

The Road Not Taken: a Journal of Formal Poetry Autumn, 2010

- For those of you wondering why my comments are so often about the weather, I would point out that we publish on a seasonal basis, our publication date being the nominal first of the new season (the 21st of December, March, June, and September, respectively, in order for each year). This means that my thoughts are centered on the season and its associated weather patterns.

Poetry is also very often about the weather or the seasons. The poem from which we get our name, Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" begins:

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,"

We had our first real rainstorm last night and as the song title goes, "Oh Lord, Didn't It Rain?". It's not been cold enough for the leaves to start turning yet, but temperatures will begin dropping soon, and the countryside will take on the bright colors of Autumn. My heating oil tank is topped up, some wood has been laid by, and I am looking forward to the pleasures of walks in the Autumn air, followed by steaming mugs of hot chocolate, hot mulled cider, or perhaps something a little stronger.

For some reason, Autumn always turns my thoughts to the works of Henry David Thoreau. I guess I just envision him at Walden Pond during the days of fall, with the leaves crimson and gold, though in fact, he lived at Walden from July 4th, 1845 through September 6th, 1847. When he wrote *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, he compressed the two years, two months, and two days, into only a single year. His descriptions of his wild surroundings, particularly of Walden and other ponds in the area, were mostly of Fall, Winter, and Spring.

In autumn, Thoreau discusses the countryside and writes down his observations about the geography of Walden Pond and its neighbors: Flint's Pond (or Sandy Pond), White Pond, and Goose Pond. Although Flint's is the largest, Thoreau's favorites are Walden and White ponds, which he says are lovelier than diamonds. (from: Wikipedia)

Although best known for his essays, and, of course, the book, *Walden*, Thoreau, a leading Transcendentalist, wrote extensive poetry, and we offer a small sample below for your Autumnal enjoyment.

- [Henry David Thoreau \(July 12, 1817 May 6, 1862\)](#)

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Henry David Thoreau was an American author, poet, abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor, historian, philosopher, and leading transcendentalist. He is best known for his book *Walden*, a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings, and his essay, *Civil Disobedience*, an argument for individual resistance to civil government in moral opposition to an unjust state.

He was born David Henry Thoreau in Concord, Massachusetts, to John Thoreau (a pencil maker) and Cynthia Dunbar. His paternal grandfather was of French origin and was born in Jersey. His maternal grandfather, Asa Dunbar, led Harvard's 1766 student "Butter Rebellion", the first recorded student protest in the Colonies. David Henry was named after a recently deceased paternal uncle, David Thoreau. He did not become "Henry David" until after college, although he never petitioned to make a legal name change. ... Thoreau's birthplace still exists on Virginia Road in Concord and is currently the focus of preservation efforts. The house is original, but it now stands about 100 yards away from its first site.

Thoreau's books, articles, essays, journals, and poetry total over 20 volumes. Among his lasting contributions were his writings on natural history and philosophy, where he anticipated the methods and findings of ecology and environmental history, two sources of modern day environmentalism. His literary style interweaves close natural observation, personal experience, pointed rhetoric, symbolic meanings, and historical lore; while displaying a poetic sensibility, philosophical austerity, and "Yankee" love of practical detail. He was also deeply interested in the idea of survival in the face of hostile elements, historical change, and natural decay; at the same time imploring one to abandon waste and illusion in order to discover life's true essential needs.

He was a lifelong abolitionist, delivering lectures that attacked the Fugitive Slave Law while praising the writings of Wendell Phillips and defending abolitionist John Brown. Thoreau's philosophy of civil disobedience influenced the political thoughts and actions of such later figures as Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Read more at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_David_Thoreau.

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Conscience
by Henry David Thoreau

Conscience is instinct bred in the house,
Feeling and Thinking propagate the sin
By an unnatural breeding in and in.
I say, Turn it out doors,
Into the moors.
I love a life whose plot is simple,
And does not thicken with every pimple,
A soul so sound no sickly conscience binds it,

That makes the universe no worse than 't finds it.
I love an earnest soul,
Whose mighty joy and sorrow
Are not drowned in a bowl,
And brought to life to-morrow;
That lives one tragedy,
And not seventy;
A conscience worth keeping;
Laughing not weeping;
A conscience wise and steady,
And forever ready;
Not changing with events,
Dealing in compliments;
A conscience exercised about
Large things, where one may doubt.
I love a soul not all of wood,
Predestinated to be good,
But true to the backbone
Unto itself alone,
And false to none;
Born to its own affairs,
Its own joys and own cares;
By whom the work which God begun
Is finished, and not undone;
Taken up where he left off,
Whether to worship or to scoff;
If not good, why then evil,
If not good god, good devil.
Goodness! you hypocrite, come out of that,
Live your life, do your work, then take your hat.
I have no patience towards
Such conscientious cowards.
Give me simple laboring folk,
Who love their work,
Whose virtue is song
To cheer God along.

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The Moon
by **Henry David Thoreau**

Time wears her not; she doth his chariot guide;
Mortality below her orb is placed.
—Raleigh

The full-orbed moon with unchanged ray
Mounts up the eastern sky,
Not doomed to these short nights for aye,
But shining steadily.

She does not wane, but my fortune,
Which her rays do not bless,
My wayward path declineth soon,
But she shines not the less.

And if she faintly glimmers here,
And paled is her light,
Yet always in her proper sphere
She's mistress of the night.

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Smoke
by **Henry David Thoreau**

Light-winged Smoke, Icarian bird,
Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight,
Lark without song, and messenger of dawn,
Circling above the hamlets as thy nest;
Or else, departing dream, and shadowy form
Of midnight vision, gathering up thy skirts;
By night star-veiling, and by day
Darkening the light and blotting out the sun;
Go thou my incense upward from this hearth,
And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame.

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Rumors from an Aeolian Harp
by **Henry David Thoreau**

There is a vale which none hath seen,
Where foot of man has never been,
Such as here lives with toil and strife,
An anxious and a sinful life.

There every virtue has its birth,
Ere it descends upon the earth,

And thither every deed returns,
Which in the generous bosom burns.

There love is warm, and youth is young,
And poetry is yet unsung.
For Virtue still adventures there,
And freely breathes her native air.

And ever, if you hearken well,
You still may hear its vesper bell,
And tread of high-souled men go by,
Their thoughts conversing with the sky.

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Low-Anchored Cloud [Mist]
by **Henry David Thoreau**

Low-anchored cloud,
Newfoundland air,
Fountain-head and source of rivers,
Dew-cloth, dream-drapery,
And napkin spread by fays;
Drifting meadow of the air,
Where bloom the daisied banks and violets,
And in whose fenny labyrinth
The bittern booms and heron wades;
Spirit of lakes and seas and rivers,
Bear only perfumes and the scent
Of healing herbs to just men's fields!

- Now, leaving Walden Pond behind us, let us proceed to enjoy our extensive selection of contributors in our Autumn edition of *The Road Not Taken: a Journal of Formal Poetry*.

- [Anissa Gage](#)

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Anissa Gage is an artist in the Oil City Arts Revitalization * Artist Relocation Program. She's third generation American, of Russian heritage. She was raised in the Midwest, outside Chicago. Her verse is often an accompaniment to her realist paintings

and drawings. A portrait in rhyme is written along with a fine art work as a total expression. She's also a third generation fine artist. She was born in 1956.

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The Silverstorm
by Anissa Gage

The forest's like a crystal chandelier!
The silverstorm that came beyond the snow
Has shed its beauty on the boughs, and clear
Resplendent diamonds make the woodland glow.

Now every twig, in elfin livery,
Is swagged with fairy-fire in the sun
Festooned with a smooth crystal witchery,
Each twig atwinkle, jeweled every one.

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This Lancelot
by Anissa Gage

Among the ladies who owe their ruin and or their death to Sir Lancelot are the fair Elaine, a suicide, the Lady of Shalott, who seems to have died of heartbreak and self inflicted exposure in a small skiff sent out from her private tower to deliver her body to Camelot, with her name wisely inscribed, lest everyone, and perhaps the gentleman in question, be unaware of who she may be (some men, yes too, some women, have very short memories when it comes to love) and of course the Lady Guenevere, the Queen of Camelot.

What skiff rides lightly in the shallows there?
It shines so brightly in the gloom! Hark where,
Serene, it glides upon the moonlit tides....

Another maiden in death's arms abides.
Methinks King Arthur's taken to his breast
A serpent. Sweet Elaine's just lain to rest —
Another victim of Sir high and handsome he
This Lancelot, who's lied and lain with she
This lady too, Shalott's, so beauteous.
Another one, and he so chivalrous!

Perchance this paramour, his soul a snake,
Has wound through mede and village, free to take
Whatever maiden's cozened with his lies.

Alas, this lady had the sweetest eyes,
Her skin so pale, her hair so luminous.

“Dear Lord this knight will be the death of us!”

- **Charles Bachman**

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Charles Bachman, a native of Iowa, is a Professor at Buffalo State College, where he has specialized in Native American Literature for more than twenty years. His Ph.D. in Comparative Literature is from Indiana University, and he made his way to Buffalo by way of Missouri, Nebraska, Texas, Germany, and Indiana, including three years in the U.S. Army. His active second career as an operatic baritone in western New York included twenty-five major roles, as well as numerous art song recitals, and being guest soloist with orchestras including the Syracuse Symphony and Buffalo Philharmonic. His poetry has appeared in *The Kansas Quarterly*, *Rooftop Poets*, *House Organ*, *Hazmat Review*, *Elm Leaves*, *Autumn Leaves*, *Nimrod*, and *The Carolina Quarterly*. He has published three books of poetry, *If Ariel Danced on the Moon* (2006), *The Strange Lives of Mr. Shakovo* (2008), and *A Marked Peculiarity* (2009). He is married to pianist/voice professor Nancy Townsend, with whom he is a gardening and hiking enthusiast.

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Villanelle from the City
by Charles Bachman

He never stopped to sense what was passing him by.
So caught up had he been in the daily grind
that once, when delayed by traffic he glanced at the sky;

it was a surprise: he'd always thought he was sly,
street-wise, alert to everything, not so blind
that he wouldn't fail to sense what was passing him by

if there was anything there to verify
the high opinion he had of his ranging mind:
so lucid he had no need to glance at the sky,

but there they were—some ragged cumuli
pushed so rapidly by the cold west wind,
he was forced to wonder if something had passed him by

because the deepening azure seemed so to vie
with the power of the clouds, he was unable to find
a way to absorb that thing that his glance at the sky

was revealing, it left him feeling cold and dry
for the first time ever, somehow left behind
in floundering anger at what may have passed him by,
at the cursed intrusion caused by that glance at the sky.

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Aunt Marie
by Charles Bachman

As elder of two daughters (by ten years)
among seven sons, and ultra-responsible,
she understood that the expected way
was marry a good man, it not being probable

apparently that her career would move
beyond teaching in a country school,
which after high school she had managed
for two years, the unspoken rule

for her time and gender not likely
to encourage college, let alone
the future that three brothers would pursue:
osteopaths treating muscle, bone,

advancing just as had their legend aunt
(their mother Jennie, second generation
Dutch, did always speak of her younger sister
Dr. Emma with a twinkle of admiration).

Marie, one of the brightest of the lot,
ever-curious, avid reader of books,
lively of mind and person, full of challenge:
I can well remember the startled looks

on the faces of adolescent boys who came
to "Trick or Treat" on Halloween, only
to be confronted by Aunt Marie insisting
it was "Trick FOR treat." Suddenly lonely,

on an unwelcome stage, with an audience
more scary than any goblins or ghouls
on the growly prowl this All-Hallows Eve,
they saved themselves from being complete fools

by doing something, often prompted by
Marie: a funny face, a snatch of song,
or when every other inner resource
failed, a definitely not over-long

nursery rhyme called up in desperation.
To behold a youth whose voice in midst of change
recited the whole of "Ba ba black sheep," was
for me as a young boy as edgily strange

as any trick or treating I had done.
Sitting there was the kind, good-natured man
she had decided to marry at nineteen,
Harold the farmer, whose talk seldom outran

his daily concerns with hogs, cows, sheep,
as Marie, glancing down at the calloused knuckle
he got fencing in young lambs that fall,
exchanged with this love of her life a heart-felt chuckle.

- [Peter Austin](#)

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Peter Austin lives with his wife and three daughters in Toronto, where he teaches English at Seneca College. His poetry has appeared in magazines/anthologies in the USA, Canada, the UK and several other countries. He also writes plays, and his musical adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows* has enjoyed four professional productions. His first collection of poems, *A Many-Splendored Thing*, was published in July 2010.

Over a hundred of his poems have been published, in magazines/anthologies in the USA (such as *Iambs & Trochees*, *The New Formalist*, *Contemporary Sonnet*, *The Lyric* and *Lucid Rhythms*), Canada, the UK and several other countries.

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Hobsons Choice
by Peter Austin

York is the original name of Toronto. Kingston is 150 miles away and, in the late 1700s, no road ran between the two. Hake is a freshwater fish more commonly called burbot.

York; and a fertile, stream-fed strip
Of earth, in between bush and lake,
Which, under prudent stewardship,
Grows wheat and barley, oats and rye,
Melon and rhubarb (called the pie
Plant by the womenfolk, who bake

The sourness out of it, somehow.)
Cattle, we raise, and sheep and swine,
Shoot waterfowl in yonder slough,
And when, in spring, the pigeons fly,
Knock half a hundred from the sky
With lead shot, tied to lengths of twine.

There's muskie, in the lake, and trout,
Salmon and sturgeon, alewife, hake....
In our canoe, we paddle out,
Bewitch them with the flick'ring light
Of birch bark flambeaux, late at night,
And spear them with a sharpened stake;

Yet one thing tempers this richesse:
We Yorkites - several hundred head -
Must mill our grain in Kingston! Yes,
It's Hobson's choice: brave wind and wave,
And whisp'rings of a wat'ry grave,
Or do without our daily bread....

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William Loam
by Peter Austin

The breech-loading shotgun was invented in the 1850s. At the time, Ashbridge's Bay — separated by a narrow sandy peninsula from Lake Ontario — was one of North America's most important wetlands.

Then the breech-loader came along
And, suddenly, a man could shoot
a gross of mallard, pintail, coot
In between dawn and evensong.

The market hunter, thus, was born.
One of the topmost, William Loam,
Made Ashbridge Marsh his second home.
He'd launch his rowboat, early morn,

before the mist was off the lake,
a picnic hamper at his feet,
And, rain or sunshine, cold or heat,
Return at nightfall with a take

So tightly packed into his boat,
Of muskrats, lying cheek by jowl
With every kind of waterfowl,
You wondered how it stayed afloat.

Yes, the breech-loader earned his keep,
Although, as far as turtles went,
It wasn't worth a wooden cent.
Picture him wading, five feet deep -

Buck naked — back and forth and back,
Fitfully diving, like a duck,
To prise one from the clingy muck
And dump it in his gunny sack....

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Flesh and Feather
by Peter Austin

Based on events that took place in Ashbridge's Bay, Toronto, at the end of the 19th century. Coween is the local name for a kind of duck.

a hundred years ago and more,
a gunner who was hunting,
Along a marsh's reedy shore,
Coween, and gull, and bunting,

Espied — what was it, gliding by
So strikingly viceregal? —
And stammered, spyglass to his eye,
“By God! — a golden eagle!”

To hell with shrike and yellowshanks
And meadowlark and snowbird;

From now, along these rushy banks,
He'd track and capture no bird

But this.... He marked its swerveless flight
Toward a stately willow
And, purposing to spend the night
With bracken for a pillow,

Assembled branches, built a hide,
Began, when day was dawning,
a lonely vigil, lidless eyed,
Beneath his leafy awning....

The sun was at the zenith, when
He saw its lordly coming.
Gun readied, in his greeny den,
His pulse a frenzied drumming,

He brought it headlong to the ground,
Hallooed and, breaking cover,
Upswept the brown, amorphous mound
As rash as any lover,

And felt its talons slash his throat....
They perished locked together,
An irresolvable compote
Of crimsoned flesh and feather.

- [Deborah H. Doolittle](#)

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Deborah H. Doolittle teaches at Coastal Carolina Community College in Jacksonville, NC. Her last two chapbooks, *No Crazy Notions* and *That Echo*, won the Mary Belle Campbell and Longleaf Press Awards, respectively. Other recent work may be seen in *Abramelin*, *Avocet*, *Cloudbank*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Karamu*, *The Stray Branch*, and *Timber Creek Review*. She is married, sharing living space with seven cats and a yard full of birds.

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Great Horned Owls
by **Deborah H. Doolittle**

The woods are nearly silent. No rustle
of leaves, no bombardment of acorns. No
cheerful chorus of peepers. In that hush
that falls over the world at dusk, we know
that what we hear is not for us. One owl
calls out; another responds: hoo hoo hoo
hoo ah! That same consonant and vowel.
We imitate the call and wait. On cue,
one winged shape flies quietly above
us, one black spot in the ambient dark
of twilight; then it is gone. We would have
called it back if we could. Instead, we mark
this moment in which we heard the owls call
out, and we responded, Who cooks for you-all?

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Henry David Thoreau and the Sunflower
by Deborah H. Doolittle

Who among us has not followed the sun
and hated the clouds that hid its shining face?
Who else but us can claim that we have traced
across the sky the very path it runs?

We've travelled much through Concord, you and I.
The widest fields are fenced and most contain
cattle or corn or the stock of kitchen
gardens. The farmers never wonder why

your seeds proliferate upon their grounds.
i know how the wind blows the smallest crumb
and how the bees and birds know where to come.
The two of us, like them, know no such bounds.

The hedgerows and stonewalls can't grow taller.
The sun is but a star and you're its flower.

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Robert Frost Chooses a Mountain Laurel
by Deborah H. Doolittle

O flower which shines something like
a star, I grant you must have sent
your sweet scent heavenward or lent
it to grace a more deserving type
of blossom that could not just rise
from any hardy shrub, but had
to attract bees somehow. Be glad
all your rivals must do likewise.
Some pink mystery surrounds you
just like a misted cloud at dawn.
And with the bleaching sun, white's drawn
across your taut surface like dew
sliding on the leaves each morning
and drying up by noon. Each time

i find you, it's like my first rhyme
when I was young, my life just forming.

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**This is the Hour of the Pantoum Geese
by Deborah H. Doolittle**

Now that I can sense them, crouching,
strutting stiff-legged and stiff-necked,
one heavy footed tread upon another,
they stalk the regions inside my head.

Strutting, stiff-legged and stiff-necked,
black-backed and white chin-strapped,
they stalk the regions inside my head
on the other side of the hill, out of sight.

Black-backed and white chin-strapped,
they gossip like scullery maids
on the other side of the hill, out of sight,
but not earshot, flourishing feather dusters.

Gossiping like scullery maids,
they pace the roundness of the hill,
not out of earshot. Flourishing feather dusters,
they launch forth each dawn,

retrace the very curvature of the hill
in formations that spell only one letter.

They launch forth each dawn and land
again at dusk upon some distant water.

In formations that spell only one letter,
their entire gaggle knows their home lies
again at dusk upon some distant water:
incessant like the tide, urgent as the weather.

Their entire gaggle knows their home direction
now that I can sense them, crouching,
incessant like the tide, urgent as the weather,
and as steep as this hill I climb,
One heavy booted tread after another.

- [Cornelia Snider Yarrington](#)

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Cornelia Snider Yarrington, PhD, has taught German at Indiana University (Indianapolis) and University of South Carolina (Aiken) as well as freshman and upper division writing at the University of Colorado. In addition to book reviews for *Bibliophilos*, she has published poems in *Able Muse*, *The Aureorean*, *Bibliophilos*, *The Classical Outlook*, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *The Lyric*, *Tucumcari Literary Review*, and *WestWard Quarterly*. Poetry recognitions include *The Lyric's* Quarterly Award (fall, 2003) and *WestWard Quarterly's* First Place (winter, 2005). Originally from North Carolina, she has lived in Colorado since 1974.

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Ford on the Oregon Trail
by Cornelia Snider Yarrington

In wind troubled weeds by an old river bow
Strayed from the Platte's main branch,
a trail that was old a century ago
Still winds through a desolate ranch.
Mummified today by dry desert air
In sun-parched, alkaline clay,
Its tracks tell of settlers fording there
Little more than yesterday.

At noon in the glare of the merciless sky
When our steps raise the earth in puffs,
And the breeze settles down and the mewling cry

Of the hawk is stilled on the bluffs
And the river's chatter growing dim
As fall gold fades to brown,
To the scuff of our jeans on a bleached broken limb
Comes the echoing whisk of a gown.

For here in sparse riparian grass
By a cottonwood's gnarled base,
We see as through pellucid glass
Time's passage in this place
As though it had paused a moment before
In this land of little rain,
Leaving behind a sly, teasing spoor:
These ruts of a lost wagon train.

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Who Killed Kubla Khan?
by Cornelia Snider Yarrington

Sophomore Postmortem on Lines by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The famous bard had launched into
his mystic tale of Xanadu.
Afloat on the raft of an opium dream
his pensive pen had poled downstream

through caverns measureless to man,
where Alph, the sacred river ran—
ran, one would think, for cover:
that wailing for a demon lover,

those dead voices from afar
on a sunless sea with talk of war
to Kubla Khan, whose zany whim
had settled on a site so grim

a skeleton would feel at home
to build a stately pleasure dome
and—should this setting not suffice
to warm heart cockles all in ice.

Oops! A stowaway passenger—
a lady who's strumming a Dulcimer

and singing of Mount Abora—
has run us aground in Abyssinia.

We're back and the dome now hangs in air
with flashing eyes and floating hair
and crying of beware in case
festive feet stampede the place.

But now, after lines on holy dread
and honey dew, the poem's dead.
Was the milk the tale's weird spinner drank
from paradise a trifle rank?

Did E. coli cramp his style that day?
Did someone take his bong away?
Or did the poet's popped pen
pause to write in ink again

more lines that thronged his brain galore
as sanity rapped on his door,
and Coleridge (being much too poor
to hire a butler to insure

his opiated poesy
flowed Alph-like to posterity)
go himself to greet the knock
and on the stoop find writer's block?

He wasn't killed that day we're told
but lived on, if not as old
as the ancient mariner of rime.
But "Kubla," far from in his prime,

mere toddler on his metric feet,
lies fragmented on a sheet
in his stately pleasure palace,
victim of the muse's malice.

- [Mark Arvid White](#)

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Mark Arvid White lives and works in Alaska, and has been writing poetry and stories for a number of years. His work has appeared in numerous publications such as Modern

Haiku, The Fib Review, Alien Skin, Permafrost, Wild Violet, and many others in the U.S. and abroad. He is the founder of the online poet's gathering place in Second Life, the Shin Tao Haiku Retreat, and is currently the Alaska region coordinator for the Haiku Society of America.

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The Place Where Puffins Fall
by Mark Arvid White

To jagged rock my fingers pressed,
Cliff face hard against my breast,
In exaltation reached the crest,
Could not find words,
Could not find language to express
This isle of birds.

A nest on every tuft of grass,
A bird in every nest held fast,
Bird heads tilting as I passed
Across the isle
To reach the windward side at last
And rest awhile.

Against the wind on bended knee
I peered over the edge to see
A puffin from the rock face free
And falling fast,
So fast his wing beats graced the sea
And o'er it passed.

And here where ocean meets the sky
The ceaseless wind, the seabird cries.
Shivering, I knelt and closed my eyes.
Almost, it seemed,
The Isle could fade and I would fly.
Almost, I dreamed.

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And the Snow Fell, 1944
by Mark Arvid White

To a patriot's song we danced,
Our father's children, step by step,

Beneath the cross, believing, lost,
That summer of our ignorance.

In cadence clear we felt our pride,
Banner by banner we piled it there
On those bright streets where Jewish boys
Dreamed dreams of Moses parting seas.

Our youth, as endless June, burned hot
With power in which we stood unswayed,
While shuttered shops hid folded hands
Still praying in vain for days of old.

Now winter has come, the air is cold,
No shutter opens to the light;
On streets of discipline we wait
Without a song, this martial few.

The snow, once unimagined, falls
Upon each wagon, dog, and hat;
A thick grey snow that does not melt,
So covering our legacy.

Not far away, tall chimneys weep
A torrent of fire, and smoke, and ash,
And little Jewish boys hold hands
To part the waters of the night.

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Chasing Rainbows
by Mark Arvid White

The old man's eyes were black as the dust
Which he coughed up every now and then;
He frequented the corner bar,
Confronting all the younger men:

“Don't go chasin' after rainbows!”
It was his only argument,
A plea for the next generation of miners
To keep going where their fathers went.

Fewer and fewer did so, though,
As many had died as left the town;

You couldn't convince folk anymore
That the best way up was always down.

Chasing rainbows. Dreams for some,
For most the chance to get out alive;
One poor excuse after another
To an old man pushing forty-five.

Families here used to worship together,
Nurtured in blood, chained to the earth;
Growing, marrying, working, living
With the smell of coal from the moment of birth.

The old man knew his place in life,
Holding on to what God had wrought;
Never chasing a single rainbow,
Forsaking the magic when one is caught.

- **John Thomas Clark**

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A retired NYC elementary school teacher, John Thomas Clark lives in Scarsdale, NY with his wife Ginny, his daughter Chris, his son John and Lex, his black Lab service dog. Currently, over 130 of his poems are appearing in OCEAN, The Recorder, Calliope, The Barefoot Muse, The Healing Muse, Byline, and some forty other journals. The Joy of Lex: Life with a Service Dog, his light-hearted romp of fifty-six poems and fifty-six accompanying color photographs recounting life with Lex, with an introduction written by best-selling author Dean Koontz and a back-cover testimonial by world-renowned poet Derek Mahon, was published on July 11, 2009. His 500-page novel of fifth-century Ireland entitled The Chronicles of Saint Patrick: The Captivity will be published next year.

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The Road Not Chosen
by John Thomas Clark

This ekphrastic poem has a resonance with Edvard's Munch's painting 'The Path of Death.'

Hunched as he walks, it's not from the cold
that he is bent but from time on time. The plod
through his two score year life slows. On each side

of his path, searched fields yield naught. Yon oak tree
stand, spare of leaf for years and sparse of limb,
split and aged and dried out, waits at the end
of his road for him. His oak legs will bend
when his heel cords grow tight to sap the vim
from his calves. Then the ham strings to each knee
will feel the flow of juice ebb. As the stride
of his step shrinks and the roots of each quad
dry up, the strength of his trunk can not hold
on this road, a road on which he's been taken,
a road which he has found to be god-forsaken.

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The Young And The Faithful
by John Thomas Clark

—for Rich Young

Jane looked quite proper in her old world flair—
her iron gray hair swept back, held in place
by a neat bun, balanced above the lace
collar of her high-necked dress. Asked to share

grand-niece Mary's first Thanksgiving Day fare,
at the head of the table, Jane led Grace
and, after all amen'd, a Young man's face,
still lowered, moved his lips in silent prayer.

This new in-law of Mary's, in a hunch
like that, an elbow resting on each knee
was, in this day and age, a joy to see—
someone so devout. She saw his thumbs crunch

on what must be his beads. In truth, his fingers flexed
out Thursday football prayers to his friends via text.

- **[Don Thackrey](#)**

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Don Thackrey spent his early years on farms and ranches in the Nebraska Sandhills
before the time of modern conveniences. He still considers the prairie as home, although

he now lives in Dexter, Michigan, where he is retired from the University of Michigan. One of his chief enjoyments during the retirement years is studying formal verse and trying to learn how to write it.

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Haying
by Don Thackrey

Mid-summer was the time to put up hay.
The hardest task for me: to find a crew
Of men who'd work a day for their day's pay.
With four such men, our family could make do.
Son John and his son mowed the ripened meadows,
Working long days except when grass was wet.
Three horse-drawn rakes dumped grass to make straight windrows.
My daughters manned those rakes, dawn to sunset.
We ran three sweeps, a horse on each sweep arm.
Our four matched Belgians pulled the lofty structure
Called slide stacker, with cage where stacks took form,
Distinctive domes of prairie architecture.
Yes, now we have a baler, but it cost
Us more than moneysomething precious lost.

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Music Evenings
by Don Thackrey

Pa brought one piece of elegance
To our barebones homestead,
A foot-pumped organ found by chance
In Yoder's auction shed.

Pa can't read notesbut can he play!
He feels tunes in his hands.
When he looks stern, the keys obey
As we doPa's commands.

With evening chores and supper done,
We sometimes sit a spell
To hear Pa play a benison
On one more day spent well.

His calloused hands with blackened nails
Can find a melody
Locked up in even simple scales
And let it scamper free.

Our pump-organ can stamp a dance
And also breathe a hymn.
We children learn if we should prance
Or keep our faces prim.

The seven of us, we love to sing
In parts "How Great Thou Art"
And other music chastening
Or cheering to the heart.

These music evenings have a grace
That promises deep rest
And cool serenity to face
What future God thinks best.

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You Made Your Choice
by Don Thackrey

You made your choice and set me free.
I'll learn to live with no regret
Concerning this absurdity
That you chose him and set me free.
I'll tidy up my heart's debris
And flick you like a cigarette.
You made your choice and set me free;
I'll learn to live with no regret.

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Almost Forgotten
by Don Thackrey

I have no time for tears;
I simply lay her by
She's been away for years.

We have our own careers.
I've seen her with a guy.
Why take the time for tears?

As soon as my mind clears,
I'll find a sweetiepie
To pass away the years.

I'll practice lovers' leers
And how to tell a lie.
This is no time for tears.

It's not what it appears.
Don't ever think that I
Can't pass away the years.

Go ahead and cock your ears;
You'll never hear me cry.
She's been away for years;
It's not yet time for tears.

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**A Melancholy Truth
by Don Thackrey**

A melancholy truth,
Despite romantic lies:
A girl's best friend is youth.

In his confession booth,
A priest dreams of her eyes
(A melancholy truth).

No matter how uncouth,
She'll make men's ardor rise
A girl's best friend is youth.

From Tampa to Duluth,
The young ones get the guys
O melancholy truth.

To Ann, to Beth, to Ruth,
The same old saw applies:
A girl's best friend is youth.

An old man, long of tooth
And short of partners, sighs:
“O melancholy truth,
A girl’s best friend is youth!”

- [Catherine McGuire](#)

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Besides appearing here previously, Catherine McGuire has been widely published over the past two decades, including *The Lyric*, *New Verse News*, *The Smoking Poet*, *Poetry In Motion*, and *Main Street Rag*. She has published a chapbook, *Joy Into Stillness: Seasons of Lake Quinault*, and is assistant director at CALYX Press.

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Swan Island
by Catherine McGuire

Despite its include "name.php";, the island’s “flocks” are freight cars rusting on their rails, or bins of grain just poured from ships with Sino-Russian plates.

The feathered natives fled when — sheared to plain — the marsh was choked with dirt and topped with screed of asphalt “grassland” for migrating cranes.

Near brackish water and bronze nests of weed, rust tin sheds and decrepit concrete mills. Not graceful, they once filled a pressing need:

the barest structure that industry could fill with eager workers, both used up now, tossed; the shops are emptied; huge metal arms are still.

progress has no place for nest birds, nor decayed historic bins where grain was stored.

- [James B. Nicola](#)

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Over a hundred of my poems have appeared (or are about to appear) in publications including *Tar River*, *The Lyric*, *Nimrod* and the *Texas, Red Cedar and Cider Press Reviews*. I won the Dana Literary Award for poetry and have just been nominated for the Rhysling award. A stage director by profession, my book *Playing the Audience* won a CHOICE Award.

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Mt. Airy Morning
by James B. Nicola

While stepping out one morning in Mt. Airy,
Maryland (I was visiting friends there)
I was struck by the rigid topiary
flanking the faces of houses everywhere,

the homes pulled by a subterranean lode
like little magnets shaken, spilled and drawn
at random all along the curving road
by some giant, the developer, now gone.

Some faced this way, some that, but all polite,
and quiet as a kitten in the night.
A kitten, though, will turn into a cat,
a creature of the night. Which might mean that

not everything behind the faces slept
all night. And now the eastern sky was red.
The redness in the wee hours must have crept
in like fatigue, a warning not of dread

but consequence. I clicked the radio
on, looked out, saw a bluebird and a bunny
hop blithely on the grass. They didn't know. . . .
Nor did the weather woman, saying "Sunny."