



The Road Not Taken
A Journal of Formal Poetry

Summer, 2019

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Corner

Welcome to the 2019 summer issue of *The Road Not Taken*. This is an issue written by masters of form -- everything from sextets to sonnets, blank verse and couplets to deliberately unstable, 9 syllable alliteration. Some of the poems in this issue draw on old traditions, while others disguise their form under an eminently modern sound. Welcome the variety, and enjoy.

What We're Looking For: Lately I've gotten a number of emails asking me what *The Road Not Taken* is looking for. Most journals honestly duck this question by saying they want your "best work" or asking you to read what we publish to find out. And these are both good answers, from an editor's point of view.

Readers want more however, and *Road* aims to please. Briefly then: for *Road*, poetry is an aural experience, so sound-patterns matter. You don't have to sound like the 19th century; we're not trying to recreate the past. In fact, *Road* has a marked preference for modern diction and an awareness of the world we live in: forms evolve. At the same time, English as we know was not created ex nihilo, so show us that your poems are part of an ongoing dialogue with the past.

What we Don't Want: please, no padding to eke out the pentameter, and no inverted syntax to make up the rhyme! A single forced line can destroy a poem. Likewise, please don't wallow in vague abstractions; we like intellectual poetry too, but make it real with distinctive imagery and earned emotion. Obviously we live in our minds; we're poets. Ultimately however it is our job to make the reader care. Our mental world matters enormously to us -- but it won't matter to anyone else unless we earn it.

Format: Fully half of all the poems sent to *Road* violate our submission guidelines, and if they're good enough we take them anyway. Out of consideration to the editors however, please read the submissions guidelines first; they're on our webpage <http://journalformalpoetry.com/>

If you forget our web address, just look up *Road Not Taken* and "journal" in Google.

Guidelines in Brief: Submit all poetry in the body of the email; do not attach! Yes, I know attachments preserve format. But we are unpaid editors working around full-time jobs, and it takes us appreciably longer to go back and forth through attachments. Think of it from our point of view.

Other Guidelines:

Titles in bold. No Underlines and please avoid All Caps
Single space poems: no extra spaces above or below lines
Use Times Roman 12.
Journal titles in italics, please: no all caps.

Looking Ahead: Starting with the November issue Jim Prothero, the previous editor of *Road Not Taken*, will be joining us again on a part-time basis. Welcome, Jim!

Kathryn Jacobs
Editor, *Road Not Taken*

Mell McDonnell

Feature Poem

Mell McDonnell is a person of several careers--as an instructor in English at the University of New Orleans, as a freelance financial writer, and most recently as marketing/public relations director for the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, University of Colorado, Boulder. She is a member of the Denver Women's Press Club and Lighthouse Writers' Workshop. Ms. McDonnell's poetry appears in *The Silver Edge* (Leaping Beryllians Society, Denver) and *Third Wednesday* (Ann Arbor).

Comfort, Tender Comfort

Honey, don't you make your bed every day?
You got to make your bed.
Else your dreams will be tangled.
You got to lay yourself down in peace
if you want to sleep the sleep like the just,
so you too won't die before you wake.

Let's go pick lilies—white for the wake.
Grief isn't forever. It's not for a day.
It fills like a pitcher and flows, just
the way these sheets smooth on your bed—
to remind us of order and rest and peace.
Where's your hair brush? Your hair is tangled.

You think of him now, and your thoughts get tangled.
He'd bring you coffee, sing you awake.
See, one by one, memories bring peace.
And habits. Tomorrow and even today—
you sit up, you get up. You make up your bed.
Oh yes, punch the pillows. Shout—it's just not just!

You punch and you cry. Yes, yes, it's not just.
Dear heart, there are knots we cannot untangle.
We'll iron your dress. We'll make up your bed.
Get up now. Wash up. It's time for the wake.
This night will pass. The day will come. Today,
we'll know he rests in peace.

We'll pray and sing and know he's at peace.
He sleeps with the just.
Come rock in his chair. It's the break of the day.
Don't fall back asleep. It's time that you wake.
Your dreams are all mixed up. They're tangled.
You got to get up and make up your bed.

No angels are coming to make up your bed.
Swing Low, let's sing, and find our own peace.

The bowl of night lifts, and you are awake.
Get up now. Stand straight. It's time to adjust.
Talk to me, darling, and help me untangle
this mess of a bed. Today is today is today.

Soon you will grow up and find your own peace,
adjust and untangle this jungle of loss. But today?
You're awake, let's start with your bed.

John Byrne

Editor's Choice
(Kathryn Jacobs)

John Byrne lives in Albany, Oregon with his partner, Cheryl French, an artist, and their college student daughter Sean. He writes formal poems and plays. His work has appeared in this journal before. New poems are also scheduled to appear in an anthology from Rose Alley Press entitled *Footbridge Above The Falls* and in *Blue Unicorn*.

Unholy Sonnet

“’tis better far to marry than to burn.”
(Saint Paul had such a gentle way with words.)
I was, in recent studies, shocked to learn
I had misunderstood what I had heard.
I thought the flaming reference was to hell
And marriage let us both escape that fire
But experts all agree Paul meant to tell
That wedding vows all dampen down desire.
I’m pretty sure Paul never walked the aisle.
It’s absolute he never felt your kiss
For had he so engaged the briefest while
You would have taught him truths he wholly missed.
To hold you every day, my hearts proclaims,
Does nothing but intensify the flames.

John MacLean

John MacLean's collection, *The Long Way Home*, is published by Cayuga Lake Books, and includes nine poems that first appeared in *The Road Not Taken*. His poetry has also appeared in *The Lyric*, *Avocet*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Spitball* and other journals.

The Mark of the Maker

Roof trestles that were burned in Notre Dame,
Their beams hand hewn and wrestled through the air,
Ingenious truss work like a timber psalm,
Bore builders' marks that only god could share.

The men, long dead, their names now likewise dust,
In palls of brown smoke where their prayers would go,
The charred oak falls impersonal, now crushed
And deader than the nave stones far below.

To rebuild, corporations advertise
The weight of their deductible largesse,
Each tots a ledger to announce its gift,
From profits born of high priced merchandise
Piece made in Laos, China, Bangladesh
By hands they made anonymous and swift.

Greg Huteson

Greg Huteson has an M.A. in English literature from the College of William and Mary. His poems have appeared in the *Saint Katherine Review*, *the Christian Century*, and other journals. For the past twenty years, he has resided in Taiwan and China, and his poems often reflect these contexts.

These Unblessed Days

They say the sun itself is clay.
They say the moon is marble.
But I am far too panicked now
to stare at mineral displays
or ponder soil marvels.

They say that peace will come just then,
the pacifists will surely reign.
But signs in heaven, blood on earth
are teachings I was raised on.
There is no clever juggler queen

or prince to toss the world to rights
and set the props then harmless down.
The water is a crystal ring,
the birds a loop of bamboo kites
that bob and jig around.

But I'm too fear-struck for the gaze,
too weighted for these unblessed days.

Greg Huteson

A Quiet Taiwan Morning

The heavens are not sorely rent and holes
and steamy sulfur mar no narrow streets.
There's no blare of the brass trump of doom.
A comet is not near, no dire threat.
And in the grass no bandaged zombie crawls.

Behind the grubby white apartment block
no dark sun dimly lights the mustard lane.
No archangel stands near the quilted bed.
The morning is without visions, mundane
with scooters, yellow garbage trucks, loud talk.

The black-haired child with a schoolbag
guffaws. It's early yet and she ignores
the sagging gray sky. The guards pass gossip
and chuckles above the earthy chirrs
of the scooters, below the Taiwan flag.

The tea stands will open as always at nine.
And the gracious breakfast shop workers will smile
then as they do now under bright boards
of cartoon eggs and bacon, while the vile
and apocalyptic are yet undivined.

Neil Kennedy

Neil Kennedy is a librarian. He has an MFA from somewhere or other, and his work has been published by Origami Poetry Project.

Nicole

Carefully, the world prepares for its own
interruption. It thinks it can predict
spring each year, the damage spring can inflict.
No, trees are not ready for their fruit. Stone,
even though it tried, never could have known.
Regardless, spring is here with her edict:
Open your doors and let yourselves be tricked,
So you might see what you would be shown.

Nobody holds their hands against the spring.
Intending to stall when spring will arrive
cannot succeed, so no one ever tries.
Only carrying what it came to bring,
leaving reminders that we're still alive,
each year, Nicole, it comes as a surprise.

David Francis

David Francis has produced six albums of songs, one of poems, and "Always/Far," a chapbook of lyrics and drawings. In addition, he has written and directed the films *Village Folksinger* (2013) and *Memory Journey* (2018). His poetry and stories have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies.
www.davidfrancismusic.com

In the French Quarter

The saxophonist stops playing his scales...
façade-imprinted shadowed rubber tree...
a curtain leaps onto a balcony...
the sky is cloudless and full of blue sails
but not yet twilight, Southern, mild, it pales
to an apricot-flavored daiquiri...
the mansard roofs slope horizontally:
in a courtyard, sense of direction quails...

Now it is night and you can see the stars
in the pool, and the rooms' interiors...
until someone puts out the light and dulls
that section which is showcased no longer:
voluminous, the fountain water falls
like a blind man whose hearing is stronger.

David Francis

Indignity

There's nothing dignified about waiting.
When asked, she had already told the man,
she's waiting for someone. No doubt, waiting,
he thinks and settles on the same old plan.
He backs off to get a new perspective:
a real estate agent eyeing squatters,
hawk-like, he watches for some space to give;
he moves like a shark through shallow waters,
implacable, feral, dark, swift and cool;
the ocean depths are his, down to the sand bar:
so finally he acquires a barstool,
the territory of a regular.

No one comes. And the poor woman baiting
her own trap of hope, anticipating.

Earl Huband

Earl Carlton Huband is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a resident of Durham, NC. His poems have appeared recently in *Kakalak 2018*, *The Main Street Rag*, and *Visions International*; and in the 2019 *Pinesong Awards* and *Heron Clan VI* anthologies. *The Innocence of Education*, based on Huband's experiences as a young Peace Corps Volunteer teaching English in a remote fishing village in the Sultanate of Oman, won Longleaf Press at Methodist University's 2018 chapbook contest and was published by Longleaf in November 2018.

Love the Crooked Thing

– after “Brown Penny” by W.B. Yeats

1. A Man's Approach

I told myself, I am too old.
And then, I am young enough.
Therefore I spent some guineas
to find out if I could still love:

Go and love, go and love, old man,
if the woman be wise and fair. —
A guinea, a guinea, a guinea
to ruffle the roots of her hair.

2. The Woman's Response

He fears that he is too old
and hopes he is young enough.
Therefore he labors plenty
to prove that he can still love.

Ah, love — come and love, old man,
for your object is lithe and bare. —
A guinea, a guinea, a guinea
to roost in the roots of my hair.

Rex Wilder

Two-time U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins says: “In Rex Wilder’s poetry, the tired English of everyday use comes back to us refreshed and full of its original surprise. In a world glutted with poetry, that Wilder has found a new way to say the old things is a notable achievement.” Wilder created a new poetic form with Richard Wilbur called the boomerang, four of which appear in “Wide Awake, Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond,” named one of Los Angeles Times Book Critic David Ulin’s “Top Ten Books of the Year.”

Dave’s Camp

Where’s Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley when you need her
& her monster in the woods? A cedar
blocks my view & then I see it’s a deer. I feed her

all I have, my love of nature, imagine she’s chewing
on it, wondering what’s she’s doing
here to deserve it. Neither of us is musical, but we two sing

or hum, or beat on our limitations. *I have been*
a good son, I tell her over tears, beaming in
between her antlers with my telepathic brain.

I have been a good deer, she says to me, grateful
for my friendship. She’s speaking with her mouth full
if I’m not mistaken, maybe of the truth, however small.

Jeffrey Essmann

Jeffrey Essmann is a writer and poet living in New York. His poetry has appeared in, among others, *America Magazine*, *Dappled Things*, *the St. Austin Review*, and the Summer 2018 edition of *The Road Not Taken*. He is a Benedictine oblate with Mt. Saviour monastery in Elmira, NY.

A Woman From the Parish

A woman from the parish died.
I knew her from the 5 o'clock.
She had a child who whined and cried
and two who blithely ran amok.

I prayed for patience every week.
I raised my eyes to God. I sighed.
I thought that maybe I would speak
with her, and then I heard she died.

The person who passed on the news
(whose name discretion here forbids):
"You know her: young; the forward pew.
The one," she said, "with those three kids."

The family wasn't at the 5:00
the next week nor, I think, the next.
I feared some other mother, live,
the dead one's pew would soon annex.

But then one night they plodded in,
the father and the children three,
soul-deaf with grief's consuming din
and dull with grey solemnity.

He huddled with his sullen squad
in their old pew in prayerless shock.
I sighed. I raised my eyes to God
and prayed they'd once more run amok.

Sylvia Lattice

Sylvia Lattice is a librarian and domestic abuse advocate in Fremont, Nebraska. She graduated from Boston College and has published in a few small journals in Europe.

Kitchen Gadget

He comes home, sneers, and acts as if
I accomplished nothing-- I made the kids
take their naps, so he won't be adrift
with tired hellions, watching episodes

of Game of Thrones he's seen at least four times.
Unknown to him I now speak French and Thai
I mastered after reading nursery rhymes
and changing Disney diapers. Who am I

that I have two degrees and he has one--
associates in actuarial something,
unrelated to the job he dons
like pinstripe suits and hard cologne that's stinking

so much I'm leaving when they're both in school--
he's free to buy another household tool.

Angelo Mao

Angelo Mao is a research scientist in the field of biomedical engineering, living in the Boston area. His poems have previously appeared in *Lana Turner*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

The After

(I left the lab) (I walked across the
earth) (a city was built on it) (was made
from built-up sides of buildings) (the
sides had space between them) (I saw a glade
of space) (I turned into it) (watched it withdraw
each time I turned) (the streets made a city)
(its edge was made of railroads) (freeways) (I saw
a building) (it was made of holes) (a city
of entrances and exits) (bodies entering and
exiting) (and the bodies made from pieces)
(pieces made from timepieces) (contraband)
(poached) (but always) (like in a fleece
a broken fingernail) (in something caught)
(I am looking at it) (the body) (I have not

done a thing) (besides look) (at the body)
(and feel) (because isn't that what I am)
(contingency of knitted time) (city
to which each wound has been) (a womb
broken) (but regarded as though) (under
anesthesia) (when only the dull ache)
(from nerves awakening) (in the border)
(tell) (how sad that new deadspaces lack
feeling) (and so the wounded flesh itself
feels like nothing) (alas for the rite
of closure) (skin creeps like a sea-shelf
over a space that leaks) (the streetlight
leaks its own halogen) (a shadow runs
down the street) (oblong to all presence)

Luke Harvey

L.R. Harvey currently lives in Chattanooga, TN., where he teaches high school English. His desire is that his poems, as Joseph Campbell writes, “see the life value of the facts round about and deify them, provide images that relate the everyday to the eternal.” His most recent work has been accepted by *After the Pause*, *Street Light Press*, *Ancient Paths Literary Magazine*, *The Write Source*, *The Tennessee Magazine*, and other publications.

The Charge of the Brown Brigade

Like so many lemmings blindly leaping
to join a game of follow-the-leader,
every year around October
they decide to descend, all sweeping
down on an evening breeze.

 The first,
the frailest, leads this charge of The Brown
Brigade with scarce a single sound,
and silently, as though rehearsed,
they follow, whispering down the wind
to scrape the Autumn dirt.

 “It’s as if
they share a common mind, as if
they think as one.”

 I notice then
the troubled look on the freckled face
beside me.

 “But Ms. O’hara says
we’re not to follow the crowd. She says
to be yourself.”

 I gently mess
the auburn hair and watch the leaves
come circling down from overhead.
“Your teacher’s right.” A burnished red
has blanketed the house’s eaves.
“But still,” I say in a musing tone,
“we are not meant to age alone.”

Aaron Novick

Aaron Novick is an assistant professor of philosophy at Purdue University. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Notre Dame Review*, *Dunes Review*, *L'Éphémère Review*, and elsewhere.

Indeterminacy

For Morton Feldman

Blank the page as the city decays
swollen with ghosts from the relict past
unengaged ungathered strays
derelict of post unmoored held fast

Hours in this murk each elusive mark
mocking pursuit Their fleeing feet
goad me smirk merge with the dark
leaving me lootless in the still street

One in the hand a few soon aligned
not many The avenue open leaves
room to expand to seek and to find
here in this havocked city what lives

Maria Grace De Lallo

Maria Grace De Lallo is fascinated by words, and has been turning them into poems for as long as she can remember. She lives alone in a little cabin, which she calls The Hobbit Hole, plays bagpipes, keeps swords in her umbrella stand, and enjoys peated whisky. Her poem, *The Sea of Tiberias* was recently published in *Catholic Poetry Room*.

Discovery

I climbed a tree and found a nest,
a little nest of twig and string
with unfledged jaybirds, loud within,
noisy, new and ravenous.

They were ugly and undressed,
feeble, blind, unfeathered things,
crying mouths, altricial skin,
timid, weak and tremulous.

Yet, lovely in their ugliness:
the new life, bare and trembling,
the plaintive calling, hungry, thin,
fragile, fair and wondrous.

And full of latent loveliness
the hidden flight in half-made wings,
the faint first colour, coming in:
blue and black and lustrous.

Deborah Doolittle

Deborah H. Doolittle has lived in lots of different places but now calls North Carolina home. She has an MA in Women's Studies and an MFA in Creative Writing and teaches at Coastal Carolina Community College. She is the author of *No Crazy Notions*, *That Echo*, and *Floribunda*. Some of her poems have recently appeared (or will soon appear) in *Comstock Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *I-70 Review*, *Pilgrimage*, *Poem*, *Rattle*, and *Slant*. She shares a home with her husband, three housecats, and a backyard full of birds.

Muse for Hire

I'm one of those famous nine siblings:
your Grecian urn, melodious bird,
the muscle, the sinew, the one part
inspiration you desperately yearn
for amid all your blood, sweat, and tears.
You fear Mount Blanc on that horizon.
I'll be your volcano, both fire, ash,
in that vista: your voice, your raison
d'être, your modus operandi,
that dish of ice cream you so deserve.

Benjamin Lukey

Benjamin Daniel Lukey lives in Monroe, North Carolina. He teaches high school English classes whenever he is not fishing or writing poetry. His work has previously appeared in *Edify Fiction*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *The Wire's Dream Magazine*, and other publications. Please visit hellopoetry.com/bdlukey to read more.

A Blue Blaze

Upon this ancient hickory, there is a blaze of blue.
To guess the meaning of this paint is more than I can do.
It does not seem to mark a trail; there are no other signs,
And blue is not the proper hue to mark one's boundary lines.

What errand was the painter on? Who made this mark, and why?
And who can follow where he led?
Can anyone?
Can I?