

# The Road Not Taken: a Journal of Formal Poetry Autumn, 2009

- **The Waning Year**

**Enjoying the company of good friends and good poetry.**

Nights are cooler, mornings brisk. The hint of fall is in the air. Soon we will all be admiring the bright reds, oranges, and yellows of autumn foliage, and hopefully this may inspire some to wax poetic.

There is something about fall that touches the heart of man, the realization that life is not endless, though there is a promise of more to come. It is a time of hope, a time of harvest, a time of thoughtfulness and thanksgiving. A time for long walks in the woods admiring fall colors and enjoying philosophical poetry.

**We have added a new feature to our website.** Our own Donald T Williams, Professor of English and Director of the School of Arts and Sciences at Toccoa Falls College, has written a Prosody, an explanation of the basics of poetry. Don begins his work: Many students today are never exposed to the elementary nuts and bolts of traditional poetry, especially when it comes to meter and verse form. To alleviate this growing ignorance, we offer the following summary of the basics. See the navigation button in the left column to check out this new feature.

Let us begin our poetry enjoyment with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, English Romantic poet and philosopher who, along with friend William Wordsworth, was one of the founders of the Romantic Movement in England and one of the Lake Poets. He is best known for his poems, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*, as well as his major prose work *Biographia Literaria*. His critical work, especially on Shakespeare, is highly influential. He coined many familiar words and phrases, including *the willing suspension of disbelief*. He was a major influence, via Emerson, on American transcendentalism.

- **[Samuel Taylor Coleridge \(1772-1834\)](#)**

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“I enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a very sensible, though at the same time, a very severe master...At the same time that we were studying the Greek Tragic Poets, he made us read Shakspeare and Milton as lessons: and they were the lessons too, which required most time and trouble to bring up, so as to escape his censure. I learnt from him, that Poetry, even that of the loftiest, and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its

own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes....“

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**Metrical Feet — A Lesson for a Boy  
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

Trochee trips from long to short;  
From long to long in solemn sort  
Slow Spondee stalks, strong foot!, yet ill able  
Ever to come up with Dactyl's trisyllable.  
Iambics march from short to long.  
With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng.  
One syllable long, with one short at each side,  
Amphibrachys hastes with a stately stride —  
First and last being long, middle short, Amphimacer  
Strikes his thundering hoofs like a proud high-bred Racer.

If Derwent be innocent, steady, and wise,  
And delight in the things of earth, water, and skies;  
Tender warmth at his heart, with these meters to show it,  
With sound sense in his brains, may make Derwent a poet —  
May crown him with fame, and must win him the love  
Of his father on earth and his father above.

My dear, dear child!  
Could you stand upon Skiddaw, you would not from its whole ridge  
See a man who so loves you as your fond S.T. Coleridge

- Now come with us on an autumn walk through the fields of poetry offered by this issue's contributors. I'm sure you will enjoy the trip, and at it's end the warming fire and hot chocolate will comfort all the more.

- [Robert J. Ward](#)

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I have lived my whole life in the Boston area. I graduated from Boston College with a BA in English and Romance Languages (specializing in French), and stayed at BC for two more years to obtain an MAT. After working three years in the insurance industry, I became an English teacher at North Reading High School (also occasionally teaching

French). The upcoming year will be my thirtieth and last at NRHS. I come from a fairly large family but have no family of my own.

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**In The Stadium**  
**by Robert J. Ward**

I think it was a morning just like this  
That you came here: no music, no array  
Of jocks here for a cause, but sun, the hiss  
Of leaves, and time to run. You ran away.

Perhaps because it's opposite the gate -  
The far turn, backed by trees, not traffic, stands,  
Or homes - I'd guess that here, this hour, that date  
You felt, fought on, then came to understand.

We were told, Dad, that you lay there awhile,  
Resting, to the caretaker's busy eye,  
Until he turned once more from his raked pile.  
He wondered, wandered over, and saw why.

Two lifetimes later, on a morning when  
We run for others' lives, you run again.

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**Thoughts of the Last Cistercian to Die at Tintern Abbey (1537)**  
**by Robert J. Ward**

The winding Wye reflects the hills and sky  
Only upon the stone walls of my cell.  
Two endings loom, mine and Tintern's. I tell  
Myself, "Envision both safe and strong. Try."

But we hear news: our brethren shut and shooed;  
The abbeys, God's, bestowed on men. This king  
Will take ours, too; then he'll try straightening  
Our river, make it reflect just his mood.

I pray to die before this can begin.  
Or will I linger? Will my brothers need  
To haul me with their clothing, books, and feed?  
Will burdensomeness be my final sin?

All my years here I've believed; now comes doubt.  
If God lets king be faith, I'll go without.

- **J. M. Ricks**

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J.M. Ricks is a retired psychologist living in Victoria, B.C., who now divides his time between coaching exercise for people over 50, playing in a clown band, fiddling, and writing poetry. In Canada he is best known for extensive appearances in both radio and television dealing with psychological topics. Having published a humorous book about psychology (Seal Paperbacks), one poem, and through broadcasting, many articles on psychology, he now turns his attention to the writing of poetry, which he enjoys and also regards as an extension of his Buddhist practice.

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**Solitude Soliloquy**  
**by J. M. Ricks**

“She’s perfect for me in so many ways,”  
said the aging widower of his same aged love.  
“We go to museums on cloudy days,  
and nights we see the latest ballets.  
We never miss any of the avant garde plays.  
Why, our souls fit together like a hand in a glove!”

“Our conversations are lively and bright,”  
said the white haired man of his new found love.  
“We discuss philosophy into the night.  
We assess politicians from the left and the right.  
We generally agree, then turn out the light,  
and go to bed grateful to heaven above.”

“After decades of marriage, I thought I was alone,”  
said the widower whose grief had generally passed.  
“But while my loss I did fully bemoan,  
I cherished new solitude, time and space on my own—  
in some ways I find I have actually grown,  
and opportunities and freedom have somehow amassed.”

“She’s perfect for me, a total delight,”  
sighed the widower of his new found mate.  
But sharing my house is just not quite right,

nor finding her at morning by dawn's early light,  
nor paying her way every day and each night.  
This bliss is putting me in a bad state."

Solitude's fine but loneliness is hard,"  
mused the man who was fit and aging quite well.  
"I can't just throw her into the yard,  
nor say, "Let's be friends" and keep up our guard  
while continuing to search for someone less marred,  
Or can I?" he mused. Oh bloody hell!"

Sometimes our boats plunge through canyons towards falls  
We see the white water, hear its distant dull roars.  
We strain to listen to the soul's vital calls,  
confused with the echoes of towering walls  
and so we sit staring and do nothing at all,  
until life forces a choice, and we snatch at our oars.

"She was perfect for me in so many ways,"  
Said he to the young woman as their plane started to land.  
"We went to museums on cloudy days,  
and nights we saw the latest ballets.  
We never missed any of the avant garde plays."  
And she smiled out the window as she squeezed his hand.

- [Katie Vagnino](#)

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Katie Vagnino is a 2nd year poetry student in the Creative Writing M.F.A. program at Emerson College in Boston. She has written theater, art, and food reviews for publications including *Time Out New York*, *Smithsonian's The Torch*, and *New York Magazine*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *nibble*, *nthWORD* and *The Raintown Review*. In the blogosphere, she writes a bi-weekly column for *The Sex Appeal* and posts regularly on her own blog, *The Vagnino Monologues*.

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**The Bridegroom**  
by **Katie Vagnino**

You laid there still and heard it all unfold  
In the tomb where your lover and I mourned.  
Did my death make your wanton blood run cold?

Beneath your balcony, his voice grew bold  
Comparing you to the sun in verse well-worn  
While I hid in shadows, heard it all unfold.

You promised to another what your father sold  
To me. He was your rose, and I, the thorn  
Praying for vengeance that night in the cold.

But your death no one could have foretold  
From your side, the nursemaid refused to be torn.  
You laid there still and heard it all unfold:

Hysterical fits, funereal plans, the old  
Priest giving the eulogy. I was forlorn;  
Cousin, your death made my blood run cold.

Yet in the monument, before the mold  
Of death could mar your face, I could have sworn  
I saw you smile. Did you hear it all unfold?

Juliet, you meant more than honor, more than gold.  
As your husband, I could have been reborn.  
You laid there still and heard it all unfold  
Did my death make your wanton blood run cold?

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**Ineffable**  
by **Katie Vagnino**

In English, we have words for everything:  
Names and tidy labels stain our lives,  
Brand each moment with a familiar ring.  
Beneath the letters, something else survives—  
An ancient rhythm, resonating deep  
That has no syllables, no metric scheme,  
Spoken by infants and those fast asleep.  
Show me in your Webster's what can redeem  
A tiny casket, how it feels to drown.  
Describe the imperfection of a kiss,  
Why many children are afraid of clowns,  
Why his bad jokes are what you miss.  
Defensively, we churn out words each day  
To mask the fear of what we cannot say.

- [Emrys Westacott](#)

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Emrys Westacott teaches philosophy at Alfred University in Western New York. His poems have appeared in *Measure, Light, Umbrella*, and *Contemporary Rhyme*. He has also published numerous articles and occasional pieces of fiction in various philosophical journals.

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**Gadflies**  
by Emrys Westacott

Socrates, snub-nosed, wall-eyed, paunchy, squat,  
stood before his accusers and confessed  
to being a gift from goda gadfly, a pest  
sent to save the city from moral rot  
by stinging it out of its torpor. He was not  
believed. The Athenians could not think themselves blessed  
to be bitten by philosophy. Unimpressed,  
they silenced their gadfly with a judicial swat.

Today, we keep our would-be pests inside  
a jar, contentedly droning away from the world.  
But should one ever get free and buzz about seeking  
to sink a sharp question into society's hide,  
then the nation yelps, newspapers are furled,  
and packs of good citizens clamber up flailing and shrieking.

- [Michael Fantina](#)

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Michael Fantina has had scores of poems published in the past 25 years both in North American and in the UK. He has appeared in *The Lyric, Candelabrum Poetry Magazine, The Penwood Review, Harlequin, The New Formalist, Contemporary Rhyme, The Book of Ebon, The Red Candle Treasury* and many others.

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**Spells on the Hillside**  
**by Michael Fantina**

On hillsides where the moon is  
An ark that witches ride,  
I mark cold comets streaming,  
With gnarled oaks sleeping, dreaming  
With magic that too soon is  
Swept up like some high tide,  
On hillsides where the moon is  
An ark that witches ride.

Here on the breeze perfume is  
Like scent from concubines  
Who in the darkness holding  
Weak kings there're shaping, molding,  
Each kiss there in the gloom is  
A spell that dulls, entwines.  
Here on the breeze perfume is  
Like scent from concubines.

Now I am led to valleys  
Long hidden from the sun,  
Where Sirens ply their potions,  
Their aloes and their lotions  
Where each slim Siren tallies  
Each man's oblivion.  
Now I am led to valleys  
Long hidden from the sun.

Each night these hillsides call me,  
When first stars rise at dusk,  
These hills I know are scheming,  
As these dark oaks are dreaming,  
I know they will enthrall me,  
These Sirens with their musk.  
Each night these hillsides call me,  
When first stars rise at dusk.

At night this world is riven  
By some magician's hand,  
My heart is thumping, seething,  
While I have trouble breathing,  
For so long have I striven  
To flee this haunted land.



At night this world is riven  
By some magician's hand.

Ah, would that I could break it,  
This spell that holds me fast!  
I would some lover woo me,  
Her love to pierce right through me,  
It's then that I might make it,  
Saved from this curse at last!  
Ah, would that I could break it,  
This spell that holds me fast!

On hillsides where the moon is  
An ark that witches ride,  
I mark cold comets streaming,  
With gnarled oaks sleeping, dreaming  
With magic that too soon is  
Swept up like some high tide,  
On hillsides where the moon is  
An ark that witches ride.

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**Winter Scarce Begun**  
by Michael Fantina

I mark the long pellucid river run  
Beyond the drumlins and the steep moraine,  
Across that vast and sparsely wooded plain,  
Where leaden skies block out the morning sun  
Above the autumn fields all turning dun,  
Those fields lie fallow, gone the waving grain,  
While all the signs are now portending rain,  
With summer gone and winter scarce begun.

How many mark this scene yet fail to find  
The slightest or the least uplifting trace,  
Such viewers seem to me as deaf and blind,  
For finding not the smallest God wrought grace  
In wind blown hills or rushing, savage streams,  
When all is real and wilder than our dreams.

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**The Return**  
**by Michael Fantina**

I have awakened from a dream,  
For just one hour as the kiss  
Of dusk falls on this house and stream,  
Where once I suffered, yet knew bliss.

For here against this window we,  
Would mark the stream and jagged hills,  
Above our lovers' huge oak tree  
In fallow fields that no hand tills.

Yet once the rye and corn grew here,  
Our children played throughout the house,  
At night we held each other near,  
Each child as quiet as a mouse.

They took you from us in the war,  
And you were gone for oh, so long,  
And then beneath a happy star  
You then came back one May at dawn.

The children married and they left,  
The two of us grew frail and old,  
Yet we were happy, not bereft,  
Our earthbound time was all pure gold.

One winter when the snow lay deep  
I stirred so early, said a prayer,  
And you, my love, you fell asleep,  
Still in our bed, you were not there.

I know I've come from bliss to see  
This place again, I know not why,  
So now back to eternity,  
I leave with but a tiny sigh.