

The Road Not Taken

A Journal of Formal Poetry

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The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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David W. Landrum

David W. Landrum teaches Literature at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. His poems have appeared widely, most recently in *Angle*, *Mojave Review*, *Measure*, *Asian Cha*, and *The Literary Bohemian*.

On a Line from Sanguineti

Il mio libro sei tu, mio vecchio amore . . .

----Edoardo Sanguineti

You are my book, old lover—and you told
a story and I saw your page unfold.

You chose to open yourself up—to part
those delicate white leaves and show your art.

I read your narrative time after time.
When you were poetry, meter and rhyme,

we loved. Then you became prose and pushed on.
We reached our story's end when love was gone.

You told me you left thinking you were just
a passing interest of my curious lust.

So true. And yet don't think the tale you told
will be forgotten. Even when I'm old,

I will remember you and what you said—
your story told by lamplight in my bed.

Grey-Eyed Morning

Rainfall and sunlight checked; grey clouds, the thrum
of droplets on the roof; the windows jeweled,
you next to me in bed, this magic spun
from neutral tones; air and our spirits cooled

by breezes. A garish awakening
would not be proper in this misty dawn,
no morning birds to sing,
mist hiding land and sky like curtains drawn.

Saint Julian's Cat

Saint Julian, in hagiography,
holds up a tabby cat and strokes its fur.
Of animals, a cat alone could be
kept in a convent. The Prioress would incur
Chaucer's scorn for keeping little dogs
as pets—she fed them milk and roasted meat
and found herself set in his analogues
of clergy who had undergone defeat
by those three enemies of Christian worth
Jesus noted: the world, the flesh, the devil;
who spent their threescore years and ten on earth
engaged in unimaginative evil.

Saint Julian obeyed. An anchoress
could have a cat and live in holiness.

Scott Wiggerman

Scott Wiggerman is the author of two books of poetry, *Presence and Vegetables and Other Relationships*, and the editor of several volumes, including *Wingbeats: Exercises & Practice in Poetry*, *Lifting the Sky: Southwestern Haiku & Haiga*, and the brand new *Wingbeats II*. Recent poems have appeared in *Decades Review*, *Frogpond*, *Pinyon Review*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, and the anthologies *This Assignment Is So Gay* and *Forgetting Home: Poems about Alzheimer's*. He is chief editor for Dos Gatos Press in Austin, Texas, publisher of the *Texas Poetry Calendar*, now in its seventeenth year.

Blue Heron

He's offered glimpses, but today he stands
in all his glory—steely blue, a tinge
of silver, rather like a knife—the pond's
reflection sharp and clear, but also strange:
that neck, a twisted metal plumber's snake
more suited to a sink; those thin gray pipes
called legs, attached by tiny nuts that mock
a heavy plumage; last, the tuft that ropes
atop his head, a quirky ornament.

An odd array of parts, this bird, now seen
away from camouflage of trees, the tent
of grayish bark he blends with well, as when
pondwaters ripple and reflections skew
the thing we think we know, now shown anew.

Sentry

I heard them first—their quirky squawks—before
I saw the parrots. Green as jungles, fresh

as spring desire, their feathers rich and brash,
so unforeseen, I did a double-take.

So green on green, it took a stroke of luck
to spot these three among the leaves, but then

the telltale beaks, the doll-like eyes, the din
of vibrant colors. Where'd they been the last

ten months? And could I possibly have missed
such flash each day? I savor the moment,

aware it might soon fly away. I want
to turn virescent: blend into the green

as long as time allows. To stand alone,
remain a hidden sentry, wait for more.

A Perfect Day

The buds were brown larvae last week, but now they're white as cotton balls. The willow tree, its mess of strands like seaweed set loose, wows with leaves in force this week. A certainty, a thrum of hope, the unaccustomed sprout—spring is the cult of metaphor. It's there in tiny stars of blue that all but shout among rosemary's spikes; the peach that shares new blossomed scents; the yellow daffodil and early iris. Even weeds, those green precursors, are welcome in March. What will tomorrow bring that now cannot be seen? What change, what wonders to discover? See that rose about to leave its cave and be?

Too Brief

While summer lingers like an accident
and winter holds on with a bitter grip,
poor autumn barely starts before he's spent,
a smear between the heat and cold, a blip.
For even leaves bypass feverish hues,
transform to brown in just a blink, as though
you wake up from a Rip van Winkle snooze
to find a season's come and gone. Below
the trees the muddle begins—twigs and leaves
amass in prairie dry as wheat. It's hot
as June, but it's November. Summer grieves
while winter nears, but autumn, he gets squat.
You see that flare of sumac, hidden in
the grass? There's your season, abrupt as sin.

Gilbert Allen

Gilbert Allen has lived in upstate South Carolina and taught at Furman University since 1977. Measure Press published his sixth collection of poems, *Catma*, shortly before he was inducted into the South Carolina Academy of Authors in April 2014. Some of his newest work has appeared (or will soon appear) in *floor-plan-journal*, *The Georgia Review*, *Measure*, *Miramar*, *Poem*, *The Southern Review*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

This Segment on Spirituality in America Is Brought to You by Victoria's Secret

The brunette intones, breathily,
Believe in miracles
as the camera waltzes away
baring her clavicle

then her miraculous under-
garment, hoisting her breasts
on some invisible platter
like twin Johns (the Baptists),

perfected pates. Possession must
be nine-tenths of belief
and Gadzooks, she's really got it—
Good News for every wife.

Angles are among us—
alas, mostly obtuse.

Fourteen Sentences That Couldn't Have Happened to Nicer People

Her bathing suit had left her far behind.

He did a swan dive into a mirage.

Her Jag fell through the bridge she had designed.

His bomb worked nicely, in his own garage.

The kid she'd spanked became her principal.

The hit man's gun exploded in his hand.

Her best Rottweiler learned to crush her skull.

His ex-wife repossessed his wedding band.

The dryer shrank her panties to a thong.

The fag he fired bought his company.

Her bungee cord was half a foot too long.

The rapist botched his own vasectomy.

She read her Harlequin Romance, and cried.

He fell into his septic tank, and died.

The Dictator's Driver

Like a golf swing, empathy can be learned.

—Dr. George Hamilton

Hold me. With both hands. That's it.
Now see that tiny white
head, bald as a cancer patient's,
lying between your feet?

It's your infant daughter's. Just swing
and feel her lovely pain
as you perfect it, like a pro,
again, again, again

exquisitely, until it stops
being good. Until my
sweet spot sours, and your soul scrapes
the corner of your eye.

Congratulations, Ace!
You've joined the human race!

Two 8X10s, Still in Her Living Room

A wheel fell off an ancient Coupe DeVille,
killed his twin brother, fifteen years ago.
My staring makes him feel uncomfortable.

The bitch behind the wheel, responsible,
still keeps in touch. She's 87 now.
No longer drives her ancient Coupe DeVille.

I begged them not to buy a motorcycle.
My dead son listened. But the live one? No.
My caring made him feel uncomfortable.

Three bikes later, off to Fayetteville.
Without a helmet. Via Idaho.
I wasn't in that frigging Coupe DeVille—

His farewell note, nearly illegible—
I can't be Derrick, Mom. I'm only Joe.
My staring made him feel uncomfortable.

His brother begged him for a birthday thrill.
Just one time, Joe, and Mom will never know.
A wheel fell off an ancient Coupe DeVille.
My staring makes them feel uncomfortable.

Antonia Clark

Antonia Clark, a medical writer and editor, has also taught poetry and fiction writing and is co-administrator of an online poetry forum, The Waters. She is the author of a poetry chapbook, *Smoke and Mirrors* (Finishing Line Press, 2013) and a full-length poetry collection, *Chameleon Moon* (David Robert Books, 2014). Her poems and short stories have appeared in numerous print and electronic journals, including *Anderbo*, *The Cortland Review*, *Eclectica*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Rattle*, and *Softblow*. Toni lives in Vermont, loves French picnics, and plays French café music on a sparkly purple accordion.

The Drowned Girl

My grandmother would never watch me swim.
They'd pulled her daughter, Dorcas, from the pond
when she was twelve. I looked like her, except
that she was delicate and blonde. Her feet
were bound, as though with ropes, by tangled weeds
that held her down. She might not have been found
so soon but for her cornsilk hair that floated
on the surface like a water flower. She drowned.
And my grandmother wept late into life,
until at last, her pale and searching eyes
grown wild, she saw in me her own lost child.
My grandmother, in her senility,
half-rising from her damp and sagging bed,
called out to me, "Dorcas, come here!" I fled.

Longing to be a sonnet, she

worked to keep herself in line
and curbed her wayward, wandering feet
that skipped ahead of the regular beat.
Partial to intricate design,
she wished above all else to make
a pleasing pattern through subtle play
of rhyme, and loved the reckless way
that any line could suddenly break
your heart. But now and then her style
broke the rules. Alarming!
cried some of the critics. Yet rather charming,
claimed others. And so versatile!
And though she didn't always measure
up, she persisted in her pleasure.

The Way To Go

You've got to move fast, let go, light out, leave
your babies crying in your mother's arms.
Imagine the worst: your house on fire, alarms
blaring. Take your comb and cash. Believe
someone will come after you. Leave now,
on foot, but leave no footprints. Leave the doors
ajar, the dirty dishes, tumbled drawers,
the broken night's debris. Remember how
he slunk in doorways, lingered in the hall,
his big talk, bad breath, groping hands, unsteady
footing, lurking in shadows, always ready
to twist your arm, to jerk your head back, drawl
close to your ear: Where you been, sugar? Hey,
don't you know I've been waiting here all day?

Gwen Hart

Gwen Hart teaches writing at Buena Vista University. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Measure*, *First Things*, and *PRISM International*. Her poetry collection, *Lost and Found*, is available from David Robert Books.

The Empress of Kisses

Because I fell in love with poetry,
my mother sighed and said that I was doomed
to work at a cosmetics factory,
naming lipsticks. How else did I presume

to make a living? And so I buckled down:
The-only-red-umbrella-in-the-crowd,
The-pearly-froth-of-a-bubble-bath-just-drawn,
The-glow-of-Christmas-lights-beneath-a-shroud-

of-snow-enveloping-the-sugar-maple.
My mother scoffed. "Don't you understand
these have to fit on *tiny* lipstick labels?"
Her ridicule could not slow my hand.

I'd glimpsed my future. Nothing could eclipse
a thousand kisses from a thousand lips.

Marginalia

I found some comments written in my hand—
short, cryptic quips and squiggles on the page.
I wondered who I *was*, so I began

to turn the pages, trying to understand
the code—an ‘X’ for ‘disagree’? Amazed,
I found these comments written in my hand

were tiny tickets to a foreign land,
small time machines set to a former age.
I wondered *who* I was, since I began

to see that now I love a book I panned
when I was younger. (Convictions can be changed,
I found.) The comments written in my hand

had several layers. As sediment is panned
to search for gold, I sifted through each stage,
uncovered who I was. Then I began

to pen new words. My separate selves now stand
together on the margin’s narrow stage,
two sets of comments written in my hand,
connecting *who I was* and *who I am*.

Gregory Palmerino

Gregory Palmerino's essays and poems have appeared in *Explicator*, *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, *College English*, *Amaze: The Cinquain Journal*, *International Poetry Review*, *Courtland Review*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *The Lyric* and *the fib review*. He teaches writing at Manchester Community College and writes poetry in Connecticut's Quiet Corner.

Sound Madness

--After Seeing Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* Online

I love how *O* starts low in the belly
like *Om*, arises in the throat with *da*,
and eases past my grinning teeth with *ee*.

These sounds to me are succulent soma,
physical drugs, so *Odalisque* can't trick
in her light manner, staring in the raw

all nil. She must lay in sounds we can lick,
sounds we can kiss with open mouth. Her hue
must not convey or fein in pixel talk,

but shout at dilettantes who dare subdue
her lines. Her peacock eye, the one that's blind
at night, must not elude one part of you,

art lover; it must roil the blood in kind
and compel the sound madness of your mind.

After (Litter) Fall

My winter is nothing like an old man
who gripes and broods over the rags of fall,
worn out clothing stitched by summer's hand,
whose weedrobes trip the light ephemeral:
a final dance of deciduous waste,
when light and color step over the brink
from nature's first green to autumn's posthaste
to fashion an interstice out of sync.

My winter is like a woman, instead,
who weaves lost fibers into living yarn.
With season as form and color as thread,
my lapsarian seamstress comes to darn
a fertile garment round her lover's feet
so colloid and crystal at last can meet.

Peter Roberts

Peter Roberts has poems forthcoming in *New Myths*, *Lilliput Review*, & *erbacce* (UK), and has had well over 100 poems and stories published over the years in at least 70 different magazines and journals. He has a BS in mathematics from the University of Pittsburgh. Peter currently lives with his wife in north-central Ohio.

Sylvia

i wrapped an oven 'round my head,
turned on the gas, & now i'm dead.

my husband left, so i left, too;
our violent affairs were through.

life was as it should not be:
i wrote to let my anger free,
but anger turned itself on me.

i left a child, & a child —
should i be praised, or be reviled?

my poems, it seems, will still be read
long after controversy's fled;

can such immortality
(impersonal, as it must be)
compensate for loss of me?

Kevin Murphy

Kevin Murphy's work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Heron Tree*, *Gravel Magazine*, *5x5*, *Cactus Heart*, and other journals. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Idaho. He currently resides in Asheville, NC with his person named Shannon.

Each Screen Its Purpose

Our evenings often spent inseparable
at home. The living room: museum of new
and old gaming systems. Shaped in a U:
our couches facing four T.V.s – the spoils
of five young men combined. As though labeled
on each screen: its purpose. All on. Three mute.
The internet in constant laptop use.

My roommates: one on Xbox soccer. While
waiting their turn: one sits stuck to the web
in the corner. One moves through channels ducking
commercials. One plays a different game. Wedged
inside it all, rotating screens, I watch –
earbuds in, blinking pixilated dust
from my eyes – while swallowed by the red couch.

Carol Lantz

Carol Ann Lantz and her husband live northwest of Corvallis, Oregon in the foothills of the Coast Range Mountains. She is a botanist by training, a lover of nature by genetics, and a poet by avocation.

She is fortunate to live beside thousands of acres of forested land, criss-crossed by old logging roads and elk/deer trails. She is a graduate of Oregon State University with a degree in botany. Although she writes in all genres, her preference is in formal poetry. Eight of her poems were commissioned by the Chintimini Chamber Music Festival for a song cycle (*The Gray Unsettled Light*) composed by David Mullikin who was at the time a member of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, and performed in concert in Corvallis. Her poems have been published in such popular magazines as *The Bark* and *Open Spaces*, and have frequently appeared in the Oregon State Poetry Association's anthology of winning poems. Some of her poems have also appeared "on-line", for example, *The Western Cowboy Poetry at the Bar-D-Ranch* published a favorite poem of hers entitled "Lessons I Learned From A Horse I Called Pride."

Street Dog

I could have knelt beside the dog, mussed
his coarse fur through my fingers; in time,
rekindled in him loyalty and trust,
made the mangy mongrel mine.
But it was easier to drive on through
the intersection where he dodged across
the busy streets. Oh, let someone who
needs a dog buy him a collar; give the lost
perhaps abandoned animal a name,
walk him in the park, toss him a stick.
He lapped oily rainwater beside my lane,
pawed a crumpled fast-food wrapper, licked
the soggy litter, pilfered its scant prize,
He raised his head, looked at me—his eyes seemed
to remember something, seemed to recognize
something from someone. Then the light turned green.

Gail White

Gail White (gailxpoet@cox.net) lives in Louisiana and publishes widely in formalist poetry circles. Her manuscript ASPERITY STREET has been chosen as a Special Honoree by Able Muse Press, and will be published in 2015. Her chapbook, SONNETS IN A HOSTILE WORLD, is available from Amazon.

Lady Macbeth

He was the best of the unlikely batch
That courted me in our grim countryside.
My father didn't really like the match –
But gave Macbeth his temperamental bride.

He would have missed his chance without my care
In managing events that crucial night.
“Leave all the rest to me”, I said – and there
He left it. Our prospective crowns were bright

But tarnished in the day we put them on.
Loyalty didn't stick with us for long.
I thought one little murder might be done
And then no more. It seems that I was wrong.

And now Macbeth can't sleep? I'd rather be
Awake than dream and see the things I see.

Benedick's Beatrice

Just when love's temperature is hitting zero,
Here come the gentlemen back from the war.
Young Claudio is making eyes at Hero,
Remembering he fancied her before.

And Benedick? His heart is so elastic
No doubt its contents have been rearranged
A little bit. He found me too sarcastic
Last year, and he won't find me very changed.

If I could learn to act like other women -
Hiding all evidence of having brains,
Making my heart a pool for him to swim in -
I'd have a chance, but I won't take the pains.

In every dumb and placid beauty lurks
A wit. It's not our fault that men are jerks.

Jeff Burt

Jeff Burt has work forthcoming in *Spry*, *Story Shack*, *phren-z*, and *On the Rusk* . He has published in journals such as *Thrice Fiction*, *Storm Cellar*, *Star 82*, *Windfall*, *Dirty Chai*, and *The Cortland Review*.

American Principle

Leave us alone.
Let us generously congregate.
Others pester.
Don't allow them to associate.

Let us snoop, spy,
Drop in on their disquieting speech
Like bats from caves
Of laws, but still keep us out of reach.

We may hang right
Or left. The prying is similar.
Shine the spotlight,
On Dick and Jane. Everyone's sinister.

Jean Syed

Jean Syed has been published by The Road Not Taken before and has had various poems published in The Lyric. She has also been published by St. Anthony Messenger, Bird Watchers' Digest and others long defunct. She has had a book of sonnets published by Dos Madres Press and a book nature poems published by Kelsay Books under the Alabaster Leaves imprint. She has also been broadcast locally and has appeared in several anthologies and newsletters.

As is A Butterfly

The oak-leaved hydrangeas were white and green
Like me. Summer is past, petals turn pink,
Though imperceptively, the pink turns beige,
And snipping scissors cut, destroy their age.

I desire to be as those pink flowers
Seeking the shade of a peaceful garden,
Though imperceptively I walk to clay,
Here are my threescore years and ten today.

When florists spray silica gel to fix,
Preserve the pink, they look on the mature.
My pink is confident new clothes, for I
Am at peak prime - as is a butterfly.

Andrew Graney

Andrew Graney is a recent graduate of the University of Delaware, where he earned a degree in English, with a concentration in Creative Writing. He plans to continue his studies in an MFA program. Recently, he has been published by the Random Acts of Poetry series at the University of Delaware.

Internet Flix

I open up my notebook thinking I
just need to discipline myself and write,
just need to turn the TV off and try.

The twenty shows a day has surely fried
my brain. Has turned it to a stringless kite.
I open up my notebook thinking I

just need to write some words, then pick and pry
through metaphors to get out of this plight.
Just need to turn the TV off and try

to write a draft, then let it cool and dry
and see if I like it tomorrow night.
I open up my notebook thinking I

don't know why I can't pull my screen-glazed-eyes
away, but every program wins the fight.
Just need to turn the TV off and try.

I feel like Sisyphus and start to cry.
It's just TV. I'll stop. I'll stop tonight!
I open up my notebook thinking I
just need to turn the TV off and try.

Tracey Gratch

Tracey Gratch lives in Quincy, MA with her husband and their four children. Her poems have appeared in various and sundry publications including, *Mezzo Cammin*, *The Literary Bohemian*, *The Flea*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *The New Verse News* and *The Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine*. Her poem, "Strong Woman" is included in the *American College of Physicians, On Being A Doctor, Volume IV*.

Blueprints

No worse for wear, they hang square on the wall,
cyanotype – a story built on stone.
In the foyer, which they called, *Reception Hall*,

these white lines etched on blue have set the tone.
I felt the first time I had entered here
the stateliness its maker sought to hone.

The details he had measured with great care –
like the roof deck and the kitchenette, upstairs,
the sconces and the gumwood, red and bare.

We bought the house, and now we'll make repairs –
the pipes are brass, the kitchen has to go.
I clean the glass and think of *their* affairs –

The blueprints, framed a – clue to what we know,
of someone's dream, some eighty years ago.