

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry



Fall Issue, 2013
Table of Contents

Kim Bridgford	Inflatable Doll Has to Face a Newer Model Perfection is the Enemy of the Good Hoarder
Kari Wergeland	Trespasser
John Grey	How Much the Rain Wants me to be the Rain
William Ruleman	Some Musings on Nature while in the Black Forest Saint Martha
Ed Shacklee	In Other Tongues Unwritten Villanelle The Python
Thomas Zimmerman	Dark Holler
Atar Hadari	Touching Down
Doug Stuber	Pablo and Max February Sonnet
David Pratt	Elizabeth Barrett Browning Died in Florence In Nopigia
Eileen Kennedy	Villanelle for the Rejected Poet
Richard H Peake	What's Left
Jeff Burt	The New Book Silk
Clinton Van Inman	Invited Number 7
Martin Willitts	Before William Blake Made Metal Plates of Angels
Michael R. Burch	Willy Nilly
Mina Le	The Binary Stars
Sandra Bounds	The Touch of Sadness

Kim Bridgford

Kim Bridgford is the director of the West Chester University Poetry Center and the West Chester University Poetry Conference, the largest all-poetry writing conference in the United States. As the editor of *Mezzo Cammin*, she founded The *Mezzo Cammin* Women Poets Timeline Project, which was launched at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington in March 2010, and recently celebrated its third anniversary at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in affiliation with the exhibition *The Female Gaze*. Her collaborative work with the visual artist Jo Yarrington has been honored with a Ucross fellowship. Bridgford is the author of eight books of poetry, including *Bully Pulpit*, a book of poems on bullying; *Epiphanies*, a book of religious poems; and the forthcoming *Doll*. She has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Connecticut Post*, on NPR and the website of *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, and in various headline news outlets.

Inflatable Doll Has To Face A Newer Model

After all that they've been through, he says he's done:
He doesn't care what she's put into this.
She's lost her colors, left out in the sun.
She grits her teeth, arms rigid with unfairness.

She knows he wants to do it all again
With someone else: the car rides in the lane
Meant for commuters; four-hundred thread count
Bed linens; trips to Mother for his rent

And for his love. Why didn't these things bother
Her before? She thought they loved each other.
And if she thought him somewhat immature,
At least, all day, he only thought of her.

Now what? And yet inside she already knows.
He lets her air out, insults her to her toes.

Perfection Is The Enemy Of The Good

(An explanation, given by the chair, about why the English Department shouldn't reach for perfection re: curriculum revision, 2009-10).

This shocks the public, wakes the grammar god,
As if espresso fired up each synapse.
Perfection is the enemy of the good.

Why else would teachers fill each page with red?
Why else would editors become obsessed?
This shocks the public, wakes the grammar god,

Who walks with Don Quixote (who can read),
And tilts at mediocrity, in relapse:
Perfection is the enemy of the good.

It's not the money, the long hours, or hybrid,
Bureaucracy and all its colored tapes
(This shocks the public, wakes the grammar god),

But a belief that excellence is fed.
And there it is: an *A*. Worth all these gripes.
Perfection is the enemy of the good:

It's like George Orwell in the neighborhood.
That's why we chose this discipline: for keeps.
You shock the public, wake the grammar god:
Perfection is the enemy of the good.

Hoarder

I.

I am the world: its schedules and detritus
(Newspapers, fliers, cans, and empty boxes,
A trail that meanders, like a tilting axis,
Some clothes with their tags still on, and Johnny Unitas

In a mag; boxes of candy, and nuts, and flowers
Dying on their stems forever and for hours).

And it's mine.

II.

After I'm dead I find the eyes
I had for all the stuff—the visceral surprise—
No longer there. With garbage bags, they come.

The tenderness with which I kept each comb
And then forgot about it! It's just the way
We all live, only more intense, more lonely.
Which is to say, *We each pull all to us*.
The difference is, I *was* the omnibus.

Kari Wergeland

Kari Wergeland is the author of *Voice Break*, as well as *The Ballad of the New Carissa and Other Poems*. In addition, she wrote a children's book review column for *The Seattle Times*, which ran monthly for 11 years. Wergeland earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Pacific University. She currently works as a librarian for Cuyamaca College in El Cajon, CA, and lives part-time on the Oregon Coast. For more information, please refer to her website: kariwergeland.wordpress.com.

Trespasser

The female spiders build their fluffy nests,
soft little balls of down with eggs inside;
but I do not want these uninvited guests—
I ladle them and toss them all outside.
A lizard tried to scale the side of my pail
and fell; he toppled down into his cell.
The weakened reptile could no longer flail—
I tipped the pail and wished the lizard well.
A rattlesnake found water near my hose—
then bathed on heated pavement by my door.
I won't disturb this serpent in repose.
Perhaps she'll find a wild place to explore.
For now this tidy house belongs to me—
Time's unrelenting grind will set it free.

John Grey

John Grey is an Australian born poet. Recently published in International Poetry Review, Sanskrit and the science fiction anthology, "The Kennedy Curse" with work upcoming in Freshwater, Pennsylvania English and Nerve Cowboy.

How much the rain wants me to be the rain,

In all its drizzle, all its drape of gray,
Persistently, it drizzles, drips its way
From splattered window sill to ceiling stain
To be the blood that bubbles through my vein,
To turn my body liquid, feet to clay,
So even when it's gone, the rain can stay
In my damp heart, my weary, flooded brain.

But I will not be rain, I will not pine
For those who've left, who do not call, who've died,
I'll be what I still am, what still is mine
As dry as ever weather was defied,
I'll be this break of sun, the honeyed shine,
I will not be what's happening outside.

William Ruleman

William Ruleman's verse has appeared in many journals, including *Acumen*, *Envoi*, *The Formalist*, *The New Formalist*, and more recently, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Sonnet Scroll*, and *The Galway Review*. H also teaches English and creative writing (at Tennessee Wesleyan College).

Some Musings On Nature While In The Black Forest

(Breitenberg, Germany, 13 October 2010)

Perhaps one saving (if irksome) grace is her
Apparent disregard for our futile frets.
We share our pain with trees; their limbs just stir;
We ask a fawn a favor, and she forgets.

If we survive the way she seems to shun
Our pleas to her at times, we may receive
Those boons she offers, free, to everyone:
A vision strange, and hard to disbelieve;

The way these pines seek out the sky and give
Our gaze a heaven-harking inclination,
The way boughs know to bend in wind to live,
While birds heed neither cry of creed nor nation,

And firs who'd think theology absurd
Yet murmur benedictions sans one word.

Saint Martha

Oh, Martha, all day long you've hurried,
Fetching food and drink for each guest.
All the stress has got you worried:
You haven't had a moment's rest.

Yet sister Mary does naught but tarry
There at the feet of that strange wise man.
Careful: all this calm is scary.
You'll have to convince him if you can

That Sister's needed to serve everyone.
"Really. I'm run off my ragged feet!"
Sit down, Martha. And hear the Son.
Your soul's a mess, though your house is neat.

Hear Him speak of the one thing needful,
Of which your sister's been amply heedful.

Ed Shacklee

Ed Shacklee is a public defender who represents young people in the District of Columbia. His poems have appeared in *Able Muse*, *Angle*, *Kin Poetry Journal*, *Light* and *Tilt-a-Whirl*, among other places. He is working on a bestiary.

In Other Tongues

I love the songs in other tongues the best,
whose singers never tell me what I know,
but everything I feel and, doing so,
let those who listen cipher out the rest.

I love those songs I scarcely understand,
or only understand as birds by rote
will freely sing each blood-imprinted note
as time or place or season will demand;

but I look slantwise at the songs that dare
to say what I will not, in words I know,
and what I learned to mask will bravely show,
and give love its expression to the air.

Unwritten Villanelle

I'll write a villanelle before I die:
I love the form to death, though I'm afraid
the rules I love are strict but don't apply.

As common as the sparrows at Versailles,
for witty rakes, these were their stock in trade –
they all wrote villanelles. Before I die,

I'll whip one up, a lemon meringue pie,
fluffy, tart and sharper than a blade;
and love will not restrict which rules apply

to lacy underthings hung out to dry,
a bit risqué, and racily displayed.
But villanelles I've written always die;

the moment that my thoughts solidify
the brilliant witticisms quickly fade.
The rules I love constrict or misapply,

refrains grow frayed and rhythms go awry,
till all my friends admit they'd be dismayed

if I wrote a villanelle before I die.
The rules of love are strict, but don't apply.

The Python

The python's painted smirking smile
will widen to a winding mile
of slimy cave that tapers slowly
while prey are slyly swallowed wholly.

Inviting guests to dine within
his empty diamond vault of skin,
the legless devil seems to grovel
before his dark, unfurnished hovel

with eyes like hollow golden charms.
He swears he doesn't carry arms –
then quicker than most men can yell he
proves a python's mostly belly.

Thomas Zimmerman

Thomas Zimmerman teaches English, directs the Writing Center, and edits two literary magazines at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His chapbook *In Stereo: Thirteen Sonnets and Some Fire Music* appeared from The Camel Saloon Books on Blog in 2012. Tom's website: <http://thomaszimmerman.wordpress.com/>

Dark Holler

(for HGZ)

Dark holler from my dimming mind: I'm drunk
on songs of love and death, on ale that's aged
in rum-soaked barrels, feeling Horace—Dad
to my dad, old bootlegger who could play
harmonica and banjo, farmed by day
and gambled nights away, so seldom caged
by glum propriety—now humming sad
and dire tunes to me. And when I junk
my jailing angels, I myself will sing
of darkness rich and nourishing, will name
my daemon, start the fire, gnaw the rind
of consciousness, descend, be drowned, take wing,
alive—with inner, ever-mounting flame,
with scorching, fragrant ash I leave behind.

Atar Hadari

Atar Hadari was born in Israel, raised in England, and studied poetry in the US. His “Songs from Bialik: Selected Poems of H. N. Bialik” (Syracuse University Press) was a finalist for the American Literary Translators’ Association Award, his debut collection, “Rembrandt’s Bible” is forthcoming from Indigo Dreams in 2013 and his “Lives of the Dead: Poems of Hanoch Levin” forthcoming from Arc Publications in 2014.

Touching Down

A glimpse of a row of lights
In the darkness, like club lampshades
Overlooking brick red fronts
A row of tiny window sunshades

Remind me of the humid night
The palm leaves flapping listless
The blast of air from the cabin hatch
As it opens – the smell of wetness

And the ground, just like other ground
As you touch the tarmac, seeking tremors
But something about it – maybe heat
Maybe the sweat of all those windswept

Leaves – it always seems to be night
And always humid and the cab ride
Always seems to involve a fight
Over money, as if to say, “Welcome home, you *were* missed”

And the lights in the warm, warm night
As you flash to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem
Yellow as sodium and pink as rock
And warm to your hand if you touch them.

Doug Stuber

Doug Stuber is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Chonnam National University in Gwangju, South Korea. His poems have appeared in *Hazmat Review*, *Mangrove Review* and *A.I.M.* and others. His 12th book "*Open Secrets, Top Secrets,*" was published by Chonnam University Press in 2013. Stuber's MFA is from Hollins University. For More: <http://dougstuber.wordpress.com/>

Pablo and Max

This is the story of Pablo and Max,
They left New York City to avoid income tax
And gather some primitive artifacts.

They left in the rain in spring '52
And were seen in the fields with an African gnu
Admiring the shapes that came into view.

While Pablo was digging up red cube-like art,
Max drew some monsters on government charts.
(They looked like amoebas with elongated parts.)

The days were spent studying carvings of stone,
Or walking in jungles out on their own.
An artist knows how to survive alone.

Always popular with their new friends,
These two went about setting new trends.
They taught the natives how to pretend.

Unlike the scientists who went to steal,
The artists just borrowed that primitive feel.
A congenial arrangement, if not ideal.

February Sonnet

Bishop's armadillo nips at Eliot's cats,
Natalie sits and watches as Anais takes a nap.
Alice serves us brownies, Ellis dreams of zero,
Madonna dances cowboys, Brittany's her hero.

Recurring themes now frighten, TV over books,
Artistic verve forsaken, your Nielsen is how you look.
Varuca Salt is sprinkled, Ricci pops a gourd,
Dean expanded shout-out, voters here are bored.

Brocade river poems resound off valley walls.
Power has the power to grab freedom by the balls.

Nicole returns to smile and pine at her mountain farm.
Renee says "hey" they find a way to flourish arm in arm.

Jade palace shimmers in the winter sun,
Riches pile on poverty, the battle's never won.

David Pratt

David Pratt's poetry and short stories have been broadcast on public radio and published in many journals in the US, Canada, Britain, and Australia. He is the author of The Impossible Takes Longer (Walker, 2007).

Elizabeth Barrett Browning Dies in Florence

As the procession passed, we bowed in veneration,
weeping for her like children who had lost their mother,
the champion of our cause, our longing for a nation;
we lined the streets, and comforted each other.

We wept for her like children who had lost their mother;
the beautiful English lady, loved by all;
we lined the streets, and comforted each other;
laurel and white flowers adorned her pall.

The beautiful English lady, loved by all,
a famous poet in her own land, we're told;
laurel and white flowers adorned her pall,
Signor Roberto's grief was tragic to behold.

A famous poet in her own land, we're told.
She kissed him a dozen times before she died.
Signor Roberto's grief was tragic to behold,
she had eloped with him from England as his bride.

She kissed him a dozen times before she died.
As the procession passed, we bowed in veneration.
She had eloped with him from England as his bride,
this champion of our cause, our longing for a nation.

In Nopigia

She cooks an omelet with oregano,
walking the kitchen tiles in tanned bare feet,
her sun-bleached hair in morning disarray.

clothes dry outside, and on the village street
dogs bark in counterpoint and children play,
behind us on the hillside roosters crow.

In the still air, I hear a donkey bray.

I have a sense that something is complete,
though what it is exactly I don't know.

Her T-shirt shows a tree branch in the snow,
on it a snowy owl. Our final day
on the chapel-speckled mountainside of Crete.

Eileen Kennedy

Eileen Kennedy has been writing since she was eight years old. She has published nonfiction, fiction, and poetry in a variety of media. She holds a Doctorate in Language and Literacy from Fordham University and a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism from the University of Missouri, Columbia. She is on the faculty of the City University of New York. EileenKennedy2.wordpress.com

Villanelle for the Rejected Poet

The Exalted Society regrets to inform
That despite your verse's abstruse plot
Your poem was rejected by the Writers Reform.

We do not understand your sonata-like form
Your work has no rhyme nor school of thought
The Exalted Society regrets to inform.

We do not like to discourage or misinform
Please with some other place find a spot
Your poem has been rejected by the Writers Reform.

Do not whine, criticize, or fill out a claim form
Your work left us confused and distraught
The Exalted Society regrets to inform.

Do send a check or cash with this subscription form
With your handiwork contact us not
Your poem has been rejected by the Writers Reform.

We publish all races, creeds, genders and artists' forms
From everyone but you – we have got
The Exalted Society regrets to inform
Your poem was rejected by the Writers Reform.

Richard H. Peake

Peake has published four collections of poetry, the most recent *Earth and Stars*, a collection of his poems published from 2008 to 2012. Recent poems of his have appeared in *Avocet*, *The Harbinger*, *Asylum*, and *Jimson Weed*.

What's Left?

There was a young soldier from Austin
Who knew it really might cost him
When he went to the front
On a long road hunt
And found the bomb that tossed him.

Buddies found him, a little too holey.
They evacked him over to quick surgery
To cut and bandage and save him
Less limbs they must trim
So they left him a little ungainly.

He wasn't dismayed by his harsh fate
But took therapy early and late.
He walked 'til he panted
With his new leg they granted
Successfully finding his gait.

Jeff Burt

Jeff Burt lives in Santa Cruz County, California, and works in manufacturing. He jettisoned all of his Motown albums in Utah on his way out west from Wisconsin, and loves the aroma of a freshly sharpened #2 pencil.

The New Book

Codex, a compilation of quires,
From caudex, the trunk of a tree,
Now bytes and megabits on wires
From hubs electronically

Yet I still sit in shadowed woods
With musty page held up to read,
Acidic pulp at work on words,
Borders with marginalia bleed.

Silk

My ties go in and out of style,
well, mostly out. They hang
too wide, too thin, the asp-like Nile
in length, the yin and yang,

more cling and clang in the wild clash
with culture. They come pre-hung
because once tied they stay, the brash
colors dulled, silky tongues

gone rough and snagged, deadened by time,
like language not with song
in speech can no longer chime
or strike a ringing gong.

Clinton Van Inman

Clinton Van Inman was born in Walton-on-Thames, England in 1945, grew up in North Carolina, graduated from San Diego State University in 1977 BA in Philosophy, and is currently a high school teacher in Tampa Bay. He lives in Sun City Center, Florida with his wife, Elba.

Recent publications include Internet magazines: Poetry, BlackCatPoems, The Inclement, The Tower, Journal, Warwick Unbound, and the Beatnik, while recent printed magazines include Down in the Dirt, Hudson View, Tower Journal, Inclement, Out of Our, and Indiana University Spirits to name a few. Currently, I am trying to gather most of my poetry together to publish in a book called, "One Last Beat."

INVITED

It was no accident my coming here
For they must had known long before
I wandered to their farmhouse near
That soon I would knock upon their door
And wait until the storm would clear.

Call it more than a good neighbor's sense
In snow to leave a porch lamp lighted
Or post the sign upon the picket fence
For those in need are all invited
Even if it were mere coincidence.

NUMBER SEVEN

They paraded you in pinstripes
Gave you a lucky number even
Placed your picture on cornflakes

But tried to keep it a secret
Like buried Cuban missiles
Or the real price of gold

That you were just like us
But we didn't care about the
Drinking and the smoking

Or that illness that ran in your family
Only that you were in the lineup
For you were every kid's hero

Because you were a legend
And idols makes perfect statues
Like yours they placed in center field.

Martin Willitts

Martin Willitts Jr is a retired Librarian living in Syracuse, New York. He was nominated for 6 *Pushcart* and 6 *Best of the Net* awards. He provided his hands-on workshop “How to Make Origami Haiku Jumping Frogs” at the 2012 Massachusetts Poetry Festival. He won the William K. Hathaway Award for Poem of the Year 2012. He has 5 full length and 20 chapbooks of poetry including 2013 national contest winner, "Searching For What Is Not There" (Hiraeth Press). This poem is a part of a series based on the life and art of William Blake.

Before William Blake Made Metal Plates of Angels

Blake saw an angel, all tattooed and forlorn. He asked,
my God, what happened to you?
“*My God,*” responded the ripped-open angel, all blasted,
bruised wings, all scarred and redden sinew,
twisted bone, smashed and smeared face. “*I am fallen.*
This is what happens when you question too often.”
Blake wondered if he should dare to draw this famine.
Would he face the same harsh judgment, become this sullen?

What happens to humans that stumble? How short the fall?
These words were clearly etched onto his face.
The angel said, “*You can avoid this fate, avoid fiery hail.*
Pray while you draw. Put them in a slipcase.”
Blake felt his hands and ink and handmade paper merge
wings of intense light, voices of scourge.

Michael R. Burch

Michael R. Burch is the editor of *The HyperTexts*, on-line at www.thehypertexts.com. He has five Pushcart nominations and his work has appeared more than 1,700 times in publications such as *Light Quarterly*, *The Lyric*, *Measure*, *The Chariton Review*, *Pennsylvania Review*, *The Chimaera*, *Able Muse*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Trinacria*, *Writer's Digest—The Year's Best Writing*, *The Neovictorian/Cochlea*, *The Best of the Eclectic Muse* and *Iambs & Trochees*.

Willy Nilly

for the Demiurge, aka Yahweh/Jehovah

Isn't it silly, Willy Nilly?
You made the stallion,
you made the filly,
and now they sleep
in the dark earth, stilly.
Isn't it silly, Willy Nilly?

Isn't it silly, Willy Nilly?
You forced them to run
all their days uphillly.
They ran till they dropped—
life's a pickle, dilly.
Isn't it silly, Willy Nilly?

Isn't it silly, Willy Nilly?
They say I should worship you!
Oh, really!
They say I should pray
so you'll not act illy.
Isn't it silly, Willy Nilly?

Mina Le

Mina Le is a native of Minneapolis. She holds a B.A. from Harvard University and an M.D. from Harvard Medical School. She is an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon currently undergoing fellowship training at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. Her poetry has appeared in *Eureka Literary Magazine* and in *Minnesota Medicine*.

The Binary Stars

epithalamion for Chanda

If, on the contrary, two stars should really be situated very near each other, and at the same time so far insulated as not to be materially affected by the attractions of neighbouring stars, they will then compose a separate system, and remain united by the bond of their own mutual gravitation towards each other. Herschel

The bulk of stars are out there on their own.

They may have neighbors, but none come too near.
Though once, like them, you solitary shone,
Another star now shares your atmosphere,

And as a pair you form a wondrous system.

His path in space is evermore defined
By how your gravitational field has kissed him,
And likewise he bends yours. It's as entwined

As suns that burn with separate souls can be.

You'll share a legacy of blazing light,
And all the while you'll dance; the end shall see
A nova that obliterates the night.

Sandra Bounds

Sandra H. Bounds has a Master of Arts in English and has taught in both high school and community college. An active member of the Mississippi Poetry Society, she was its 2005 Poet of the Year, and MPS published a chapbook of her poetry to honor that selection. She has won many awards in the annual contests sponsored by MPS, and she has been published in such journals as Art Gulf Coast, The Lyric, The Road Not Taken, Sharing, The Well-Tempered Sonnet, and Westward Quarterly. She received two nominations for a Pushcart Prize in poetry for 2013. She has also been published by Free Expression, an Australian journal.

The Touch of Sadness

An ache of sadness in the sweetest thing:
beyond the sun's red glow a misty rain,
the bite of Winter in the breeze of Spring,
in our soul's deepest joy a twinge of pain.
The nipping frost dulls Autumn's richest gold,
too swiftly subdues Summer's lavish green.
The whole world lapses into dormant cold,
dark time of death before rebirth is seen.
Even the strongest heart suffers some fears,
its calm abraded by worry's foment.
Our broadest smiles burdened by unshed tears
as sadness struggles to gain its moment.
Eden's perfection soon succumbs to grief
In our moments of sweetness all too brief.

Editorial Board

Salvatore Attardo
Hunter Hayes

Anna Evans

Jim Prothero
Karen Roggenkamp

I would like to thank all of the above for so generously agreeing to serve me with their advice and support. In addition, I would like to thank my technology advisor Frank Miskevich, without whom I would never have published a single issue.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Jacobs
Editor in Chief