

A photograph of a long line of utility poles stretching across a body of water under a blue sky with light clouds. The poles are arranged in a perspective line, receding into the distance. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a clear, pale blue with some light, wispy clouds. The utility poles are tall and slender, with cross-arms and wires. The overall scene is serene and evocative.

# The Road Not Taken

## A Journal of Formal Poetry

Summer, 2015

# **The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry**

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## **The Road Not Taken:**

### **NEWS**

First, I want to thank all my contributors, not only for your excellent poems, but for your patience in proofing, waiting – in short, everything that goes into putting together a new issue.

Now, the **Big News**: there are two of us on the editorial staff now. Please welcome **Rachel Jacobs** to *The Road Not Taken*. Rachel comes to us from the University of Chicago, and when she is not reading poetry, she works in educational publishing. All the improvements we make over the last year will probably be due to her; she is the pragmatist to my academic. Welcome, Rachel!

**Also**: Kelsay Press published *Wedged Elephant* in June 2015. *Wedged Elephant* is a book of poetry in four chapters by yours truly, and it progresses from “Elephant's Child” to “Frankenstein” to “A Sad Dearth of Ducks” to “Art is Where You Find It.” The poetry is (of course) metrical, but it is also flexible. See [this link](#) for more information. And enjoy the summer issue.

Managing Editor  
Kathryn Jacobs

## **Karen Kelsay**

Karen Kelsay, native of Southern California, is the founder and editor of Kelsay Books. Her poetry has been published in magazines and journals including: *Mezzo Cammin*, *Trinacria*, *String Poet*, *The HyperTexts*, *The Raintown Review* and *The New Formalist*.

### **The Visit**

She had a dream her husband came to chat;  
He floated by the closet near her bed.  
She frantically apologized for how  
His clothes had gone to charity, and said:

*I didn't know that you were coming back!*  
And then he turned around to check the place,  
As if he wanted to familiarize  
Himself with homey things, and see her face.

Inside the living room he turned to find  
A flat screen hanging on the wall. *Oh, THAT*  
*Dang thing looks expensive! What the heck?*  
And so she gave his hand a little pat—

*I've loved the chance to see you once again,  
Now please be good and go back where you've been.*

## **Lady of Shalott**

French tapestries, embroidered with spun gold,  
hang down against your polished cherry walls.  
Around sachets of lavender you fold  
soft skeins of yarn. A distant tower calls.  
You pause to hear Westminster chimes—a song  
that's carried up from Camelot. Light weaves  
with shadow near the window pane. A long  
alluring ray gleams through the barley sheaves.  
Your dress is caught beneath the chair and rips.  
You brace yourself to stop the fall, and wield  
the loom against the mirror. Your world tips,  
dismantled by a knight across the field.  
The canvas is in ruins, you're distraught,  
and no one else is left but Lancelot.

## **An Expatriate's Message**

Remember me to homeland winter skies,  
where dusk sifts purple ribbons through the leaves  
around the linnets huddled in the limbs  
of sycamores. Remember me to seas

and fishing villages between the bluffs,  
cathedral bells and heather on the moor.  
Recite my name when tufted mallards pass  
beneath the bridge, and kindly reassure

the harebells they are missed. To thistle, woad,  
Valerian, extend regretful smiles.  
This California sun has held me back  
with bindweed grip, and bars me from the Isles.

## **At Sunset by the Oak**

I've come into the shadow of the oak  
to feel the spine of summer leaves. I've come  
to rest in realms of dampness, darkness. Stroke  
familiar branches beneath twilight's thumb.  
I've come to wrap long vines around my breasts  
and smear wet clay upon my dress. To weep.  
The nutmeg colored bark becomes a test.  
I find my way, I find my way. Time sweeps  
me like a leaf across a fieldstone wall,  
where like some flightless young, I huddle, cold.  
I've never found forgiveness in the small  
of night. That human element, controlled  
by drifts of tulips and the lilacs' white.  
That place I cannot love you in the light.

## Peter Branson

Peter Branson is a poet, songwriter & traditional-style singer whose work has been published by journals in Britain, the USA, Canada, Ireland, Australasia & S. Africa, including in *Acumen*, *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *Anon*, *Envoi*, *London Magazine*, *North*, *Prole*, *Warwick Review*, *Iota*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Interpreter's House*, *South*, *Crannog*, *The Shop*, *The Columbia Review*, *The Huston Poetry Review & Other Poetry*. His latest book, *Red Hill, Selected Poems, 2000- 2012*, by Lapwing, Ireland, came out in May 2013.

## After Aries

“ ... and the younge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,”  
Chaucer: General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales

The leaves are irresistible, like chicks  
from eggs, their pale translucent greens as sheer  
and delicate as wings on butterflies.  
Star supercharging, almost overnight,  
birds busy everywhere, the mood's transformed,  
the sway of light inside each pulsing breast  
a litany of song, like blossom on  
the breeze, to whet long-jaded appetite.  
Through copse and field, by river, lake and strand,  
to blank indifference of city street,  
where pilgrims make sweet harmony at pave-  
ment bar and coffee house, way of all flesh,  
desire infuses every human heart,  
from tender prioress to lusty squire.

## **'If life were a thing that money could buy -'**

'All you can see is houses, houses, houses, it makes me prostrate with dismal.'  
Jim, Bob's father, about Peacehaven, near Rottingdean, Sussex, circa 1930s.  
For Bob Copper, traditional singer, born 6<sup>th</sup> January 1915; d. 2004

Some say your joyous, high church harmonies  
led Sixties' young revivalists astray.  
Back there, where so few carriers of Folk  
survive, to copy-cat and idolise,  
your Copper-full of song rings true (still stirs  
today); inspires the Waterasons, then Steel-  
eye Span rock-glam struts by, high price to pay,  
bucolic idyll Kippered, pseuds in smocks.  
Recall 'The Black Horse' in your father's day,  
ripe language, ale, tobacco, wassail songs  
for every season, pass the jug rounds -  
at shearin's, hollerin' pots and harvest homes;  
grace notes, diminished fifths, as delicate  
as wild-flowers, charming chalk-hill-blue South Downs.

## **Elise Hempel**

Elise Hempel's formal and semi-formal poems have appeared in many journals over the years, including *Able Muse*, *Measure*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *The Midwest Quarterly*. Poems are forthcoming in *Angle*, *the Evansville Review*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and *Cumberland River Review*.

### **My Mother's Closet**

Beyond her linen suits still pressed  
for long-ago work, her pillbox hats  
once worn to church, her summer housedresses  
coffee-stained and sagged,

beneath the cobwebs her high-heels shut  
in their lidded boxes like coffins,  
and on a shelf, her satin clutch,  
its gold clasp and sequins

hinting of smoke and perfume, those  
nights before children she slipped  
out with her lipstick and powder, in hose,  
for hours turned and dipped

in that thin-strapped dress far back,  
zipped tight in a bag's cocoon,  
still swaying when I'd touch its black  
velvet under the bulb's dusty moon.

## **Elegy on Cleaning Day**

Still, at the end, each morning, my mother got ready  
in bright fluorescence, before the bathroom mirror,  
primping for her day of naps, TV,  
even as she saw her ever-thinner  
face, putting on a little lipstick, a dab  
of powder, unrolling the big rollers that gave  
some semblance of shape to her hair, a fly-away web,  
spraying her invisible helmet in circling waves.  
Then made her way to the blue sofa in these  
twin beige boats a decade in my closet,  
still side-by-side, pointing outward, as she always  
docked them next to the end-table to await  
each dwindling foot's insertion, her push -- ten polished  
ripples hard as stone, refusing to vanish.

## **The Visitation**

A glance, and there it is atop  
the very edge of our wooden fence,  
perched as if by nail or clip,  
holding on with perfect balance:

the dimmed outline of its head  
without a neck, a wide dome  
seeming to stare straight ahead  
then turning, wings unhinging from

the huge body, its heavy, slow  
rise but facile slice across  
the yard with only a flap or two,  
low-sweeping into darkness.

Who, sleepless, at another window  
will see it next by accident?  
And what, out crawling the night right now,  
will feel its swift descent?

## **Jenna Le**

Jenna Le's poetry collection *Six Rivers* (NYQ Books, 2011) was a Small Press Distribution Bestseller. Her poetry, fiction, criticism, and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI Online*, *Angle*, *Barrow Street*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Measure*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *The Normal School Online*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Rotary Dial*, and *The Village Voice*.

### **Surgeons Like You**

Husband, it was not my wish to cast aspersions on you.  
I was just so shocked to find two half-clad Persians on you!

I'll never look at poison ivy quite the same again.  
I was naive to go on this excursion with you.

I love baptisms, snorkeling, and the Great Molasses Flood:  
anything that causes swift submersion of you.

Last night, I let a stranger walk me home from Beantown Pub,  
but he was just a plucked, spit-polished version of you.

## **A History of the Cetacean American Diaspora**

Zoologists inform that us the whale  
evolved from a four-legged grassland mammal,  
a pampas-dwelling grampus, a rope-tailed  
veldt-roamer. This slope-nosed primeval camel

some million years ago made up his mind  
to settle in new digs beneath the sea,  
exchanging hooves for flippers, sky for brine.  
—The whale's a child of immigrants, like me.

I know the burn the surf-drunk humpback feels  
when, self-flung, he up-flounces out of water,  
dashing the sun's hot sclera with salt splatter.

I also know the glacial chill that seals  
his tug-sized heart off from the universe  
when, flubbing flight, he drops back down with force.

## **Emory Jones**

Dr. Emory D. Jones is an English teacher who has taught in Cherokee Vocational High School in Cherokee, Alabama, for one year, Northeast Alabama State Junior College for three years, Snead State Junior College in Alabama for two years, and Northeast Mississippi Community College for thirty-five years. He joined the Mississippi Poetry Society, Inc. in 1981 and has served as President of this society. He was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by this society in 2015. He has two hundred and thirty-five publishing credits. *DANCING AUTUMN: AN ETHEREE*

### **Dancing Autumn**

Leaves,  
Scarlet  
And yellow  
And almost purple  
In autumn flurry,  
Spin like helicopters  
Twirl through the streaking sunlight  
Pirouette like ballerinas  
On Mother Nature's beautiful stage—  
A final performance before winter.

## Robert McLean

Robert McLean was born at Christchurch, New Zealand in 1974. His poems, stories, reviews, and articles have been widely published in Australasia and elsewhere. He has published four books of poetry, the latest of which is *A Graveyard by the Sea* (Cold Hub Press). Widely anthologized, including in *Essential New Zealand Poems*, McLean is presently editing the selected poems of Diana Bridge. He lives in Wellington.

### An Ideogram

*The fourth throne room, Han Empire, 166 C.E.*

Expecting by right an audience,  
hirsute profiteers, reeking of  
civility and violence  
and clearly with a lot to prove,  
turned up with ivory, tortoiseshell,  
rhino horn, and mother-of-pearl.

Acquired en route, gift-shop bijou  
undermined their scant credentials.  
Bad manners simply would not do,  
whatever doyen these provincials  
were vassals of. Ta-ch'in bespeaks rumour,  
though one that intimates great power.

Such diplomacy debases coinage  
as surely as a chisel does.  
As if fatigued from their voyage,  
they genuflected while training eyes  
to covet our silks, friezes of gold,  
and equines hewn from polished jade.

An-tun, their no doubt pensive King  
in all but name, albeit a name  
that carried weight of reckoning,  
supposedly sponsored this periplum,  
as did projections of Ptolemy,  
two names utterly unfamiliar to me.

Huan sat impassively on his throne.  
The visit was noted in the scrolls,  
briefly. The smelly bearded men  
stayed for a time but soon set sail.  
They had nothing that we were lacking.  
We smiled and bowed. And sent them packing.

## Market Day In The Campo Di Fiori

The market in the Campo di Fiori  
exemplifies all that you'd want to know  
of native vanity and Nature's glory.  
And in its midst stands Giardino Bruno.

The *idée fixe* – exactingly defined –  
shuddered to think the solar system runs  
along a course not fashioned by God's mind:  
the stars we see at night are other suns.

His questions, doubts, and speculations pained  
the powers-that-were. They moved to disabuse  
him of such notions. Bruno was detained  
for the unorthodoxy of his views.

For seven years the arguments went on  
but soon enough they did as they would please.  
The defendant soon learnt all hope had gone,  
found guilty of a dozen heresies.

No doubt, the locals that day raised a cheer.  
They knew in sum he was a cheat and liar.  
They led him to the middle of the square  
where godly men had worked to build a pyre.

Men acting in the name of all that's good  
made Rome dead center of the universe.  
The brand was lit. Flames leapt from the dry wood.  
And Bruno uttered neither prayer nor curse.

His death – like many more to come – was well  
attended. His cowed figure hardly towers  
above the charming square where vendors sell  
your choice of fresh fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

## Judith Terzi

Judith Terzi's most recent chapbook, *If You Spot Your Brother Floating By*, is a collection of memoir poems from Kattywompus Press. Her poetry has appeared in journals and anthologies including *Myrrh*, *Mothwing*, *Smoke: Erotic Poems* (Tupelo), *Raintown Review*, *Times They Were A-Changing: Women Remember the 60s & 70s* (She Writes), *Unsplendid*, and *Wide Awake: The Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond* (Beyond Baroque). She holds an M.A. in French Literature and taught high school French for many years as well as English at California State University, Los Angeles, and in Algiers, Algeria.

## The Boys of Kabul

after "In Afghanistan, childhood is often a full-time job" (*Los Angeles Times*, 4/19/14)

Salim has learned to bake the naan and sell  
the baker's breads. He's only twelve but wakes  
at five to gather water from the well.  
At noon he runs to school, returns to bake  
more loaves for afternoon. And then the muezzin  
calls, and Salim prays. The oldest son,  
his job supports a family of ten.  
Sami's nine, he works at hawking gum  
or scarves or hunts for bites of trash to grab,  
while Hamid's on the streets hailing cabs.  
If Ali works his youth away at metal,  
who's to blame for labor laws abused,  
for hands already scarred from trays and kettles?  
These boys, they're tough, their fathers old and used.

**Brian Gavin**

**Eddie At The Counter**

He went down to the city for a job.  
Most likely, it was just about the time  
Ed Sr. said 'Good luck' and sold the farm  
for less than he had ought. It was a crime  
that no one proved to gain from, least of all  
the shop worker he would go on to become  
for all the long years of the 60 miles  
on Highway 19, the to and the from.  
It sort of made sense at that time, that choice,  
before the cars were to be made elsewhere,  
which started after 20 years of work,  
and left him leaning on the counter here;  
palms down, red apron, a tag, a name,  
a half a million miles from where he came.

## **Glenn Freeman**

Glenn Freeman has published two collections of poems, *Keeping the Tigers Behind Us* and *Traveling Light*. He teaches writing and American literature at Cornell College in small-town Iowa where he lives with his wife and two cats.

### **Black Friday in the Pines**

*For Walter Butts*

Somewhere mobs are shopping for deals on goods  
that never last, crowds in their rituals  
of consumption. Out here, oak leaves rattle  
and whisper in the breeze. An eagle scribes huge  
spirals across a gauzy sky. Here in the pines,  
heavy boughs shudder and whisper in the breeze;  
cardinals, juncos, and chickadees  
flit through leafless underbrush: such tiny,  
delicate voices against the constant hum  
of distant commerce. An early, wet snow  
melts underfoot, but in the shadows  
it resists: I think of your letters, typewritten  
and filled with poems in your beautiful voice.  
How stubbornly beautiful to see the world as verse.

## Len Krisak

Len Krisak's work has appeared in the *Hudson*, *Sewanee*, *Antioch*, *PN*, and *Southwest* reviews. A recipient of the Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, and Robert Frost Prizes, he is also a four-time champion on *Jeopardy!*

## Little Room

She had his “Loveliest of trees” by heart,  
Though not for what it said, but for its art:  
The teasing little math to puzzle out;  
The coy, cliff-hanging, snow-for-blossom doubt.  
She loved the bride-like cherry’s Eastertide,  
And how the bloom suggested what had died  
Would live again—all this perfected by  
The plaintive tone of *rerum lacrimae*.

So when she tendered it in quiet word-  
For-word, he took it as he thought that she  
Had meant. And he was right.

Soon, fifty springs  
Will have gone by, and everything he heard  
That day will be a bitter memory.  
(It all depends on how you look at things.)

## **Diana Woodcock**

Diana Woodcock's first full-length collection, *Swaying on the Elephant's Shoulders*, won the 2010 Vernice. Quebodeaux International Poetry Prize for Women. Her six chapbooks include *Beggar in the Everglades* (due out in September 2015), *Desert Ecology: Lessons and Visions*, *Tamed by the Desert*, *In the Shade of the Sidra Tree*, *Mandala*, and *Travels of a Gwai Lo*. Her second full-length collection, *Under the Spell of a Persian Nightingale*, is forthcoming from WordTech Communications in late 2015. Widely published in literary journals, her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Award. Her most recent award-winning poem, "Music as Scripture," was performed onstage in Lincoln Park, San Francisco in 2014 by Natica Angilly's Poetic Dance Theater Company at Artists Embassy International's 21<sup>st</sup> Dancing Poetry Festival. Since receiving an M.F.A. degree in Creative Writing in 2004, she has been teaching literature and writing courses at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar. Previously, she spent nearly eight years working in Tibet, Macau, and on the Thai-Cambodian border. She is a PhD candidate (creative writing/poetry) at Lancaster University.

### **Advice To a Suicide Bomber**

(on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Qatar's 2005 suicide bombing)

Once you decide, as they will help you to do,  
though you are full of second thoughts and fear,  
and wondering how on earth you ended up right here—  
and which day and hour, which city and venue—

go to a mountain and sit by a stream;  
invite the flowing waters, birds and trees to guide you.  
When they ask, *What are you about to do?*  
tell them every detail of the sordid scheme.

Tell them why you finally chose this course—  
why you truly believe you'll enter Paradise for this.  
Listen when they accuse you of cowardice.  
Allow them to lead you directly to Truth's source.

Once you decide, as trees, birds and stream will help you to do,  
though you are full of second thoughts and fear—  
knowing those who trained you may cause you to disappear—  
invite the flowing waters to baptize you.

## **Richard H. Peake**

Richard Peake published early poems in *Impetus* and *The Georgia Review*. Collections of his poems include *Poems for Terence, Birds and Other Beasts*, and *Earth and Stars*. Recent poems have appeared in *Avocet, Jimson Weed, Boundless, The Red River Review*, and *The Anglican Review*.

### **Strip Miners Avoid the Dark**

Another mine death makes the news  
today, brings thoughts of accidents  
so numerous it's hard to choose  
which disaster to mourn the most.

Not Hades, nor quite Hell, coal mines  
underground are dank and deadly,  
not for recreation, or wine,  
unless you toast a yen for death.

Work is not difficult today  
in mines; huge machines eat coal seams,  
but death is one roof fall away  
when you go down to dig black gold.

No wonder some miners prefer  
to stay above ground and blast rock  
covering coal seams. They'd rather  
tear up earth's face than face the dark.

## Joan Alice Wood Kimball

Joan Alice Wood Kimball, a founder of the Concord Poetry Center, was a Finalist for the 2010 Morton Marr and 2011 & 2012 *Atlanta Review* poetry prizes. She has published two poetry books, *This River Hill* and *Summer River*; and her poems have been accepted by *Arion*, *Atlanta Review*, *Measure*, *Raintown Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, and others.

### The Feeding Field

A ruffed grouse risks exposure in the meadow  
and clicks commands to her six half-grown chicks  
who scavenge random seedlings, ants and ticks  
close by. A rustling stalk or flying shadow  
makes her tip her head to check the sky  
for trolling hawks or listen for the crunch  
of booted feet. A hint from her, they'll hunch  
beneath the trees.

She gives a chirr.

They fly—

like people under siege—to reach an oak  
and watch a falcon slant across the field.  
They hide below sparse leaves, their only shield,  
till empty stomachs goad them to provoke  
honed claws again or gamble to outrun  
a hunting gun.

## **C.M. Rivers**

C.M. Rivers is a native of the Pacific Northwest, now living in New York. He writes poetry to observe the natural world and meditate on human nature. You can read more of his writing at [C.M. Rivers](#)

### **Of Time And Earthly Life**

They are the children,  
and we, their old,  
clutching mortal dreams  
like whirlwinds.

The rich ruddy mortar  
of body and soul  
paves the good sturdy road  
with its twists and bends.

Wheels carve lonesome tracks in the mud  
on our way to empty the urn.  
Whistling past the graveyard,  
the next generation takes its turn.

At times the weight  
is too much to bear,  
when stones  
are gathered together.

Yet each one alone,  
though still made of stone,  
can be shouldered  
in all kinds of weather.

## **Drew Marshall**

Mr. Marshall works as a Program Assistant, in the mental health field. His poetry has been published in various online and print journals. He is currently working on a collection of short stories. When not cemented to his desktop keyboard, he enjoys; walking, playing guitar, water colors, and practicing Tai Chi.

### **The Cell Phone that Never Rings**

She said her life was a mess.  
I told her she wasn't alone;  
We were in the same boat

Nothing worked out as planned.  
I saw a hint of a smile  
As she reached for my hand.

We live with choices forced on us,  
Along with choices made  
All the reasons eventually fade.

Someone told me  
Things work out for the best  
I can't remember  
If he was an enemy or a friend

Most of our friends and family are dead.  
When she travels  
She holds her cell phone, to her breast.

## **Michael Fraley**

Michael Fraley is a recent contributor to *The Road Not Taken*, *Poets' Espresso Review*, *Plainsongs*, *The Lyric*, and *Blue Unicorn*. Michael lives with his wife and daughter, and two full-time cats (not counting drop-ins), within walking distance of the San Francisco Zoo. Besides reading, he also enjoys photography, hiking, and vintage cameras.

### **The Butterfly**

The butterfly, whose time is brief,  
Still manages to spread her wings  
And catch the warmth that daylight brings.

A softly aging autumn leaf,  
Her wing strokes lift her up and down  
Before she settles to the ground.

Sometimes a pair of them will fly  
In urgent spirals side by side  
And yet somehow they don't collide.

Their presence lends the summer sky  
A surge of joy, a bright display  
Of beauty that is freed to play.

A living proof, if prove you must,  
A witness you can surely trust,  
The butterfly has left behind  
Her past life for a better kind.