

The Road Not Taken:

a Journal of Formal Poetry

Summer, 2009

- **New poets, new poems.**

We are changing to quarterly publication.

Due to the quantity of excellent poetry being submitted to us for publication, we have decided to changeover from a biannual format to a quarterly publication schedule. This will enable us to ensure a smoother flow of poetry from submission to publication, while keeping the volume of work to be done to a reasonable level.

Some of these poets have had to wait awhile. Instead of just being added to the Winter/Spring issue, they will see the light of day in our new Summer Quarter edition. Here we present you with several new poets of note.

First though, let's celebrate the arrival of Summer with a brief trip down that road not taken to enjoy a small sample of formal poetry from an earlier day and a different background, two poems by Scotland's favorite son poet, Robert Burns. I hope you'll na' gi' lost in'na Gaelic brogue.

- **[Robert Burns \(1759-1796\)](#)**

Robert Burns (25 January 1759 – 21 July 1796) (also known as Rabbie Burns, Scotland's favourite son, the Ploughman Poet, the Bard of Ayrshire and in Scotland as simply The Bard) was a Scottish poet and a lyricist. He is widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland, and is celebrated worldwide. He is the best known of the poets who have written in the Scots language, although much of his writing is also in English and a 'light' Scots dialect, accessible to an audience beyond Scotland. He also wrote in standard English, and in these pieces, his political or civil commentary is often at its most blunt. [[Wikipedia: Robert Burns](#)]

A Rose-Bud By My Early Walk - 1787 **by Robert Burns**

A Rose-bud by my early walk,
A down a corn-enclosed baw,
Sae gently bent its thorny stalk,
All on a dewy morning.
Ere twice the shades o' dawn are fled,
In a' its crimson glory spread,

And drooping rich the dewy head,
It scents the early morning.

Within the bush her covert nest
A little linnet fondly prest;
The dew sat chilly on her breast,
Sae early in the morning.
She soon shall see her tender brood,
The pride, the pleasure o' the wood,
Amang the fresh green leaves bedew'd,
Awake the early morning.

So thou, dear bird, young Jeany fair,
On trembling string or vocal air,
Shall sweetly pay the tender care
That tents thy early morning.
So thou, sweet Rose-bud, young and gay,
Shalt beauteous blaze upon the day,
And bless the parent's evening ray
That watch'd thy early morning.

Auld Lang Syne - 1788
by Robert Burns

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!

Chorus.-For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint stowp!
And surely I'll be mine!
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne.

We twa hae run about the braes,
And pou'd the gowans fine;
But we've wander'd mony a weary fit,
Sin' auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
Sin' auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne.

And there's a hand, my trusty fere!
And gie's a hand o' thine!
And we'll tak a right gude-willie waught,
For auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne.

- [Frank DeCanio](#)

We begin with a poem by Frank DeCanio, who describes himself:

I was born & bred in New Jersey, worked in New York. I love music of all kinds, from Bach to Dory Previn, Amy Beach to Amy Winehouse, World Music, Latin, opera. Shakespeare is my consolation, writing my hobby. I like Dylan Thomas, Keats, Wallace Stevens, Frost, Ginsburg, and Sylvia Plath as poets.

Demure Waitress
by Frank DeCanio

If spleen's an act to shield a coward's heart
I'm heedless of combative gals whose ranks
betray a regiment that's torn apart
and musters bluster to protect its flanks.
But what strong infrastructure does she boast
who posts no soldiers at her borders' gates
but plays with flair the diplomatic host.
She's dauntless as my armed invader baits
her to assess her readiness for war.
She needs no battery of ragtag men
to make me wonder if I should withdraw
the forces that I've mobilized to pen
her sensibilities. Her smile affirms
she's won unchallenged peace on favored terms.

- [Catherine McGuire](#)

I'm certain you will enjoy these two poems by Catherine McGuire:

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.

Islands in Fog
by Catherine McGuire

They emerge, morose precipitate
condensed of super-saturated mists.
A darker gray, an edge delineates;
cold smoke gives birth to granite precipice.
Wraithlike, the pseudo-scene erodes, unfurls —
unstable chimera re-sculpting coves,
erasing outcrops. Sudden hungry swirls
of jagged mist cleave dark and smoky groves.
To land on such mythos — treacherous whim,
trusting atmosphere to hold — requires
much courage or obsession with slim
chance. But internal landscapes can inspire
the same foolhardy verve, as I presume
to wrest lasting poems out of mist and fumes.

Now You See It...
by Catherine McGuire

The miser fears mortality; she feels
in the metal edges of a coin,
molecular betrayal; atoms reel
into quantum spaces that purloin
security. All that's solid fades
and time dissolves all substance; endless loss
like grains though hourglasses. She evades
her doom behind the barricades of dross.
Yes, wealth is power — not for what it buys;
providing comfort is its lesser role.
The “love of money” comes for its sheer size,
and hoarding bares the basis of her goal:
piling up enough of anything
provides a warning of Life's vanishing.

- [Doritt Carroll](#)

Lawyer and mother, Doritt Carroll shares an emotional poem with us:

Doritt Carroll is (unfortunately) a lawyer and (fortunately) the mother of two young daughters. She received her undergraduate and law degrees from Georgetown University and works for the Commerce Department while teaching drama on the side. Her poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Nimrod*, *Slipstream*, *Rattle*, *Plainsongs*, *Poetry Depth Quarterly*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Explorations*, *Negative Capability*, *Poet's Canvas*, *Illuminations*, and *The Baltimore Review*.

panic villanelle
by Doritt Carroll

the panic shakes me like an angry mother
or wind that beats on windows like a fist
the bone-pain is too deep for me to utter

it galls me that they call this thing a flutter
my heart exploding at my neck and wrist
the panic shakes me like an angry mother

it bangs against ribs, rattles in the gutter
of my innards, careening so hard that i list
the bone-pain is too deep for me to utter

dying's something for some faceless other
not someone that i've known, or been, or kissed
the panic shakes me like an angry mother

i've had enough of fevers, aches and other
things whose cures our medicine has missed
the bone-pain is too deep for me to utter

this chance was not enough, i want another
a first-class ticket for every boat i've missed
the panic shakes me like an angry mother
this bone-pain is too deep for me to utter

- **[Thomas Zimmerman](#)**

Thomas Zimmerman seems something of a philosopher:

I teach English, direct the Writing Center, and edit two college literary magazines at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, MI. Three of my poetry chapbooks are available at genremall.com.

Socrates Sandals
by **Thomas Zimmerman**

For Pantelis Melissinos

I bought a pair of sandals yesterday.
The maker was a poet, too. We swapped
each other's books; I told him where I'd stopped
along my mainland tour. I'd come to say

that poetry unites the world, but said
instead, "I've brought a gift." I realize now
the two are much the same, remember how
the sandalmaker's eyes lit up, the red

that warmed his tongue. I chose a simple pair
called "Socrates" and got the custom fit:
My naked foot was trapped, an arctic hare,

in leather strong enough to mangle it.
The maker laughed, then shaped his art: To wear
these is to walk the path of truth and wit.

Americans in Oxford
by **Thomas Zimmerman**

Our accents surely give away our roots.
In pub or hotel restaurant, our speech,
our clothes, our shoes, our skin, our builds must reach
the eyes of natives here, like hobnailed boots

identify a country rube in books
by Dickens, Hardy, Eliot. We love
the local ales, the cozy tavern nooks,
the parks, the cobblestones, the clouds above

that break to free the "English sun," a sun
our concierge suggested might not warm
our foreign bones. But these are cousins here:

we share a language and a culture dear
to us. Despite the world's sore ills that storm
and howl like Lear divided, we are one.

The Old Parsonage, September 11, 2008

- **Tiel Aisha Ansari**

I find these five poems from Tiel Aisha Ansari to be quite delightful:

Tiel Aisha Ansari is a Sufi, martial artist, and computer programmer living in the Pacific Northwest. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in several print and online venues including *Islamica Magazine*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *The Lyric*, *Seasons*, the journal of the Zaytuna Institute, and the *VoiceCatcher* anthology from Portland Women Writers. Her poetry has been featured on *Prairie Home Companion* and *MiPoRadio*. She is the author of the poetry collection *Knocking from Inside*, published by Ecstatic Exchange. You can visit her online at knockingfrominside.blogspot.com.

Chalk Talk
by Tiel Aisha Ansari

This morning, on the pavement shining wet
from recent rain, I saw a message scrawled
in hopscotch chalk. It warned me: "Don't forget."
And wheeling overhead, a seagull called
"Remember." Strange graffiti on the wall
of my perception; cryptic clues to best
my crossword-puzzle analytical
attempts; emerging words on palimpsest.

The morning traffic filled my neighborhood
with engine noise, the grinding clash of gears.
These chalk-talks from mysterious pamphleteers
weren't meant for me, I finally understood:
the sleeping world dreams of God, and writes
these notes on sidewalks in the rain-wet nights.

Petrified Wood
by Tiel Aisha Ansari

Harder than carbide-steel sawblades, this gem
was surely never wood. What tender green
could grow from stone-cold orange cambium?
Yet growth rings, seven fat and seven lean
recall both years of drought and years of plenty.
Quartz intrusions, jagged rifts of white,
fill gaps that thunder-stricken limbs left empty.
Fallen into montmorillonite,
a strange clay-change turned tree to stone. Medusa's
eyes were less effective— only meat

was hers to alter so. But clay reduces
everything to mineral at last,
a color-coded skeleton, complete
recording of a lost organic past.

Hobo's Door
by Tiel Aisha Ansari

There are no trains that run here. Even so
the town aligns itself to unseen tracks
and every night I hear the whistle blow.

Our sons and daughters go and don't come back.
No-one talks about it, but we know
the town aligns itself to unseen tracks.

As in the sunset's dreamy afterglow
as when the dawn draws light out of the black
no-one talks about it, but we know

there's something out there, something that we lack
a thing half-light can only halfway show
as when the dawn draws light out of the black.

At midnight, vision's full. At midnight, go.
The hobo's door is open, just a crack
a thing half-light can only halfway show,

a thing that day will hide behind this fact:
there are no trains that run here. Even so,
the hobo's door is open, just a crack
and every night, I hear the whistle blow.

Water Music
by Tiel Aisha Ansari

I lay awake and listened all night long
to water-music, out-of-season rain
a rooftop dance, a tin-pan gutter song
a liquid orchestra in every drain
a summer tune with autumnal refrain.
I heard it as a segue, blending themes
the last few notes of summer that remain
with fall's chorale of fast-refilling streams.

Now water-music softly fills my dreams
as rising rivers overflow their locks
and in my final hour of sleep, it seems—
as earth goes tilting towards the equinox—
in the new movement of this composition
I hear the guiding hand of the Musician.

Thunderbird Poem
by Tiel Aisha Ansari

My falcon hunches, hooded, on my wrist
and digs her talons, sharp as razors, in
to leather-guarded forearm, trembling fist.
She craves the air. I hold her penned within
the compass of my will. I'll let her fly
when time is right, for some raptorial lover
who will read her writing on the sky
and hear the predatory music of her.

I'll loose my falcon soaring from the page,
a live thing made of paper, ink and words.
I'll loose this poem from her printed cage
to join the company of thunderbirds
above the clouds, behind the lightning strike:
electric storm above an open mike.

- [Carol Smallwood](#)

Carol Smallwood steps in with a nature oriented poem:

Carol Smallwood's work has appeared in *English Journal*, *Poesia*, *Michigan Feminist Studies*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *The Detroit News*, and anthologies. *The Published Librarian: Successful Professional and Personal Writing* is forthcoming from the American Library Association. She's founded various humane societies.

Beetle Triolet
by Carol Smallwood

A spotted beetle was on the sill,
an imported ladybug wannabe
on its round back quite still.
A spotted beetle was on the sill
so righted it with a feather quill

so it could walk as freely as me.
A spotted beetle was on the sill
an imported ladybug wannabe.

Then, as if it was daring,
it returned on its spotted back again
four thread legs treading air.
Then, as if it was daring,
its wings wildly flaring
as if some farewell amen.
Then, as if it was daring
it returned on its spotted back again.

I sought an ending that seemed right,
wind to carry it out of sight—
it was meant to use its wings in flight.
I sought an ending that seemed right
so put it out to fly with all its might
in wind in wild delight.
I sought an ending that seemed right,
wind to carry it out of sight.

- [**Jene Erick Beardsley**](#)

Mr. Jene Erick Beardsley presents us with two eclectic pieces:

Jene Beardsley was born and raised in Mount Vernon, New York. He received his MA in English literature at the University of Illinois. He now lives in the suburbs of Philadelphia. His poems have appeared in *The Amherst Review*, *The Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Soujourners*, *Fulcrum*, *New Letters*, and *The Lullwater Review* among other magazines.

Pyramus And Thisbe
by Jene Erick Beardsley

You are surrounded by your mind—
Beyond, you have no view,
But something there approaches fair
And wants a bond with you.

What is your life or life itself
But answering her call
Through chinks appearing, disappearing
Somewhere in the wall?

Yet on your side of the duplex, hid
In vase or under shelf,
Devices tell the authorities
You're talking to yourself,

And the realtor from the brokerage,
That unimaginable mouse,
Will swear in court she sold to you
Only a single house.

A Legal Brief
by Jene Erick Beardsley

The laws that make our innocence sad,
That stand wherever love once stood,
Keep many men from being bad
And many men from being good.

- **[Kathryn Jacobs](#)**

Striving to deal with loss, Kathryn Jacobs creates beauty:

I am a poet, a medievalist, and tenured at Texas A & M – C. I took a doctorate from Harvard, published a volume of poetry called *Advice Column* last year, and have roughly 8 dozen poems at a wide variety of excellent journals, yours among them (also <="" em=""> etc). I have also written a scholarly book on medieval marriage customs and sixteen articles.

In Memory of Raymond
by Kathryn Jacobs

It isn't often that you meet someone
so loved he makes you want some, ten feet off.
And if you do, he's almost never young.
and if he is, he never smiles across
the intervening space as if he'd tramp
a thousand miles to meet you. Which is why
I'm certain now we must have made you up.
One day when we were lonely probably,
and needed somebody to make us feel
that someone out there noticed – you appeared:
the power of suggestion. Solid – real;
we kept it up for years. Did we get tired?
now “real” is all that humdrum in between:
commuting, working, shopping, sleep – routine.

Survivors' Guilt
by Kathryn Jacobs

You're still around. He isn't. In his teens
no less, while you're — what, fifty? So you know
there's no excuse for it — alive again
at sun-splash and in bird-song. And you throw

bread at those ducks of his, while that dead child
is shut up in the dark. And it would help
a lot if you could just un-stick the dial
Your mind keeps playing, like a long-range cell
With just one button working: punch in shirt,
or school-busses, or black-capped chickadee,
and maybe there's a sputter and a jerk,
and there it goes again: one memory,

one face, one station. Someone's broadcasting,
If you could clear the static. Try again?

Time to Smile
by Kathryn Jacobs

It all depends on knowing when to rant,
and when a smile in passing (no, don't stop)
is much the better move. Say that you want
to gripe about the plumber, or the crap
Your tenants left, or what you pay the vet:
no problem whatsoever. Or let's say
your boss is misbehaving – better yet,
your husband. By all means feel free: betray
his confidence, his politics, his taste
for Barbie dolls, you include "name.php"; it: just so long
as you can tell a joke and make it fast,
your friends will love it. But when things stay wrong
For months on end: when you're beyond denial
And anger doesn't help — it's time to smile.

Moving In
by Kathryn Jacobs

The light is creamier around this bed:
less gold, but also brighter. It's the blind:
the other room had curtains. Mockingbirds

outside the window right behind your head:
they're inside, almost. Photos to remind
you that you're not unloved – just gone. Awards
the children left behind. The sort of room
that never makes demands...they'd go unheard
now, anyway. Unpack your discs tonight;
you'll definitely need them. What a bird —
he's showing off this morning. And the light;
so soft and full of voices. Bits of home
misplaced here, but they're trying. You'll adjust.
A bit of life left, still. A little trust.

- [Debby Cooper](#)

Debby Cooper offers us a glimpse into the mind of the Master:

I'm originally from Massachusetts, a graduate of Mt. Holyoke College (if it matters), and have lived on the West Coast since 1966. Since 1980 my husband (nature photographer and author Ed Cooper) and I have lived in Sonoma, California (about 50 miles north of San Francisco, if you're not familiar with the area). My publication credits include a number of poetry periodicals, many (alas) now defunct: "*Candlelight Poetry Journal*," "*Capper's*," "*The Comstock Review*," "*The Galley Sail Review*," "*Lucidity*" (featured poet), "*Medicinal Purposes*," "*Mobius*", "*The Nisqually Delta Review*," "*Oatmeal & Poetry*," "*Poetry Digest*," "*Poet's Review*," "*Tucumcari Literary Review*." My work has also appeared in a number of anthologies.

Frost on Free Verse
by Debby Cooper

Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down. — Robert Frost

Who's winner of the game or set
Or match, with horizontal net?
(Does it follow as a corollary
That the reader is the adversary?)

Now Robert Frost, no rank beginner,
Of Pulitzers four times a winner,
Scaler of poetry's higher peaks—
He ought to know whereof he speaks.

Now, when you used to read a poet,
If he or she lacked skill, you'd KNOW it.
The rhyme or rhythm would be awful,
And convoluted would sentence structure be,
with word order quite unlawful.

The current mode: no rules at all,
And poetry's become a brawl
Of parts of speech all unrelated
That make me wish I were sedated.

Frost used blank verse; it doesn't yield
And let your message wander far afield.
Ten syllables (or so) will not allow
The vast confusion that is reigning now.

For much free verse has no parameters,
Circumferences, or diameters,
With meaning vanished in a pall
Of smoke from the verbal urban sprawl.

I don't think rhyme is necessary,
And weird word order I would bury,
But in throwing out bath water, maybe
Along with it we tossed the baby.

- [Don Thackrey](#)

Don Thackrey paints for us a picture of times past.

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.

Remembering Youth
by Don Thackrey

Summer corn more green than sense can hold,
A rich and loamy darkness in the ground.
Above, white swirls in blueness so profound
It wounds the heart, and here, two forms of gold:
Helen was one, and I the other one.
We hid in rows of corn and shed our clothes
In joy and naturalness that youth bestows
To sport like Greeks, be naked in the sun.

Bright vision—now just memory, a blade
That slices through an aging troubled mind.
I seek in looking back on years to blot
Out thoughts of how that bright sun turned to shade
And how for rapture we grew less inclined.
Ah me! I try to blot them but cannot.

- [Carol Frith](#)

A variety of subjects are grist for Carol Frith's poetry mill.

Carol Frith, editor of *Ekphrasis*, has a Special Mention in the *2003 Pushcart Anthology*. She has been published in *Measure*, *the Formalist*, *Lyric*, *MacGuffin*, *Seattle Review* and others. Her chaps are from *Finishing Line*, Bacchae Press, *Medicinal Purposes* and *Palanquin Press*. Her full-length collection is due out from David Robert Books next year.

Heroic Rispetto for Kathy's Birds
by Carol Frith

She makes an aviary of the air –
twenty juncos at her feeding tray.
Each dark-eyed songbird jockeys for its share
of millet seed and corn. She hears the way

the silence turns beneath each edgeless wing.
She knows that wintering is graceful-slow:
the way the birds drop millet in the snow,
descend, then rise, the air surrendering.

Bridal Shop: 10:00 P.M.
by Carol Frith

Tulle: a sash, perhaps, in crèpe de chine.
It's dark. The dresses float like butterflies,
a chapel train in ivory mousseline.
A quiet winter moon begins to rise.

It's dark; the dresses float like butterflies
above the unlit shop floor – so much silk.
A solemn winter moon begins to rise,
its light like bone, paler than skimmed milk

above the darkened shop floor. All this silk
and tulle, a gown with hand-stitched appliqué,
white as bone and paler than skimmed milk.
Mannequins as brides, décolletés

in tulle. A gown with hand-stitched appliqué,
its chapel train in ivory mousseline.
Each bride's a plastic ghost, décolletés
in tulle and innocent in crêpe de chine...

Dryden Roundelay at Advent
by Carol Frith

The same old story: lights and tinsel and
the discourse of a child. Time rewinds
itself. Advent, and a year of sand
collects. Invert the glass and no one minds.
We've spread ourselves too thin this year. The grand
old wreath of story shifts the light and blinds

itself. Advent and a year of sand
collects, inverts the glass and no one minds.
We sit in lamplight, pass the plot from hand
to hand, and alter it. Duration finds
we've spread ourselves too thin. This year the grand
old wreath of story shifts the light and blinds.

We sit in lamplight, pass the plot from hand
to hand. We're altered now. Duration finds
a way to mute the interchange with band
on band of light. The story lurches, grinds:
we've spread ourselves too thin this year. The grand
old wreath of story shifts. We open blinds^¾

a way to mute the interchange with band
on band of light. The story lurches, grinds
its plotline out again. "Oh, come," the bland
adestes sing, but, oh, we've sung all kinds.
We've spread ourselves too thin this year... Our grand
old wreath of story shifts the light and blinds.

- [John Manesis](#)

Two very interesting poems from the pen of retired physician John Manesis.

I am a retired physician and my poetry has appeared in over 30 publications, including *Wisconsin Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Measure*, *The Lyric*, and *The Charioteer*.

The Trembling Deep Within
by John Manesis

The instant that Apollo lunged at me
I felt a surge, a strange intensity,
as if reborn, and saw the laurel green
leaf through my fingertips onto the scene.
Overhead, my vestal arms held high
had changed to branches arching toward the sky.
The tree had taken form, from roots to crown,
anchored in the earth, secure, alone.

He pauses here, almost every day,
to shape another garland made of bay.
I heed the sorrow in my suitor's sighs
and understand the longing in his eyes.
When he lays his hand upon a limb,
does he feel the trembling deep within?

A Vision
by John Manesis

The villagers said he was a crazy one,
a codger compensated for his chores
not in silver coins but apple cores.
Meandering in the fields, his day was done
when he had planted all his well earned pay.
Then he laid his head upon the earth,
his bed, and unconcerned about his worth,
foresaw the harvest of another day.

Who remembers the parson's oratory,
the judge's proclamation, the banker's story?
Each spring, the blossoms, to everyone's delight,
adorn the countryside in pink and white.
And with the coming of the fruit, indeed
the children speak of Johnny Appleseed.

- **Eve Green**

We are very pleased indeed that this young lady has chosen us for her first poetry publication. We hope to receive more from her.

My include "name.php"; is Eve Green. I am fourteen years old and this is my first time to submit any of my poetry.

**The Moon Shines
by Eve Green**

Blow out the candles
Wave away the lights
Whisper to them all,
The moon shines tonight.

Quiet the lamplighter's task
Of walking through the streets
Tell the composer to write a moon song
Sheets and sheets and sheets

Serenade the moon with your flute
Begging more light of her
Send your notes through the mist
Setting each one to cover
The recurring light of the fireflies

Tell the maiden with her lamp
To vanish out of sight
Whisper to her, please,
"The moon shines tonight."