.
 My thoughts stretch like branches toward something unnamed,
 even as old versions of me are breaking softly at my feet.
 I have seen bright things dim without warning,
 lived through small catastrophes no one clocked.
 Time escapes no one, not even the versions of me I tried to keep.
 It kept closing doors I had just opened,
 leaving a hairline crack in everything I trusted.
 I learned to read the dial of my own pulse,
 even when doubt came dragging its shadows across my altar.
 I was drawn to the edge of myself,
 searching for an extension of truth that felt like home.
 There were seasons I lay fallow on purpose,
 resting in the dark like seeds that refuse to fold.
 I met friction and called it initiation,
 honored every interruption as divine redirection.
 My body carries marks that do not beg to be erased,
 they are a meter of survival, sacred and exact.
 And something in me began to quicken again,
 a pulse rising beneath the rush of becoming.
 I stopped setting myself aside for comfort,
 let the past tarnish without trying to make it shine.
 At the threshold, I did not hesitate,
 even when the path threatened to veer into unknown dark.
 I refused to call my becoming wasted,
 every thread of me is deliberately woven by something greater.
 I learned that surrender is not defeat, but the sacred moment I choose to yield.

Shannon Morley

You Don't Go

Steeped in salt and bright from a green-to-blue day in the sea,
you're sunk into sleep, your breath breaking—
you always fall first.

My skin hums an ache against the rush,
a hidden meter, the dial drawn tight.

I ease from bed, step over the clothes we peeled from each other,
like woven memories,
a binding extension of our limbs.

There, in the fold of *Love in the Time of Cholera*,
an offer to go—
a brown envelope,
the tarnish of obligation.

You would tell me it can wait.

At the threshold, I feel it quicken.
Moonlight and streetlight yield
to tree branches dragging marks across the wasted sky.

On the lover-map axis,
both smell like catastrophes,
fallow.

the crack—
the interruption,
friction.

I veer into blind recognition, clocked like the alarm
in that movie we watch—I cry. You never know why.

Setting the packet in the drawer,
its closing, a sigh.

You have not moved. My pillow has grown cold.

Bradley Samore
Speed Dial

I remember the rush of the blinds being drawn, the bright blue breaking my sleep despite my teenage eyelids' refusal to yield to the mornings Mom claimed I'd wasted. She'd invent rude catastrophes like dragging a fork against a skillet or pressing its iron heft onto peppercorns until they'd crack. Other times, she'd hatch a simpler interruption like snatching away my woven blanket, watching my body fold, my dream veer into the cold reality of winter. Whatever she'd pick would quicken my breath into a groan or an ache I'd fake to escape the weekend's chores. If she'd been raised in a rural setting, she'd have understood the importance of letting land lie fallow. Or if she'd listened to the logic in her lawyer father's closing remarks, she would've at least respected my wit when I said *I never signed a binding contract*. None of my reasoning could tarnish her conviction that work is the friction that sharpens youth.

Now, my wife and I work full time, often crossing the 40-hour threshold. It is not rare for her to open the door of our home office after 12 hours and announce, exhausted, *I've clocked out!* Her mother tells us *I've watched you each make your careers the axis around which you spin. Don't you want to have a child?* We tell her we don't have time. Day branches into days, months. Today marks three months since my mom died. The doctor said *it's only a matter of time. The chemotherapy will only provide a twelve-month extension, at best*. I didn't miss Mom while she was alive, but I do now. I knew she'd always pick up the phone. It seems impossible, ridiculous, cruel, that in high school I used to stare at the clock and listen to the ticking meter of the second hand, wishing for it to dial each number faster.

Zeke Shomler

My friend, a geologist, once told me that time was a wave

breaking into itself again and again. I can't say I believed her but I still keep that bright blue friction on my tongue like it's the binding that holds me together. What holds me together? Not the falling of birch branches, not the setting sun. I am trying and failing to watch gold tarnish without all my poems turning elegy; it's temporal luck that keeps me moving, like a glass dish that breaks with every crack of dawn. It's the relentlessness of it that scares me, the lavender rush of it always closing in. Even physicists say there's hardly anything that keeps *past* distinct from *future*, only entropy, that ache always arriving, the chaos that marks the dial for defeat. So time continues dragging itself across the ocean floor. So it keeps itself drawn, curtain in a threshold, no light coming in. I've been arriving into myself all my life, clocked in for a job I never asked for, and time is the fallow field where all of my catastrophes unbend. So the axis keeps shifting, the meter always changing, days wasted like a vast serving of ice cream melted on the ground. My body tells itself not to pardon any interruption, says *never yield*, its blood still steaming, woven into the earth like a stone. I watch my pulse quicken on a screen, always only some watery extension of myself, a name that can't be brought into the fold. I do not veer. I cut my huge ticking heart out and give it to you on a platter.

—a *Golden Shovel* after Bianca Stone, for Dr. Kathy Kitts

Amanda Trout

Flint Hills Anti-Pastoral

In futures free of dragging backhoes, all bugs emerge as scheduled, flood prairie air with poetry. They rush gallery forests, beg best spots to serenade. They veer between blue horizon lines. They quicken wings on wind gusts. They claim this land the home it's always been: blessed setting,

threshold of meter marks before fallow, fold, and friction, before interruption of us, breaking ache, ruinous human beats woven into the earth. Each buried cicada is extension of seconds, stalled dial, clocked septuagenarian, a little insect drawn to bright and binding branches

as the axis shifts. Abuse births present tarnish, catastrophes of a closing earth. Post our first wasted summer, we'll question each crack in quiet ground. We'll ask *why don't you yield your songs to us? Where has all our music gone?* and the ground will yield silence, an answer, the only answer we deserve.

Marcus Tsai

Still Life

Up next: Madonna. The oily blue a shadow
 daubs across his torso. His eyes breaking
 through the drawn curtain of night: they sing
 to you. Now marks the ten-minute anniversary
 of woven fingers. Your rediscovery of the mouth's
 pliable threshold. And here you hoped your body
 would lie fallow, the old ache setting its sun on you.
 No—the club's speakers fold the empty lot in music
 as you quicken your pace toward midnight. *Strike
 a pose.* Inside, bodies crack against one another,
 Madonna booms, glow sticks veer through the blue-dark.
 The moon, a bright nail, wets the soft axis of his back,
 and the dead lamp posts, the parking lines, the open
 warehouse doors—what small catastrophes, what
 wasted canvases. Everything drinks the light, everything
 is closing soon. “Close,” he says, dragging your hand
 to him as if a dial resides at the center of his chest.
 What you want, more than anything, is sweet,
 binding friction against the contours of
 the moon. A voice branches overhead: *Strike—*
*(Shadows tilting as two bodies tarnish their fine hems. An eye, red
 as blood—then another; a group of rabbits yield their rule over
 the lot. You suddenly cannot bear it, the closeness of his body, and, by
 extension, your own. You close your teeth around a rush of
 breath. When you pull away, cold air laps at your bodies' shared
 interruption. He calls to you, but his voice is the ocean through a shell.)*

Silence that makes your ears ring. While the DJ changes tracks,
the moon lurches, as the boy did, away from you. In the far corner
of the lot, now illuminated: a thin cut of gray. You imagine
a fistful of coins, that the parking meter has clocked nothing at all.

Linda Vandlac Smith

This Is the Hour

This is the hour of breaking news
the latest crack in the bright dial,
a flash-bang rush of tariffs enacted
dictators extracted climate redacted
fishy bombers retracted then resent

This is the hour of clocked algorithms
a new setting with no pre-set threshold
along an AI axis that won't yield in
its ligature binding of human wrists,
hands measured by protest signs as
the elected fold on fallow branches

This is the hour of blossoms wasted
in blue ache, petals of peace drawn
into a whirlwind's dragging friction,
endless fiction until the meter expires

This is the stolen hour of manmade
catastrophes, interruption without
refund, use-by date without extension
slow tarnish of lives woven with fear

This is the hour of breaking news
of drones, of jets that quicken, veer
toward schools of collateral damage
to claim what marks our rise & fall
in a countdown to the closing bell

Katherine Whitworth

On the Trail

While I'm on the trail there's no interruption,
No rush, no deadlines, no online catastrophes,

Only the quiet beep from the dial of my Garmin
As I switch the setting to "run" and press start,

Only the soft light of dawn breaking through
The branches of the oak trees that surround me,

Only the friction of my bright blue Hoka shoes
Dragging dirt across the pavement of the path,

Only my steps which quicken with every meter
Until sweat fills each fold in my skin and I yield

To the ache in my feet. But I'm drawn to the ache,
To the achievement, to the freedom, to seeing the

Miles clocked when I press stop on my watch.
No time is fallow or wasted when I'm on the trail,

On the threshold of the release of endorphins.
I never veer from the trail or tarnish it because

While I'm on it, nothing exists but the oak trees
And dirt and me and the sunlight stretching across

The sky as Mother Earth rotates on her axis, which
Marks the closing of yesterday and the start of today.

My need to run is woven into me, binding me to
Earth, for I am an extension of Her. Like time,

She keeps on moving forward towards the next
Tomorrow, and so do I, but while I'm on the trail

At the crack of dawn, I exist between yesterday
And today—and for a time nothing matters but

The quiet beep of my Garmin and my steps and
The ache and achievement and freedom as I run.

Ryan Wilde

Exit Signs

Past

the mirror in a blur slamming the door shut into
dawn light drawn blue like an ache, dragging
lanes binding as a contract, another
crack in the wall from today's rollover

chaos woven in the landscape.

Rush in place for a fallow hour. Another
downtown workday clocked. Skyline dial ripples
evening tarnish, shadows fold and quicken
the way limbs yield to the axis of another, marks of
a new setting—dusk an extension
toward closing eyes. Veer barefoot to pierce the threshold—
wet mud, thick reeds, wild river,
whitecapped catastrophes breaking the surface, branches
without interruption, friction bright under the moon

wasted—

alarm bossy as a meter.
I hasten past the mirror.

Robert Wynne

Another Day

Another night catastrophes quietly into morning as the yawning sun rises once again with the proud ambivalence of someone else's god. I swivel safely to the bed's edge, dragging my feet over that threshold, drawn into the ache of bright blue light breaking against black blinds. Charlie is just waking on her bed beneath the window so I yield to gravity, feel her heart quicken beneath thick fur as she shifts her wasted hips to nuzzle my neck. We are aging together. Today marks merely one more extension, time's rush clocked by each dial on wrists and walls, second hands counting minutes, becoming hours even when no one's looking. I take the dog outside, so she can tarnish some dewy grass glistening yellow. Fallow branches crack an irregular meter beneath birdsong as the wind Walt Whitmans a long, long line without interruption. Spring is coming but not quite yet. Charlie sniffs the air like reading her horoscope, but doesn't share any sage advice, just heads back inside to paw at her food bowl. And so we eat. The fabric of this day is woven from the threads binding all our previous days into a tapestry we rarely consider, but which serves as the setting we expect. We revolve around an axis of our own making whether we admit it or not. Flickering images and loud sounds veer my thoughts away until the sun relents, firmament closing like an eye, the silent friction of possibilities lost. As I pat the dog and fold my body back into bed, I pray to time. Without words I ask for more, like a beggar with an empty bowl, hoping to still be hungry tomorrow.

Raychel Yearsley

Liminality

Under a blue-bright sky
I clocked in to the closing of time.

The dial shadow is dragging
along the threshold

of the here and now
and the not ever.

If I yield to a breath, is it time wasted?
Lungs drawn into extension,

a brief interruption, then a veer
into the hollow of lung and pulse.

With the setting of the final sun,
a rustle of the rush grasses.

Wind's friction marks,
adds a tarnish upon the fallow land.

With the starless night, branches breaking—
they are all catastrophes in the making.

I feel the heart quicken
feel the night ache

feel the crack and fold of every meter
of the earth under pressure.

The world tilts upon its axis
then, the binding of our souls:

woven together forever,
whether we want them to be or not.

Contributors

Beth Turner Ayers is a poet and storyteller. Her poetry covers many topics in a variety of styles. Her poems appear in the Poetry Society of Texas *A Book of the Year*, *Encore*, *Leaven*, several issues of *Forces* literary journal and other anthologies.

Adriana Barker is a professional concertgoer, estate sale visitor, art lover and collector of pre-owned things. She supports her hobbies with a day job in marketing at Casa Mañana Theatre. You can read her published work at www.adrianabarker.com.

Cameron Barth is a video editor, Dungeons and Dragons podcast host and ultimate frisbee player who lives in Portland, Maine. His mom encouraged him to join this competition with her, and he had a ton of fun writing poetry for the first time.

Monica Berry was born in upstate New York and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She attended Midwestern, Big Ten schools for college and law school but ended up in Texas. She's an in-house lawyer who writes in her free time, believes in fairytale endings, and eats dessert before dinner whenever possible.

Barbara Blanks is recording secretary, librarian and acting treasurer (plus other assorted roles) for the Poetry Society of Texas. An award-winning poet, she is the author of 11 books and co-author of one. Her work appears in a variety of publications and anthologies. Barb is known for her exuberant love of life, the liberties she often takes with her own reality, and her pursuit of a sense of direction.

Helen Chandler is a retired writing and professional communications instructor who taught at Dallas College's El Centro and Brookhaven campuses and at the University of North Texas. She enjoys gardening (really, farm-labor-type yard work) and spending time with her partner, Dena, and Chihuahua, Daisy, as well as family, neighbors and friends.

Karen Cline-Tardiff has been writing for as long as she could hold a pen. She is the author of the chapbook *Raccoon*. Her works have appeared in several anthologies and journals, both online and in print. She stays

up too late and snoozes her alarm past any reasonable time. She is founder and editor-in-chief of Gnashing Teeth Publishing. Find her at karenthepoet.com.

dès Anges Crusier has a doctorate in social psychology. She has invested her life in education, systems management, and research in behavioral health sciences, supporting her daughters, grandson and granddaughters. She now enjoys retirement, writing and traveling with her amazing husband and their two dogs.

Lauren Dowdy is a middle school English teacher from Dallas who loves spending time outdoors with her husband and two sons.

Annie Christine Freshwater is a poet and novelist who examines the ghosts of our own making that haunt our inner and outer landscapes. Her chapbook, *Diluvium*, is available from Finishing Line Press. Annie is a co-host on The Poetry Lab Podcast, with a focus on the intersections between the magical and the mundane. In her free time, she enjoys looking at dinosaur fossils at natural history museums and whispering secrets to her collection of philodendrons.

Josie Gepulle is a writer and artist from North Texas. She believes writing is good for the soul and thinks everyone should try it at least once.

Valentina Gnu's poetry collection, *Ruined Music*, was published by Grayson Books in 2024. In 2023, she won the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Award for Poetry as well as second place for the Yeats Poetry Prize. She has also won the Lascaux Prize in Poetry (2019), the Ekphrastic Challenge from Rattle (2017) and the Rattle Reader's Choice Award (2015). She lives in Mill Valley, California. Find her at valentinagnup.com.

Emma Pearl Johnson grew up rambling around a small family farm in East Texas, learning to bake bread, grow a garden and sew a straight seam. She earned her BFA at Stephen F. Austin State University and her MFA at North Carolina State University, where she was a finalist in the 2017 and 2018 poetry contests. Her poems have appeared in *The Blue Route*. Emma lives in Hurst, Texas, with her husband and their dog.

Paul Koniecki lives and writes in Dallas. He was once chosen for the Ashbery Home School residency. His poems feature in Richard Bailey's movie, *One of the Rough*, distributed by AVIFF Cannes. His work has been

published by Cathexis Northwest Press, *The Blue Mountain Review*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Chiron Review*, *As It Ought to Be* magazine, *Henniker Review*, *Gasconade Review*, *Thimble Literary Magazine* and many other places.

Karen Krotzer is a retired elementary school teacher who resides in Manassas, Virginia, and grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. She has been published in school literary and art magazines in high school and in college, and by Great Lakes Poetry Press, the Tom Bird Institute, Hutton Publications (with a poem nominated for the Pushcart Prize), Local Gems Press, *The RavensPerch*, *Retrograde Review* and *The Miserere Review*.

M R Longoria (@traumacanvas) is a visionary creator whose work maps the intricate geography of the human psyche. Emerging from a personal need to translate the unspoken into the visual, her creative journey explores trauma, resilience and the anatomy of healing. A studio-trained artist based in Allen, Texas, she is a graduate of the University of North Texas. She uses her talents to create works that evoke hard conversations.

Paulina López is an art museum educator. She enjoys listening to decluttering podcasts as she drives to local thrift shops to buy more clutter. Born in Mexico and raised in the Midwest, she now lives in Oak Cliff with her husband, two (soon to be three) children, and a growing collection of half-used planners.

Budd Powell Mahan is the author of five publication-winning poetry books. He is past president of both the Poetry Society of Texas and the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc. He is an actor who has appeared in over 70 local stage productions and a public school teacher who retired after 36 years in the profession.

Ximena Montemayor-Luna was born and raised in Dallas. An avid reader growing up, she's had a love for words since the age of five. She graduated from the University of North Texas in 2019 with a master's degree in public administration and has dedicated her career to the nonprofit sector. In her free time, she enjoys running, baking, crafting and spending time with loved ones (especially her 10-year-old dog).

Qua Moore is a poet and mother of two teens who writes from the quiet spaces most people avoid. For her, writing is both therapy and art, a place where feeling becomes form. Her work moves through softness

and depth, exploring identity, memory and becoming. With a voice that lingers rather than demands, she invites readers inward, where truth is felt, not forced, and every layer of self is gently revealed.

Shannon Morley writes poetry, fiction and creative nonfiction. She is an editor with *The Lascaux Review*.

Bradley Samore currently works as a technical writer. His poems have appeared in *The Florida Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Thimble* and other publications. He is a winner of the Creative Writing Ink Poetry Prize. Find him at www.BradleySamore.com.

Zeke Shomler is a poet and educator in Fairbanks, Alaska. His work has appeared in *AGNI*, *Modern Language Studies*, *The Shore* and elsewhere.

Amanda Trout is a Midwestern writer with a love for sound, form and cicadas. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Barzakh* magazine, *Pleiades*, *NOVUS* literary journal and other publications. Her micro-chapbook, *Still Life*, was published by Yavanika Press in 2024. She currently teaches composition and studies poetry at Oklahoma State University. Find Amanda on Instagram @atrout2972.

Marcus Tsai lives in Texas. A Pushcart nominee, he is the winner of the 2024 Robert Bone Memorial Creative Writing Contest and is a recent alumnus of the Kenyon Summer Workshop. His work appears or is forthcoming in *The Rumpus*, *Jersey Devil Press*, *Dulcet* and *Rectangle*, among others.

Linda Vandlac Smith lives and writes in a rural valley north of Seattle, Washington. Her poems often focus on interpersonal relationships, life in the Pacific Northwest and their intersections. Her work appears in small-press and online journals, most recently in *Pontoon*, *Chiron Review*, *Radical Teacher* and *Rattle*, as well as in several published and upcoming anthologies.

Katherine Whitworth is a writer from Dallas. She graduated from Brigham Young University with a bachelor's degree in English and now teaches English as a second language in her local community. Her work has been published in *Irreantum*, *Segullah* and *Livina Press*. She is also a mother to two daughters who keep her busy and inspire her creativity.

Ryan Wilde drifts Dallas.

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, most recently *Self-Portrait as Odysseus* (Tebot Bach Press, 2011). He's won numerous prizes, and his poetry has appeared in magazines and anthologies throughout North America. Having retired from IT work in 2023, he lives in Burleson, Texas, with his wife and their aging German Shepherd, Charlie.

Raychel Yearsley lives in East Dallas and writes essays and poetry. She has previously been published by The Writer's Garret in *The Common Language Project: Horizon* and *Poetry in Place* anthologies. As a psychotherapist, she is especially interested in the healing and validating powers of poetry. She writes at poetictherapy.substack.com.



The Writer's Garret