



The Road Not Taken

Spring, 2018

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Corner

Welcome at long last to the Spring 2018 issue of *The Road Not Taken*.

The editors would like to begin this issue by thanking the readers who waited so patiently through the tech disaster that sunk our fall 2017 issue (as most of you know by now, we lost *all* of our Fall submissions, and changed addresses in consequence). We would also like to thank the many, many poets who resubmitted their lost poems – both those who contributed to this issue, and those who offered. To the latter particularly we would like to say that the number and quality of the poems submitted this year has never been greater; it was extremely difficult to reject poems this year. In part we tried to make up for this by accepting more than usual; readers will notice that the Spring 2018 issue is longer than usual. Still, many very good poems were reluctantly put aside that might otherwise have been accepted. In short, please keep submitting!

A few of the poems in this issue are more properly winter poems than spring. Given the loss of the last issue however, we elected to include them anyway. Please consider this therefore a combined Fall-Spring issue.

Yours

Kathryn Jacobs
Editor
Road Not Taken

Steven Knepper

Feature Poem

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*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *SLANT*, *Modern Age*, and other journals.

Tilman Reads *The Georgics*
For Jim Tuten

Alfredo loaned that book to me to show
This grandson of the Pennsylvania Dutch
That Roman boys know how to make things grow
Even if his own rows don't look like much.
I'll tell the truth. It beats the Almanac.
I read through every single page of it.
It teaches how to keep the soil black
And how a lovestruck bull might pitch a fit.
On several other points I have to ponder
If Maddensville is ready for the shock.
If I should plant some olives over yonder
Would that not make the gray-haired farmers talk?
And if I took to plowing in the nude
Would Clara sparkle up, or call me lewd?

Old Tools Hanging in a Restaurant

Amidst the trinkets, curios, and kitsch,
The eight-hour marathons she runs for tips,
The kind ones and the ones that call her bitch,
The pain of swollen feet and throbbing hips,

She sometimes stops to contemplate the tools
By Coca-Cola signs above the booths
That once were used by those who worked like mules,
Like this old spade that hardened hands wore smooth

Or this cast-iron skillet near John Wayne
Some woman seasoned on a thousand fires
And who, she bets, like her did not complain
When life denied her earlier desires.

She feels a kinship born of bone-deep toil,
Uncertain yields, lean years, more chaff than wheat,
Hardships as eager as a snake to coil,
But also satisfaction when ends meet.

And when she scrapes potatoes, ham, and beans
From plates of wasteful customers she's fed,
She thinks of those who in such fare had seen
An answered prayer, their hard-won daily bread.

Julie Bloch Mendelsohn

Editor's Choice (Rachel Jacobs)

Julie Bloch Mendelsohn lives in Israel and Vermont with her husband and six children. She has published a book of poems entitled “Travels to Ourselves” (Poetica Publishing, 2015). Her work has been published in Poetica Magazine, The Poetry Society of Vermont's Mountain Troubadour, Lilipoh Magazine, the Voices Israel Anthology and the Road Not Taken. In addition to writing poetry, spinning yarn, and weaving, she also works as lawyer for holocaust survivors, and on pancreatic cancer research.

#RobertFrost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
and wondering which one to explore,
as every modern traveler should,
I knew my faithful smartphone could
reveal which path the world *liked* more.

I *googlemapped* this wonderous place,
and found five hundred trip reviews,
the smoothest trail, the perfect pace
the cliff that looks just like a face,
the *snapchats* with the nicest views.

Amanda B. was here last week.
She posted it on *Instagram*.
She walked her dog up to the peak,
and there she met a handsome Greek.
Her *Facebook* said his name was Sam.

It never even crossed my mind
that I would not return someday.
With *Waze* and *GPS* to find
my pinned location in a bind,
I knew I could retrace the way.

Thus, seeing all there was to see,
I lost my grand desire to roam.
The woods held little mystery,
and left with zero battery,
I turned around and headed home.

We share the path with everyone
where Frost once had a bit of space
to wander in the woods alone,
before the world was on your phone,
and earth became a byte-sized place.

Luigi Coppola

Luigi Coppola (www.luigicoppolapoetry.blogspot.co.uk) teaches and writes in London, England. Shortlisted for the Bridport Prize twice, he appeared in the Worple Press anthology *The Tree Line* and publications include *Acumen*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *The High Window*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Iota*, *Magma*, *Orbis*, *Pennine Platform*, *The Rialto*, *The Shop*, and *Snakeskin*.

She Played Piano

She played piano, hidden at the back
of Sam's. Before she came, the dust was thick
on seat and lid – although he laid a sack
on top, to guard from any spill or nick.
Sam used to play the thing himself, but now
his jarring hands just pulled the pints and counted
tills at closing time. He might allow
a friend to touch the keys – although he doubted
any knew his tastes. But this woman,
wordless, just pulled the sack from off the top
like she was taking off her shirt. The floor
stared as the wood and bone were stripped for hands
that played all night – until Sam called out stop,
just when his hands trembled too much to pour.

View

A window frame – a crooked matte-grey square
that peels and cracks around the mould – a green
that smears when touched. I often close the screen
to shut out light – today I leave it bare,
bar lines of condensation. Here and there
are chips from stones flung up by cars – they've been
going too fast. I stare through prisms. Seen
a lot of things from here. I wheel my chair
up close, and watch a child, held on a lead –
he kicks, tugs at his mum with all he's got.
I sit and note the cars: their make, year, speed
and whether driven carefully or not.
Most aren't. Most rev and screech as if they need
to be somewhere – they burn through my black spot.

Robert Beveridge

Robert Beveridge makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry just outside Cleveland, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in The Literary Yard, Big Windows, and Locust, among others.

Mesestina

Wooden nickles.* Freaks at dawn
a light in the sphincter duodenum Lysistrata.
Pound. The laughter of ritual cancer.
Atlanta is the home of AIDS. Take a good
look. See smoke. Silver, polished. Poison
in the water supply. Paranoid chant.

Paranoid time. Weaken. Join in the chant.
Call the hounds. One with the wild hunt. Dawn
means freedom, sickness. Snakes. The poison
in your blood. Rappel the mount, count strata
in your sleep. Wakefulness and a good
plate of spaghetti. Sin eaters. Cancer

eaters. Jet fuel is the cure for cancer.
Prayer can heal, the psychic mindset. Chant
words or silence. Mass. If you can't say good
don't say. Quick and the dead. When dawn
comes all cancer is healed. Malignant. Stratus,
status, precancerous, postcancerous. It's all poison.

Smoke. Inhale. We ingest. Voluntary poison
for clarity's sake. Experience. AIDS. Cancer.
Immune. Sarcoma. Thrust. Pain. Strata
of diseased organs, white death. All the chants
and crystals cannot save you. Dusk. Dawn.
The nurse who calms you, feeds you good

meals instead of hospital shit. Good
riddance to Jell-O. That shit's poison
especially the green shit. Looks like dawn
on the shallow sea floor. Where's the cancer
spread to now? Fuck it. Arithmetic chant
projection. One plus one equals the strata

of all society succumbs to cancer. Stratum
of lung tumor. Ridged, bowed. Feel good
for as long as you can, okay? Fuck. Chant
obscenities if it makes you feel better. Poison
pigeons. Anything. Read endless cancer
articles in the med journals. You see dawn

break and dawn outlines strata
on the wallpaper. Looks like cancer, or a good
depiction of Jersey. Poison the air with your chant.

*A nickle is a European woodpecker.

Shelley Benaroya

Shelley Benaroya is the founding director and teaching artist for the Writing Center for Creative Aging (www.writingcenterforcreativeaging.com). Her poetry has appeared in *Diner*, *The Edison Literary Review*, *Ekphrasis*, *The Lyric*, *Mobius*, *Thirteenth Moon*, and elsewhere. In 2017, she received the Ekphrasis Prize and a Pushcart Prize nomination.

From *The Arabesques of Fez: On Staying*

“They are that that talks of going

But never gets away...”

- from “*The Sound of Trees*” by Robert Frost

I.

Just when you thought the trees left town for good --
because to stay and only imagine
themselves behind the wheel, white knuckled wood,
reckless tumbleweeds of sweet gum and pine,
meant they learned nothing from us, that they could
take longing only far as the heroine's
safe passage to the next town down the road.
Beyond that: we knew what would do her in.
That's the difference between us and the trees.
It's their longing to resume on the brink
of escape the shy chemistry, catch in flight
sweet reward from the humdrum play of light.
What use then do they have for us who think
there's no difference between us and the trees?

From *The Arabesques of Fez*: On Staying

II.

There's no difference between us and the trees,
I tell Robert Frost, who can't be heard above
the ectoskeletal hum of summer
and backyard mantras with wings outside me.
Sure you'll be gone, and I'll be standing here
occupied with whatever hangs upon
my not going: July's blue parka, its purr
that sedates the limbs where the journeys were.
How easy it is to fall behind. One
more lavish indecision disappears
whole under the chocolate blanket called home,
And like nuts, sprouts arms enough to humor
each lover: the one who cradles its hoard,
one whose cool hand we anticipate like breeze.

Herb Guggenheim

Herb Guggenheim is the author of two books of poetry: *Sunset at the Hotel Mira Mar* and *Strange Encounter at the Shakespeare Motel*. His work has appeared in many journals, including *Gargoyle*, the *Florida Review*, and *Poetry Quarterly*. Herb has been nominated for a Pushcart and a Best of the Net award. His novel *Violations of Causality* was a finalist in the 2016 Foreword INDIES competition.

Poet

The man who died wrote sad and twisted pieces
conflating faith with carnal imagery.
He loved two things—the countenance of Jesus
and Asian girls not long past puberty.

The man who died felt angry, trapped, and hollow.
He lived alone and heated frozen dinners.
Sometimes he'd cough or find it hard to swallow,
reminding him he sinned like other sinners.

The man who died lived in a small apartment,
attended noon Mass on a daily basis.
He kept a missal in his glove compartment,
tried not to stare at other people's faces.

For his devotion, people gave him praise.
His body wasn't found for fourteen days.

Vera Ignatowitsch

Vera Ignatowitsch is addicted to poetry, raspberries, and the occasional good scotch. Her poems have been published in anthologies, *The Lyric*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Peacock Journal*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, and *Poets Reading the News*. She is Managing Editor of *Better Than Starbucks Poetry Magazine*.

Samaras

Embarking from the trees they seem so blithe,
phantasmagoric swirling whirligigs.
They ride the breezes roaming far and wide
as if they know they're mostly guinea pigs
and sacrifice is fated. This is trust,
this blind conviction in a known result,
appearing unconcerned as wanderlust
while being launched as from a catapult.
A few will kiss rich soil and sigh, unwind
the storied journey that will culminate
in destination providential, find
fertility and one day germinate.

I watch your shadow carefully, enchanted
to see the zygote ripple when implanted.

Brian Gavin

Brian Gavin is a retired newspaperman and a lover of the poetry of Robert Frost, Richard Wilbur and other great writers of modern, formal poetry. His work has appeared in earlier issues of *The Journal of Formal Poetry*, and he was Peninsula Poets' 2017 winner of 1st Place for Nature Poetry. He lives with his wife Karen in Lakeport, Michigan.

Grand Opening

It isn't so much hope behind these doors
as work to do. And so the doing goes
on at 4:00 AM. He mops the floors,
he gets the coffee ready. What he knows
he doesn't think about. His arc is set,
as five who went before him ought to tell.
And yet, if asked, he may seem to forget,
or shrug. For if it once had been a bell
to service, or, once, a flag staked out in war,
that was the thing upon which all relied,
it is a thing like that to own a store
and breakfast counter, in a village, alongside
a winter crossing. He reaches for the light.
He sets his OPEN sign against the night.

Becky Gould Gibson

Pokeweed

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Frost, “The Tuft of Flowers”

Well, no wonder it pokes up everywhere—
like here cheek to jowl with a power pole
on West End Boulevard. And wonderful
to find it still flourishing—weed-eater
distracted or with sense enough to spare
for once a thing for being beautiful.
You’re partial to its fuschia stalk, purple
berries, prefer the rampant to the rare,
the known, any day, to the exotic.
As a child you figured out the genius
of poke for taking root without a fuss,
would later relish its democratic
impulse. Now you wryly tell me roaches,
rats, and pokeweed will likely outlast us.

James Hamby

James Hamby is the Associate Director of the Writing Center at Middle Tennessee State University. His work has appeared in *The Road Not Taken*, *Measure*, *Light*, and other publications.

The Imperfect Dozen

Beneath our lid each smart consumer pries
To check our freshness and our quality;
And always disappointment fills their eyes
As their discerning gazes fall on me.
For they seek cartons free from flaw and waste,
And nothing less than perfect eggs will do.
Yet even if we were picked up in haste,
No check-out clerk would ever let us through.

So here we sit in stasis every day,
Awaiting our expiration date.
My broken shell holds customers at bay—
There's nothing I can do to change our fate.
Into the box a dozen eggs were packed,
Yet I bespoiled them all—for I was cracked.

Todd Outcalt

Todd Outcalt is author of over thirty-five books in six languages with most recent poetry in *Rattle*, *The Oklahoma Review* and *The Lyric*.

Young & Old Love

Young love is all the rage
Wild horses streaking across a plain
Open-mouth kisses in the rain
Blue words on a page

But old love
Is never taken for granted
It is a fine wine decanted
The last of

A rare property with frontage
View of a calm sea
An apostrophe
Of youth in an antique age

Old love plays same suits
No games of pretense
A sure defense
No substitutes

Young love hyperventilates
But old love grays
Survives dark days
Hibernates

Old love lasts through young love's lies
A test of time
In pantomime
Of young love's face through old love's eyes.

Norman Klein

Norman Klein has published in *Ploughshares*, *Epoch*, *The Beloit Poetry*, and *the Antioch Review*.

Sleepy River School Bus

Inspired by Lee Bontecou's construction of the same name.

Our warm smiling big-as- a whale school bus
welcomes us through its soft gummy lips,
shows us to seats beneath circles of
light and yellow sausage-shaped
windows that look out on the
transparent dorsal fins that
guide us to school.

Dad likes the extra rivets in the brain
cap, the leathery side panels, and
the fact that when river traffic
is heavy the bus dives and
swims under water then
surfaces in the school
swimming pool.

Robin Helweg-Larsen

Robin Helweg-Larsen's poetry has mostly been published in the UK, but also in the US and Canada. His chapbook on writing poetry "Calling The Poem" is available as a free download from the UK webzine Snakeskin, issue 236 (<http://snakeskinpoetry.co.uk/snake236.html>). British-born but Bahamian-raised, Robin lives in his hometown of Governor's Harbour on Eleuthera.

The Gods' Gift

Through a dream moonscape of tornadoed rubble
Comes the epitome of all the trouble
He, man, was born to as the sparks fly upward:
A gorgeous female – as from heavenly cupboard
A fresh, clean vessel should be lifted down
By old gods watching if he'll drink and drown.
Hidden in their mist-mystery myths of gray,
They challenge him to drink, or dare to say
This cup's no answered prayer, no dream foretold;
Can he refuse, when gods demand he's bold?
She trusts him, is and is not innocent,
A willing suicide-bomber, and gods-sent;
The gift that would demand as sacrifice
His marriage, business, life, in fire and ice.

Louis Hunt

Louis Hunt teaches political philosophy at James Madison College, Michigan State University. He has had poems published in *The Rotary Dial*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Snakeskin*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *The Asses of Parnassus*, and *Lighten Up Online*.

Prayer for the Virtuous

Cast the unerring stone
At those who have no stain,

Who never once were tempted
Or by coarse flesh corrupted

To seduction or betrayal,
Love or love's denial.

Tear down their pious houses,
Built of lime and ashes,

And drive them from the harbors
Of their imagined borders.

Let them learn to eat
Thorn and desert root,

And come at last to seek
Water from the rock,

Salvation from the salt
Taste of shame and guilt

For sins left uncommitted
And virtues now regretted.

Charles Southerland

Charlie works at farming, isn't very good at it. He likes to write poetry and feels he's getting better at it. He's been published in: *Measure*, *First Things*, *Trinacria*, *The Amsterdam Quarterly*, *The Pennsylvania Review*. He is also the editor of *Contemporary Sonnet*, an e-zine.

The Black River Train Stops In Poplar Bluff

~She sees her Love one last time at the VA hospital~

I heard you've come back home to watch me die
and if that's true, before you see my wounds
I'll try to shave and wash myself, apply
new dressings, change my clothes, and play the tunes
you liked when we were young, when I was strong
and you were beautiful, before the pull
of us apart began, before the wrong
conclusions ruined the day, before the full
eclipse had darkened us and filled our hearts.
And I don't know, can't say, if you'll love me,
can't tell without a tongue, but if those parts
I miss are true, I'll kiss you—let it be.
Can you imagine us before the past
went by, the train we caught, the whistle blast?

Paula Mahon

Paula Mahon is a family physician practicing out of Manchester NH. She is a returned Peace Corps volunteer and mother to her Kazakh son, Raymond, and wife to her husband, Robert. All of these experiences inform her writing which has been published in Parody, Naugatuck River Review, Westward Quarterly, and the Boston Globe among other places

The Baby Turtle

My yard is lush with turtle nests
buried underground.
I don't know when the eggs hatch,
the babies make no sound.
They never wail for absent Moms,
with nightmares or for feeding.
The mother turtle's not around
to listen to their pleading.

I found a dime sized child one day
travelling alone
and wondered If he knew his way--
if he was ever prone
to thinking of his mother
like my Asian son does his
or feeling lost in his new world,
what his parent's story is.

Is she basking on a flat stone?
Were there siblings in the nest?
Did she have some other litters?
What happened to the rest?

My son has matching questions
which I have no answer to.
And how I'll ever answer them

well, I haven't got a clue.

John Robinson

John Timothy Robinson is a graduate of the Marshall University Creative Writing program in Huntington, West Virginia. He has published in forty-three journals since August 2016. John teaches for Mason County Schools in West Virginia. Most recent work; *Dragon Poet Review*, *Origins* and *The Heartland Review*.

Broken Crocks From Cellar Dirt

All these pieces join together—
fragile feathers
tender as bone,
each broken stone.
Gluing shards in sure-found form makes
exact eyes trace,
each crevice fit
the edge's grip.
Small, bare, scattered bits of nothing;
rough, scored mumbling
through quiet years
held whole with tears.

Kevin Shyne

Kevin Shyne is a lifelong writer whose work once appeared in national magazines, corporate annual reports and employee newsletters. Turning to poetry in his retirement, Kevin has had poems published in *Poetry Breakfast*, *The Lyric*, *Poetry Porch* and *Blue Heron Review*. In addition, as a volunteer organizer of the Festival of the Written Word, a creative writing festival for high school students from seven schools in rural Illinois, Kevin was reminded that being a poet is about more than writing poetry.

Burning Leaves

The air came crackling
underfoot at dawn
driving me outdoors to see
the immolation of the trees.
I caught my breath,
blown away and yet discerning
violence and savage voices.
Good air for burning.

I joined my neighbor, blistering
our hands in a fit of raking,
but our trouble was as nothing
to the birds' awaking. They gathered
sparked, flamed out, arced
in a migratory churning,
kindling a forest fire in flight.
Good air for burning.

The birds were flying embers
but their frenzy was as nothing to the leaves,
a mob of hooligans, wrecking the arena,
jumping rails to riot in the field,
reckless, unrefereed,
trampled by the weather's turning
while geese in wedges split the sky.
Good air for burning.

Our leaf pile writhed
to a curbside dragon's head
but its roaring was as nothing to the turmoil in the air
stripping men of words, leaving us to gorge
the fire-breathing beast and flash each other signs
as men will do concerning
a love, a leap, a season lost.
Good air for burning.

Gregory Lucas

Gregory Lucas writes fiction and poetry. His poems and short stories have appeared in many magazines such as *The Lyric*, *Pif*, *Blueline*, *Neologism*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Ekphrasis*, and *The Horror Zine*.

Summer Night

(Inspired by Winslow Homer's *Summer Night* – oil on canvas USA, 1890.)

On a summer night, they dance and they sing,
their ruffled white dresses aflutter
in the cool breeze as they spin and swing

in time with silver ocean waves beating
a steady rhythm on the rocky shore.
Throughout the charmed night, while they dance and sing

neither thinks of what the future might bring,
these two young women holding each other
while the breeze cools them. As they smile and swing

death's a thought more distant than stars hiding
behind a veil of clouds. Each sister
on this glittering night, while they dance, sing,

and pirouette across the sand, will cling
to joy they know cannot last forever.
In the cool breeze, as they laugh and swing,

shadows by haloed rocks are trembling.
One passing night fades into another,
but still in our hearts they dance and they sing,
two souls borne on a breeze who whirl and swing.

Scott Hicks

Scott Hicks is an agricultural scientist who lives in Fresno, California. As a poet, he has had work published in *Poetry Quarterly*, *Three Line Poetry*, *Modern Haiku*, *Shot Glass*, *Liquid Imagination*, and *Down in the Dirt*.

Splashing Dust

Rooted in the banks of the dry river,
spring blossoms, a sign they are still alive:
hardy willow, ash, and sycamore,
sporting ungroomed beards of dry lichen.

Too many years before another dry,
only roots along deep fissures triumph,
crust coated waiting. Clouds passing by,
overcast day dreams for dangling leaf tips.

Falling leaves landing splash dust on the ground.
Wilted and tired, trees fewer in time.
Broken river bed, riparian life gone,
branches and shadows intertwine,

bends harmonized in comforting embraces,
telling shapes, traces of hope filled faces.

Lionel Willis

Lionel Willis was born in 1932 in Toronto. Professor Emeritus (English Lit.) Ryerson University. Has had 150 poems printed in various journals, including *The Lyric* (twice winner of Lyric Memorial Prize) *The Formalist*, *Iambs and Trochees*, and *The Fiddlehead*.

Footnote Fame

Posthumous fame's not the gift that it seems
For us who still bravely exist in our dreams.
O sure you're not there to sniff the bouquets,
But who ever misses the faintness of praise?

The natural prize of artists, of course
Must elude, but safe from the sting of remorse:
Your fatal mistakes may spread to all cells
But the monsters they spawn haunt someone else.

Let's suppose a Creator may happen to find
The experiment here (which seems double-blind)
Rewarding enough to preserve it a while,
In the end it must fade to a satisfied smile.

Shoulders will shrug and the Earth will get tossed
Into the bin where all fossils are lost
In Necessity's backyard, and fame shrink
To whatever footnote's deserved by a wink.

John Byrne

John Byrne lives in Albany, Oregon with Cheryl French, an artist. He writes formal poetry and plays and, with his spouse, he puts on summer play camps for youngsters. His verse has appeared in several journals that welcome such verse including this one (2010), *The Lyric*, *Fourteen by Fourteen* and *Lucid Rhythms* (now defunct but not because of his poems.)

A Christmas Rondel

You are the only present I desire
No need for Fedex pounding on our door.
Out with the new; in with the old once more
Especially when the winter calls for fire.
Let others yearn for items that inspire
The frenzied rush from store to trendy store,
You are the only present I desire
No need for Fedex pounding on our door.
No tiny print, no batteries required,
No puzzling what this extra piece is for,
Just knowing as we both have known before
Intenser heat comes from well tended fire.
You are the only presence I desire.