



The Road Not Taken
A Journal of Formal Poetry

Fall, 2025

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Corner

Those of you who have read *The Road Not Taken* for years (if only off and on) will notice that the Fall 2025 issue has only two themes: **In Retrospect, and Closure**. This is unusual; generally speaking we have a hard enough time fitting poems into three themes, let alone two.

Here let me insert a word for new readers: themes are only chosen *after* we send acceptances and rejections. We could present poems randomly; most journals do. But we think emphasizing what different poems have in common adds interest for the reader. If it also inspires an argument here or there, so much the better.

This time however all but two poems fell unequivocally into the two themes named above (I will let *you* guess which poems were the outliers). We did consider synonyms (i.e. "Endings" for "Closure,") but the biggest problem wasn't which themes to pick, but which of the two best fit any given poem. You see, many of our selections are *both* retrospective and conclusive.

What does this mean? Well, speaking as an editor, I was overwhelmed by the quantity of "sadder but wiser" in this collection of poems (and it was a *large* collection: the fall issue had a record number of submissions). If the poems we received this season are any indication, our readers are *not* a cheerful bunch. Resolute, yes. Thoughtful and capable, yes. But cheerful, no. All I can say is "This too shall pass..."

Kathryn Jacobs
Editor

Assistant Editor Wanted:

The Road Not Taken would like to expand its staff a little. This is not an urgent need (I'm not going anywhere), but if you're interested, please send a letter with a one-page CV to me at jacobskathryn2@gmail.com, with Assistant Editor in the subject line. The work is not onerous (we have reading periods only three times a year), but availability during those periods is a must.

Note: *Road* focuses on metrical and/or rhymed poetry, not free verse. There is wonderful free verse in the world, but that's not what we do, so your experience should reflect that. Thank you -- Kathryn Jacobs

In Retrospect

Derek Healy

Derek Healy grew up in the Cotswolds Hills and now lives in Malvern UK. His fourth collection, *Children in the Window* (Graffiti Books), is due for publication shortly. His poetry has appeared in many journals, including *The Road Not Taken*, *The Lyric* and *Orbis*. He is presently working on a series of Ghazanelles on Ageing.

The Paths of Glory

Just think of all those things I didn't do
which might have made me famous, even great:
I scaled no heights, plumbed no depths, overthrew
no demagogues by force of derring-do;
never attained to an office of state,
nor counted as cronies the good and great.
Not one monument nor marble statue
shall mark my days, no fanfare nor ado.
Yet, so be it. Mine's been a pampered fate,
and want of odes and garlands shouldn't grate.
I've dummied disgrace, dodged my Waterloo,
endured far less misfortune than I'm due.
Don't let me pout or moan like an ingrate.
Few are the moments I would dare undo.

Susan Jo Russell

Susan Jo Russell is a mathematics educator from Somerville, MA. Her poems have appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *Chautauqua*, *Cider Press Review*, *Leon*, *Passager*, and elsewhere, and she has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She co-directs the Brookline Poetry Series.

I Catch My Mother Hiding from Thunder

Arriving unexpected in a storm,
I find my mother, in her nineties then,
ensconced beneath the stairs, and in her arms
the cat, which also fails to apprehend

these rude disruptions of the summer skies
that some say are the fickle gods at war
or thunderbirds with lightning in their eyes
or angels rolling balls among the stars.

My mother—ruled, I thought, by rigid truth—
embarrassed to be caught out in her hide,
admits, when I was small, she'd sworn an oath
to mask her fear. She'd throw the curtains wide—

stand rigid as the savage thunder crashed
pretend to thrill at every jagged flash.

Aaron Nydegger

Like William Carlos Williams, John Stone and some other poets he admires, Aaron Nydegger practices medicine full time and poetry part time. He lives in Layton, Utah. His poetry has appeared in venues such as *The Road Not Taken*, *The Asses of Parnassus*, *The Orchards*, *Lighten Up Online* and *The Society of Classical Poets*.

In Which Granddad Teaches Me to Stack Hay

We took off down the road, midday,
so dusty I could barely see,
drove down to Gardiner's farm where we
picked up a load of late-cut hay.

We headed back to our barn where
the old man's theory was explained:
"Proper angles must always be maintained,
so when you stack them, stack them square.

This point cannot be emphasized enough.
The integrity of the entire stack depends
on the way the ends align with other ends
which applies to hay—and lots of other stuff."

The silage there is getting soft.
we put the hay there with the other fodder
and just so placed so that the broader
bales support those in the upper loft.

We worked all day (not by my choice),
my muscles ache as nightfall nears.
Granddad's dead now twenty years,
but I still smell hay and hear his voice:

"Lift them on the corner—*there*,
flush against the corner wall
at right angles one and all.
When you stack them, stack them square."

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.

Momentary Stay

Though I have shrunk from contention,
I have hoped to find
language as tough as stone,
the nerve to speak my mind.

This spit of land,
so narrowly defined,
begs to be undermined.

Monuments fall,
for dissolution's stronger
than anything at all.
Still, of dissolving things,
stone lasts a little longer.

Lee Evans

Lee Evans lives in Bath, Maine in retirement from the Maryland State Archives and the Bath YMCA. He writes poetry whenever he cannot resist the urge to do so. He has self-published thirteen books of poetry."

Rising Sun Inn

At a log cabin that was once a store,
I waited for the school bus, holding in
my hand my lunch box, scowling out toward
the road that passed by an historic inn—
the *Rising Sun*, where a plaque upon a post
instructed me that General Washington
had passed by there, en route to the State House,
to give up his commission and be done.
Ignoring this as stuff I needn't mind,
I tensed myself for one more day in school.
The bus appeared, its folding doors swung wide;
I grimaced. But a child takes, as a rule,
too long to learn how vital to our nation
it is to know the time for resignation.

Steven Kent

Steven Kent's work appears in *Light*, *Lighten Up Online*, *The Lyric*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Philosophy Now*, *The Pierian*, and *The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry*, among others. His collections *I Tried (And Other Poems, Too)* (2023) and *Home at Last* (2025) are published by Kelsay Books.

Introducing A Man From Porlock

Mr. Coleridge, I'm from Porlock Trust
And we are more than just a bit concerned.
Your account is overdrawn again;
This kind of thing must stop, it simply *must*.

You and I have had a talk before;
I frankly thought the lesson had been learned,
Yet it's only been a week since then
And though I really hate to be a bore—

Oh, you're writing? Well, I'll keep it short,
Be on my way before the hour has turned.
I still need to call on other men,
So let us take a look at my report. . . .

Kevin Saving

Kevin Saving lives in Shetland, off the North coast of Scotland and is a retired psychiatric nurse. His previous publications include *A Brand of Day* (1994), *"Rough Bearings* (2005), *Miracle & Mirage* (2010) and *A Want of Absence* (2017).

Dis-Illusionment

The eye sees what we think it sees:
night-people who, by day, are trees;
a mouse -or leaf blown by the breeze.

As adults, we espouse distrust-
both miracle and mirage must
now leave us doubtful or unfussed

though part of us will always grieve
that we grew harder to deceive
and had to learn to disbelieve.

Lynn D Gilbert

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

Different Generations

Chatting the other night with friends my age
about our earliest public memories—
one of those pastimes of the bland, mid-stage
of life, you'll find—I felt my vision seize
on rainy April, leaves plastered to the blurred
slate sidewalk as I scuffed from school, intent
on my ill-laced shoes and on the puzzling word:
Roosevelt was dead, our President
forever. That long dreariness, The War,
an endless blight, at last was nearly spent.
June saw my uncle back from a far shore
to thank my aunt for all the treats she'd sent....
These recollections—can it be believed?
My God!—date from before you were conceived.

Martin Briggs

Martin Briggs only began writing in earnest after retiring from a career in public administration, since when he has infiltrated various periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic. He feels not constrained but liberated by the demands of form, metre and, when appropriate, rhyme. He lives in Suffolk, England, with his wife and laptop.

Gods

In our own image we created them
to understand ourselves. But then they came,
and sacrifice there had to be -
sweet thunder, bitter honeycomb,
poisonous pearls conceived in wrecking foam;
for Asgard and Olympus - heights of tragedy
erected in imagination's name -
outgrew their toybox travesty
and beat us at our own invented game.

A pantheon of ambiguity
invested with a grand portfolio –
war, love, wine, fertility -
they meddle with us mortals and our fate,
they rape, ensnare, inebriate,
abusing human hospitality,
all making free to condescend thus low,
secure in boasted immortality.
And we should know. We made them so.

Closure

Susan McLean

Susan McLean, a retired English professor from Southwest Minnesota State University, has published two poetry books: *The Best Disguise* and *The Whetstone Misses the Knife*. A third book, *Daylight Losing Time*, is forthcoming from Able Muse Press.

Clocking Out

On Friday, she clocked in, and none
saw her clock out that day, although
on Tuesday they were shocked to learn
that she had died four days ago.

They found her sitting at her desk.
Was she a workaholic? No.
Her colleagues thought it was grotesque
that she had died four days ago

and no one noticed. A bad smell
had raised some comment. Even so,
they blamed the plumbing; none could tell
that she had died four days ago.

Her cubicle was rarely checked,
and no one stopped to say hello,
so how could anyone detect
that she had died four days ago?

Now, though, they must disturb Denise.
HR would have to let her know
(who'd rested for so long in peace)
that she had died four days ago.

Donald A. Ranard

Donald A. Ranard is an award-winning writer whose work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *The Washington Post*, *Gargoyle*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Best Travel Writing*, and elsewhere. In 2022, his play, *ELBOW APPLE CARPET SADDLE BUBBLE*, placed second in Savage Wonder Theater's annual playwriting contest. The son of an American diplomat, he grew up in Japan, Malaya, and Korea and after college worked and lived in Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

There's a Certain Feel to Fall

There's a certain feel to fall
when you reach a certain age:
the dying day, the coming cold,
the lamentation of the trees,
stricken to the bone.

Go south, old man, you tell yourself,
where nights are cool and days are warm
and nothing ever seems to fade.
Instead, you stay where you belong,
here in fall.

Ruth Holzer

Ruth Holzer is the author of ten chapbooks, most recently, "On the Way to Man in Moon Passage" (dancing girl press) and "Float" (Kelsay Books). Her poems have appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *Freshwater*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *POEM*, and elsewhere. A multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, among her awards are the Edgar Allan Poe Memorial Prize, the Tanka Splendor Award and the Ito En Art of Haiku Contest Grand Prize.

Toll

We won't go up to Jersey anymore;
no one's left who we would care to see
and nothing is the way it was before.

Not to visit Skylands or the Shore,
where once we played our roles as family,
will we go up to Jersey anymore.

How often we would tactfully ignore
the growing signs of their fragility,
of nothing being as it was before.

Trading in the Turnpike's mindless roar
for silence and the final mystery,
we don't go up to Jersey anymore

to climb those steps, to knock upon that door.
The lock has changed. It needs a different key
and nothing's like it was the day before.

Though we may try our hardest to restore
the fabric of a fading memory,
we can't go up to Jersey anymore.
Nothing is the way it was before.

Kevin Saving

Kevin Saving retired with his wife, Sarah, to Shetland (off the North coast of Scotland) after a thirty-five year career in nursing. He has published four collections of formalist poetry -the last being *A Want of Absence* (*Lapwing*, 2017). Some of his book reviews can be found in *London Grip*.

The Maze

Rest your hand upon my shoulder,
walk me through the maze.
As the once-warm world grows colder
as my fading embers smoulder
out, in listless days,
keep your hand upon my shoulder
through this final phase.

If, as life presents closed doorways,
locked beyond a key,
I'm diminished more and more ways;
if the faces I've known, always,
scrape from memory-
though my life presents closed doorways,
stand and wait with me.

Terence Culleton

My third volume of poetry, a collection of sonnets entitled *A Tree and Gone*, now out through Future Cycle Press, was recently included in the *New York Review of Books Small Press Releases* listing and is available at <https://amzn.to/3qDrRqN> or through my website: terenceculletonpoetry.com, where you can read my blogs, catch up on my breathlessly exciting life as a writer, and even purchase my other two books, *A Communion of Saints* and *Eternal Life*.

A Division of Labor

She gets up early, long before I do.
She goes downstairs and brews a morning cup.
She lets the dog out, lets it back in, too,
some moments later. By the time I'm up,
she's swept the porch and watered all the plants,
chopped up a latest batch of chard or leeks,
checked out the mousetrap, scanned the floor for ants,
and roused the kids up, fed them, wiped their cheeks.
She goes to work, I drive the kids to school
or to the state park if it's Saturday.
Oh, heavy lifting's my job, as a rule.
I split wood or I cart big rocks away,
hoping to do at least a moiety
of what she'd do herself if not for me.

Kevin Burris

Kevin Burris lives in southern Illinois. His work has appeared previously in *Poetry East*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, and many other publications. He has published two books of poems: *The Happiest Day of My Life* (FutureCycle Press, 2016) and *Inside the Clock* (Pine Row Press, 2023).

Speaking With Larkin

I could provide you with as many good reasons
as anyone else, I suppose, as to why I lived
where I lived, worked where I worked, made decisions
that hurt some people the way they did.
I could explain my many failures
or demonstrate success with a page of words,
the *fons et origo* of my struggle with the absurd
predicament in which I laboured.

We could stroll down the intersecting
library corridors of a life, open a plate glass swing door
to a private room of mine or yours
and spend a church-going minute inspecting
or listening unjudgementally while we each
lounged in club chairs, exploring our separate truths,
letting the tongues of gin and tonic speak
the ramblings of a momentary muse

but what good would that do,
if good is a thing that truly matters,
if we talk at all on this long train ride that scatters
each of us into our singular terminal gloom
where we will, at last, inevitably go
to await some promised transcendental intermingling
an enlightened view through a clear high window
both eternal and uninteresting.

A.Z. Foreman

A. Z. Foreman is a linguist, poet, short story author and/or translator pursuing a doctorate at the Ohio State University. His work has been featured in *The Threepenny Review*, *ANMLY*, *Rattle*, *the Los Angeles Review* and elsewhere including two people's tattoos but not yet the Starfleet Academy Quarterly or Tattooine Monthly. He writes from the edge of thought between sleep and waking. He wants to pet your dog.

Portrait of T. S. Eliot

Behold the banker with a poet's mask.
The clock strikes quarter-hours of nervous prayer.
He files the soul to fit a filing task
and measures April like a market share.
The city hums. A typist shuts her knees.
A clerk spills ink. A god begins to fade.
He draws the blinds across the centuries
and whispers *Shantih* over what he's made.
But honestly, how much High Modernism
can Modernity choke on? Prufrock's tie,
the sterile Wasteland thunder, Christ half-risen
in footnotes crying "please, just let me die" ...
This undertaker for a shattered tongue
heard the world's last word and interred it sung.

Daniel P Stokes

Daniel P. Stokes has published poetry widely in literary magazines in Ireland, Britain, the U.S.A, Canada and Asia, and has won several poetry prizes. He has written three stage plays which have been professionally produced in Dublin, London and at the Edinburgh Festival.

The Architect's Song

I never heeded the squeaks of the half-opened gate
nor the kitchen clock tchhing that you were late.
My pen, as it's wont, under pressure scratched on
till the unruptured quiet exploded she'd gone.

For weeks, no for months, I could hear the room moan
how she never liked it, her armchair intone
that it was made use of, while the two wardrobes whined
she'd stripped them and skulked off, herself on her mind.

But we worked on and planned for the day you'd come back,
A few flowers, a nice wine, what we had still intact.
Till by wind and by wire sure and short came the news
that you lightly gave 'way what I'd dreaded you'd lose.

Turned, waded through routine, and the walls still as stone
told nothing I'd do could undo what was done.
And the carpet hushed boards that were tempted to squeal
as I peered in at the hurts that I couldn't yet feel.

Now, I've taken the belt of a spade in the face
and know numbness allows but a brief breathing space
and to sop the surprise from the onslaught of pain
screened unexpurgations of dread on my brain.

In a year and a day I could name you aloud
with no claw in my gullet. I'd worn my want out.
And laying out plans for the rest of the year
saw how much we'd have done if you'd never been here.

Now the door's been repainted, the hall redesigned,
the garden reseeded, the curtains relined,
the furniture covered, refurbished or new
and the bell's been retuned to chime fuck off to you.

Carl Kinsky

Carl Kinsky is a sonneteer masquerading as a lawyer in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, a small and quirky town on the west bank of the Mississippi River. His work has appeared too few places and he's won too few prizes.

Imposter Syndrome

I suffer from imposter syndrome, sure
I'm not the person others think I am,
a character defect without a cure,
condemned to live a life I know's a scam.
Should I declare I'm just a total hoax,
attempt to clear the air with honesty?
A stupid plan. Too many puzzled folks
would think me guilty of false modesty,
ironic since I always toot my horn
to drown out voices shouting in my head,
doubts I've had seemingly since I was born
which I try to suppress but thrive instead.
Imposter syndrome's a bizarre malaise -
deserving criticism, seeking praise.

Aaron Zhu

Aaron Zhu is an undergraduate computer science student at the University of Maryland. He enjoys reading and writing poetry.

Mourning Song

I watched somebody's funeral today—
I can't remember whose, though I recall
the creaky pews and mildewed walls,
the cloying scents of camphor and decay,
the dust and lint rolled into little balls.

But as the mourners filed from the church,
somehow, I was reminded of the light
that creeps around a faded curtain-edge
and, perching softly on a window ledge,
conveys the close of yet another night.

Paul Burgess

Paul Burgess is the sole proprietor of a business in Lexington, Kentucky that offers ESL classes in addition to English, Japanese, and Spanish-language translation and interpretation services. He has recently contributed work to *Blue Unicorn*, *Light*, *The Orchards*, *Snakeskin*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and several other publications. <https://paulburgesswritingandlanguage.blog/>

Final Ride

“Construction first, and now this happens? Damn!”

I grumble waiting for the endless line
of tinted cars that huddle up and cram
the road like segments of a metal spine.
Our signals change although the way is blocked
to let the long procession slowly pass.
The wailing siren makes me feel I'm mocked
by cops not caring if I'm late for class.

But soon I find myself a bit ashamed
for swearing at the parents, kids, or wife
whose loved one's final ride has been reframed
as just a minor nuisance vexing life.
I wonder if my trip inside a hearse
will also be a pest that drivers curse.