

The Road Not Taken: a Journal of Formal Poetry Spring, 2011

- Spring is almost here! The weather warms, the snow becomes rain, but with occasional relapses. The trees begin to blossom. Crocuses splash their colors across our vision. The world, at least our corner of it, is slowly being reborn.

We have a special surprise for all of our readers this issue. Our own Don Williams, co-publisher/co-editor of *The Road not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry*, has authored a volume of his own poems entitled [*Stars Through the Clouds*](#). In celebration of the event, we would like to share with you below a few poems from this collection.

Don is an aficionado of all things Arthurian, as am I, and a major portion of the volume, “Book III: Tales of Taliessin,” has as its subject the history of lovely Camelot and its tragic king. I am limited in how much of the volume I can include, so I will begin with only the Prelude to this section, but know that a small taste of honey leaves one with the strong desire for more.

An ordained minister in the Evangelical Free Church of America, Don is also a Christian, and much of his poetry reflects the Christian Gospel and his relationship with the triune Lord of Life. I next include “Resurrection” which tells of Christ’s death and the victory of His rising again in glory.

Called simply “Life,” the next sample of Don’s poetry is an ode to suffering, the pains we all feel just by being alive and human. Pain can be a blessing or a curse; it’s all up to the sufferer to transcend his pain, to turn lead into gold.

Based on his experiences teaching the Gospel in Africa, Don wrote “Village Evangelism” in a spare moment while reflecting on his calling there.

A final example, with a Shakespearian theme, summerises the lesson to be learned from the Bard’s excellent play, *The Tempest*, my personal favorite. And Shakespeare got it from Jesus, who said, “Who would save his life must lose it.”

- [Donald T. Williams](#)

Donald T. Williams holds a BA in English from Taylor University, an M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and a PhD in Medieval and Renaissance Literature from the University of Georgia. He is the editor of *The Lamp-Post of the Southern California C. S. Lewis Society* and the co-editor of *The Journal of Formal Poetry* and the author of six books: *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Broadman, 1994), *Inklings of Reality: Essays toward a Christian Philosophy of Letters* (Toccoa Falls College Press, 1996), *The Disciple’s Prayer* (Christian Publications, 1999), *Mere Humanity: G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien on the Human Condition* (Broadman, 2006), *Credo: An Exposition of the Nicene Creed* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), and *The Devil’s Dictionary of the Christian Faith* (Chalice Press, 2008). He has also contributed essays, poems, and reviews to such journals as *National Review*, *Christianity Today*, *Touchstone*, *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, *Philosophia Christi*, *Theology Today*, *Christianity and Literature*, *Christian Scholar’s Review*, *Mythlore*,

SEVEN, *Christian Educator's Journal*, *Preaching*, and *Christian Research Journal*. An ordained minister in the Evangelical Free Church of America with many years of pastoral experience, he has spent several summers in Africa training local pastors for Church Planting International, and currently serves as Professor of English and Director of the School of Arts and Sciences at Toccoa Falls College in the hills of NE Georgia. More material on the Inklings and other topics can be found at his website, doulomen.tripod.com. He blogs at www.journalofformalpoetry.com/blogs/don/.

Taliessin At Glastonbury (Spring, 2011)
by Donald T. Williams

Prelude to the section "Tales of Taliessin"
"The starveling hermit praying in this cell
Was once the mighty knight Sir Lancelot.
Pass quietly, but look upon him well.
The path from many towered Camelot
Has many twists and turns, but to this spot
It leads. Might you have the leisure for the tale?
Well, rest we then beneath yon spreading oak."
He sat and twitched aside his hooded cloak,
Resting a small harp upon his knee.
"I was King Arthur's minstrel," then he said,
"My job: to keep the Great Hall filled with glee.
And all those golden days, so quickly fled,
Passed in all their sorrow and glory
Before my hungry ears and watching eyes.
And so, if otherwise
You've heard in legend or allegory
Some version of the deeds that there were done,
Allow one who was party to the story
To speak. No greater honor e'er was won—
Or lost—in any land beneath the sun."
He bowed his head in memory of the King,
And then began to sing.

Resurrection (Spring, 2011)
by Donald T. Williams

When Christ was nailed to Calvary's central cross
And His bright blood flowed out, the sun was pale;
For in the Son's sunset the sun was lost,
And thus in it's mourning, morning's sun was veiled;
And thus in darkness shrouded, Phoebus sailed,
Until in glory bursting from His tomb,
And having conquered sin and death and hell,
The rising Son broke, shattered, split the gloom,

And at Son's rising sunlight was resumed.
And angels sang, for in that light the day
When sin and death would meet their final doom
Was set, ordained, as Holy Scriptures say.
And still the light shines forth, though sometimes dim,
That then was kindled in Jerusalem.

Life (Spring, 2011)

by Donald T. Williams

"Life is pain, Princess. Anyone who tells you different is selling something." —

Westley, the Farm Boy

It's not so much a matter of amounts,
When it comes to suffering, all men have their share.
They weep in taking their first breath of air
And rattle when their last one they renounce;
Between them, troubles wait their turn to pounce.
Adrift in apathy; driven to despair;
Insistently continue to care?
It's what they let it do to them that counts.
Without deep hurt, true beauty can't be born.
Those who deny this truth have been abused
By surface prettiness the eye can see.
The real thing's founded in the way we mourn;
In sorrow felt and bitterness refused,
In pain transmuted into poetry.

Village Evangelism (Spring, 2011)

by Donald T. Williams

"But I'm a teacher, not an evangelist."

"No, the muzungu must preach at the crusade. That way, everybody will come."

The stars shone on the hills of Africa
And on a sea of eyes that shone in wonder
At the generator-driven cinema,
Another sky of stars that spread out under
The temporary platform we'd erected.
They'd never seen a video before.
The younger ones had never once inspected
A white man. I can't say which held them more
Enthralled, the flashing images or my skin.
It was the skin that made them pay attention
When once the "Jesus" film was at an end,
I rose to preach. And now what new dimension,
Stranger than moving pictures on a screen
Or ghost-like skin in health by some strange art

Could possible be waiting to be seen?
Christ crucified and raised; the human heart
Made clean.

The Tempest (Spring, 2011)
by Donald T. Williams

The New American Shakespeare Tavern,
Atlanta, Georgia, 5/24/09

He who lacks the wit to tell
Caliban from Ariel
Or perhaps the will to know
Antonio from Prospero
Nonetheless must cast around,
Confined within the island's bounds,
While the music in the air
Leads him on, he knows not where.
Who would seek a deeper craft
Must break in twain his carven staff.
Who on higher truths would look
Must cast into the deep his book.
Who would free and fully live
Must his enemies forgive.
Thus across the salt-sea foam
Comes the exile sailing home.

- As you can see, Don is quite a poet. In this day of post-modernity, Donald T. Williams, and a few others stand against the tide, offering their words in love to a world that knows them not.

I trying to select only a few poems to print here, I had a great difficulty in making my choices. "Oh, here's another! And another. And another! How can I chose? There are so many!"

I had trouble even reading some because the tears they engendered blurred the little vision that age has deigned to let me keep.

I wish I could show you more, but we have many contributors to publish here as well. So on to their work we plunge, a hot cup of tea in hand and a loving Labrador retriever at our feet. But for those who would have a bit more, look into Don's Prosody (see the navigation menu on the left), where you will find a few other of his poems to enjoy. To order your own copy of [Stars Through the Clouds](#) click on the book thumbnail in the Recent Books column on the right.

- [Tamara Louise Simpson](#)

I am a great lover of poetry and the written word, and an active, zealous writer. I have won numerous local competitions including (multiple times) the Katherine Susannah Prichard Prize. I love reading and writing both traditional and experimental poetic genres.

Of The Disingenuous Reflection (Spring, 2011)
by Tamara Louise Simpson

The force of wind did 'pon my white brow blow,
Across the darkened attributes of night
And streaming thro' the shutters now wide thrown,
Stirring questioning thoughts of wrong and right
Like leaves in the still and unquiet air.
And catching glimpse my face in blackened pane
I search for dark within mine own eyes' stare,
And like the moon I watch it wax and wane.
Take an open look through the new window,
For the dark holds no contracts, and with him
No seeds of condemnation shall be sown;
My soul remains my own within this hymn.
 But look, there is no mirror 'pon the sill;
 This face a vision of the night's distil.

- [Leticia Austria](#)

Native Texan Leticia Austria is a former operatic coach, pianist, and would-be nun. Her childhood love of writing poetry was rekindled while in the monastery. She now cares for her parents in San Antonio and continues to hone her poetic craft. Her work has appeared in printed journals such as *The Lyric*, *The Eclectic Muse*, *The Storyteller*, *WestWard Quarterly*, and *Time of Singing*, and in the online journal *The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry*. She will be the featured poet in an upcoming issue of *Decanto*. Ms. Austria has also won top prizes from The Laurel Crown Foundation and Utmost Christian Poets.

The Pianist Recalls (Spring, 2011)
by Leticia Austria

I longed for silence; but instead, I found
that winter raindrops tapping on the ground
reminded me of fingers playing Bach.
And with the lissome beat of that courante,
I heard the voice of my old confidante
behind the door I had so firmly locked.

Optimism (Spring, 2011)
by Leticia Austria

Be captivated by the light,
the hidden colors in its whitest ray,
the gleanings gathered in the bright of day,
and take them with you into night.

Seek out the modest gleam of dusk,
the varied values of its subtle hues,
the finished golds behind the muddled blues,
and spread them out upon the dust.

- [C. S. Thompson](#)

Magazines and anthologies that have published my poetry include: *Underworlds*, *Mythic Circle*, *Artemis Journal*, *Pablo Lennis*, *Horn*, *Talebones* and *Beyond These Charted Realms*. I'm the author of the *Noctiviganti* dark fantasy novels, as well as several books on historical swordsmanship and martial culture from Paladin Press.

Lost World (Spring, 2011)

by C. S. Thompson

I sometimes think of how that fire of joy
Came coursing through me so I laughed out loud-
The music's heartbeat and the dancing crowd
Transformed at once to angels and destroyed,
So all of them- each lonely, dancing face-
Each predatory, lost or haunted soul
Stood then revealed as beautiful and whole
As gods and goddesses, without a trace
Of imperfection, wreathed in flowing light,
And me, in love with all of them. I cried,
Heartbroken and triumphant. And outside,
The world, unchanged, ground out its bloody night.
Of broken promises and needs unmet,
Of prayers unanswered and of tears unheard,
Of final hopes erased with just a word.
The years have passed, but I cannot forget
That moment when I woke up, and it seemed
As if I looked on heaven. Now, my life,
Like anyone's, is made of peace and strife
And empty days, and moments when my dreams
Seem almost touchable. That godlike bliss
Is now so far from me that I can grasp
Just hints of what it was. And I must ask-
Which life is real- that shining world, or this?

- [J. J. McKenna](#)

McKenna's poetry and creative nonfiction has appeared in more than 30 literary journals and mainstream magazines including *Ideals Magazine*, *Hawaii Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Louisville Review*, *Chaminade Literary Review*, *Concho River Review*, and *ELM*. His poem "At the Japanese Gardens" was nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

McKenna teaches contemporary literature and creative nonfiction at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Lotus (Spring, 2011)

by J. J. McKenna

Like a lotus you float
on the pool of my desire
serene, indifferent; by rote
you make this love transpire.
So distant, so marine,
the ripples of your pulse bell
a retreat so silent, so serene,
it hardly seems like will.
In cold and perfect pastel
I feel the placid petals of your love;
In truth, I ache to quell
the practiced ebb of your remove.
But, from love you build a harder shell
around love, the pearl of your will.

- [Anissa Gage](#)

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.

In Quiet Rapture (Spring, 2011)

by Anissa Gage

A poem inspired by Sandro Botticelli's "Venus"
In gentleness, the goddess that is love,
More delicate than dreams, and thrice as fair,
More tender than the plumage of a dove,
And lighter than a sigh, drifts through the air.
Her gorgeous golden wealth of silken hair
Enrobes her in chaste modesty. She seems
So pensive, vulnerable, naked, bare
Of all adornment save her beauty. Streams
Of shining fabric all caress the breeze in gleams,
And wish to kiss her softness. What does she
In such a quiet rapture muse upon?
Nymphs come to welcome her, who from the sea
Was born, more precious than a pearl. Here on
Her fluted shell she glides, so pale and wan —
The flaming sun has never burned her brown

Nor burnished her with rose. Here she is gone
Unto her island. She will soon step down
With flawless fragrant toes, and flowered fluttering gown.
No lovelier a Venus has been seen
Since ancient days, no finer artist born
Beyond a thousand years. The graves are green
On endless eras. Mark! This is the morn
Of art rebirthed in grandeur, to adorn
The visions in our souls. What does he
The artist Botticelli whisper? Torn
By wars and wisdom now, oh what can we
Divine of all this innocence so fine and free?
Alas, his life is swathed in mystery!
Alone of all the artists then alive
Da Vinci speaks of him, who then did see
The goddess virginal and pure. We strive
Through all our lives this vision to revive:
Love beauteous and chaste for whom men die
And women wantonly destroy their lives;
The sacred tenderness for which we sigh,
And search for all our lives to claim and glorify.
My poet friends, here! Hearken! She alights
Amongst those laurels we've to wreath in rhyme
And crown her praise with. Mourning maids and knights
Beseech her, infinitely tender, time
And endless times eternally: the crime
Of tears she ever has condemned: no harm
Can come to those whom she, sublime,
Has blessed: so has imagination's charm!
Oh how we all enchant her, arm in amorous arm!
The poets' painter, Botticelli, saw
What we own in our hearts: the magian bond
That love itself inspires in us like law—
This intimacy that we all respond
To, sensitivity so far beyond
What we've been raised for— O that powerful thing
Kind love considerate, that vagabond,
Of which, immortally, we poets sing,
Which brings us joyful lives, blessed with God's everything

Time (Spring, 2011)

by Anissa Gage

This poem was inspired by reading a translation of the works of the poet Horace. The selection was titled "The Shortness of Life" and was translated by Stephen Edward DeVere.

Time

Alas, alas, for time, whose gradual years
Steal youth and passion from us and leave tears,
Till finally even tears desert our eyes:
Bright love abandons us: we're proclaimed wise.
Then, unremembered, we, with whitened hair
Step silently upon the marble stair,
Descending all alone into the dark
For none to mourn and few to even mark.
And so we come at last unto the stream
That quenches all desire and every dream:
The vision of all fears: when we must ride
The dismal ship of ruin upon the tide.
Then all our valiant efforts to survive
Avail us not: to death we all arrive;
And some arrive in peace, and some in fear,
And some in pain that wracks each lengthening year.
The lord, the lady, hero, lover, slave —
All, all must glide upon this gloomy wave
To come at last unto the unknown shore
Where all is lost in time's unending roar.

- **[Paul Busson](#)**

Paul Bussan is the author of two books of poetry, *A Rage Of Intelligence*, and *On Freeing Myself From A Full Nelson Hold and other sonnets*. His poems have appeared in *Quadrant Magazine*, *The Yale Journal of Humanities in Medicine*, *Snakeskin*, *Trinacria*, *Lucid Rhythms*, and have been read by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer's Almanac*. Jennifer Reeser has praised his work for its "unassailable craftsmanship", and has said that Paul Bussan has "a voice that is like no one else's!"; and of his work X.J. Kennedy has stated "The finest of Paul Bussan's sonnets are in a class by themselves: pointed, incisive, richly musical and well wrought". He lives in Cheshire, CT. For more information go to www.psbpublishing.com.

"I read the latest issue of a rag..." (Spring, 2011)

by Paul Busson

I read the latest issue of a rag
And not one poem in it inspires me;
In fact each poem in it is such a drag
That reading through it only tires me
Instead of leaving me exhilarated
Which is the way that I should feel when I
Have read what other poets have created
And yet I don't. Instead I only sigh
And just resign myself to the plain truth
That there is very little now that's published,

Despite the fact it's prosody is smooth,
And that in terms of skill is quite accomplished,
That has some thing to say, a piece to speak,
That's more than exercises in technique.

- [Don Thackrey](#)

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.

Workaholic (Spring, 2011)

by Don Thackrey

I like to see the animals at play.
The horses roll and kick and toss their mane.
I pause to watch; I'd like to learn to play.
The kittens and the puppies romp. How they
And all the baby creatures entertain!
I like to see the animals at play.
I hear the donkey's lusty tenor bray;
A frisky hog squeals descant in refrain . . .
I pause to hear—I too would like to play.
Cows mount each other, practicing foreplay;
I watch and sport a grin I can't restrain.
I like to see the animals at play.
Some birds play fighter pilot, swoop, sashay,
And tail in fun another feathered plane.
I study them. I want to learn to play.
"All work and ..." Yes, I know what people say.
Of course I'm dull as dirt and work's my chain.
But when I see the animals at play,
I pause to watch. Can they teach me to play?

Threshing Ring (Spring, 2011)

by Don Thackrey

We neighbors got together, some fifteen
Of us, to share the cost of harvesting.
We jointly bought a fancy thresh machine
And formed ourselves into a threshing ring.
Work starts with neighbor Henry's dry shocked wheat.
I bring my hayrack, pitch a load of sheaves,
Then head my team toward Henry's farm, and greet
The crew there sharing work and courtesies.

Some men join me in feeding bundles in,
Mechanics watch the parts they fear will break,
Some shovel wheat into a tight grain-bin,
A child brings water, women cook and bake.
In a world gone wrong in almost everything,
A nice exception is the threshing ring.

A Trip Back East (Spring, 2011)

by Don Thackrey

I drove back east to Iowa one fall.
And since my folks had not for years left home,
I urged them: "Put the cattle, chores, and all
In hands of others and consent to come."
They made conditions: I must drive back-roads
To let them study livestock, crops, grassland.
No mountains, canyons, castles, pyramids
Could tempt them, just the traveling work they planned.
We started east. They used a practiced eye
To estimate the yields of corn and grain
And gauge the way a farmer's plowed fields lie
In proper folds to make best use of rain ...
Back home, Pa claimed the trip had met his hopes;
Each day he'd seen cows grazing on green slopes.

Coming to Truth (Spring, 2011)

by Don Thackrey

"Cross my heart and hope to die!"
The wayward child in me would say,
"This is the truth, it's not a lie."
I often made my mother cry
While swearing my mendacious way,
"Cross my heart and hope to die."
Young friends would loose a weary sigh
To hear again the same cliché,
"This is the truth, it's not a lie."
Years later, now repentant, I
Sense shadows creeping their sure way
Across my heart, and I must die.
Tell me before my last goodbye;
I need to know right now, today,
What is the truth and not a lie.
As Pilate knew, there's no reply,
Just silence causing bleak dismay.

At least a shadowed heart will die;
I know this truth is not a lie.

Lesson (Spring, 2011)

by Don Thackrey

How heavy is the lesson learned:
Nothing escapes a last goodbye.
A treasure lost, a lover spurned—
How heavy is the lesson learned.
The things for which the heart has yearned
Must fade or spoil or flee or die.
How heavy is the lesson learned:
Nothing escapes a last goodbye.

The Tide in Me (Spring, 2011)

by Don Thackrey

When tide comes in and then goes out to sea,
It calls me as I stand upon the shore.
I brace my stance against catastrophe
When tide comes in and then goes out to sea.
Why does the ebbing water beckon me
As if it meant to lead me through death's door
When tide comes in and then goes out to sea?
—It calls me as I stand upon the shore.

- [Joe Hart](#)

I first became aware of poetry when I read “The Highwayman.” I still remember pictures and feelings from it. My favorite poets are Keats and Brooke. If I’d written the thesis, I would have an MA in humanities.

Three Stanzas (Spring, 2011)

by Joe Hart

This music is the mother —
The one I never had —
It nurtures me in silence
With a deep and soothing sound

And friendly repetition —
Familiarity —
Warmth inciting drowsiness
Following with sleep —

Imaginative rhythms —
Clever words and notions
And music — perfect music
Blends with poetry —

- [Stephen Larson](#)

Stephen Larsen is a recent graduate of San Diego State University and is currently applying to graduate schools. Though he is a new writer, he has been writing songs nearly all his life, which has given him creative experience as well as a unique perspective on poetry. Drawn to poetry as a vehicle for expressing thoughts and telling stories he found unsuitable for song writing, he is especially attracted to the musicality of formal poetry.

Perfection was a Garden (Spring, 2011)

by Stephen Larson

Perfection was a Garden
Where once my frayed robes swept
Along the golden pathways
Of angels' staying Songs
Perfection was a Garden
Where sweetness was the air
That stopped within my nostrils
Like Knowledge always known
Perfection was a Garden
Where every stem was crowned
And robed in royal Purple
And none was less nor more
No stem strayed from her straight line
No hedge peered o'er its twin
No wind through branches whispered
To tempt the docile leaves
No songs were sung of heroes lost
Nor lines read wet with tears
I felt like one who'd feasted well
Until my flushed eyes looked—
To where her static rivers stood
To pools already full
Where nothing Struggled, Fell, or Strove,
And nothing was Beautiful

While the World Slept (Spring, 2011)

by Stephen Larson

While the world slept
We dashed through streets by starlight

And danced in moonlit spotlights,
Our shining feet splashed silver pools
While the world slept
We lay down on the dewed grass
With warm cheeks pressed close, gazing
At winking myriad diamond eyes
While the world slept
We flew in through the back yard
With faces flushed and smiling,
Our hot breaths fogged the crisp night air
While the world slept
We climbed high in the oak tree
Where bronze leaves glowed like beacons
That called us to the moon's soft face
Then, with eyes grown bright with wonder
And lashes brimming beaded dew,
We turned to where the moonlight gazed
A world that slept beneath our shoes
With one last look, and hands clutched tight,
We leapt onto the rooftop
And slid inside, past slumbering blinds,
With the front door wide, unlocked

- **Steven Shields**

Steven Shields is an emerging poet from the Atlanta area, author of "Daimonion Sonata" (Birch Brook, 2005). Twice-nominated for the Pushcart, his work has appeared in print and online in Measure, Umbrella, Deronda Review, Raintown Review, Main Street Rag, Penwood Review, Lyric, and Sleet. At present he teaches communication at Gainesville State College in Gainesville, GA and is associate editor for FutureCycle press. This poem placed honorable mention in the 2009 annual sonnet competition of the New England Shakespearean Festival.

**At Anne Hathaway's Cottage, Shottery, England (Spring, 2011)
by Steven Shields**

This sonnet won Honorable Mention in the 2009 Sonnet Competition of the New England Shakespearean Festival.

We stood outside, while schoolboys wandered past,
Bored stiff at thatch, at beams, at Anne and Will,
The future hopes of England unimpressed
Their elders found some value in it still.
Hard now to see the stairs, the narrow rooms
As anything but fossils, and the bench
Where Anne and Will rehearsed as faded plumes
And not a scene from Shakespeare's first romance,
Which left young Anne with child before they wed,
A fact divulged as something to reprove.

“It happened ALL the time,” the guide declared.
“The course of true love never did run smooth,” *
I said. “True then, true now. But they took their vows,
Perhaps the better lesson of this house.”

*From *A Midsummer Night's Dream* | Act I, Scene I

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