



The Road Not Taken

A Journal of Formal Poetry

Summer 2017

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Corner

Welcome, Readers.

As many of you know, we do not collect poetry by “theme” and we do not feel obliged to organize the poetry we accept along thematic grounds. For whatever reason however, certain themes often predominate among the poems we accept for a given issue – and this year the overwhelming favorite was definitely “letting go.”

Let me emphasize that the editors were the last people to expect this particular theme. Given that it was summer, I was expecting something along the lines of leisure or outdoors or the like. But our submitters were not, and you govern!

The first batch of poems (Summer, 2017) are a miscellaneous group beginning with several poems that suggested summer to us; summer on the beach (Mary Winslow's poems) or baseball (Yates Young). The last eight however are all about minimalism or letting go or loss, so we bowed to the prevailing winds.

We hope you enjoy --

Kathryn Jacobs
Managing Editor

Rachel Jacobs
Associate Editor

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Mark Blaeuer

Feature Poem

Mark Blaeuer is originally from Illinois but now lives in Arkansas, a few miles southwest of Hot Springs. With an M.A. in anthropology, he worked in the fields of archeology and physical anthropology. Later he was employed for twenty years as an interpretive ranger, in the National Park Service. His poems and occasional translations (from Spanish) have appeared in dozens of journals, over several decades, and Kelsay Books published a collection of his poems, *Fragments of a Nocturne*, in 2014.

Idiosyncratic Eden

Our road, an access, sexual, a probing
tongue from the outer world, allowed us room:
a hiker's hill to map with Elohim,
serviceberry in white lace camisole.
An in-ground swimming pool in the backyard
was rather a drawback (I couldn't float,
she never liked a dip with chemicals).
Right after we decided to forget
to use chlorine, egg masses magically
bejellied formerly unnatural
"square liquid," leading to—at last count—eight
varieties of froggy opera,
snails, salamanders, newts, aquatic snakes.
Mud islands rose in cattail, waterwillow,
marsh flag.

Admittedly, we had to shunt
the native copperheads and timber rattlers
off our peaceable establishment
for safety of an over-curious
chihuahua muzzle jabbing at the fangs.
Thus,
an asphalt organ of Big City Life
annihilated balance with a slurp,
although we thought we'd done the opposite.
"You're simply an appendage of the Beast,"
the Beast now whispered in our consciousness.
It was a lie. We persevered, eccentric,
chaste at the altar of a homely faith.

Ghosts at the Washita

Black Kettle wouldn't listen to his wife
until too late. She pleaded, "Camp downstream,
beside another village—with *young* men."
Eight hundred mules and ponies in snowdrifts,
groaning, red. The 7th Cavalry
had shot them, weighed down, at first, with a plan
to slash each horse's throat (time-inefficient).
Moving Behind and Corn Stalk crawled away
through barren thicket, hiding in tall grass
while other women and their children died.
Joel Elliott, shouting "Here's for a brevet or
a coffin!" as he forded a small creek
where Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho—
the vast majority of warriors—
met him after being roused from sleep.
Subsequent to one verse of "Garry Owen,"
the band stopped. Frigid metal instruments
froze to lips, fingers balky at the valve.

Now it's warmer, 70 degrees,
autumn of sulfur-haunted butterflies
blown northeast over anchored relatives:
sunflower, aster, goldenrod, and thistle.
Meadowlarks call *tee-yah tee-yair*,
invisible upon a distant fence
meant to protect our memory of death.

Yates Young

Editor's Choice (Rachel Jacobs)

Yates Young 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 (The Literary Baseball Magazine), Bear Creek Haiku, The Road Not Taken, Ancient Paths, The Daytona Beach News-Journal and The Caribbean Writer. He resides in Palm Coast, Florida.

The Art of Hitting

You guys ask “why”
About everything
I have no idea
I see it, I swing, I hit it
It’s not pass go and
Collect \$200 instantly

Hitting is never the same
Two days in a row
Things like
Is the wind blowing in?
Where are they playing me?

Some play me to pull
Some pitch me away
We would all be great
If there were only one way

You have a fight at home
You go 0-for-4 that day
You patch things up
You’re 4-for-4 the next day
Not to mention luck
The incidentals

A perfect swing produces
A line drive hit right at someone
A check swing results in
A blooper that scores a run

And this
The best hitters always miss
Way more than they hit.

Mary Winslow

Mary Winslow is the author of the chapbook, “The Dungeness Crabs at Dusk” and a forthcoming poetry book, *Dea Tacita*, written with fellow poet and husband Jeff Stier. Ms. Winslow’s poetry has appeared in “The Antigonish Review,” “Avocet,” (print and online versions), “Road Not Taken: Journal of Formal Poetry,” “The Blue Nib: Journal of New Writing,” “Switch Poetry Journal,” “The Indiana Voice Review” and other publications. She has an MA from the University of Oregon in poetry and interdisciplinary writing and an EdM from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She teaches poetry and fiction writing to teens and adults in Portland, Oregon.

Pantoum of Low Tide at the Oregon Coast

A few seagulls pick over Dungeness shells at dusk
I find a sand dollar, a limpet, and an orange rind
tide of shadows, tearful, brainwashed cobalt sea foamed husk
rocks and drowned paraphernalia slung with the living kind

I find a sand dollar, a limpet, and an orange rind
sand fleas scatter translucent over hermit crabs left bare
rocks and drowned paraphernalia slung with the living kind
driftwood’s sculpted indifferent dun wrapped in seaweed hair

Sand fleas scatter translucent over hermit crabs left bare
the color of the sails pillow white at the horizon
driftwood’s sculpted indifferent dun wrapped in seaweed hair
a Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel grabs a fish in its talon

The color of the sails pillow white at the horizon
only a few children are left collecting on the beach
a Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel grabs a fish in its talon
those irretrievable wings and cradles within our reach

Only a few children are left collecting on the beach
the wind turns colder as high tide’s waves are approaching
those irretrievable wings and cradles within our reach
they’re swept off, moon shows through, high tide’s returning

The wind turns colder as high tide’s waves are approaching
tide breathes shadows, tearful, brainwashed cobalt sea foamed husk
they’re swept off, moon shows through, high tide’s returning
a few seagulls pick over Dungeness shells at dusk.

High-tide Ivory Tower Terzanelle

Oysters have left their towers these blunt dunces
swallowed our pollution filtered through the sweet sealed shell
in cloisters filtering grit in knuckle salt punches

They learned glacial melt, warm seas, as currents travel
they caught the despair in the prickle pearl of knowledge
swallowed our pollution filtered through the sweet sealed shell

Industry's bottom washed chemical spills to their edge
oyster beds collapsed to acidification
they caught the despair in the prickle pearl of knowledge

Oyster beds collapsed to acidification
oysters have left their towers, these blunt dunces
gone are those who once saw their marble reflection
in cloisters filtering out grit in knuckle salt punches

Becca Menon

Known for her musical storytelling craft, Becca Menon is an American writer whose works, often based in myth, fairy tale, folklore or Scripture have been hailed internationally from the United Kingdom and India to the Middle East, as well as in the U.S. She is the author or translator of several books of verse narrative, and her shorter works appear in publications such as Parnassus, Mezzo Cammin, Poetry Life & Times, Antiphon and others. Come listen to actors read selected works and discover other mischief at www.BeccaBooks.com

Stewing

It all goes into the pot:
the savory, the bitter,
the histories forgotten,
the physically gritty,
the rending of trust,
worlds broken, worlds suffering,
the rage for justice,
lost views, the great river,
a living forgiveness,
and full love, well-wishing....
Why don't I ever seem cooked enough?
What fairytale substance can alter a thing?
Salt! But there's always a catch. It can sting.
Don't look, stuff's kind of disgusting –
but maybe... a little... delicious?

Martin Levinson

Martin H. Levinson is a member of the Authors Guild, National Book Critics Circle, PEN, and the book review editor for *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. He has published nine books and numerous articles and poems in various publications. He holds a PhD from NYU and lives in Forest Hills, New York.

Cento Mental

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark
half a league half a league
half a league onward where

I saw the best minds of my generation
destroyed by madness, where Alph
the sacred river ran through caverns
measureless to man, where on either

side the river lie long fields of barley
and of rye, had we but world enough,
and time to gather rosebuds while ye may
I'd wander lonely as a cloud that floats on

high o'er vales and hills, I'd drink to me only
with thine eyes and take some honey and
plenty of money and a star to steer me by,
for hope springs eternal in the human breast,

like a Tyger! Tyger! burning bright in the
forests of the night, whose woods they are
I think I know his house is in the village though,
his love's like a red red rose so worn with

passing through the bars his gaze holds
nothing any more, for what is this life but
full of care, we have no time to stand and
stare, in Flanders field the poppies blow

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .

Ash Caton

Ash Caton is based in Edinburgh where he writes plays, poems and novels. He rarely waltzes.

We Tried Walzing

We tried waltzing, you and I
You broke an ankle
And I lost an eye
The quaking paramedic begged
We'd never attempt
Again to shake a leg.

We tried singing, our arms linked
Furniture bled
The song thrush went extinct
Twitchers held vigils and tearful, implored
If moved again to sing
We'd move abroad.

We tried gazing, at the stars
Venus exploded
And so did Mars
The cross cosmologist stamped and swore
That the stars had seen
This, all before.

After that, we had a night in.
Me with my patch
You with your limp
Ate tea off our laps, fell asleep in the yard
And didn't know why
We'd been trying so hard.

Nelson Sager

Nelson Sager resides with his wife, Jane, and their black cat, Mr. Cools, in Alpine, Texas. He is a retired Professor Emeritus of English, from Sul Ross State University.

The Essence of Evil

The essence of evil is not always
ingrained in physical experience,
neither antagonist or stymied haze
of confusion that blocks one's defense
against a perceived foe or imagined
force of malignity. It's often just
a pervasive, persistent, ill-blown wind,
intense as an unexpected knife thrust.
For it cuts deeply, spilling out what
love and goodness *we* have acquired in time,
those elements of our moral thermostat,
replacing honeyed acts with noxious slime.
On a scale of power from one to ten,
evil's essence must exceed eleven.

Martin Elster

Martin Elster is a composer and serves as percussionist with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. His poetry has appeared in *Astropoetica*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *The Chimaera*, and *The Road Not Taken*, among others, and in anthologies such as *Taking Turns: Sonnets from Eratosphere*, *The 2012 and 2015 Rhysling Anthologies*, *New Sun Rising: Stories for Japan*, and *Poems for a Liminal Age*.

Dialogue

Two pigeon-tails project beyond the roof,
frozen as gargoyle wings.
Some sparrows, less aloof,
make jaunty trills from the dogwood tree. Each sings

with tones that echo off the bricks and glass
fringing the avenue.
Above the rooftops pass
a pair of swallows. Keeping each other in view,

the sharp-winged hotshots outdo even Apollo's
mythical arrows. One
turns right, the other follows.
Perhaps their destination is the sun,

which peers down at the wheels weaving their way
around this black-and-white
of lines and planes, while play
and struggle, joyful chirps and frantic fight

go side by side. Across the walk, a rat
sprints toward a hedge away
from human feet. A cat
sleeps near a chain-link fence. At close of day

she'll hunt that hated rodent; then, at dawn,
the birds that hunt the seed
or larvae in the lawn.
As shadows shrink she'll rest while others bleed

from falling prey to carnivore or car.
As I sit in my yard,
these notions float as far
and near as traffic on the boulevard,

above which pigeons have the bright idea
to flap in a great flock
toward the pizzeria
for the choicest crumbs this side of Antioch.

Theme:

Letting Go

Suzanne Burns

Suzanne Burns writes both poetry and fiction. Dzanc Books just released her second short story collection, *The Veneration of Monsters*. She is currently working on a novel

Two Nonets

1:

Sometimes I have nothing but poems
to keep me going in winter,
luxurious time planning
the next way to please you
with just the right word,
killing time 'til
my body
takes its
turn.

2:

I haven't stopped looking at the moon,
not completely. I just forgot
how it shines above us both
when you seem far away.
There is comfort there,
the darkness not
permanent.
Morning
comes.

Billy Malanga

Billy Malanga is a first generation college graduate, Marine veteran, and grandson of Italian immigrants. His writing reveals his victories and struggles in redefining masculinity. His poetry has been published/or is forthcoming in: The Adelaide Literary Magazine's 2017 Award Anthology; The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature; Indolent Books; Aji Literary Magazine; Picaroon Poetry; Wraparound South Literary Journal; Spindrift Art & Literary Journal.

Nothing Lasts

The dog and I ran for shelter
as a bruised purple sky
wept for a few hours.

Thunder and lightening
detonated like cluster
bombs in lavender fields.

Thirsty things got battered
and abused, but the earth
did not collapse.

A choir of Blue Warblers
emerged in humid air,
serene and richly alive.

It exposed, no matter how
honorable or wicked,
nothing lasts.

Not dark sky, not bright
light, not hate, not right,
not love, not us.

Jeremy Decker

Jeremy Decker is from Northern California. His work has appeared in *Old Red Kimono* and *Stepping Stones Magazine*.

Beseiged

When Time has driven into disrepair
the fences, shutters, gates, and garden shed,
when moths have eaten off the clothes you wear
and termites peeled away the paths you tread,
when Age itself becomes the umbral truth
and casts its shade on where your eyes have been,
then you must take up instruments of youth
and mend what's old to make it new again.
Yet could new gates for Troy, strong though they were,
have stopped the god-like wrath for ten more years?
Immortal forces, cloaked in mist, which spur
a man unto his fate despite his fears?
What slightest difference then could locked doors make
to enemies who cause hinges to shake?

Charles Sutherland

Charles (Charlie) Southerland runs his farm in North-Central Arkansas where he derives great pleasure and inspiration for many of his poems. He is published twice in this journal— he's been published in Measure, TRINACRIA, First Things, The Rotary Dial, The Pennsylvania Review, the Amsterdam Quarterly and other print and online poetry journals. He's been a Pushcart nominee and a Nemerov finalist in the past. It tickles his fancy to be published darn near anywhere, especially formal journals.

By Degrees

He burned his last LIFE from the fireplace box,
his last iconic lover up in smoke
as he sat huddled with a blanket, socks
too close, the tempered glass, the screen, a joke.
He watched the cover corner light, the cloak
as red as Riding Hood begin to curl
and draw, begin to blacken with his stoke,
—a final poke at her, as if the girl
consumed his ghost and left him dry, a whorl
of hair, a smile the last to go, the eyes
long gone by then, caught in the pipe, a swirl
of papal draggle spewn into the skies.
It was the *coldest* night, below the norm
which found him frozen, equal to the storm.

Edison Jennings

Edison Jennings is a single father, part-time teacher, and veteran living in the southwestern Appalachian region of Virginia. His poetry has appeared in *Boulevard*, *Kenyon Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Rattle*, *River Styx*, *Slate*, *Southwest Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Valparaíso Poetry Review*, and other journals and anthologies. His chapbook, *Reckoning*, is available at Jacar Press.

Necessities

I've made a list of what I need
to get me through the next few years,
not a lot, some books to read,
HD TV for watching Cheers,

a La-Z-Boy, a single bed,
meds to keep my memory clear.
Yet I confess a subtle greed,
a discontent, a secret sneer;

I find I want more than I need,
a woman's kiss, a glass of beer,
the God in whom I once believed.
Old age is brittle and austere;

memories blur and recede
then altogether disappear.
But I've a list of what I need
to get me through the next few years.

John Bennett

I am a retired ambulance EMT in New York City. I studied Creative Writing and Comparative Literature at New York University.

This Is The Place

This is the place where old men keep
Their lives in a paper bag
As they drag
Themselves to a corner to sleep
This is the place where old men sleep
Dreaming of roast beef and wine
Sweet tasting dreams fine
Enough to keep
Tonight I shall sleep
Dirty unkempt unshaven
On benches in windy doorways
and keep
Searching for the raven
Haired girl always.

Stanley Kaplan

Stanley Kaplan has published poetry in Onthebus, Convergence, and Chiron Review among other journals. He is the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant.

The Phone Rang

I enjoyed the weather this morning.
The sky leaked a tepid light.
No illusions this morn of coming delight.

Right now its fifty-two in Morristown.
Devil time in the city.
Satin getting ready to don his crown.

Still expect a shower.
It will rain 700 dollars or more.
All before you even reach the corner store.

We will hear from Jesus next,
the registered owner,
author of the special text.

The store will have a sale,
a clearance event,
something said, never meant.

He called me on the phone,
many hours ago.
She died. Now I'm alone.

Louis Hunt

Louis Hunt teach political theory at James Madison College, Michigan State University. He has published poetry in such journals as The Rotary Dial, Autumn Sky Daily, The Road Not Taken, and Snakeskin.

Marching Song

His deepest detestation was often reserved for the nicest of liberal academics, as if their lives were his own life but a step escaped. Like the scent of the void which comes off the pages of a Xerox copy...

Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night*

Hold high your banners though the wind goes slack
And conviction gutters under skies
Grown ominous with streaks of red and black.
Review the troops which muster on the field
Of war. Recite again the usual lies
That soldiers must endure but never yield,
That bullets flower in the willing flesh,
And death in battle is a warrior's pride.
Wield again the sharpened scythe to thresh
The early wheat and burn the broken husks.
Remember what awaits the losing side:
The women keening in the coming dusk.
But if you will not fight and cannot run,
Put flowers in the barrel of your gun.