



# The Road Not Taken

## A Journal of Formal Poetry

Spring, 2025



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

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## Poet's Corner

**Welcome to the Spring 2020 Issue of *The Road Not Taken*.** In fall of last year I began Poet's Corner by saying how impressive the submissions were; "I have rarely had so many difficult decisions or turned down so many skillful poems." Well, the quality continues! You get better and better. So this issue we took advantage of that. As you know, *The Road Not Taken* accepts poems without regard to subject matter (though we do draw the line at bad taste - and yes, we define that). After acceptance however, we reread each and every poem (often several times) to pick themes that fit. We think this makes reading the issue more interesting than a random collection would be. Some readers will disagree with the themes picked, but that's all the better: reading poetry ideally involves "conversations" between reader, writer — and yes, editor. :)

This issue however, we accepted so many good poems, we were free to pick themes that only fit *most* of those accepted — and publish the rest in our summer issue. This is the first time we've experimented with delayed publication, but the quality and quantity of submissions clearly justified that decision. In no case however was the delay a reflection of quality, and we were careful to ask permission of the author.

Which brings me to another new feature of the poems selected this spring: Overt Party Politics. Anything in life can be meat for poetry, and there's nothing wrong with that — but this year the political content was much more explicit. This caused me some soul-searching. On one hand, we welcome satirical poetry; I've always enjoyed a good satire. On the other hand, it is important to me as editor that poetry be for everyone: in this journal at least, poetry comes first. I don't want *The Road Not Taken* to represent a single American party — for one thing, our contributors and readers span the whole globe. Mainly though I'm just naive enough to think that people of all political persuasions might enjoy poetry, that this might be a forum where our divisions could (if only briefly) be put aside.

What did this mean in practice? No one — not a single poet — got a blanket rejection for political content. In a few cases however, we *did* pick a poet's non-political (or at least, *less* political) poems, in lieu of others equally worthy. In short, remember if you can, that politicians come and go, but poetry lives on. And this is a journal for people who read, be their politics what they may. Thank you.

Yours,

Kathryn Jacobs  
Editor

The associate editor would add (thank you to the editor for inviting me to share my piece) that not all of us can put our divisions aside. But all points of view can create great art, and this journal will never write anyone off because we disagree. Boring biases make poor art, but strong passions have inspired poems from Dante's "Inferno" to Wordsworth's "London 1802."

Rachel Jacobs  
Associate Editor

## **Breakups**

## **Sara Wenger**

Sara Wenger has enjoyed a long career in education. Currently, she is an adjunct faculty member at Arcadia University where she teaches a poetry seminar to first-year students. She has published in *UNLOST: Journal for Found Poetry*, *Mothers Always Write*, *Three-Line Poetry Journal*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Wilderness Literary Journal* and *Everyday Fiction: Bite-Sized Stories for a Busy World*.

### **Estrangement**

Once we were close and then you disappeared.  
It was incumbent to choose sides, you said,  
and when I could not, you abandoned years  
of affection, durable sibling threads.  
Like broken twigs tossed aside, memories  
sparked from old photographs and birthday cards  
have been bundled; emotional debris,  
their greetings and portraits tattered and scarred.  
Of the four of us, you had it hardest.  
At birth, your cheeks were hollow and blue, death  
was a threat, a long life was not promised.  
We were told that mom and dad held their breath.  
At times I've thought that your tenuous start  
foreshadowed living with a lonely heart.

## **Lynn Gilbert**

Lynn D. Gilbert's poems, twice nominated for Pushcart Prizes, have appeared in such journals as *Appalachian Review*, *Arboreal*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Consequence*, *Light*, *The MacGuffin*, *Sheepshead Review*, and *Southwestern American Literature*. A founding editor of *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, she lives in an Austin suburb and reviews poetry submissions for *Third Wednesday* journal.

### **Give It a Rest, OK?**

In company, I hope to hear a word  
of sunny scene, great meal, or generous deed,  
a stroke of luck, or anecdote absurd  
enough to make me laugh. I do not need

recitals of your wrongs or ailments. Please  
excuse me from environmental doom  
scenarios; no large-scale remedies  
lie in my power to effect. Nor have I room

in mind for other miseries of the world—  
everybody sees them on the news:  
the massacres, the tons of ordnance hurled.  
On all these, please don't weight me with your views.

Fair warning: if I find you can't comply,  
I'll ghost you. See above for reasons why.

## **Daniel Sofaer**

Daniel Sofaer lives in Brooklyn with his two chihuahuas, Pinky and the Brain. He is a student of Ancient Greek and a folk blues musician as well as a lover of poetry.

### **Friends Parting Ways**

Fond the hope that we'd take it all in together,  
collecting toadstools, turtles, comparing notes:  
You'd give us advice on how to grow a garden.  
We'd vie at our absurdist anecdotes.  
How large the world seemed then, how blessed,  
as I rattled on to you about the things that I cared about.  
That was before our falling out.

Keep up no keening, flute no horrid elegy  
for brother drown'd at sea who doesn't like thee.  
And if our paths should cross, you say,  
"I hope we can be civil." I hope not.  
I hated your note with its faint terms of praise.  
When friends part ways, may their parting be abrupt,  
without concession or apology.



## Steven Kent

Steven Kent's work appears in *Asses of Parnassus*, *Light*, *Lighten Up Online*, *The Lyric*, *The Orchards*, *The Pierian*, *Philosophy Now*, and *Snakeskin*, among others. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, his collections *I Tried (And Other Poems, Too)* (2023) and *Home at Last* (coming Summer 2025) are published by Kelsay Books.

### **My Wife Had Stood -- A Loaded Gun**

(With apologies to Emily Dickinson)

My wife had stood -- a loaded gun  
in her good hand -- again.  
I don't know what she thinks I've done  
or where she thinks I've been.  
Each morning when I leave our house  
she watches -- like a hawk --  
as I, the ever-faithful spouse,  
begin my daily walk.

Once more she'll twenty questions play  
when I come through the door.  
The weekend's worse -- on Saturday  
she'll ask me thirty more  
Suspiciously -- I know not why --  
I've given her no cause --  
I never, ever tell a lie  
or violate the laws.

I'm on the edge now -- sleeping light --  
alert to every sound;  
I dare not close both eyes at night  
whenever she's around.  
Although I could not stop for death,  
she'll blindly stop for me --  
too soon I'll sigh with my last breath,  
*Et tu, my Emily?*

## ***In Retrospect***

## Donald Wheelock

Poetry, a preoccupation for many years, has taken over Donald Wheelock's life after a career of teaching and composing concert music. *The Road Not Taken*, *Sparks of Calliope*, *THINK*, *Blue Unicorn*, and many other journals have published his poems. His two full-length books, *It's Hard Enough to Fly* and *With Nothing but a Nod*, have been published by Kelsay Books and David Robert Books, respectively.

## Covenant

She left it up to his imagination,  
the piercing words she said under her breath.  
Her eyes gave her away. "Provocateur,"  
he saw with every syllable she spoke.  
Of what he'd done he wasn't all that sure.  
The spat would end. They did not act from hate,  
their marriage still a covenant between  
two equals: *Hurt me and I'll hurt you back*.  
The evening grew much harder to endure,  
she engrossed in reading on her own,  
he in wondering what it was she'd found  
to hate in words he'd offered her offhand.  
"Nothing," she said when asked, "it's something else."  
He'd ask her in the morning what she meant.

## **Derek Healy**

Derek Healy grew up at the foot of the Cotswolds hills and now lives in Malvern UK. He has had three collections published, the latest being *Uncharted* (Graffiti Books, 2022). His poetry has appeared in a number of journals, including *The Road Not Taken*, *Ibbetson Street*, *The Lyric*, *Orbis*, *Snakeskin*, *The Cannon's Mouth* and *The Muddy River Poetry Review*. He has read on several occasions at the Cheltenham Literature and the Cheltenham Poetry festivals.

### **At Banyuls-sur-Mer**

That whitewashed hilltop chapel, the town square  
waking under plane trees, far-off mountains  
bleached by sun – all of this within a year  
we'll just recall as France, somewhere, or Spain  
perhaps, its distinctive sounds, smells and sights  
stirred together in memory's melting pot:  
half a lifetime's hill towns, grandes places, resorts  
left traceless, names and places peeled apart.  
Much as you and I, love, since student days  
have blended, the one into the other,  
until the telling flavour that endures  
is singular – of each of us, yet neither.  
And now I've little taste for who I was  
without you, nor yen for being otherwise.



**Derek Healy**

**“Now You are 23”**

You found my fancying I was old bizarre,  
hand wrote this little book of quotes to please  
and tease me for my lofty au revoirs  
to youth, my over-eager obsequies.  
You were twenty, wiser, loved being young,  
hugged in every adieu some fresh encore,  
wasted no tears for where the grapes had clung,  
drank life's draught to the lees then looked for more.

Five decades on your gift resurfaces  
with deeds and wills; yet you don't remember  
now how tenderly you wrote its verses,  
fresh in love, that long ago September.  
For me it could be all but yesterday  
and I'm young again – wishing time away.

## **James Toupin**

James Toupin is a retired federal government lawyer who has published widely in journals, garnering a couple of Puschart nominations. His first book of poems, *Upon the Century Called American* (Main Street Rag Publishing), appeared in late 2024. He is also a published translator, of *Selected Letters of Alexis de Tocqueville on Politics and Society*, and writer on legal topics.

## **Interpretation**

Milton, you should be living at this hour,  
so someone now could set your reading right.  
Adam had a truth put in his power  
and dressed it up, thinking woman too slight.  
What did God say? Not to eat of the tree.  
But this is not how it was passed to Eve  
She heard, Don't touch. Fiction set serpent free.  
Touching, and living, she could not believe  
the tree's fruit could be anything but sweet.  
You blamed the woman, and all those so sexed,  
but Adam's garbling made her first to eat.  
A poet should be careful with his text.  
Exaggeration was the first of sins;  
next, to have blamed the hearer ever since.

## **Mike Wilson**

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in many magazines including *The Gravity of the Thing*, *Mud Season Review*, *The Petigru Review*, *Still: The Journal*, and in Mike's book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic* (Rabbit House Press). Mike's awards include the League of Minnesota Poets Award, the Maine Poets Society Award, and the Chaffin/Kash Prize of the Kentucky State Poetry Society. Mike lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

### **The Air We Breathe**

The wide world searches fervently  
for rich White people trapped in a submarine  
exploring the corpse of the Titanic,  
another rich White people disaster.

Rich or poor, each of us shares their fear.

Temperature at the bottom of the sea  
is cold as the shoulder turned to those  
who breathe their own thoughts and prayers  
and try not to implode.

Here's an exercise in imagination.

Alter the attributes of those in peril  
by race, wealth, nationality, gender,  
politics, religion, whatever comes to mind,  
and compare subtle differences in your gut.

That will tell you a little about yourself.

Then do it again, and in each case,  
visualize what assets and attention  
rushes to aid, or kneels to mourn,  
and where and how they emerge.

That will tell you a little about the world.

## **Karen Greenbaum-Maya**

Karen Greenbaum-Maya is a retired psychologist, former German major and reviewer of restaurants, and a three-time Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. Her collections include three chapbooks, *Burrowing Song*, *Eggs Satori*, and, *Kafka's Cat* (Kattywompus Press), and, *The Book of Knots and their Untying* (Kelsay Books). A collection of poems about her late husband, *The Beautiful Leaves*, was published in 2023 by Bamboo Dart Press.

### **How I Learned Not to Applaud Between Movements at Concerts**

Robert Mann, of Julliard,  
legendary violin,  
raised his finger to his lips,  
slowly shook his head, to shush me.

I was gauche, barbarian—  
with a flick he could have crushed me.  
He, who lightning could have hurled,  
saw I sought a better world.  
Down the tubes he could have flushed me—  
Robert shook his head, and shushed me.

Say I never learned the rules—  
say Fame stumbled, should she brush me—  
say that Fortune smiles on fools—!  
but also say, that Robert shushed me.



## **Karen Greenbaum-Maya**

### **About the Author**

Like Proust, I'm not inventive.  
Like Henry James, I'm fat.  
Like Melville, slow to publish;  
Like Eliot, I've a cat.

Like Stevens, I do other work;  
Like Jarrell, write in prose.  
Like Thurber, I don't see too good;  
Like Shakespeare, I wear clothes.

Like Kafka, I remember dreams;  
Like Shaw, pontificate.  
Love Paris just like Baudelaire;  
Like Henry Roth, I'm late.

Like Freud, I must have enemies.  
Like Gilbert, I'm not glad.  
Like Wilde, I'm snide but tactless.  
Like Sylvia Plath, I'm mad.

Like Joyce, exploit allusions;  
Like Tolstoy, I'm no fun;  
Like William Blake, can't catch a break;  
Like Reverend John, I'm donne.

## **Michael Waterson**

Michael Waterson is a retired journalist after career stints as a seasonal firefighter, San Francisco taxi driver and wine education. He holds an MFA from Mills College, and is Poet Laureate Emeritus of Napa Valley. His info may be found at [michaelwatersonpoetry.com](http://michaelwatersonpoetry.com).

### **Jazz Aged**

The air bubbled and buzzed, sizzling with jazz  
when dazzling Zelda danced a splashy Charleston  
in Union Square Fountain as the wingding  
on this side of paradise rolled on and on.  
The sparkle of those feted nights fizzed flat,  
leaving the genius and his mad muse belle  
both broken and broke, beautiful and damned.  
Hacking for Hollywood, failure dogged him,  
inspiration drained dry with sobriety,  
as locked in an asylum Zelda blazed  
for years before her immolating flames  
wrote the ending he wasn't around to pen  
in words searing the damnedest hearts holy.

## David Hummon

David Hummon is a poet, painter, and emeritus professor (Holy Cross College, Worcester, Massachusetts). His creative writing appears in various journals from *The Healing Muse* to *The Unitarian Universalist World*. A larger collection of his poetry and art, *How to Write a Bench*, is forthcoming from The Finishing Line Press in 2025. He currently resides in Winchester, Massachusetts.

## The Sheet

*The cool that came off sheets just off the line*  
Seamus Heaney, “Clearances”

My father taught me how the cotton line  
we used to trim the sail was called a sheet.  
The lateen sail was canvas, not linen –  
its delta shape held true by well-sewn hems.  
Close to the wind the sail luffed and shook  
like sheets upon a line. A cross-wind  
bowed the sail, the undulating canoe thwacking  
water in the bow; the sheet, taught in hand.  
Such innocence, like nothing had happened,  
the leeboards down, just skimming, happening  
down the lake, attentive to the touch and go  
of shifting winds, waves – no holding back.  
We sailed that day, this way and that – O  
thinking not how lives come about and tack.

## **Judy Lorenzen**

Judy Lorenzen is a poet, writer, and teaching artist. Her first book *Turning Back to Her Love Pages* is due out in May 2025, Kelsay Books. Her work appears in journals, magazines, anthologies and on websites.

### **When You Were Young**

I wished I'd known how fast you'd grow,  
that life is brief and childhood short.  
I should have known and understood  
your time within our laurelled wood—  
would vanish. . . I remember how  
you built your fort and snuck about  
the house to steal a pan or plate,  
then tip toed out our garden gate.  
Crammed in your fort, your sleeping bag—  
your telescope to view the moon  
and find Sirius, your favorite star,  
your baseball glove and a mason jar.  
Those summers gone—your fort still stands,  
built by those small, determined hands.



## ***How We Got Here***

## Cal Freeman

Cal Freeman is the author of the books *Fight Songs*, *Poolside at the Dearborn Inn*, and *The Weather of Our Names* (due out later this year). Recent poems have appeared in *The Glacier*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Panoply Zine*, and *Gargoyle*.

### **I'm Still Wondering Where Those Bastards Are**

for Doug Hopkins

I drift with my battered suitcase  
through a little airport.  
Out the window Catalinas,  
ranch houses, and carports.

I wish I was home with Sarah  
in that little bungalow,  
with red wine in the decanter  
and Monk on the stereo.

But it's pointless to be wistful  
when you are on the road  
with some good friends waiting for you  
to drink and pick and crow

those songs about the town you left  
that say we'll live forever,  
while saguaros raise centenary arms  
in Tucson in December.

## Glenn Wright

Glenn Wright is a retired teacher living in Anchorage, Alaska with his wife, Dorothy, and their dog, Bethany. He writes poetry to ponder what puzzles him, to celebrate what delights him, and sometimes to keep from putting his fist through the drywall. His poems have recently appeared in *Muse*, *Rumen*, *Amethyst Review*, and other journals.

## Urban Sprawl

The city was miles away when we first came.  
Then every year it sent out subdivisions  
like tentacles probing the edges of our peace.  
Now we are trapped by peering plate glass eyes.  
Cars patrol the streets, growl as they pass.

I know. We are all free to chase the dream.  
But still, it feels impossible to bear,  
as though the city barged into my house,  
flung itself on my couch, slammed muddy shoes  
on my coffee table, and yelled, "Get me a beer!"

## **Barbara Bazyn**

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

### **A Compromising Battle**

When the sea attacks the shore,  
the rocks must take a stand,  
but the sea wins out in the end;  
rocks become waves of sand.

The land wrestles with sea,  
but wrestling's a contact sport,  
requiring intermingling  
of the most intimate sort.

The sky treats the shore far better.  
The rain doesn't bother it much,  
but their meetings remain inconclusive.  
They're even a bit out of touch.

If you stick around and fight,  
to the sweet or bitter end,  
you'll resemble your bosom enemy  
more than your distant friend.



**James B. Nicola**

James B. Nicola, returning contributor, is the author of eight collections of poetry, the latest three being *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*, *Turns & Twists*, and *Natural Tendencies*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Actor's Guide to Live Performance* won a *Choice* magazine award.

**Racket and Ball**

I hit the ball dead center. It goes to  
the other side. For good, I think. But then  
it comes back. It seems up to me to do  
something about this, so I swing again.  
On which side is the ball trying to be?  
I want so to accommodate the ball.  
It is not so considerate of me,  
however, and keeps coming. Oh, the gall  
of such a small, insensible, round thing:  
No person on the planet has more drive;  
no planet, more direction of attack;  
no play provides more proof that I'm alive  
One of these days I shall withhold my swing;  
or it will startle me and not come back.

## **Mary Cresswell**

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

## **Snow Job**

Profit motives drift down softly  
some on you and some on me.  
See them growing, gently drifting,  
never random, floating free.  
See the fat cats snug and warm  
bulldoze chattering huddled masses  
into frozen heaps of storm  
and isolated drizzle patches.

Once upon a time we wondered  
how we'd ever look for shelter  
if the atmosphere exploded  
to leave us naked in the weather.  
Now we wander through the drifts  
hoping a future still exists.

## David Ram

David Ram, a retired community college teacher, enjoys living with his wife in Easthampton, Massachusetts. His recent poems appear in *Amethyst Review*, *JAMA*, *Meat for Tea*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Star 82 Review*, and elsewhere.

## Garden Plot

Kneeling among blue hydrangea blossoms  
I combed barehanded through composted mulch.

An earthworm crept from the dirt, so I paused  
while it coiled wave-like around my fingers.  
A robin landed feet away and shot  
me a look. I buried the worm and scooped

up the row. The robin stepped toward me,  
pecking at woodchips, and pincered the worm.  
I stopped weeding and returned the bird's glare.  
It tore away, letting the worm escape

into the soil. Alone, rummaging through  
assorted tubers and taproots, I thought  
a lot about our one-act play, how much  
we left inevitably unresolved.