

A photograph of a dirt path leading into a dense forest. The path is narrow and made of brown earth, winding through a field of tall green grass and numerous bright yellow wildflowers. The forest in the background is thick with green foliage and tall, slender trees. The overall scene is bright and natural, suggesting a summer day in a wooded area.

The Road Not Taken

A Journal of Formal Poetry

Summer, 2021

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Summer, 2021

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Poet's Corner

Welcome to the summer issue of *The Road Not Taken; A Journal of Formal Poetry*. I am very proud of this issue; in fact, the number of strong poems I received over the last four months was at once humbling and encouraging. Humbling, because ultimately we have to make difficult choices between poems that are subtle and expressive. Ultimately though, it can only be encouraging to realize how many talented and observant poets are reading and submitting to *Road*. Yes, we still get submissions that appear to be sent to us virtually at random – but many may fewer than we used to. The overwhelming majority of our submissions however carefully weave sound and sense with an awareness of genres as they evolve over time.

The poems in this issue fell into four themes: *Across The Centuries*, *Separation*, *The Green World* and what we call (for the sake of parallelism) *The Asphalt World*. For the record, we do not plan our themes in advance; we just see what comes and then sift through the relationships between them. This season for instance included an unusually large number of poems that responded in some way to the poets of the past – and this was particularly important to us because it embodies the inevitable give and take between all readers and writers.

It also struck us though that a majority of our summer poets focused *either* on their relationship with the natural world, *or* the complex and destructive nature of human interactions – so we contrasted those two. Finally, we always receive many many close-ups on individual relationships. This year though, the focus seemed overwhelmingly on breakage and loss: parents and offspring who try to talk and fail, and friends who disappear. Even lovers were overwhelmingly *former*: it was not in short a season that celebrated suburban life.

That said, we are considering experimenting with theme-based future issues; if we go in this direction we will announce the themes loud and clear on our web-page. Such issues would also have a “General Submission” category, because some poems are just too good to say no to.

Again, thank you for contributing, and thank you for reading.

Kathryn Jacobs
Editor

Rachel Jacobs
Associate Editor

Road Not Taken

Across The Centuries

Replies

Rebuttals

Conversations

Enriqueta Carrington

Enriqueta Carrington is a Mexican poet, translator, and mathematician. She enjoys translating good writing, especially poetry and novels, from Spanish to English or the other way round. Her own poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies. She is a member of the editorial committee of the poetry journal *USI Worksheets*.

Penelope, as Her Thread Wears Thin

The tales I have to weave are hard on the ears
So I unweave by night what I wove by day
Will he return, having traveled twenty years?
Only a sorceress could keep him away

So by night I unwrite what I wrote by day
It's in the nature of husbands to be late
Only a sorceress could keep him away
Is a sorceress immune to a wife's hate?

It's in the nature of husbands to be late
He'll be back, the scent of her fluids in his hair
Is a sorceress immune to a wife's fate?
I'm tied to this loom, while he has lust to spare

He'll sail happily back, her scent in his hair
The phantoms of darkness dissolve in the light
Tied to woman's fate while he has joys to spare
So what I weave by day I unwrite by night

The phantoms of jealousy survive the light
Will he return, having traveled twenty years?
So what I write by day I unweave by night
And the tales that I weave are hard on the ears.

Enriqueta Carrington

Words, Words, Words

Polonius: *What do you read, my lord?*

Hamlet: *Words, words, words.*

—Shakespeare: *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*

Human speech was like the songs of birds
until she grew to grasp the sense of words,
love she learned in the songs of her mother
before she toddled down long corridors.
Later she learned father, sister and brother,
she learned great loves and opened many doors,
friend and husband, children and grandchildren.

Grandchildren she forgot first, then children,
memories hiding behind horrid doors,
husband and friend lost in their turn, brother,
sister, she toddled down long corridors
finding no face but the face of her mother
fading away, like the meanings of words.
When that was gone she had the songs of birds.

Enriqueta Carrington

Notes for a Love Sonnet

for Roe

When Herrick has gathered the rosebuds of May,
when Juliet's the sun and Sylvia's *Who*,
Barrett Browning has counted every way,
and Dickinson has been debauched by dew,

when all those before us have said their say
and sung their love, both false and true,
down to warbling pebbles and clods of clay,
besides Sappho, Petrarch, Neruda, Du Fu,

when following them we might as well bray,
yet know our love is sweet, and unmatched too
to the depth and the height their words convey,
about love, what can we write that is new

now fall leaves fall and flowers die away,
how can we burn and rave at close of day?

Diane Lee Moomey

Diane Lee Moomey is a painter and poet living in Half Moon Bay, California, where she is co-host of the monthly Coastside Poetry; her work has appeared in *Light*, *Think*, *The MacGuffin*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and others. Her newest poetry collection, *Make For Higher Ground*, is available on Amazon and at www.barefootmuse.com.

Forty Three and One Half

—a response to Millay's Sonnet #43)

But I remember every lip, and where,
and all the hands that ever cupped my cheek;
recall the day and season bringing each
and bearing each away—our mingled hair,
an arm across me in the night, the wary
promises we may have meant to keep—
remember canyons far too wide to leap,
the lips, unknissed, that smiled across; the very

stones beneath my feet. No languid vine
from lands where suns drift gently south to north
and trees forget their birds, their verdant bowls
of fruit—this heart's of sleepless summer, time
between the thaw and freeze, brief bringing forth
of tiny berries, lights above the poles.

D.S. Martin

D.S. Martin is Poet-in-Residence at McMaster Divinity College, and Series Editor for the Poiema Poetry Series from Cascade Books. He has written five poetry collections including *Ampersand* (2018), *Conspiracy of Light: Poems Inspired by the Legacy of C.S. Lewis* (2013), and his new book *Angelicus* (2021).

Count Ugolino's Rebuttal

*The Count recounts his story & challenges Dante's version
(Inferno Cantos XXXII & XXXIII)*

Just call me Ugolino now with titles
as Pisa's Count & ruler stripped from me
I skillfully out-smarted all my rivals

aligning with which rising tide would be
victorious Ghibelline first or Guelph
until the ebb which kept my loyalty

reserved to serve no banner but myself
not favouring the emperor or pope
unless that brought me influence & wealth

Some years ago oh never mind the gap
that passes by so quickly now I know
I took control of Pisa & set up

for banishment each of my grievous foes
I bought off distant threats with lavish gifts
but never worked to bring my rivals home

My nephew double-crossed me when a rift
between us rose I also exiled him
The riots after Pisa became hit

with shortages of food were hard to stem
The archbishop did not care who was killed
until he found his nephew one of them

He led a mob against me My house filled
with smoke & fire burned down in half an hour
& then to keep my voice forever still

he locked my sons & me in Muda Tower
The archbishop whose heart was cold as stone
made sure I never could return to power

The door was nailed shut the key was thrown
into the Arno River with a splash
so we would starve right down to skin & bone

& Pisa would be his to rule at last
Would Dante say we cannot be forgiven
till we grant pardon to those in our past?

But some gaps cannot ever be unriven
Can you conceive the wailing in our cell
their starving agony how I was driven

to hate that archbishop damn him to hell
as my dear sons & grandsons suffered there?
My anguish even Dante cannot tell

So how can he say I should have to share
eternity equal with my arch-rival?
So why portray me as a vile monster

my teeth making his head my gruesome meal
his hair wiping brain-matter from my face
as if we both deserved this lowest circle?

& even if we both were locked in ice
could Dante's words provide a miracle?
Are poets not likewise in need of grace?

Olivia Hajioff

Olivia Hajioff's poetry has appeared in literary journals including The Front Porch Review, Better Than Starbucks Journal, Ginosko Literary Journal, and on renowned philosopher William B. Irvine's website. She is the Grand Choice winner of the Laura Jackson 2020 Poetry Competition. She is a professional violinist and Fulbright scholar.

This Is Not A Poem

Poems, like anything, follow the fashion.
It's not enough just to express with a passion
the joys and delights of a natural life.
Instead, it seems, you need to offer some strife.

You might think that nature is always in style
but many prefer just to read about bile.
If you think you'll see poems of landscapes and mists,
you're mistaken, instead you'll find grocery lists.

And rhyming, forget it! That's far too old school
unless you don't mind being seen as a fool.
In fact, even verse forms are often declined
but write in plain prose and you'll not be maligned.

It seems one must be bold and edgy today,
don't shy at coarse language. Be shocking! they say.
Try adding words rhyming with punt and with duck.
One every few lines and you'll find you're in luck.

Here endeth my lesson to poets aspiring
and I will add this, for those still inquiring,
that my works ignore the advice I am giving.
Good thing I don't write them to earn my own living!

Separation

Memory

Loss

Carolyn Martin

Carolyn Martin: From associate professor of English to management trainer to retiree, Carolyn Martin is a lover of gardening and snorkeling, writing and photography. Her poems have been published in more than 130 journals throughout North America, Australia, and the UK. She is currently the poetry editor of *Kosmos Quarterly: journal for global transformation*. Find out more at www.carolynmartinpoet.com.

Over the Telephone

What do you want from me? she asks each week.
At 96 she's ready and can't conceive
why heaven doesn't want her yet. I throw
her insistent question back: *Do you know*
what you want from yourself? My words stop her
in her wobbly tracks. The question infers
there's something deeper to want than a pair
of Easy Spirit shoes or a tooth repair.
And that bladder surgery? *Why bother?*
her stance, when time's on the run. My mother
asks again, *What do you want from me?*
I almost dare, *An apology*
for childhood taunts you didn't save me from.
But her recall is lost. I hold my tongue.

E.P. Fisher

E.P. Fisher taught school in Uganda in the Peace Corps. He holds a BA in Literature and a doctorate in Psychology, and has worked as a play therapist and adventure-based counselor with special needs children. Credits include five books and poetry in hundreds of college journals and little magazines. A Pushcart nominee and winner of several competitions, his articles have appeared in *The Writer's Chronicle* and elsewhere.

Neon Utopian Nowhere

The road meanders on its river route
By a bridge detour, on my last commute,
Passed abandoned ramshackle bungalows
Where driveway neighbors come & go—
Swans on a pond, on a private estate,
Brick-ivied wall with its wrought-iron door;
A dog on a chain where security gates
Keep the filthy rich from the desperately poor...

Evicted tenants and lottery winners—
The Fire Chief, lost at the World Trade Center;
The lady who jogs, the man who keeps horses;
The elderly couple who take in church orphans;
The husband who smoked, got cancer & died;
The handicapped boy & the suicide;
The retired cop & the prison guard
And 'foreclosure' signs in every front yard...

Media sideshow of bombastic blowhards,
Radio-ravings of flag-waving cowards
Fuel a utopian nowhere in neon,
A "Keep Out" culture of cheap come-ons,
Where humbug, dumb-down & dis-information
The gospel of greed & world-domination
And high-octane terror is mass-produced
Like battered wives in the evening news!

With murder in their hearts, out in no-man's land,
Bankers engineer a new world crisis;
Down in his labyrinth, a bull-headed man
Sells off futures at rock-bottom prices—
A cat's-cradle crime-scene, outlined in chalk,
Grid-lock & gunfire, heard round-the-clock—
This cold-blooded drive-by for 'our daily bread'
As we kill the children & put them to bed.

Bruce Parker

Bruce Parker holds a BA in History from the University of Maryland Far East Division, Okinawa, Japan, and an MA in Secondary Education from the University of New Mexico. He has taught English as a second language, worked as a technical editor, and as a translator. He is an Assistant Editor at *Boulevard* and lives in Portland, Oregon. His work has appeared in, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Cloudbank*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Pif*, *Hamilton Stone Review* and elsewhere. A chapbook, *Ramadan in Summer*, is forthcoming.

More and More

More and more my address book
is peopled by the dead,
the walking stick beside the door
an invitation to be gone unread,

an idle thought as dawn breaks ground
in trees in rain soft as paws.
I have found no trace of them,
no fear of any unknown cause.

Light is still upon the lawn,
still dew upon the silent leaf—
every number that I dial
rings up unburied grief.

Peggy Landsman

Peggy Landsman is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *To-wit To-woo* (Foothills Publishing) and *Our Words, Our Worlds*, scheduled for publication by Kelsay Books in 2022. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in numerous literary anthologies and journals, including *Nasty Women Poets* (Lost Horse Press), *Mezzo Cammin*, *BigCityLit*, and *Scientific American*. She lives in South Florida where she swims in the warm Atlantic Ocean every chance she gets. <https://peggylandsman.wordpress.com/>

Thinking of You

for my mother

I'm waiting for an email to arrive
to notify me that you've passed away.
I wonder how much longer you'll survive.
The air today is sweet. The sky is gray.
South Florida's a world of warm and green.
You always said green was your favorite color;
coffee, your favorite flavor of ice cream...
In hospice, are your senses growing duller?
We've been estranged so long, it does feel strange
to think of you becoming memory.
I couldn't change the thing that needed change.
I couldn't make you want to talk to me.
My arms hang at my sides. I wait for news.
No matter what is lost, there's more to lose.

James B. Nicola

James B. Nicola, a returning contributor, is the author of six collections of poetry, the latest being *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*. His decades of working in the theater culminated in the nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Guide to Live Performance*, which won a Choice award.

The Colors of the Crowd

Do you know that the day that Kevyn died
there were dozens of people around?
One hundred and sixty-three, in fact.
And not one made a sound.

The only sound was the other-worldly
sound of Kevyn screaming
for help: so odd that most convinced
themselves that they were dreaming.

There were all sorts of folks that day in the crowd
of one hundred and sixty-three:
tall folks, short folks, thin folks, fat folks,
freckled folks, and me;

White, black, red, brown, yellow,
every conceivable hue.
One hundred and sixty-three, in sum,
did not know what to do.

So when I say *There's only one*
race, it's the human race,
and you demur, might I remind
you of the time and place

that Kevyn was suddenly made as still
as the hundred and sixty-two
black-white-red-brown-yellow-tall-short-thin-
fat folks, me, and you?

Judy Koren

Judy Koren lives in Haifa, Israel. Her poems have appeared in Israeli literary magazines and in international literary magazines including *Better Than Starbucks*; *Blue Unicorn*; *Lighten Up Online*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *The Road Not Taken* and *The Taj Mahal Review*. She is currently President of Voices Israel, a society for poets writing in English.

The X Factor: A mathematical lesson

When my X left me, I asked Y:
He said my shape had grown unreal,
I needed to divide by half
to multiply my sex appeal.

I'd thought his love was infinite
when it was merely rational,
it decimated me to know
our feelings weren't reciprocal.

for me, pure love was cardinal,
for him, just my topology,
to make our marriage workable
we lacked the needed symmetry.

The sorry end of this affair
should caution women to be wary:
before you integrate, take care
his love is not imaginary.

Jean L. Kreiling

Jean L. Kreiling is the prize-winning author of two collections of poetry, *Arts & Letters & Love* (2018) and *The Truth in Dissonance* (2014). Her third book, *Shared History*, will appear early next year.

The Frog

Yes, we'd said, to champagne flutes,
my father's ancient cribbage board,
framed photos, Grandma's Christmas plate;
but *no* to worn quilts, hiking boots,
a floor lamp with a fraying cord—
and then my mother said *Oh, wait!*

I'd added to the discard pile
a four-inch tall ceramic frog.
It sat up straight, un-frog-like, brave-
ly grinning, and my mother's smile
beamed through her weary, mournful fog.
That, she cried, she had to save.

I asked her why; she'd only say
I like him. Chipped and bulging-eyed,
it had three limbs instead of four,
but she made sure it made its way
to her new home. It sat beside
her kitchen sink for ten years more.

It sits by my sink now, a token
of unexpected empathy:
she'd said she liked not *it*, but *him*,
for reasons always left unspoken.
Some dear but private history?
Perhaps it was the missing limb.

Robert Wooten

Robert Wooten's poems have appeared in *The Lyric*, *Strong Verse*, www.strongverse.com, and *Sparrow: the yearbook of the sonnet*.

Barry

My mother stooped to dig potatoes
from the A&P sack, placed each one
and turned on the tap. As she began
scrubbing, slicing through the water's stream
while cleaning, staccato garden hose
sounds from the sink in that room arose,
drowning out the Barry Manilow
albums that were dropping like flat rocks
on the record player. Then mother sang
lead in her kitchen. And Barry, restrained
to the living room, earned his keep awhile
as her back-up vocalist. Mother
also played water guitar, giving
the water strings subtle licks against
the faucet feedback's general roar.
I was her crowd, hungrily clapping
for more. While still performing, she served
up creamed potatoes, for an encore.

Donald Wheelock

Donald Wheelock's chapbook, *In the Sea of Dreams*, has been published by Gallery of Readers Press. His poems have appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *Ekphrasis*, *Equinox*, *Snakeskin*, *The Lyric*, *Rue Scribe*, and elsewhere. In addition to writing poetry, he has composed chamber, vocal, and orchestral music, during a long career of teaching music. He lives with his wife Anne in an old house at the edge of a hayfield in Whately, Massachusetts.

Eighty's the New Sixty

I was, of course, inclined to jump for joy,
to hear, at my age, of the gradual loss
of subcutaneous fat—was it a ploy
to rid me of the guilt from eating sauce,
or other things that like to hibernate
between my liver-spotted skin and bone?
Alas, along with gradual loss of weight
came symptoms I'm less eager to condone,
as when I need the furnace to deliver
a blast of warmer air before its time,
to stop my bony body's need to shiver.
And this when temperatures are said to climb!
80 is now 60, I heard this noon;
let winter be like summer, then, and soon.

The Green World

Anne Graue

Anne Graue is a poet, reviewer, and editor whose work has appeared in literary journals and anthologies, online and in print. She is the author of *Full and Plum-Colored Velvet*, (Woodley Press, 2020) and *Fig Tree in Winter* (Dancing Girl Press, 2017). Her work has appeared in *SWWIM Every Day*, and *Mom Egg Review* and in the anthologies *The Book of Donuts* (Terrapin Books, 2017) and *Coffee Poems* (World Enough Writers, 2019). She teaches writing and is a poetry editor for *The Westchester Review*.

Rendering

The morning rain worked hard to envelope
me in the moment. There was one orange
left on the counter, its keen telescope
noticing all but its habit to singe
my taste buds with sour, just as an eyelash
floated down like a black bird on a wire.
I thought about the scratch of your mustache
and how my red skin resembled a fire
as it quenched itself, as it laid underhand—
so much history and truth to render!
So I wrote, without an ampersand,
a note to you and me feigning tender
feelings that were not as photogenic
as you were, eating a pomegranate.

Anne Graue

Triolet of Crows

Crows dipped in puddles in a road
repeat muddy syllables
in language perfect for an ode
crowed loud in the blackened road
just after it had snowed
& streets were barely passable
crows puddled deep in the watered road
muddied reflected syllables

Diane Lee Moomey

Elementary

—*a Love Letter*

You enter what is empty, and surround
all objects in your path, adopt the shape
of anything that holds you. Underground,
you follow every crevice, fill the space
around each root. Above, you'll ride a storm
at poles, or at the planet's waist. You cream
at ocean's edge and swiftly shift your form
according to the weathers— now ice, now steam.

On slender skiis, I've slid across your back
in heat and cold; have waded overflow;
have crossed your bridges, fallen in, been filled
and fallen on. In different moods you'll crack
a window, smash a boat, or gently follow
a finger, placed in the smallest woodland rill.

Alena Casey

Alena Casey is a wife, mother, and writer from Indiana. She is an avid reader, writer, and student of literature and poetry, and sometimes blogs about it at strivingafterink.wordpress.com.

I Climbed a Hill

When I was young, I climbed a hill,
and at the top, I looked my fill.

Grass, like cloth, lay all around,
with flowers embroidered on the ground.

Wind exhaled and cantered past,
to win its time-long race at last.

Each brown arm of each great tree
reached out to touch infinity.

Time passed, and, longing not to go,
I stayed to watch the sunset grow.

When I was young, I climbed a hill,
and there I'm standing, staring, still.

The Asphalt World

Patricia Behrens

Patricia Behrens lives in New York City. Her poetry has appeared online in journals such as *Split Rock Review* and *Poetry Porch*, in print journals such as *American Arts Quarterly*, *Mom Egg Review* and *The Same* and in the anthology *Nasty Women Poets: An Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse*.

In Key West

Cruise-ship tourists swarm up Duvall. It's tawdry,
flea-bit, packed with louche-looking bars and vendors
hawking T shirts, flyers for sunset boat rides.
Why did I come here?

For the light, of course, and the quiet mornings.
For the sunrise—just as the roosters wake us,
darkness lifts, and freshening breezes say a
new day is coming.

Yes, for hushed Duvall when the shops are shuttered,
streets are clear of people and I imagine
modern trappings fallen, the early island
risen around us.

Let them have the drama of gaudy sunsets,
gaff-rigged boats that glide over gilded water,
Reds that fade to blue for the nightly revels.
Give me the mornings.

John MacLean

John MacLean is a retired lawyer and teacher, whose poems have appeared in *The Lyric*, *The Avocet*, *Blue Collar Review* and several times in *The Road not Taken*, most recently in Summer 2019. His collection *The Long Way Home* is published by Cayuga Lake Books.

Quaranta Giorni

This time of plague, so many die alone,
in quarantine, surrounded by machines
that soldier through their leaving unaware,
until a human, masked and gloved and gowned,
can note the time and flick the switches off.

So many years ago, in peaceful times,
while siblings watched my parents “pass away,”
I chose to quarantine myself instead,
kept social distance while their spirits went,
perhaps to help pretend they hadn’t gone.

“Quaranta giorni” gives the ancient term
for forty days apart, where, Jesus like,
you wander arid spaces and endure
temptations that remind you of those things
you’ve had to live without, for live you must.

And now as in those ancient Tuscan times
when every dying parent was a threat,
to hold those wrinkled hands that once held you,
to ease those “passing hence” who eased you here,
seems luxury that no one should forego.

Hilary Biehl

Hilary Biehl's poems have appeared in *The Lyric*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Phantom Drift*, and elsewhere. She lives with her husband and their son in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Dream Places

That intersection where you always find
yourself. The candy shop you visit once
or twice a year. Mere products of your mind
and yet predictable. A river runs

behind the shop. The same elderly man
is always at the counter, and although
he hides dead bodies in the garbage can,
you're glad to see him. Most places you go

are unfamiliar, so it's a relief
to be somewhere you recognize. You try
to keep your idling in these venues brief,
knowing that you're pursued and now must fly,

literally, over the rooftops, just
by willing it. The sky, of course, remains
a constant, blue and sometimes swirled with dust
or, higher up, with clouds. You dodge airplanes

and come to perch finally in a tree.
It's hard to keep your balance, but you do.
Soon most of this will fade from memory,
leaving the river, the worn face, the blue,

these unreal places that you come back to.

Michael Todd Steffen

Michael Todd Steffen is the recipient of a 2021 Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship. His poetry has appeared in journals, including *The Boston Globe*, *The Concord Saunterer*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Poem* and *The Lyric*. *On Earth As It Is*, his second book, will be published this autumn by Cervená Barva Press.

Paradise

I wouldn't know how to sit at its long table
of harps and thunder, foie gras and Champagne,
salvation in your wake; where being sociable
becomes the task, a behavior to maintain
assent of values. You are always right,
expulsed from the garden of inebriating doubt
and its buttery big-pitted avocados.
Stumped at wisdom and her love in Plato's
cozy Republic, even the travel ads
with bronzed bods under palm leaves leave a dazed
lethargic air of time stalled in its sand,
the uneasiness in fact of our materialized
heaven, how its atmosphere forbids
plain sense any hope much further beyond.