The Road Not Taken
A Journal of Formal Poetry

Spring, 2016
The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Spring 2016 is a tribute to the flexibility of form and (stylistically) a polyglot issue. We begin with two flexibly fluid metrical poems by David Culwell and Carolyn Martin that juxtapose open-ended form and modern idiom with an unobtrusive pentameter. Ruth Asch and Elizabeth Cohen's poems look much less formal, but they balance a contemporary appearance with an underlying pentameter beat.

And so it continues. In the poems that follow readers will find everything from Western narrative to romantic delicacy, robust modern realism and social satire. Which is as it should be. For metrical poetry does not belong to one region, style or sensibility. And we at The Road Not Taken wish to show the wide variety of effects that can be achieved by that eclectic creature, metrical poetry.

Read and enjoy –

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Feature Poem

David Culwell

David Culwell holds a bachelor of journalism from the University of Texas at Austin and an MFA in fiction from Bowling Green State University. His fiction has appeared in Wisconsin Review, The Long Story, and The MacGuffin; his poetry has appeared in The Merton Seasonal, The Penwood Review, Anglican Theological Review, and Think. He was awarded the 2008 Thomas Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred and the 2009 Columbus Literary Award for poetry. He lives in College Station, Texas, where he works as a technical editor.

The Reader

esse est percipi

This sonnet, which I labored on one night (and now sits here in print), didn’t exist (idealists say) till you just now dismissed the world and started reading for delight. I, with silver hair and pen in hand, sat at a table, Labyrinths nearby. The book, with its white title, held my eye, which moved to an hourglass of spilling sand. I thought of a blind Borges and his zeal for Berkeley, who maintains a thing’s not there unless someone perceives it. In my chair, alone, I grew afraid I wasn’t real, so I wrote this to keep my fear at bay: I am because God never looks away.
Carolyn Martin

After forty years in the academic and business worlds, Carolyn Martin is blissfully retired in Clackamas, OR, where she gardens, writes, and plays. Her poems have been published in journals throughout the US and UK, and her second collection, The Way a Woman Knows, was released by The Poetry Box, Portland, OR in 2015. Since the only poem she wrote in high school was red-penciled "extremely maudlin," she is amazed she has continued to write.

Concurrencies

despite the fact the children are fighting
about who’s next to play Sir Lancelot
and I forgot the week of clothes sulking
in the dryer’s drum, ignored the dishes
caking in the sink; despite the fact
a stealthy jay is stalking skittish squirrels
and peanut snacks (she’ll wait for them to carve
their shell-shaped tombs then raid their mounded turf);
despite all these distracting ins and outs,
I’ve unearthed this poem and plan to post it
through Submittable to editors
who may have children of their own who play
with swords, lack fresh underwear and dishes
cleaned for lunch – realities these stressed aesthetes
never will reveal when I query why
my words have sulked for more than half a year
in hardened poem-shaped ground they call “Received.”
Ruth Asch

Ruth Asch is a poet, mother and teacher. Her book *Reflections* (St Austin Press) was published in 2009 and poems since in many literary journals. She translates foreign language poems into real poetry in English and hopes to have another book of her own in print soon.

Wanting

A whispered step, feignedly casual, downdown the passage... and back up, now loitering... as though with some intent, inward debate to halt, falter the tempered walk's long toiling.

Drab shadow, odd and yet familiar lingering by light-pools cast from open doors. Stares at the wall a moment, then retreatsin hasty unconcern; no look implores.

She does not beg, hunger hid in the bones which flute her, by a want-wind blown from place to place. Her mind sits in the rooms which laughter warms: a fed guest, welcome trill, a smiled-on face.

She chose a meagre supper carefully. Dined with ravenous restraint and pleasured sigh, perched on a narrow bed, at peace alone: a twilight interlude with hopeful, green-rimmed sky.

But then the darkness wakes. Rueful, unfilled she paces, moon-wasted, the halls, and dim-lit street. At last a cheery smile! a friendly wave. But all acquaintances pass as they greet.

She does not ask; want buried in the eyes whose light is turned to follow them. She stands apart. And smiles thinly, feeding herself with dreams and promises: the liar's trade, a loner's art.
Elizabeth Cohen

Elizabeth Cohen's work has appeared in River Styx, Kalliope, Hawaii Pacific Review, Exquisite Corpse, Yale Review and other publications. She is the author of four books of poetry, a memoir and a book of short fiction. She is a professor of English at SUNY Plattsburgh.

Area Codes

Dear 505  -- you were mesa
and chaff
roadrunners on the river bed
cottonwood's cragged arms

607 and 518
and little shack

in the 203, there is
no going back

Your all just numbers now
nostalgia cows

herded along Tunnel Road
in the dawn mist

902, 212, you are where it all began
true love and loss of love, the kissed

and the kisser,
when Jack the Ripper

sawed through my ankle
and left me stich-zippered

Dear 505, wash over me
with that special recipe

of your warm red dust, let me sit
in the sift

of slow light, dig in
my other heel, the good one
Yates Young

Yates Young has been writing poetry for over forty years. He majored in English Literature and minored in Mandarin Chinese at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition to writing original poetry, he translates Classical, Tang and Sung poetry. His poems have appeared in *Spitball, Bear Creek Haiku, The Road Not Taken and Ancient Paths*. He resides in Palm Coast, Florida.

What Would I Tell Your Next Lover About You?

She doesn’t sleep well.
She says what she thinks
especially when she’s drinking wine.
Her cooking’s divine.
She’s as good looking today
as she was on the day we met.
She buys pretty clothes
but she never overpays.
You’ll be proud to take her out.

She loves to soak in the tub
while talking with friends on the phone.
Will never refuse a foot or a back rub.
She worries a lot and that makes
her hurry so much that she’s already
forgotten what it was she forgot.

She said “I Do” because
she thinks I’m funny.
That was before we had money.
But now that we’re skimping again
she talks about being my friend.

There are things that
she doesn’t like sharing.
As for caring you couldn’t want better.
I hope that you never read this letter.
Thomas Davis

Thomas Davis has served as President of three tribal colleges and the Chief Academic Officer of three others. State University of New York (SUNY) Press published his book, *Sustaining the Forest, the People, and the Spirit*. He has been an editor of anthologies and three small literary magazines. He has had novels, short stories, essays, and plays published/performed in a wide array of venues.

**Spreading Wings**

On Friday nights I’d work all day, then walk home from the office where two teenaged girls were streaming past their mother with their talk about this boy, this girl, their endless whirl of friend, near-friend relationships that bloomed and changed like clothing changed from day to day. The minute that I touched the door excitement spumed as I gulped down a meal before Green Bay — and then we drove for forty country miles to where two girls could dance and laugh to songs and show that small town girls had mastered styles that big town girls would envy all night long. I sat inside a dinghy Burger King and read while daughters spread their teen club wings.
Alan Cohen

Alan Cohen has been unearthing/shaping/composing poems (formal) and tells (less formal) for decades. He has always been fascinated by the crossroads where poet, audience and editor/intermediary intersect. This is his first hesitant venture into that intersection in a literary journal, committing what he’s seen/known/felt/transformed out into the open before anonymous contemporary readers. It seems to him momentous, a rite of passage. He has been married to Anita for 36 years and they live in Eugene, Oregon.

Empiricism

So I am to be the needle
that pulls this thread through your wound
that closes your skin to the daylight
makes certain the scar be small
poised, brilliant, sharp, and sterile
disposable after use
a transient shaft in your tissues
until you can heal yourself

So I am to be the window
through which you will learn to see
as spring explodes into summer
and blossoms fall in a shower
defend your senses from danger
until they're hardened and wise
remain in this frame and darken
as you enjoy foreign worlds

So I am to be the lantern
that lights your way through the gloom
that breaks the darkness like lightning
then lapses into this jar
so I am to be the vision
that you will be traveling by
until in the dawn you leave me
blow out my flame and depart

I am the flower and the windstorm
the self you see in the glass
I am the sun and the starlight
I write my love on the air
you can make me your utensil
others have tried in vain
this beauty comes once in a lifetime
it will never come again
Lee Nash


Death on a suburban estate

Don't die on a Wednesday in mid-July
when you've just installed new double-glazing.
No one will notice, and no one will cry.
All else will continue: central heating,
insurance policies, hypericum.
Only your wife who finds you, red as brick
but cold as stone, will moan. A tripped alarm,
her voice will carry over the clean-picked
lawns, stop neighbors in their ceremony
of washing. Santa, who clung for his life
last Christmas, is replaced by a small tree –
fiber-optic glory glints off a knife:
she never used to carve, must find the knack.
Buckets of flowers edge the cul-de-sac.
Moving on

The cottage is dim, as cottages are;
not all the ash has fallen in the grate.
I stroke a line through dust with my finger;
in the kitchen, one glass, one dinner plate –
it’s obvious a man has ceased to care.
Once, she confided she could not believe
that marriage could be any other way,
thought everyone was that devoted
to their mate. When her mother died, she grieved,
paid her natural debt. He could not pay,
left her clothes where they were, across a chair;
lived out his days sane yet broken-hearted.
Then his daughter, too, found her perfect match;
she sold the cottage, and its maslin thatch.
Craig Daniel Koon

Craig Daniel Koon was born in the Rust Belt of Northeastern Ohio in 1976 and has studied Writing and Humanities at Hiram College but never persisted in getting a degree which he tells himself is an antiquated ideal. He is troubled by the effects of Modernity on the current era and desires a return to simplicity in life and humility in thought. He stubbornly resists the tidal wave of technological luxury and is one of those sticks in the mud who believes poetry should be of a versified nature. He now enjoys a fine career of opening boxes all day long and writes poetry and prose at his leisure.

The Patch of Snow

The patch of snow which lingers in
the corner of that field,
wherein the entrance of the wood
is cleverly concealed,
reminds me of my early youth
the conquest and the hunt,
when forts were built in maple trees,
hours spent a deviant.
And still that snow, persistent there
against the springtime rain
does beckon to my ageing soul,
“come be a child again.”
William Craig Rice

William Craig Rice has worked as a schoolteacher, auto mechanic, college teacher and president, and federal official. His verse has recently appeared in *The Caribbean Writer, The New Criterion,* and *The Satirist.* He lives in Washington, DC.

*Quartz*

You’re not just some dun stone—you’re gathered, prized, culled and crushed, reduced to sand, fired and formed: all manner of glass. Blown thin, you ring. Ground thick, you magnify the stars and planet Mars.

From pockets you’re bartered, coinage of boys in alleyways from Rome to Santa Fe, later forgotten in wooden boxes, then rediscovered like a jester’s skull.

I traded pursuit of you for carpets in my rooms and inlaid plates, long curtains, but you returned, transformed on erotic nights, when beeswax candles cast flailing shadows on the papered wall: your chiseled goblets glowed, wine drained, standing lanterns, calm to the storm.
Peter T. Donahue

Peter T. Donahue teaches English at an independent school in northern New Jersey, where he lives with his wife and son. As a poet, he draws inspiration from Robert Frost, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Middle English verse, and the New Jersey landscape. Peter’s poetry has appeared in the now-defunct Furnace Review, and his lyrical essay “A Brain Bruise, a Blue Blessing” was recently featured by concīs. He is also a graphic artist, cartoonist, and songwriter.

Metric Expansion

Down my street a rusted mailbox lists, the way a mast might on a storm-worn ship. It lingers like a vagrant by the burned-down house. Human nature abhorred this vacuum, stuffed it with Styrofoam cups, paper bags, a crumpled can of beer.

Yeah—even though
I remember being seventeen,
stumbling when the maw of nothing opened
inside me, hurting from hollowness, I know I would rather be
an empty mailbox, love-letterless,
than one crammed with garbage left by every passerby. I was only growing—
like the universe—the emptiness
I felt, the space between my galaxies.
The Merest Mask of Gloom

Fifteen years ago, or so, we’re caught in snow in Montreal.

Shoveling out my parents’ van, we pause a second, to call up the myth of Michelangelo chipping away the parts that weren’t art.

The sculpture I picture is known as *The Awakening Slave*; he left it unfinished—like I leave many of my own projects, though I can’t blame a pope’s bounced checks.

This might be oversharing, but I often sleep like that—naked, kicking off the sheets, a pillow twisted in my fists. That’s weird:

I used to relate to the chiseler. Huh.

To plunge into water, we hold our breath. But our breathing slows by itself as we carve into the sea we face alone each night.
Susan J. Erickson


**Burning Toothpicks**

“So, what’s the damage report?” he would ask returned from business wars. He’d shed his gear, the wing-tip shoes, the standard charm school mask. He’d toss his tie, a striped silk snake, on a chair. He’d riffle the mail for this week’s bills, then check the fridge to grab the ham and cheese, its toothpicks bristling like porcupine quills. Staccato kiss delivered to my cheek. It’s possible—I’ve seen it done—to boil water in a paper cup over flame; the laws of thermodynamics control. We played marriage as a zero-sum game: by burning sharpened toothpicks one by one while waiting out an eclipse of the sun.
Johnny Longfellow

Johnny Longfellow is the editor of BAD ACID LABORATORIES, INC. and of the online street-poetry site, Midnight Lane Boutique. A twenty year mentor to Newburyport, MA high school students through their annual Poetry Soup reading program, his verse has appeared in a handful of journals, including Horror Sleaze Trash, The Literary Hatchet, Ppigpenn, Stepping Stones Magazine, and The Rotary Dial.

Wyomin’ Long Haul Lament

These forty tons o’ metal roll
when I’m alone at night,
an’ this ol’ highway takes ‘er toll
when I’m alone at night,
‘cause hey, Good Buddy, can’t ya’ see
through Sundance, Lusk, ‘n’ Laramie,
temptations tempt the likes o’ me
when I’m alone at night?

Now, sometimes after it gits dark
when I’m alone at night,
I see them dudes down Pickle Park
when I’m alone at night—
what’s mo’, I see their button flies
framed by them chaps that hug their thighs,
while Stetsons shade their starin’ eyes
when I’m alone at night . . .

But boy, I know ya’ love me true
when I’m alone at night,
an’ Sweet Lawd knows, I love ya’, too,
when I’m alone at night,
so, why would I—fo’ goodness sake!—
unzip my fly, an’ take a break,
if that won’t soothe this deep down ache
when I’m alone at night?

With starlight glintin’ off my chrome
when I’m alone at night,
I think o’ you, asleep back home
when I’m alone at night,
while somewhere near, the c’yote croon
to that ol’ lonesome, prairie moon,
an’ hooooowwwl together—out o’ tune—
when I’m alone at night . . .
John L. Stanizzi

John L. Stanizzi -- author of Ecstasy Among Ghosts, Sleepwalking, Dance Against the Wall), After the Bell, and Hallelujah Time! His poems have appeared in Prairie Schooner, The New York Quarterly, Rattle, and others. He teaches English at Manchester Community College.

CRAZY BALDHEAD

East Hartford, Connecticut
1963

Frank Cassone would warn me every time that my old man would send me right back to him if a single hair contacted my ears and still it always took at least two times to get it short enough to satisfy my father who would never have a son as dirty or as shabby as a Stone. As long as I lived in his house I’d be Joe College or I could live on the street. But I wanted to look like Mick or Keith, so I’d tell Frank to leave it a tad long, then I’d go home hoping he wouldn’t see. But he always did, and sent me back to Frank who’d say, What’d I try to tell ya, Kid?
So Jah Seh

So Jah seh
Fear not for mighty dread,
“Cause I’ll be there at your side.”

for John “Terry” Ryan
July 12, 1946-July 4, 2015

Terry would joke that hanging out with me was just as good as being all alone. And I agreed. We could sit for minutes neither of us saying a single thing. I always took that kind of ease to mean that we were comfortable enough to not find it necessary to speak a word, some small talk used to break the awkward silence. That’s just it; the silence wasn’t awkward. It was as easy as being all alone, looking out at the vast hills, not even acknowledging their presence, but knowing they were there, and that they’d be there, your loyal friends waiting by your side.
Isabel Chenot

Isabel has had poetry appear in *Indiana Voice Journal, The Penwood Review*, and *Anima Poetry Journal* among other venues. She has a poetry collection forthcoming from Anima Poetry Press.

'Yesterday'

The land would hollow and incline:  
between shoulders  
of hills, I saw the year’s gold, fine-  
spun by older  
hands than summer’s. Within a dip  
of gold it lay,  
beside a russet slope,  
tranquilly  
set: the prospect’s hidden jewel, an empty lake —  
reflective  
agate, placidly opaque,  
evocative  
of memories.  
It was an ornament  
suggestive of the fading day’s.  
The tenement  
of heaven in a humble field,  
it stood like an  
abandoned house inside a gilded  
wood.
John Kaniecki

John Kaniecki in an author and poet. He has two poetry books "Murmurings of a Mad Man" and "Poet to the Poor, Poems of Hope to the Bottom One Percent." In addition he has a science fiction collection entitled Words of the Future. John's poem Tea With Joe Hill won the Joe Hill Labor Poetry Prize. John's work has been published in over seventy outlets. John resides with his lovely wife Sylvia in Montclair, New Jersey. John volunteers as missionary in the inner city of Newark. John hopes one day his writing will have a positive impact on the world.

Religion

The obvious truth is not to repeat
blasphemy whispers father molester
genocide is a matter of the mind
freedom of religion, not the ghost dance
as Pentecostal holy rollers scream lies
heaven awaits a ladder to the skies
God is joking or at best misunderstood
television messiah dresses fine
mansions, jet planes, luxury limousines
buddhist monks set fire in final protest
there is no God says one who worships Marx
I see the Almighty's face in each morn
religion in the poor man's politics
Shari LeKane-Yentumi

Shari Jo LeKane-Yentumi lives in St. Louis, Missouri, where she writes poetry, prose and articles, and specializes in literary criticism and non-profit matters. She has a B.A. in English, Spanish, and an M.A. in Spanish from Saint Louis University in Madrid and St. Louis. Since brain surgery, she teaches creative writing in a maximum security jail and to people with special needs. Her novel, *Poem to Follow*, is written in verse, and her book of poetry, *Fall Tenderly*, is currently at press. Shari is featured in several poetry anthologies, including the Missouri VSA 2013 Anthology, *Turning the Clocks Forward Again; Poetica Victorian; Think Pink; The Society of Classical Poets; Snapping Twig; The Lonely Crowd; Form Quarterly; The Iconoclast; Devolution Z; The Quarterday Review; MacrMicroCosm Literary Art Journal: Solstice; Red Dashboard Disorder Anthology: Mental Illness and Its Effects; The Muse India/Createspace Anthologies Of Present Day Best Poems; Bordertown Press Poetry of People on the Move; and Literature Today International Journals of Contemporary Literature Vols. I & II*. Shari's poetry has appeared in several literary magazines in the U.S., Canada, England, India, Ireland, Spain and Wales.

**Midnight Affair**

Moon flowers bloomed in their translucent glory against humid darkness. I tasted night air and inhaled stale dope as you told me your story with cool reservation. I tried not to stare. It started as casual conversation, but music came on and you asked me to dance to a slow Latin beat, and without hesitation I followed your lead in a rhythmic romance. We swayed to the samba that came from your jeep when you brought my face closer and gave me a kiss. It lasted as long as the song, and I deeply relaxed in your bliss. Should the world end like this? Dawn woke the birds who sang morning's first prayer and ushered an end to the midnight affair.
Lucia Galloway is the author of three collections of poetry. Her second chapbook, *The Garlic Pealers*, was co-winner of the 2014 QuillsEdge Press inaugural chapbook competition. She was one of ten winners of Rhyme Zone’s 2014-15 Poetry Prize for “Open to the Elements” and has poems appearing in a variety of journals and anthologies.

**Listening for Water**

*after the first line of Neruda’s Sonnet XL*

*It was green, the silence; the light was moist.*
We blessed each meeting with a hungry kiss.
Amidst the iris, wild rose, columbine
we threaded paths through dripping vine.

We picked no garden blossoms for my hair,
no lilies from their stalks to grace my table.
And I would come alone sometimes, remark
red-throated humming birds, their liquid spark.

Together we fell silent, touch our only talk.
We cherished bird song and the fountain’s burble,
the splash of water over darkening tile.

Spring slid to summer, fall set sere pods,
their seeds a loose, a desiccated laugh
mocking our tryst, its harvest gone to chaff.
Lucia Walton Robinson

An editor and English professor emerita, Lucia Walton Robinson was born a Hoosier but has lived and worked in Manhattan and Florida; she now lives near her daughter, an editor and poet, in southeastern North Carolina. Some of her work has appeared in The Penwood Review, Kakalak 2015, and The Southern Poetry Anthology, Vol. VII, and (as Ellae Lawton) in The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, Iodine Poetry Journal, and other publications.

Eve’s First Distress

One sometimes wonders if it was the shame of disobeying God by second hand
et Adam go on granting Eve full blame
long centuries, ascribing her sin’s brand
and hoarding to himself earth’s mastery
to mask his falling—not to serpent’s wile,
but woman’s will. Is this the mystery
unravelled kindled La Gioconda’s smile?
did Leonardo calm her restlessness
confessing why men droned their old refrain
long after God redeemed first Eve’s distress
by choosing blessed Mary’s tenderness
to flesh His spirit’s fruit? Some years from then
He gave Himself to heal the sins of men.
William Conelly

William Conelly took Master's Degree at UC Santa Barbara, under Edgar Bowers, and has been revising a couple of these pieces pretty much ever since. The Able Muse Press brought out a collection of his verse last year, titled *Uncontested Grounds*, and he had a Young Adult novel in circulation with an agent, spottily seeking a publisher, for the last year. He moved to Warwick, England, in 2003 but with all three of his sons settled in California, they're back and forth to the States a lot.

**For My Aunt**

> *who favored birds*

Stoop’d from the neck and gnarled,
daily she grew less able,
if just as likely to offend.
We left her at the dinner table,
where her keen wits had less to rend,

where she might drift and chafe,
watching the yellow finches
drive sparrows from a feeder perch,
head lowering by stubborn inches,
failing sun in the silver birch.

We’d even recollect
that Sunday school aged fable:
scattered by chance, some seed still grows
to grant the bitterly unstable
harvests of divine repose.

May she’ve accepted.
May her oddly straighted double,
this coroner’s facsimile,
be only gruesome, powdered rubble
beneath a soaring liberty.