

A photograph of a forest path. The path is a narrow, dirt trail that winds through a dense forest. The trees are tall and thin, with light-colored bark, possibly birches or aspens. The foliage is lush and green, with many leaves visible in the foreground and background. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating dappled light on the path and the surrounding vegetation. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

The Road Not Taken

Summer, 2020

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Market

Welcome to the summer 2020 issue of *The Road Not Taken*.

Overall, the poems submitted to the summer 2020 issue were reflective. Perhaps this is because of Covid; we all stayed home and *thought*. There was also less humor than usual, and more nuance. Without doubt I was bowled over by the quality of the submissions we received this time; almost all the poems deserved serious consideration.

Some of the poems in this issue are comments on poems of the past: referential, revisionist poems that look back in order to look forward. Others are satirical comments on the modern age, born of isolation and reflection. And (because the human spirit is after all resilient) all this contemplation leads ineluctably to human relationships: relationships that survive difficult times, and keep us whole.

Most of the poems in this issue are traditional in form. Because in difficult times recreate old forms, and make them new.

Thank you all for the work and creativity manifest in this issue.

Kathryn Jacobs
Editor
Road Not Taken

Gail White

Feature Poem

Gail White has been part of the Formalist poetry movement from its beginning, has outlived some of its journals and still submits to all she can find. She is a contributing editor of *Light Poetry Magazine* and also a frequent contributor to *Lighten-Up Online*. Her book *Asperity Street* and chapbook *Catechism* can be found on Amazon. She is the resident cat lady of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana.

Why I Never Win The New Yorker Cartoon Caption Contest

Because I want the story to make sense
instead of just accepting it as given
that there's a flight of bats in a submarine
or a talking dog and cat at the gate of heaven,

chatting up Peter. Now I think of it,
I also wish my life had more cohesion,
with clever dialogue, a clearer plot,
and fewer deaths. I even wish religion

would make some sense, but not too much, because
religions when they leave their mythic dreams
can contradict themselves and make me laugh.
I never wish for love, because it seems

too much to ask, but money would be nice.
Maybe I'll try the caption contest twice.

Jake Murel

Editor's Choice
(Kathryn Jacobs)

Jake Murel is a PhD candidate in Boston studying early modern Europe. His work has appeared in *The Lyric*, *Better Than Starbucks*, among other print and online poetry journals.

On First Reading Mark Twain

I too traveled through realms of gold along
the anguine, muddy belt of bygone days,
watched the Ol' Man River gently blaze
a beige hue unknown in paint or song.
My teachers often rattled off how long
the mighty river spans in winding folds,
but still the Mississippi hid unknown
till I heard carefree Twain speak raw and strong.
And then I wondered why I sat beside
the river all those nights, listened to
its cricket choir, smelled the earthen breeze
that wafted from its deep and grassy banks,
when all along, I could have read about it
through books inside an air-conditioned room.

Robin Helweg-Larsen

Robin Helweg-Larsen's poems, largely formal, have been published in *The Road Not Taken* and elsewhere. Some favorites are in *The HyperTexts*. He is Series Editor for Sampson Low's "Potcake Chapbooks - Form in Formless Times", and blogs at formalverse.com from his hometown of Governor's Harbour in the Bahamas.

God Modernizes

We sealed Joe's body in its envelope
for dropping in the mail slot in the ground,
addressed to God. But the Recording Angel
coughed, said, "God has an online work-around,
so doesn't take them like that any more."
How email Joe to God, to bless or damn?
Cremation goes to Heaven... but, knowing Him,
souls just end up in limbo, marked as spam.

Fat-Shaming

Gorging on food, an atavistic trait
useful, essential, in the paleolithic--
like a man's lust for teenage girl as mate--
is one not needed now, shamed as horrific.
It's healthy, though, to recognise such drives,
note where they came from, why they once were good:
these traits in which the primitive survives,
inbuilt components of our personhood.

It's acting on them, though, that we deplore:
those who fuck teens and those who overfeed,
like those who steal, or lie, or start a war,
aren't shamed for primitive desire, but deed--
like those who pray to gods, follow religions,
or skry the future from entrails of pigeons.

Karen D'Anselmi

Karen D'Anselmi lives in the Hudson Valley region of New York.

Because I Stopped for Emily

Because I stopped for Emily,
so deftly in her poem,
I'll kindly stop for you as well
though each must go alone.

It seem'd to her a pleasure,
my carriage — no surprise;
she in tulle and gossamer
took my hand — did arise —

Time cannot take a sparrow
nor a poet from the song;
though every sound is quiet now,
the poem lingers on.

We passed by school at recess,
the fields and setting sun;
we passed the strangely sinking house
which seemed to call her home.

Or rather, I passed over them
like a morning chilled with dew;
moments linger centuries —
when death leads the review —

I, Death — am just a driver —
nor tell — what you shall see —
when once a poet turns her gaze
towards eternity.

Karen D'Anselmi

Privileged

I was privileged to know you when the day was new
and our eyes were still wide and unknowing.

I was privileged to know you when the air was clear,
the clouds were sailing, and a breeze was blowing.

I was privileged to know you when your smile was broad,
when a certain dimple had a way of showing.

I was privileged to know you when the sun was high
and the bluebells and zinnias were growing.

I was privileged to know you when you wore your hat
in a jaunty tilt that threw the world off-balance.

I was privileged to know you as the days grew long,
and each hour brought a welcome challenge.

I was privileged to know you in the gathering dusk
when your face in the candlelight was glowing.

I was privileged to know you as night closed in
and the memories of the day were overflowing.

Elaine Wilburt

A graduate of Middlebury College, Elaine Wilburt received a 2019 Creatrix Haiku Award and lives in Maryland with her husband, five children, mother and one spoiled dog. Her fiction and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Cresset*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Broad River Review*, *Heart of Flesh* and *Ekphrastic Review*, among others. She volunteers as a copy editor for *Better Than Starbucks*.

Dear Mom,

I lunched on Mr. Darcy, and to tell
the truth, I've no regrets; I found it hard
to stop and bit Elizabeth as well.
If I'd been let to run throughout the park
that made his Lizzy fall in love, I could've
abstained, but D was much too tall he said
for puny dogs to play with him: I would've
seen Pemberley if I'd been a Great Dane instead
of Yorkie, then I might've ignored his pride.
I simply had to chomp your book 'cause D
said, "You're too small," and I was mortified.
You know it is a truth universally
acknowledged that a dog in possession of slights
must be in want of satisfying bites.

Jeffrey Essmann

Jeffrey Essmann is an essayist and poet living in New York. His work has appeared in numerous newspapers, magazines and literary journals, among them the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *America Magazine*, *Dappled Things*, the *St. Austin Review*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and *The Road Not Taken*.

If There Were in the Silence

If there were in the silence something kind
To comfort tender the affrighted soul
I might not find its emptiness so blind.

I daresay I might even be resigned
To planeless skies and empty streets extol
If there were in the silence something kind.

If this dead quiet hadn't underlined
How close we're nearing all the threatening shoal,
I might not find its emptiness so blind.

I wouldn't pale when midnight sirens whined
Or fear a neighbor's cough out of control
If there were in the silence something kind.

But something evil's here that hates mankind
And if I could some inner strength enroll
I might not find its emptiness so blind.

And so I pray and watch the world unwind
And silently my breaking heart condole.
If there were in the silence something kind
I might not find its emptiness so blind.

Jeffrey Essmann

The A Train

The A train's always emptiest
when seat by seat it's full
of hollowed lives lived hand to mouth
and clearly headed south;
of souls so sadly dispossessed
of grace's soothing pull.
And some of them are quite well dressed
(they truly know their wool);
full speed ahead they sally forth,
yet can't discern true north,
and tuck away their emptiness
by tailored pocketful.

Jean L. Kreiling

Jean L. Kreiling is the author of two poetry collections, *Arts & Letters & Love* (2018) and *The Truth in Dissonance* (2014). Her work has been honored with the *Able Muse* Write Prize, the Great Lakes Commonwealth of Letters Sonnet Award, the Kelsay Books Metrical Poetry Award, a Laureates' Prize in the Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest, three New England Poetry Club prizes, and the *String Poet* Prize.

Chess Players (Giocatori di scacchi)

after the painting by Franz Borghese (*image at* <http://www.artnet.com/artists/franz-borghese/giocatori-di-scacchi-anni-novanta-rmlN6KWFyWzAUqI7PpCCZA2>)

He seldom sits this straight, but at this table
he mustn't yield a thing. And he won't blink
before she does. For her part, she's unable
to figure out what made her husband think
she might be beaten at this foolish game;
she's won at everything they've ever played—
although it's true she sometimes lets him claim
that he's the victor, part of a charade
to keep the peace. But she's all done with that;
from now on, she won't fake it. He, meanwhile,
is guessing that her perfectly straight hat
might tilt or fall if she should deign to smile.
He tries to focus. Both need this success,
both well aware they're not just playing chess.

Jean L Kreiling

Soldier (Soldato)

after the painting by Franz Borghese (*image at http://www.artnet.com/artists/franz-borghese/soldato-R_sOXzLADnRk0fLIBKYhZA2_*)

He hollers the commands he's trained to give,
and leads the regiment in morning drill.
He'll teach his troops there's no alternative—
one does as ordered: march and chant and kill.
But in the frame there's only this one man,
so is he hollering in solitude?
Is he objecting to his army's plan?
Has he seen too much death, and come unglued?
Perhaps he now thinks war is ludicrous,
and shouts a pacifist's epiphany.
Wide mouth and beady eyes—ambiguous—
might signify resolve or agony.
His uniform is neat, his medals bright—
a gung-ho soldier, or one loath to fight.

Iain Thomas

Iain Thomas works the graveyard shift at two different hotels in Colorado. His work is usually the inspiration for his poems.

To the guy who checked out in the hotel parking lot

There's not much you left me to know you by. Still:
I'll scrounge up what little I can for this verse,
'cause god knows if I don't then nobody will.

The ones who checked out in the rooms were much worse.
They gunked up the carpet, got stains on the walls,
and left us mementos of rancor they'd nursed

to dutifully pick through when family called.
The cost of the cleaning alone was a pain
and moreso the guests that the hubbub "appalled"

into rushing downstairs to pry and complain.
Between that, the cops, and the ambulance crew,
the whole friggin' fire brigade up the lane

and everyone vying to get a good view,
forgive me for saying it's a pain in the ass (but it is).
But you weren't a nuisance like that, so thank you.

For starters, it's great that your credit card passed.
You'd racked up a thousand in total for rent
and no one was eager to call and harass

your closest of kin for the money you'd spent.
You handled it well, left little to fate.
It's clear to me now that you'd planned the event

from waiting until it was suitably late
and cozying up in your car to expire
to parking away from the primary gates

so looky-loos wouldn't be boldly inspired
to strip you of what was your chosen demise.
Before anyone even had time to inquire,

reports were collected, the boss was apprised,
your car was wheeled off with your body in tow,
your room was identified, quickly revised

and, lickety-split, it was ready to go.
We'd slated some guests for that room the same day
and I wasn't keen on the tantrum they'd throw

if out of the blue they had no place to stay.
But you were a trooper, that's all I can say.
Within just a day you were shuffled away.

Stephen Gibson

Stephen Gibson's latest collection, *Self-Portrait in a Door-Length Mirror*, won the 2017 Miller Williams Prize (University of Arkansas Press). Earlier collections include *The Garden of Earthly Delights Book of Ghazals* (Texas Review Press), *Rorschach Art Too* (2014 Donald Justice Prize, StoryLine Press), *Paradise* (University of Arkansas, Miller Williams finalist), and others.

Portrait of Madame de Pompadour at the Frick Collection in NYC

Her family name was Poisson, which means fish,
and she was scorned for being illegitimate—
like a New York hooker who asks, *Want a date?*
as some car pulls up at the curb (and wish

she hadn't when she sees a badge). And selfish.
When she heard Louis XV's mistress choked late
one night at dinner, she asked what the woman ate:
she would have the royal chef prepare that dish—

what the other couldn't swallow, she'd finish.
As a young beauty (never much on her plate),
she decided to crash a royal ball to intoxicate
the king—and thus begin her metamorphosis.

She went as a wildflower—filled with pollen—
soon Louis buzzed around, as did all the men.

Stephen Gibson

“Pretty Heart”

The model in Rossetti’s painting opening her dress
is Ellen Smith, but not much is known about her—
he “discovered” her by accident. She was a laundress.

Biographers assume she became Rossetti’s mistress
because Rossetti was notorious as a philanderer—

here, to show the heart pendant, she opens her dress.
The bios guess she might be sixteen—more or less—

but since she posed for few paintings after *Joli Coeur*,
there’s question about how he found this laundress.

Rossetti has her smile, coyly, uncovering the necklace—
she’s what Pre-Raphaelite brothers called a “stunner”

(and what she’s offering, ambiguous, opening the dress).
There’s lots known about Rossetti, not just as artist

(e.g., his wife ODs on laudanum before he finds her)—
not Ellen: she’s just a girl he “discovered,” a laundress.

But there is this: reports about a scar (no eyewitness)—
her face being slashed by a jealous boyfriend-soldier.

The model in Rossetti’s painting, opening her dress,
is Ellen Smith, “discovered” by accident, a laundress.

Stephen Sossaman

Stephen Sossaman lives, reads and writes in Burbank, California. He is the author of the long poem sequence *And Job Lies in the Feedlot Where He Fell*, and is at work on another, about the evacuation of Moscow in 1941. His website is www.stephensossaman.com.

The Princess and the Prince

On a Persian miniature by Abdhulla in the Sackler Gallery

Abdullah's young and playful lovers' scene
would crumble if exposed to natural light.
Impurities within red pigments mean
their love fades faster since it starts out bright.
Young curators who could not stand the sight
of love's decomposition labored hard
restoring a conjectured hue and light —
then used the scene for a blank greeting card.
Now boxed, the princess and the prince lie still,
awaiting future lonely times when I^{[[]]}_{SEP}
will send them to some woman, hoping she'll
perceive a loss we two might rectify.
Not rectify, perhaps. Let's say instead
we'll compensate as we lie in our bed.

Earl Carlton Huband

Earl Carlton Huband is the author of *The Innocence of Education* [Longleaf Press, 2018] and *In the Coral Reef of the Market* [Main Street Rag Publishing, 2020]. Both books are based on Huband's experiences as a young Peace Corps Volunteer in Oman.

An *Other* Point of View

"Suppose we make love
and you hop out of bed
to write me a poem.

"Suppose I lie here,
feeling a little hurt,
feeling abandoned.

"Imagine the poem
is not for me, not me,
a useful vehicle.

"Suppose we have sex
and I hop out of bed
and write *you* a poem."

Ted Charnley

Ted Charnley's work has appeared previously in *The Road Not Taken* (Summer 2014), and in such journals as *Passager*, *Think*, *The Lyric* and *The Orchards Poetry Journal*. He lives with his wife in a 200-year old farmhouse they restored in central Maryland.

Lyrics from a Distance

It makes you cry out loud, her violin;
the notes without a voice, the keening strings.
They almost rise and soar, she almost sings
to you among the crowd, then reels it in.

You want her closer now, to hear your words
accompany her music, if you can.
But when the encore ends, you're just a fan
who wants to meet her backstage afterwards.

And there, with all your knocking on her door,
you'll stand before her, tense, and try to read,
your starstruck words a stutter, nothing more.

Her face will blur, her knowing smile recede;
then, from afar, your lyrics rise and soar.
It isn't what you want, it's what you need.

Doritt Carroll

Doritt Carroll is a native of Washington, DC. She received her undergraduate and law degrees from Georgetown University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Main Street Rag, North American Review, and Coal City Review.

Quarantine Villanelle

kept in the house's box like a lost doll
waiting for the next hour to eat or sleep
the loneliness can start to take a toll

a breath confirms right now the lungs are whole
swallow another pill or two they're cheap
then lie back in bed like a discarded doll

maybe you'll stir yourself and make a call
you jump but it's only a random kitchen beep
every kind of loneliness takes its toll

there's illness, blizzard, the after-breakup pall
the days you do/don't manage to eat or sleep
your eyes blink slowly like a battered doll

its arm or head always about to fall
a manic crack spoiling its porcelain cheek
is this the way that loneliness takes its toll

a stiffening a slipping down the wall
a layer of dust that settles then grows deep
it's hard to wait for things to take their toll
is being in the box what breaks the doll?

Bruce Bailey

Bruce Bailey is recently retired from a business career and resides in Charlotte, NC. He has been an occasional writer of poetry in the past, but is now able to devote more time to the art. As a new, never published author, his inspiration comes mainly from nature, and experiences with Third World cultures.

Wind Dreams

In autumn I first listened
or first heard some moral there
the invisible engine
that driver of air

A breeze through the window
cool breath on my skin
a riff through the leaves
the conversation begins

The lungs of the earth
breathe in and out
sometimes a whisper
more often a shout

Inhale in winter, draws the frigid blast
like an icy drink, or the color blue
I shrink from the lesson
it's cold deliverance, an icy hue

Unsettled is the voice of spring
this uncertain season, clothed in pastels
an enveloping wave, a warming tide
the waning sharpness, winter's farewell

Exhale in summer, its slow hot breath
like tea set to boil, and shades of yellow or red
meager are the lessons here
the faint whispered message remains unread

Red breath of summer surrenders its chore
the engine cycles again with a sigh
autumn sings its clear brittle song
a brilliant colored hello, then goodbye

The lungs of the earth,
breath in and out
do I hear the whisper?
or only the shout.

Dan Campion

Dan Campion is the author of *Peter De Vries and Surrealism* and coeditor of *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song*, a third edition of which was issued in 2019. His poems have appeared previously in *The Road Not Taken* and in *Poetry*, *Rolling Stone*, and many other publications. A selection of his poetry titled *The Mirror Test* will be published by MadHat Press in February 2022.

The Armadillo

This one we can't run over
nor sell its hide in stores
like other armadillos'
with lesser armorers.

We can't divine its gender
nor color deep inside
the plates of sturdy chitin,
which can't be pierced or pried.

This one fulfills the daydream
of children of all kinds
that they might wear a garment
as steely as their minds.

We will not solve its mystery
until the creature dies.
But it should live forever,
just judging by its eyes.

Konstantin Yakimchuk

Fall in Massachusetts

Truly, I enjoyed pretentious Boston's autumn
Fallen leaves and puddles, broken branches,
And although I had the hardest working quota,
I remember parks, museums, tasty lunches.

I recall those bridges, stations, mansions,
Gliding wind on snowy, icy roads.
There were rumours that the Cape in stormy weather
Catches on the hook all floating boats.

Far away somewhere, over ocean,
If I am sensing breeze and salty air,
In Atlantic chilly iodine potion
I perceive New England's subtle flair.

Diane Lee Moomey

Diane Lee Moomey is a painter and poet living in Half Moon Bay, California, where she is co-host of Coastside Poetry, a monthly reading series; her work has appeared in *PoetryMagazine.com*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Caesura*, *California Quarterly* and others. Please visit her at www.dianeleemoomeyart.com

Seven A.M.

Raku's the name I give these pots of tender
clay, fired and coated in a wash
of powdered glass and flamed again. With tongs,
I've pulled them out at orange heat and dropped

them into vats of grasses, sawdust, straw,
perhaps to shatter into glitter or
to crack with blackened webs like highway maps
across a glossy surface. Plates, and cups
that now hold tea and coffee—crackle lines
that trace their crazy route a little farther
'round the curve with every morning's pour
the way our faces crease and fold themselves

around our forks and spoons, the bagel crumbs
and butter, kisses, our bits of daily news.

Diane Lee Moomey

Déjà Vu

She'd thought that she was coming home to you
again. Tires sliding into curves
evoked a former February—bird
swooped in a similar sky, hydrangea-blue
as last time. For just a breath or two,
a meager sun and vapor trail blurred
toward the west, *now* as *then*. A word
arose, as if her mind were leafing through

an older journal. Now another cloud
blows across the sun, truck down
shifts, vapor trail breaks, wind
sweeps: a gust of leaves, brief-limned
across the window. Almost there, she'd thought—
suddenly reminded that she's not.

Michael Fraley

Michael Fraley finds a creative community in the many voices of the poetry world. He has contributed to *The Road Not Taken*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *California Quarterly*, and *Plainsongs*. M.A.F. Press published his chapbook *First-Born*. Tamafyhr Mountain Press published his e-chapbook *Howler Monkey Serenade*. Michael received his MA in Writing from the University of San Francisco.

Experiment

We're an experiment, I think.
A failed one, it may be; the end
Has not been told. If we can send

A spaceship to the moon, or link
The people of the world by phone,
Or stretch the limits of what's known

To science with our cleverness,
Then why can't we protect the place
That's home to all the human race?

The plants and animals we stress
Beyond their breaking point... will seal
Our fate, if we don't help them heal.

Perhaps Neanderthals would rest
More lightly on the ground's warm breast.
The Sapiens are not so wise,
Abusing land and sea and skies.

Jenni Wyn Hyatt

Jenni Wyn Hyatt was born in Maesteg, South Wales, in 1942 but now lives in Derbyshire. A retired English teacher, she did not start to write poetry until she was in her late sixties. Her subjects include childhood memories, nature, injustice and war and she also writes humorous poems. She has published two collections, *Perhaps One Day* (2017) and *Striped Scarves and Coal Dust* (2019).

Downsizing

First time I had a study, it was vast,
a cellar room in a Victorian pad,
a massive desk and bookshelves built to last,
then we downsized. Next time I only had

an alcove in the bedroom, neatly planned
with ample shelves produced to my design,
where files, essential books were close at hand
and curved computer desk – a modern line.

The latest move – an even smaller space,
a battered retro desk, some poetry,
embroidered pictures and a well-loved face,
a book Dad signed in nineteen-thirty-three.

A tiny corner, memories I prize,
my special place, despite its meagre size.

Cynthia Hallen

Cynthia L. Hallen is a philologist by profession and a poet by nature. Cynthia is the chief editor of the *Emily Dickinson Lexicon* (EDL), an online comprehensive dictionary of all the words in Dickinson's poems. Her EDL website includes a searchable database of the 1844 second edition of Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language*, which Dickinson used for her poetic composition.

Capstone and Telos

Reading is the Needle,
and Writing is the Thread.
So as we read, we stitch and bind
our Thought to what is said.

Each life has its destiny –
its inhale, exhale, pause –
Each mind has a litany,
a Script, a key, a cause.

Writing is the Treadle,
and Reading is the Tread.
So as we write, we line the seams
of Truth to what we've read:

Audio and Visual –
Glee, glory, sound, and sight –
physical and spiritual –
perceiving lengths of light.