# The Road Not Taken A Journal of Formal Poetry

# Spring, 2023

## The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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## **Poet's Corner**

Welcome to the Spring 2023 issue of *The Road Not Taken*. By now most of you know that the editors of this journal accept poems on merit without regard to theme; only *after* we have accepted your poems do we look for common motifs. Obviously we don't have to do this; most journals present their collected poems more or less randomly. Grouping poems by content, however invites readers to ask themselves what these disparate poems have in common. Often the theme selected may be quite different from the author's intent; there are many legitimate ways to read a poem. In short, the headings suggested in this issue are (at most) one possible reading of many. In short, it is the hope of our editors that the differences between the readers' own responses and the ones suggested will lead to more nuanced interpretations.

Accordingly, we have three headings for this issue: Looking Back, Counterpoint, and Narrative Poems. Different headings might easily have been chosen: To look back for instance implicitly contrasts with the present or (perhaps) future expectations. Ditto, "counterpoints" exist only in contrast, and it is impossible to focus on narrative without asking ourselves what the prior poems have focused on instead. All the poems in this issue however balance the natural rhythms of prose and prosody. Readers will notice nuanced alliteration here, judicious repetitions there. Rhyme and off-rhyme ask us to notice the integrity of the line, while open structure encourages the direct opposite. Sound and sense are a dance, as always. Enjoy --

Kathryn Jacobs Editor Road Not Taken

# **Looking Back**

#### Karen D'Anselmi

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

#### I Want to Hear You Laugh

I want to hear you laugh your belly laugh again, bursting out upon the scene you could not restrain.

I want to see you saunter up to the wrought iron gate, displaying haberdashery like an element of fate–

showing the old gate keeper the languor of your life, giving him your boyish glance fresh as a sharpened knife.

Before justice miscarried, before sadness and sin, in the day when you could steal the moment with a grin–

I want to see you swagger in your lanky, swoony way, while I blush red as berries and skip into the day.

#### Mark J. Mitchell

Mark J. Mitchell has also been a working poet for almost 50 years. He is the author of five full-length collections, and six chapbooks. His latest collection is <u>Something To Be</u> from Pski's Porch Publishing. He is fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Miles Davis, Kafka, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco

#### Hair Shirt

In memory of David Ish

Some garments you wear—not often, sometimes the shirt from the ballgame you saw while he was busy dying, say—bleached in shame, smelling, lightly, of remorse. They can bind your shoulders, your arms. You repeat the trial you held alone the last time his name arose. The color of daylight may shift a little when you put them on. You might drift on guilt as coffee goes cold. His sharp voice has marked the row of closed storefronts. He knew this street better than you knew him. So now, all day, his silent blame blocks traffic noise. You think you see him reflected in blue glass, but don't. A long shadow from low clouds.

#### John Whitney Steele

John Whitney Steele is a psychologist, yoga teacher, assistant editor of *Think: A Journal of Poetry, Fiction and Essays*, and graduate of the MFA Poetry Program at Western Colorado University, John lives in Boulder, Colorado. His two collections of poetry, *The Stones Keep Watch* and *Shiva's Dance* were published by Kelsay Books in 2021 and 2022. <u>https://johnwhitneysteelepoet.com/</u>

#### The Art of Paddling

My father taught me how to kneel, rest my butt against the thwart, not sit up on the seat when chop is high, how to hold my paddle, stroke and steer straight down the center. Though Dad and I did not see eye to eye, together we could stroke and glide till our canoe would fly.

But those who aren't so even keeled are muscling in, flinging paddles, leaning on the gunnels, wobbling too far left or right, careening sideways down the rapids, bound to tip the boat and drown us all.

#### **Rosetta Marantz Cohen**

Rosetta Marantz Cohen is Myra M. Sampson Professor Emerita at Smith College. She is the author of the forthcoming book *Five Women* (Hidden River Press) which won the 2023 Willow Run Poetry Book Award.

#### **Gifts from Foreigners**

A wooden cup. A doll whose linen dress smells of the sun-baked marketplace of Istanbul or Marrakesh or Thrace. A pillow, small and functionless.

Also: a string of beaded yellow clay which like the polyester square of printed fabric I will never wear, but cannot bring myself to give away.

Their faces gone. Their voices, like the sea, blend into breaking sounds that sound the same. Only these odd and useless things remain, like a moral scold or a homily.

#### **Paul Willis**

Paul Willis has published seven collections, among the most recent of which is *Little Rhymes for Lowly Plants* (White Violet Press, 2019). Individual poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Light*, and *First Things*. He lives with his wife, Sharon, near the old mission in Santa Barbara, California.

#### **Donny Boy**

O Donny boy, the votes, the votes are calling from state to state, down the electoral slide. Your summer's gone, and all the ketchup's falling, it's you, it's you must go and we must bide. But come ye back with new polls in the offing or when subpoenas mount like winter snow, and bring your threats, your insults, and your scoffing— O Donny boy, O Donny boy, we miss you so!

But when ye come, and all the country's dying, if sweet democracy is dead and gone, ye'll come and find the place where we are lying and stand and shout your greatness on the lawn. And we shall hear, though Proud Boys tread above us and all our grave should desecrated be, for you will Tweet, and tell us that you love us, and we shall sleep in peace the better for to be!

#### Joe Crocker

Joe Crocker is a retired scientist, living in Yorkshire and began writing poems during the first Covid lockdown. So far, they have appeared in *Snakeskin*, as well as *Philosophy Now*, *Light*, *The Orchards*, *Better than Starbucks*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Allegro*, *Pulsebeat*, the *New Verse News*, *The Asses of Parnassus*, *Autumn Sky* and *Lighten Up Online*. Otherwise he is eye-wateringly uninteresting.

#### Kiss and rehearse

A reply to Philip Larkin

They tuck you up, your mum and dad, And breathe you in. It's what they do. They wrap you in a dream they had And pray it may come true for you.

For they were tucked up in their turn By generations kind or rough, Who, whether faltering or firm, Did something right or good enough.

Man hands tomorrow on to man. Her children twinkle from the shelf. Help them down and, if you can, Become them and become yourself.

#### Jeffrey Clapp

Jeffrey Clapp's poems, short stories and translations have appeared in North American Review, Dalhousie Review, Arkansas Review, Sycamore Review, Blue Unicorn, Asymptote, Samovar and many others. He is past winner of the Indiana Fiction Prize from Purdue and the Daniel Morin Poetry Prize from UNH. His work has been anthologized in *Best of Blueline* and *Like Thunder: Poets Respond to Violence in America.* He lives in South Portland ME.

#### Tin

Whether mending a cracked clapboard or hole in a bin whatever metal my father found to nail down was always "tin"

Whatever the predicament he was in rats in the grain or leaks on the mow, a gap in the roof or a hole in the bin—

one glance told him what shape things were in so why drop everything and head to town when you could find a scrap of tin?

Ragged or rusty, too thick or worn thin if he could bend and nail it down over a cracked clapboard or hole in a bin

whether it was rolled steel or aluminum, as sure as farm life beat living in town, to him it was "tin"

And whatever shape the farm was in, however hard the winds of change had blown through cracked clapboards or holes in a bin, he fixed them all the same—with tin.

#### **Robert Donohue**

Robert Donohue's poetry has appeared in *Amethyst Review, Better Than Starbucks, Grand Little Things* and *Pulsebeat*, among others. He lives on Long Island, NY.

#### **Beggar's Banquet**

He said when life for him was going bad, behind on rent, or in a prison cell, what he would do was to serenely dwell upon a menu, which by chance he had. I said I thought it was a little sad to whet an appetite you couldn't quell, but if your chips were down, then what the hell, it's just another fantasy to add.

He told me I was wrong, and would explain his premise in a way to make it plain: more than the promise for a special meal, a menu served to prove that any place, however mean, is still subject to grace, and what you have been waiting for is real.

#### **Daril Bentley**

Daril Bentley is the author of several books of poetry. He has been a semifinalist for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, a finalist for the New Mexico Book Award for Poetry, and recipient of an Honorable Mention in the Writer's Digest International Book Award for Self-published Poetry. He is a Black Mountain Press *The 64 Best Poets* series author and has published in numerous poetry journals, most recently in *Blue Unicorn, Grand Little Things, The American Journal of Poetry*, and *The Lyric*.

#### Lullaby of Reality Land

Sing me a lullaby factory closed. Sing me a song of the world. Play upon lute a fair scandal exposed. Play me a tune of real life.

Sing lullaby, lullaby, flag unfurled nation takes nation through strife. Sing me a lullaby workers get hosed. Sing me the cell of your wife.

Play upon flute the most human naughty! Lully, lully, lullaby's the sound. Sing me lully not tender but gaudy! Play me a lullaby facts on the ground.

#### **Tiree MacGregor**

Tiree MacGregor began publishing verse with *The Epigrammatist* in the early 1990s. Since then his poems have occasionally appeared in print and in online journals. Born in Scotland, he taught for many years at several universities in several Canadian provinces and now works as a freelance editor in Nova Scotia.

#### **Old Friends, Young Lovers**

They meet in the busy mall in their new world of the busy campus. Newness pervades all: his new-shorn, her frizzy hair, their chic clothes, their lighted faces on the brink of discovering what everyone else knows or seems to, faces that do not shrink from such knowledge, nor, perhaps, will hold it right or care when it seems that truths collapse before a skeptic's stare or beneath the reigning burden of particulars. They embrace overlong, of course, absurd in disproportion—and, without a trace of ease, steal the extra bliss of a lingering, casual kiss.

#### Ethan Vilu

Ethan Vilu is a poet and editor from Calgary, Canada. Her longsheet A Decision Re: Zurich was published by *The Blasted Tree* in 2020, and her poems and reviews have appeared in a variety of outlets. Ethan currently serves as both poetry editor and circulation manager for *filling Station Magazine*.

#### Weary

The waking hours are stockades for the mind. Every day I learn some wretched thing of loss, remorse–some flawed and weathered spring from which betrayals flow into my hands.

I still remember how it used to feel– my veins made vibrant–*God, the way they'd sing*– but now those days are gone. This deadened ring of time envelops life with its demands.

# **Counterpoint**

#### A. Gee

A. Gee has been playing with words since he was little, and has finally been talked into sharing. He is currently working on a collection of sonnets, Sonnet Station, which he expects to become available in late 2023. His collection of humorous Greek Mythology poems, Myth Takes, is available here: <u>https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BQGKLY7W</u>

#### The Argument

This happened once: the seasons disagreed. Which one of them was truly made for love? Unable to resolve it, they proceed to seek advice from Zeus, who reigns above. Old Winter said: it's clear, I am the one wine by the fire-place, can that be beat? And Autumn said: when trees, touched by the sun show off their colors, lovers feel complete. And Summer was so confident, she said: when coats come off and water makes its splash, and warmer nights invite you to their bed. Why even argue, no need to rehash... And Spring? A no show, though she would be missed. Grabbed by her lover, stayed behind, and kissed...

#### **Steve Knepper**

Steven Knepper teaches in the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies at Virginia Military Institute. His poems have appeared in *The Road Not Taken, First Things, SLANT, The Roanoke Review, The Rappahannock Review, The American Journal of Poetry*, and other journals.

#### Advice For an Edgy Essay on King Lear

First downplay Cornwall's bloody fingernails that left old Gloucester writhing in the dark. Then claim the sisters' plotted coup entails a nascent revolutionary spark. Or philosophically agree we're flies, our babe-like wails mere echoes in the void, our cosmic fate a pair of plucked-out eyes, the drama nihilistic, unalloyed. Don't blame me for the mediocre grade if you claim value underscores what's lost, assert there's something admirable in aid given without first calculating cost, or note naively that despite the fear, a love disguised in rags is always near.

#### **Yates Young**

Yates Young writes original poetry and translates Chinese poetry. His poems have appeared in The Caribbean Writer, The Road Not Taken (The Journal of Formal Poetry), 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.

#### The Reception is Fine

I chose to locate here Where the cliffs are sheer Beneath this tranquil peak.

My lot goes out as far As the nearest star And we're open all week.

There are no Apple stores For you to explore. This forest is my mega-mall.

The latest offerings Are released in the spring. New apps appear in the fall.

If you wish to visit me Leave behind your gadgetry And all your fancy gear

My cell towers are pine trees. They serve the powers that be. Brand names mean nothing here. After *Han Shan* 

#### **Isabel Miles**

Born and raised in a Scottish mining village, Isabel Miles is a former scientist, turned writer, who lives on the North Yorkshire Moors. Her poems and short stories have been published in *Green Ink Poetry, East of the Web. Shooter, Northwords Now, Alchemy Spoon, Anomaly, Acumen* and *Dreich,* among others. She is the author of a poetry pamphlet, *Spent Earth,* (Mudfog Press) and a novel, *Chosen,* (Kindle)

#### In Praise Of My Left Hand

It's often claimed the right's the upper hand but that's a judgement that I find too hard. For it's my left hand wears my wedding band, and when I play, it always holds the cards.

Although it's true it never sews or writes, it takes an equal share in cooking meals or tucking children into bed at night. And only it can cut my right hand's nails.

Unlike my right, my left hand's never hit in anger, though it's often reached in love. There's less of what it's done that I regret. And yet it's shared in building all I have.

Not sinister, except by name, this hand brings quiet yin, to balance right hand yang.

# **Narrative Poems**

#### Rosetta Marantz Cohen

#### Land Grant School

The speaker was talking about the novel, how today ecocriticism relies on too narrow a canon, when suddenly, as if seized by an idea, the man on the stage in the large auditorium turned away

from his notes to ask the audience of students "How many here have ever milked a cow?" To which the erstwhile silent uttered: "wow!" collectively, and roused themselves, feeling a sense

that something strange and wonderful was here; that plowing through this barren exegesis, one may unearth a nugget of mimesis the moo of meaning suddenly made clear.

200 hands go up, slicing the air like sickles: "Raised it, milked it, watched it go to slaughter!" "Huh!" said the speaker, taking a sip of water, then turning back to an essay by Ashton Nichols.

#### **Caleb Murdock**

Caleb Murdock is 72 years old and lives in Rhode Island, U.S.A. He spent most of his life as a wordprocessing operator for law firms. He has written poetry since his twenties but didn't lose his chronic writer's block until his mid-sixties. He is now writing up a storm to make up for lost time.

#### Haunted by Voices

I.M. Theresa Velasquez

After the building fell, the rescue workers heard a woman crying out to be saved. Each thought it a familiar voice; some heard their mothers, others their sisters or daughters; each heard the woman that he loved the most. But tons of debris put her out of reach, and she couldn't be found. Weeks later they pulled her from the rubble, no longer living, no longer crying, except for the cries they will hear in their dreams all the rest of their lives.

#### Allen Ireland

Allen Ireland has published two collections of poetry: Loners and Mothers (2017) and Dark and Light Verse (2021). His third collection, Landscapes Old and New, will be out next year.

#### Anastasia's Boy

"Child, come back—" his mother calls, cajolingly, Standing in the doorway, with the same tone She uses when she calls him in for supper, Inviting him to death. "Don't worry, ma'am, We won't hurt him," says the man in uniform. It will be painless, as his father's was, As hers will be. Her husband is still slumped Over his desk the way she often found him At dawn after he'd sweated through the night, Writing his polemic against the state. The army man sprays something in her hair. "What does that do?" she wonders, knowingly. "You'll see." But she cannot see anything: She is already dead.... And now the child Is running even faster for his life Down the long valley, past the burning barn, His heart exploding. Is this what's meant, he asks, By the Valley of the Shadow of Death? He remembers the movie he saw once About the Russian girl whose folks were killed. Anastasia.... She lived! She lived, didn't she?

#### Victoria Lau

Victoria Lau is working on her MFA at Lindenwood University. She was the 3rd place poetry winner for the Random House Creative Writing Competition in 2013. Her poems have been published in Rogue Agent, *The Orchards Poetry Journal, Gyroscope Review*, and elsewhere. She was a poetry reader for GASHER Journal and is one of the marketing coordinators for *The Adroit Journal*. She has taught poetry at Sadie Nash Summer Institute and is an English adjunct lecturer at Queens College.

#### **Erasure Sestina: Disposing the Evidence**

After Lawrence Schimel

Spending time with me became a crime that you didn't want your mom to catch you commit, so you got rid of the evidence: #1: The "Get Well Soon" balloon that I bought for you. #2: The pop-up birthday card that I made you. #3: My cats' fur.

You used a lint roller to remove my cats' fur, afraid your mom would run a fiber analysis on your clothes and find traces of me. You let your mom throw out the pop-up birthday card I made for you, clearing out all traces of my commitment to you. Before your mom came to the hospital, you hid my "Get Well Soon" balloon. The evidence.

All my heart's work floated away like a lost balloon. Your mom is allergic to cat fur like you are to commitments, yet you claimed you love me. My hand-crafted pop-up birthday card.

You and your mom blamed me. Everything kept bottling up until finally you popped the balloon and the idealized image of you that I was committed to. My cats' fur.

In our so called committed relationship, I lost a part of me. My "Get Well Soon" balloon.

You got rid of me.

#### **Marzelle Robertson**

Marzelle Robertson is a former teacher and school counselor living in East Texas. She has written several chapbooks, most recently *Listen* from *Dancing Girl Press*, and *Toward the Terminal*, forthcoming from *Kelsay Books*. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals including *Arts and Letters*, *The Comstock Review*, and *Concho River Review*.

#### **Theophany III**

By nine o'clock the man had gone to bed. Plates washed, she took a jacket for the damp, and stepped out after turning on one lamp, with garbage for the bin behind the shed. Her step was soft upon the path, all laws in balance in her universe, all right until the bear rose up and slashed the night, laying bare its bones with curving claws. She'd known the bear was king in his domain, all powerful and wild throughout his reign, and face to face by intent or surprise, would register his outrage in hard eyes, dependably respond as bear, not man, and then resume rummaging the trash can.

#### Tad Tuleja

Tad Tuleja, a folklorist who has written widely on folk and popular culture, received a grant from the Puffin Foundation for his song cycle *Skein of Arms*. His poems have appeared in *Sparks of Calliope, The Road Not Taken*, and *Adirondack Review*. In the ones he is currently preparing for a collection entitled *Things of the Brilliant Earth*, he aspires, in Joseph Conrad's phrase, "to make you see." Under the musical alias Skip Yarrow, Tuleja performs his songs on <u>www.skipyarrow.com</u> and on You Tube.

#### Chartres

The sun was high that day in northern France. Three workers sweated near a pile of stones. "What is your work?" I asked. Without a glance one man replied, "I am carrying stones."

"Your work?" I asked the second man, and he turned almost imperceptibly to say "I'm leveling the wall. Can you not see?" I saw it then, that blinding summer day.

"What do you do?" I asked the final man. I never heard a voice ring out so clear. "We do what must be done and what we can. In time they'll have a fine cathedral here."

If I had that man's eyes I would not fight. I'd walk in peace by day and sleep at night.