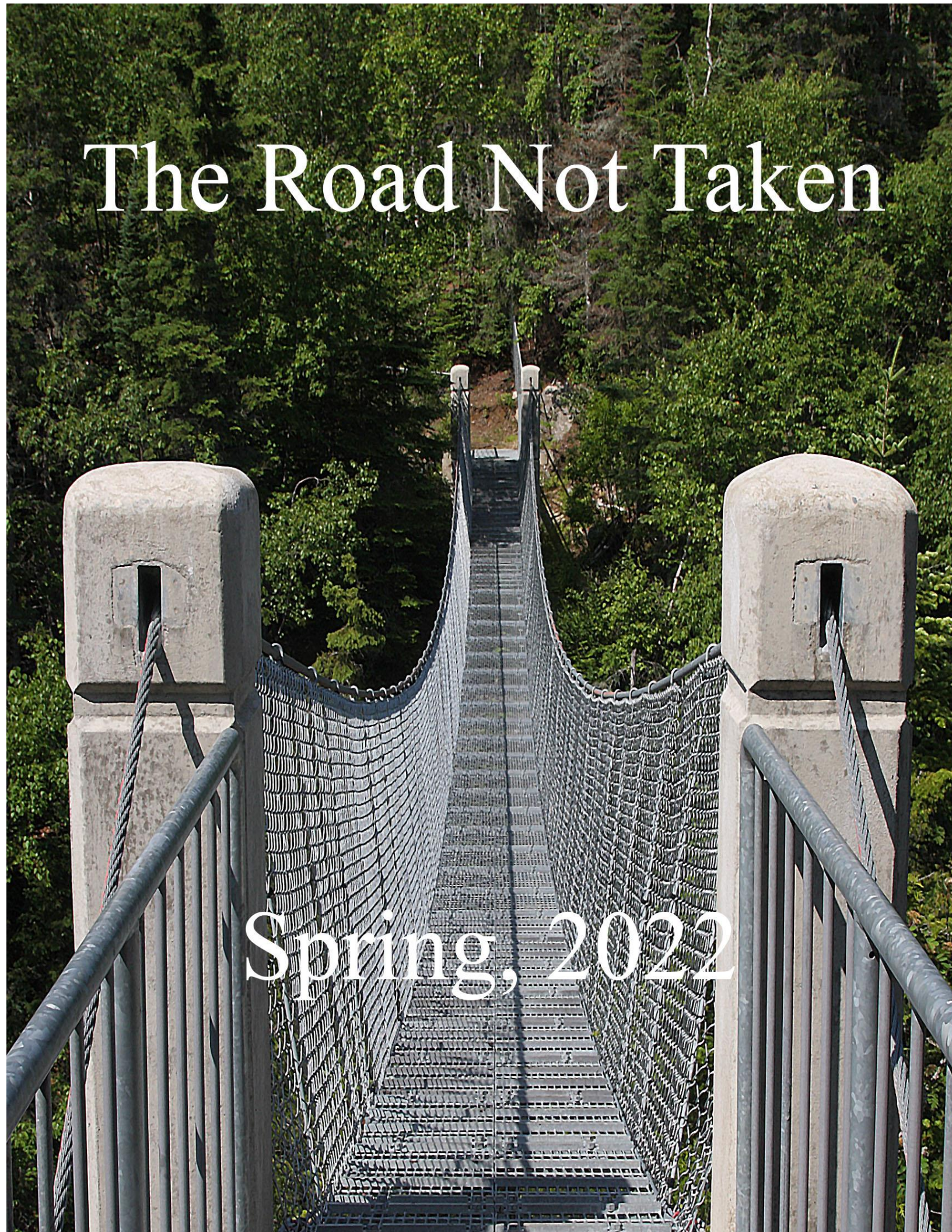


The Road Not Taken

Spring, 2022



The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Corner

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

The editors have divided this issues' poems into three themes: **Safe Spaces, Satires, and Closures.**

Why these particular themes? In the judgment of the editors, these themes worked for the largest number of accepted poems. Do they work equally for all? Of course not, there's an arbitrary element to *any* choice, given that *Road* does not call for themes in advance, and editors do not accept or reject poetry with topics in mind. In general, *Road* editors would rather examine what poems have in common after the fact, than eliminate powerful poems simply because they are outliers. In short, *Road* accepts poems on their own merit; only then do we look for common ground.

For the most part, common ground isn't hard to find; poems tend to group themselves. Inevitably though, some poems fit better than others. We could solve this problem easily by packaging them at the end under as "miscellaneous" (the most commonly used term. We resist this option however, because we think it marginalizes good poems. Better, we think, to find a defensible interpretation that fits both these poems, and the groups at large.

Why bother with themes in the first place? Every act of reading is an interpretation; grouping poems by themes simply adds another layer. Individual readers may or may not find their own reading compatible with the one implied. Even when the reader's interpretation is widely divergent with the one implied however, it is interesting to ask why *other* readers might see the poem in this way. In short, organizing poems by theme contributes to the literary debate.

Kathryn Jacobs
Managing Editor

Rachel Jacobs
Associate Editor

Safe Spaces

Robert Levitt Smith

Robert Lavett Smith lives in San Francisco. His sixth book of poems, *Calamity*, is due from Full Court Press later this year.

Night Blooming Flowers

Night blooming flowers tighten like clenched fists
at sunrise, being suspicious of the light;
although the lure of perfect dawns persists,
the naked sun is terrifyingly bright.
Give me instead the comfort of a night
lit only by the very brightest stars,
the clean page of the fog on which to write
the testament of silence and its scars.
Let darkness mend these injuries of ours
where daylight's imperfections don't intrude;
nocturnal blossoms may be few and sparse,
but shine, however brief their interlude.
And moonlight is too prudent to disclose
what no one says but everybody knows.

Shane Leavy

Shane Leavy is a writer and researcher based in the rainy west of Ireland with work published by *Popshot: The Illustrated Magazine of New Writing*, *The Ekphrastic Review* and *The Connecticut Shakespeare Festival Poetry Anthology*.

Sanctuary

You have to have a place that's not in riot,
some quiet place, with walls of wood or stone,
where, when you come to close your eyes for sleep,
you fall down deep to dreams. Outside, the moan
of wind that harries rain, the clicking groan
of branches needn't bother, you are calm.

And if you share your home with any other,
they should be calm in spirit there as well.
They should be like a mirrored pond at night:
still, and reflecting back the speckled light
of stars. Don't let chaotic people in,
the world can wash and thrash with tumult, riot.
But in your heart and home a mirrored pool
is best, a drowsy, healing hall of quiet.

Carey Jobe

Carey Jobe is an retired attorney and judge who has published poetry over a 45-year span in numerous journals including *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Lyric*, *Plains Poetry Journal*, *Orphic Lute*, and others. He is the author of a volume of poetry, *By River or Gravel Road* [University Editions, 1997]. He currently tends fruit trees and a flower garden in the lush landscape south of Tallahassee, Florida.

The Tree Frog

With bulbous eyes and smirky lips
he climbs with sticky fingertips

sheer trunks by night to snap up gnats,
then picks a slender branch tip that's

near a porch light, inflates his throat,
and wakes us with a swampy note

that swells a hundred times his size,
like a bored grump with bulbous eyes

who stops pretending and reveals
to stunned ears how he really feels.

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.

When I pass by a dog I say hello

When I pass by a dog I say hello
to the dog. With small ones I might squeal "Puppee!"
and make a tail wag, maybe two, then go.

Sometimes the dog stops. What he wants is so
clear: "Where are you running off to? Pet me!"
I can't pass by a dog who says hello

to me, who, next time he sees me, will know
me. And the person leashed may chance to see
I've made a tail wag, and stop, too. We go

on like this days, weeks, months. Do friendships grow
this way, not knowing names? Would you say we
are friends, just passing by, saying hello

with puppy dog—or person-pet—in tow?
Well, that is friendship in New York City:
We wag each others' tails, then on we go.

And even if such friendships are shallow,
untaxing, undependable, and free,
when I pass by a dog, I say hello
and wag a tail or two, then—maybe—go.

Mary Cresswell

Mary Cresswell is from Los Angeles and lives on New Zealand's Kapiti Coast. Recent books are: *Fish Stories: Ghazals and glosas* (Canterbury University Press) and *Body Politic: Nature poems for nature in crisis* (The Cuba Press). Also see: www.read-nz.org/writer/cresswell-mary/

Prodigal Daughter

Let's go now while the going's good:
Little Red Ridinghood ran to the wood
ran to visit her granny's house
ran and tripped into the grey wolf's mouth
like everyone reckoned she probably would.

She never got wet without making a flood,
whatever she did was crass and lewd,
the boys she brought back were smelly and rude ...
Oh, let go now!

She was gone for a bit but she's back in the 'hood
true to her family, true to her blood.
The old goats dribble, the old cows moo,
the fastidious sneered as they once poo-pooed
but the party's begun like we knew it would:
Let's go now!

Karen D'Anselmi

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

Stopping by Lawns on a Sunny Morning

Whose lawns these are I think I know.
He lives completely online though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his grass begin to glow.

My little mutt must think it queer
To stop without some business here
Between the curb and green expanse
The brightest morning of the year.

He gives his doggy tags a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the beep
That security systems make.

The lawns are lovely, lush, and deep,
A lawn service does the upkeep,
And everyone is sound asleep,
And everyone is sound asleep.

Satires

Maurice O'Sullivan

Maurice O'Sullivan, a former teamster, jail guard, and pub owner, finally found a way to combine all the skills those careers teach as Kenneth Curry Professor of Literature--now Emeritus--at Rollins College.

Casey at the Bar

For Maureen

My sister's friends must think it strange
how aging men begin to change.
The boys who soared at seventeen
and decades after still would preen;
those men who saw themselves as gods,
can often seem to be at odds
with their old selves. Dependent now,
with thinning hair and wrinkled brow,
they wander, searching for a partner,
just like a restless kindergartner.
But women of a certain age
have learned a lot of ways to gauge
sincerity, a quality
that only rhymes with jollity.
Now in their prime, they know the curse
of men who seek a purse or nurse

Barbara Bazyn

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

The Advice Not Taken

You'd better have something to offer
said my well-meaning headmaster.
Generosity goes but so far.
To count on it leads to disaster,
for though this is a world heroes died for,
where Caesar and Antony fought,
still the lovely are sold in the markets,
and the ugly just hope to be bought.

Kevin Blankinship

Kevin Blankinship is a professor of Arabic at Brigham Young University. His essays and poetry have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Gingerbread House*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Wine Cellar Press*, and more. Follow him on Twitter @AmericanMaghreb.

Grad Student's Lament

*For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away:
his glory shall not descend after him. (Psalm 49)*

*You're still in school? An uncle's well-meant
gripe, spoken at his son's wedding,
himself a college dropout, grudging
me his own past that came & went.*

*But what will you do with that?
All that I want to — read, write, and
think. Outrun my father's hand
tipping a bottle that tanks him flat.*

*Professors don't make any money.
So says the bankrupt & broke,
while his teenagers sputter & choke
on golden idols dipped in honey.*

But then I think, Which the greater sin?
Dullness & greed, or scholarly chagrin?

James A. Tweedie

James A. Tweedie lives in Long Beach, Washington. To date he has published six novels, three collections of poetry, and one collection of short stories with Dunecrest Press. His poetry has appeared both nationally and internationally in both online and print publications. In 2021 he was awarded First Place in the Society of Classical Poets Annual Poetry Competition, and was a Laureate's Choice Award winner in the Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest.

The Road Well-Traveled

Two roads diverged on a sun-kissed plain
beneath a broad-blue, white-cloud sky.
For reasons I cannot explain
I did not choose the smaller lane
but made my choice and passed it by.

Although I wasn't in a rush
I didn't stop, but merely slowed
to see the path, all green and lush,
recede into the underbrush,
while I kept to the well-worn road;

A road that's wide, but dusty-sore,
and covered with the tracks of those
who've passed along its way before.
With them I've gone from shore to shore;
a pilgrim on the path I chose.

What might have been, I cannot say,
but though I've loved the life I've led
I wonder where I'd be today
if I had gone the other way,
and followed that green path, instead?

Closures

Hildreth York

Hildreth York is an art historian who has been writing in and out of the field of art history for years. Publications have ranged from art of the Ancient Near East to contemporary ceramics and textiles. Poetry has been a constant companion and channel to her imagination. Poems have appeared in *Heresies*, *Psychological Perspectives*, and will appear in *Mudfish*.

Chateau de Chenonceau

Formal the pace we keep; the river air
chills like a coming death; the patched sky
slips past the leaded panes, and floating twigs
scratch like fingers at the water's edge.
Saplings are standing, spindly, in the flood,
awkward dancers not yet called to dance.
Greygreen water hisses far below
the stately checkered floor of Chenonceau

All floats away—the ragged river sky,
the sky's mirage, our footfalls on the tiles,
the arms of trees, the corpses of small birds,
the waterlogged debris of summer growth,
the sodden dreams of autumn travelers.

Charlotte Blair

Charlotte Blair is at peace when surrounded by fresh poems, time-sweetened dogs, classic Harleys and rebellious friends. She teaches kids how to write and they teach her how to remember; it's more than a fair exchange.

Separation Agreement

Can't help but look outside when I'm alone.
Atop a deadened hemlock, red on black,
the young hawk watches silently and stone.

This secrecy belies an undertone
of talons razor keen against bark cracked.
Can't help but look outside when I'm alone.

You took your muscly things and left our home;
I sat and counted dragonflies out back.
The young hawk watches silently and stone.

I blocked you, wiped your name from my cell phone.
Hawk's crimson eyes contract, raptor flashback.
Can't help but look outside when I'm alone.

This dead air is a place I've never known.
My breath is tight, my time is losing track.
The young hawk watches silently and stone.

Oh, what my heart would give to be hard thrown
across the wind and pierced by Cooper's *cak*.
Can't help but look outside when I'm alone.
The young hawk watches silently and stone.

John Perrault

John Perrault is author of *Jefferson's Dream* (Hobblebush Books), *Here Comes the Old Man Now* (Oyster River Press), and *Ballad of Louis Wagner* (Peter Randall Publisher). He is a Pushcart Nominee and his poems have appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Commonweal*, *Comstock Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Orbis* (UK), and elsewhere. John has a chapbook forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in 2022. He was Portsmouth Poet Laureate 2003-2005. www.johnperrault.com.

Fire

One limb, one nest, one bird—
if we cannot have the forest
let us at least say a word
for this scorched pine, this tiny
warbler, her blackened nest
a bowl of ash...

 And let us rest
assured we did everything
we could to save all three.

It just would not rain.

In any case, we expect
it will all come back next spring.

The fire, I mean.

Dan Champion

Dan Champion is the author of *Peter De Vries and Surrealism* and coeditor of *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song*. His poems have appeared previously in *The Road Not Taken* and in many anthologies and magazines, including *Able Muse*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Light*, *Measure*, *Poetry*, *Rolling Stone*, *Shenandoah*, and *Think*. He lives in Iowa City, Iowa.

Dispositions

The furniture gets moved around, a spouse
discloses hidden parts, your neighborhood
bleeds into other neighborhoods, the house
decides it isn't brick or stone or wood
or even glass, but light spread on a lawn
of uncut grass, of crisping leaves, of snow.
As soon as you see what it is, it's gone,
including contents you'd professed to know.
A claim of knowledge holds high standing here
the better to be toppled, charred, and spread
out thin, a burnt note in the atmosphere.
Most voices we recall, not what they said,
which probably was neither here nor there,
stray senses blent like ashes into air.

Robert Lavett Smith

Robert Lavett Smith lives in San Francisco. His sixth book of poems, *Calamity*, is due from Full Court Press later this year.

Pain's Strongest Suit

I've been as honest as breath lets me be
about the stillness left by my late wife,
about the loss embedded in my life
language can banish only partially.
Pain's strongest suit is its simplicity;
outdistancing the sunrise, I survive
because it reaffirms I'm still alive—
though I pay dearly for such certainty.
The silences are loud at 3:00 a.m.:
I hear the sobbing of embittered stars,
cheap sequins sewn on night's disheveled hem.
Morning has all the elements of farce.
Songbirds begin, but I cannot endure them:
the light is brutal, and the pickings sparse.

Leslie Schultz

[Leslie Schultz (Northfield, Minnesota; winonamedia.net) has published: *Still Life with Poppies: Elegies*; *Cloud Song*; and *Concertina* (Kelsay Books); *Larks at Sunrise* (Green Ginkgo Press); and *Living Room* (MWPH). Her poems are in *Able Muse*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Light*, *MockingHeart Review*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *One Art*, *Poet Lore*, *Third Wednesday*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *The Orchards*, *Tipton Poetry Review*, and *The Wayfarer*; and in the sidewalks of Northfield. Her work was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2017. In 2020 she served as guest associate editor for *Third Wednesday's* Winter Issue. In 2021, she joined the judging panel for the Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest. Schultz posts poems at www.winonamedia.net.] **5 line limit: shorten please.**

Wave of Departure

Each autumn, this ginkgo's leaves flee *en masse*.
One grey morning, a sudden snap of cold—
a skeletal harper's hand—makes its pass
through branches strung upright and tipped with gold.

Then every fluted fan comes fluttering down,
gilding for one last week in early fall
an eighteen-carat ring on brittle lawn,
encircling its own thin trunk. All in all,

much like a showy wedding band now slipped
on its own patient finger. Or a noose,
hung closely on a neck slightly tipped
to icy north. The howls now let loose,

departures and ruptures descend, keening:
dismal tunes preluding March's greening.

Michael Todd Steffen

Michael Todd Steffen is the recipient of a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship. His poetry has appeared in *Road Not Taken*, and in other journals including *The Boston Globe*, *E-Verse Radio*, *The Lyric*, *The Dark Horse*, *Ibbetson Street*, *The Concord Saunterer*, and *POEM*. 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 and the play of dark and light...the striking combination of the everyday and the transcendent.*

With a Coin for Charon

Your dying is a strange place for me,
a hospital in Queens, high on a hill,
opaque as the snow in the window and as beyond control
as those in this waiting room who turn on the TV

as I sit here trying to channel you
from your feeble responses to the "outside voices"
in the vague morning hour, of nurses
with a sacrament of coffee—*One or two*

sugars? With cream? You'll sit up half an hour
like yesterday, then they'll anchor you back
upon the stranger waters—more familiar?—

of inner silence. Or are they talkative
of whom you dream in the soft light of the dark
ahead of us, the waiting, where the onward move?

Susan McLean

Susan McLean, a retired professor of English, is the author of *The Best Disguise* and *The Whetstone Misses the Knife*, the translator of Martial's *Selected Epigrams*, and the translation editor of *Better Than Starbucks*. Her poems and translations have appeared in *Able Muse*, *Light*, *Blue Unicorn*, and elsewhere.

Last Dance

Rattling leaves like castanets,
the birches shimmy in the wind.
Long drought has left them brittle-skinned,
yet still they swish like old coquettes.

This isn't their first dance with death.
They know this tune, and how it ends,
so why slow down to take a breath?
They bob and sway as dusk descends.