



The Road Not Taken

A Journal of Formal Poetry

Fall, 2022

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Corner

Welcome to the Fall 2022 issue of *The Road Not Taken*.

After some thought, we grouped this season's poems into three themes: **Stories, Agitated Souls, and Settings**. Here however we should explain that unlike like some journals, the editors *Road Not Taken* do *not* pick themes in advance; on the contrary we choose themes only after we have read all contributions and made our decisions. Having accepted a body of poems, we then look for commonalities. Obviously poems can be read in different ways, and we could encourage our readers to do so. But the decision to emphasize common features — i.e. *how* does this poem imply a story? — allows readers to compare and contrast their interpretation with the one emphasized, an implicit literary debate.

That all the poems included in *Road Not Taken* show an awareness of traditional poetic form goes without saying. Subject matter and word choice however differ widely however, as language and culture change over time. Nineteenth century poets clearly did not write about robots for instance, or Paul Klee, but the 21st century poets in this issue do. Ditto, poets may use anything from poetic diction to colloquial American. In general, we encourage our poets to "make the form new."

Thank you all for reading -

Kathryn Jacobs
Editor
Road Not Taken.

Rachel Jacobs
Associate Editor

Stories

Beth Houston

Beth Houston has taught at ten universities in California and Florida. Over two hundred of her poems have been published in dozens of journals. She edited the anthologies *Extreme Sonnets*, *Extreme Sonnets II*, and *Extreme Formal Poems*.

Job's Wife

Just get it over with. Curse God and die.
Is your integrity so pure, so lame
you cower at calamity? You lie:
No court in Satan's heaven pleads your claim.
Did he not fall? The God you worship, is
He not an image graven into text
on your thick skull? No love you give like His,
I'll tell you! Do you comfort me? You're hexed!
For seven victim days—philosophy?
Your public pain brings sympathy, but I
wrestle my grief alone. Had you loved me,
I'd suffer less than you. Curse God and die
and be reborn.

 Your joy returns? I've borne
more children. Hear our dead ones? Help me mourn.

Michael Todd Steffen

Michael Todd Steffen is the recipient of a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship and an Ibbetson Street Press Poetry Prize. Of his second book, *On Earth As It Is*, now available from Cervena Barva Press, Joan Houlihan has noted Steffen's *intimate portraits, sense of history, surprising wit, the striking combination of the everyday and the transcendent.*

This Guy Shoves a Robot

in the bread aisle inside the grocery store.
Something in me rises without a name.
AI got in his way and made him sore.
The robot was incapable of pain

though could, if broken, incur costs to repair
justifying assault on it a crime.
A robot's as innocent as its program.
I, a witness, judged the man's behavior

rash and inappropriate, although
I do confess, as witness, I had no
compassion for the thing that could not feel

its own injury or the menace it posed
to the man for whom hunger and bread are real.
And where, when one's needed, is a store manager? Case closed.

Mark B. Hamilton

Mark B. Hamilton is an environmental neo-structuralist, working in forms to transform content. He earned the MFA from The University of Montana, and is a scholar of Early American History. His research on “The Work Songs of the Voyageurs” is included in the Folk Life Archives, U.S. Library of Congress. A recent eco-poetry volume, *OYO, The Beautiful River* (Shanti Arts, 2020), explores the reciprocity between self, history, and the contemporary environment of the polluted Ohio River. Please see: <http://www.MarkBHamilton.WordPress.com>

Sugar Makers

A sugarbush along the Dubois River
supplies syrup for corn porridge and coffee.
From gash to gouge a trough would deliver
the sap to workers stirring sticks in a slurry.

One chopped, another carried, a useful limb
uptilting buckets, when granules were collected.
The thin sap gets thicker as temperatures climb
in hanging kettles above fires carefully tended.

On Washington’s Birthday trees slowly froze
the mud into shackles on fettered feet
like slaves in Saint Domingue. The sun rose
that day, but hasty puddings tasted less sweet.

A little winter bird had flittered in a flurry
beneath a maple tree no longer in a hurry.

Jenni Wyn Hyatt

Jenni Wyn Hyatt was born in Maesteg, Wales, in 1942 but now lives in Derbyshire. Her subjects include family, her garden, nature, injustice and inequality. She has featured in poetry journals and anthologies and published two collections, *Perhaps One Day* and *Striped Scarves and Coal Dust*. She also contributed to *The Hero*, by Michael Dante, about the Welsh bard Hedd Wyn, killed in WW1.

The Old Bard's Farewell

Once lithe and strong I strode from court to court
and entertained the high-born with my words,
assured of a welcome in their halls,
the warmth of fire, a cup of mead, good food.

My sharp eyes spied shy snowdrops in the woods,
pale ladies' smock along the river banks,
a silver fin that quivered in a stream,
a tiny goldcrest hiding in a bush.
Then verse was wont to bubble from my throat
as freely as the tumbling waterfall.

My muse, elusive now, waxes and wanes;
it's left to younger bards to entertain
the gentry. Though their songs seem passing strange
to my old ears, life and our art move on.

I did not hear the cuckoo call last spring,
a sign I shall not see another year.
I whisper at this Lammas-tide a prayer
that if this wintertime the Reaper comes,
he'll take me soft and swift, perchance at night
ere mind, sight, muse and memory are gone.

Barbara Bazyn

Barbara Bazyn's poems have appeared in *The Road Not Taken*, *The Literary Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Cresset* and other little magazines. A retired English instructor, she lives in rural Iowa.

Snow Takes Away the Sins of the World

One winter night the snow came --
drifting as it fell.
Soon all traffic ceased,
All the world's tumult quelled
A boy reached out a window
though his hands were bare.
He grabbed himself a snowball
and tossed it in the air.
He was a dull-eyed boy,
but when the snow became
polished, icy in his hands,
forgot to be ashamed.
He knew he wasn't handsome
his schoolwork a disgrace
but sensed somehow within him
a gift had found its place.
The sky was full of snowflakes
falling from dark heaven,
transfiguring the earth until
the ugly were forgiven.

Yates Young

Yates Young writes original poetry and translates Chinese poetry. His poems have appeared in *The Caribbean Writer*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Ancient Paths*, *Spitball* (*The Literary Baseball Magazine*), *frogpond* (*Haiku Society of America*), *Bear Creek Haiku*, and *The Hartford Courant*. He resides in Palm Coast, Florida.

Wind

With six churches in active rivalry
for the souls of the town's citizenry
and attendance even during the deepest snows
it became apparent to many fellows
The Sabbath had become more competition
than routine sermon repetition.
Extreme virtue was not all it took
but flawless knowledge of The Book,
consistent, soundly reasoned argument
and, above all, inspiration, heaven sent.

The story, as it was recounted to me
was of a youthful minister
barely thirty, preaching a sermon
on probation and grace
sunlight shining on his handsome face
one serene early September night
book opened, contents in plain sight.
Although perceived from the start
as a message sprung from the heart
a gust fluttered the pages of his book.
The revelation parishioners mistook
were cribbed notes that sheet after sheet
swirled overhead then down around his feet.
Settling as the wind calmed one by one
all gathered realized what he had done.
As the pages continued to swirl and spin
they had already turned their backs on him.

John Brantingham

John Brantingham was Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' first poet laureate. His work has been featured in hundreds of magazines. He has nineteen books of poetry and fiction including his latest, *Life: Orange to Pear* (Bamboo Dart Press). He lives in Jamestown, New York.

Paul Klee's *Heroic Roses*

1938 was a heroic year for roses,
a heroic one for Klee as well who watched
as Europe fell apart, who waited
as his health failed and his works
were in danger of being burned by Nazis
with their degenerate views on humanity.
Still, Klee had the exceptional ability
to find hope in flowers, to see beauty.
Every year of my life has been a heroic year
for roses as things fall apart around me,
around the world and hope seems so dismally
naive. But hope is all that we have here
on Earth, and Klee shows me how to see,
how to build strength, joy, and possibility.

Dan Champion

Dan Champion is the author of *A Playbill for Sunset* (<https://icecubepress.com/2021/10/01/a-playbill-for-sunset/>) and the monograph *Peter De Vries and Surrealism* and is a coeditor of *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song*. His poems have appeared previously in *The Road Not Taken* and in many other anthologies and journals. He lives in Iowa City, Iowa.

Animation

The letters burnt, the commonplace book lost,
we make a John Donne up as best we can
from what came down to us: behold the man.
We must construe, no matter what the cost,
the person who could chill a soul with frost
and at the same time scald our hearts. Poor Anne,
expecting, always, since their love began,
so much confinement, till she finally crossed.
His sermons and his verses crave a face,
a force, a figure, to cast grave eyes on
a congregation, hold the sun in place,
and strike a pose—young Jack, old Dr. Donne—
on which the later ages' pens can trace
their own lines hypothetical, hard-won.

Agitated Souls

Barbara Bazyn

Prose Cannot Bear Very Much Reality

The tiger hates his rigid cage, the sea its rugged bowl.
The brittle bones of language try the patience of its soul.
And when the tiger roars his orange roar,
we all jump back despite the padlocked door.
Just as we all jump when the sleek wave pounces.
Something (spirit, power, untold rage)
has got outside its cage.
And prose, though no less strong than most containers,
is an inadequate cage for a restless tiger,
too large and fierce to be thoroughly confined,
(or be restrained from speaking his whole mind).
But the poem is his roar
and the age-old, green, uncontrollable roar of the sea,
asserting itself forever against the shore.

Paul Van Peenen

Paul Van Peenen lives in Eugene Oregon. He has had work published in Seattle Review, Poetry Super Highway, Literary Veganism and Woodcrest Magazine among other venues.

My Sestina

The first stanza isn't half bad.
Or so it would seem.
But wait, it gets steadily worse.
Is it because the form is repetitive?
Is it because when I say
The same thing over and over again

It gets a little old? Maybe. But, again,
I think, in toto, it's not that bad.
Not really. I say what I say.
Stitch together the seams.
I type the word repetitive.
All in all it could be worse.

And what could be worse
Than a bad sestina? Again,
I rise to its defense. Repetitive
Can be incantatory. Or at least not so bad.
And, if it often seems
There is nothing new to say,

Why not go ahead and have my say?
Yes, it could be better but it could be worse.
I tear it apart at the seams
And re-stitch. I do it again
And again and think, okay, not bad.
Think, not quite so repetitive

This time. I hope it's not repetitive.
Though that's hard to say
With certainty. And if it is? Say, my bad.
For better or for worse,
I'm committed. Because, again,
Bound by form, the seams

Show. And it seems
That I'm running out of steam. Repetitive,
A bit dull, this. Again and again,
I struggle for a pertinent thing to say.
And if the poem gets worse
Rather than better, just how bad

Can it be? Repetitive? Yes. Worse
Than I'd hoped? I say no, repeat it again.
It's not bad, just a bit frayed at the seams.

JB Mulligan

JB Mulligan has published more than 1100 poems and stories in various magazines, and has published two chapbooks: *The Stations of the Cross* and *THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS*, as well as 2 e-books: *The City of Now and Then*, and *A Book of Psalms* (a loose translation), plus appearances in more than a dozen anthologies.

Ascension

The rockets fled into the dark
from a dandelion globe
of hissing wave and crusted sky
toward a faceless hope

that somewhere was an unspoiled place,
a garden lush and wild
and ready to open for some lost
but enterprising child.

The lightless shadow opened up
its teeth of many stars
and closed black petals tight around
the flight of wasted years.

Deborah-Zenha Adams

I Have Questions

“Observers ultimately define the structure of physical reality itself.” ~Robert Lanza

If we forget to watch the universe
does it panic? Doubt itself? Or worse—
simply shrug away reality
and disappear? Should infinity
be left for amateurs to dominate?
What if we get bored and abdicate
our role? Don't you fear it might upset
the universe if we forget?
And why always place that same blue sphere
at center, then build outward, hanging austere
orbs and frozen moons from loops and strings?
When did our default imaginings
devise a set of enigmatic laws
that allow effect to be first cause?
How did we get here, and who'll reset
the universe if we forget?

Ed Ahern

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had four hundred stories and poems published so far, and six books. Ed works the other side of writing at Bewildering Stories, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of nine review editors. He's also lead editor at The Scribes Micro Fiction magazine.

Nocturne

I've lost the meaning of a passing day.
The hours that measured goals are indistinct
and time itself has taken on decay

The urgency of tasks has gone astray
and purpose flakes away with every drink.
I've lost the meaning of a passing day.

The joys once bright have darkened down to gray.
My story seems already to be inked
and time itself has taken on decay.

My passions once robust are not okay,
with many urges all but gone extinct.
I've lost the meaning of a passing day.

Much knowledge hard acquired has gone away.
My skills once facile are no longer synched
and time itself has taken on decay.

I fight against a future so betrayed
but ending is becoming quite distinct.
I've lost the meaning of a passing day
and time itself has taken on decay.

Settings

Donald Wheelock

Donald Wheelock continues to have success submitting poems to publications that welcome formal poetry. He was named one of two finalists for *Able Muse's* Write Prize for Poetry, 2022. His first full-length book of Poetry, *It's Hard Enough to Fly*, has just been issued by Kelsay Books.

Ambient Sound in Whately

The ambient sound in Whately at this hour
includes a breeze arriving from the east,
and constant traffic sound. I-91
lends, to my early-morning ear at least,
the sound that greets the rising of the sun
with undertones of movement and of power.

On other days, a pelting rain may hide
the hissing evidence of trucks and cars
along the Valley's well-healed concrete scars
on which our pleasure and our commerce ride.

To wish for peace, even from noise this thin
is every bit as futile as it is
to hope the worst of life will disappear.

Robert L. Smith

Robert L. Smith is a retired special education paraeducator living in San Francisco, and has been writing poetry for more than fifty years.

October Song

October, the eighth month of the old year
(the Romans counted from first green, in March),
announces fall is well and truly here.

For these few weeks the foggy skies will clear
as milder weather passes on the torch:
October, the eighth month of the old year.

Dark clouds are moored offshore but hover near;
soft sunlight, from a comfortable perch,
announces fall is well and truly here.

The migratory birds will disappear,
impatient to reclaim the sky and search
October, the eighth month of the old year.

Some sentimental song I strain to hear
tinges the smoky, scented air whose touch
announces fall is well and truly here.

The death of many things I once held dear
transforms the drowsy coastline on my watch.
October, the eighth month of the old year,
announces fall is well and truly here.

Diane Lee Moomey

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

The Work of Words

Your villanelle assures the break of day,
subdues green eyes beyond the fire's light—
my sonnets hold the roofless dark at bay.

The chanting drum, our dancing feet make tame
the taloned wild; the ballad speeds the night,
the villanelle assures the break of day.

The litany, the liturgy—to pray
in chapter, stanza, verse—arrest the lightning.
Your sonnets hold the hungry dark at bay

and lullaby and fable chase away
the wolf beneath the bed, the ghouls that bite.
The villanelle ensures another day.

The forest lurks beyond the glass—charades,
sestinas, odes, pantoums protect our lighted
rooms. The sonnet holds the dark at bay.

The rhyming lines, the pulse, *cantabile*,
accompanied by lute, by flute and fife—
my villanelle assures the break of day,
your sonnets hold the roofless dark at bay.

Gregory E Lucas

Gregory E. Lucas writes fiction and poetry. One of his poems appeared in a past issue of *The Road Not Taken*. His poems and short stories have also appeared in magazines such as *Blue Unicorn*, *Blueline*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and *Yellow Mama*.

Noon Rest

(Inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting *the Siesta or Noon Rest* – 1890. Dutch.)

With still the need to do the daily chores
they lay their sickles by their cast-off shoes
and make of the cut wheat a golden bed.
To set aside the world and merely be,
they leave undone what were their pressing tasks.
They lift the rake and load the cart no more,
nor make their aged and aching bodies bend.
Better to trade hard work for reveries,
forgo responsibilities and cares.
So, what if the ox remains untethered?
or if the hayricks aren't yet high enough?
For now, there's just one need: to linger yet
in a confluence of passing fantasies.
What greater gift is there at noon than rest?
Let the blue blaze of the summer sky be dimmed
and behind closed eyes, let illusions begin.
Embraced by shadows of the piled straw,
surrounded by the smells of fresh cut fields,
they ask for little else but a chance to sleep,
to dream and nevertheless have everything.

Malcolm Glass

Over the past sixty-five years, Malcolm Glass has published fourteen books -- in all genres. His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Nimrod*, *The Michigan Quarterly*, and many other journals. In 2018 Finishing Line Press released his latest collection of poems, *Mirrors, Myths, and Dreams*.

Liminal Water

The delicate rain falls up from mountain stone
to cumulus clouds, filling the misty air with music of lakes
and rivers, then on into space as cold as bone.

Winter Fires

Nodding branches scratch
loose a few wandering stars
that sink down the flue

into the crackling wood stove.
Pages of poetry blur

to haze. My socks toast
my feet with the ember light,
the star glow of dreams.

