

# The Road Not Taken: a Journal of Formal Poetry

## Winter 2012

- **Winter Issue**

TO OUR READERS: as I'm sure you're all aware, it's about time for the spring issue. However, due to technical issues with this website, we're are going to have to rebuild entirely from the ground up. This will happen in May. With the new website will come the Spring issue. And it will happen at this URL, so please be patient with us.

Welcome to our Winter 2012 Issue. This is my first issue in the wake of the passing of Lee, but I will honor his tradition and begin with a tribute to a formal poet from the past of surpassing virtue. I would like to introduce our readers to a little-known Welsh poet, Huw Menai. "Huw", for those of you who are not Welsh speakers, is pronounced like the English "Hugh". "Menai" was his pen name. His real name was Huw Menai Williams. He was a Welsh miner through the early Twentieth Century. Despite this life lived underground, he produced a large volume of poetry, much of it on spare bits of mining company paper. At the rate he was producing, of course it wasn't all going to be stellar. But he did produce some real gems. His four volumes of poetry sold modestly through the mid fifties into the early sixties and then went out of print. I think my collection of his work is perhaps the only complete one in the United States. I will give you my favorite below.

- The Spider in the Doorway of my Working Place

The spider's wonder angle I take care  
Not to disturb, but reverently bend my head  
When passing through the doorway to earn my bread,  
A fellow-worker for a simple fare,  
There hanging like some steeple-jack in the air  
Midst cunning loops and joints, a marvel spread,  
And woe! the moth or fly encountered  
For Nature hath her many lives to spare;

And through the struggle all doth beauty shine,  
Each thread a rainbow glistening in the sun  
Which placed on lens of telescopes help on

The worlds to keep their order in the line;  
And what a blunderer is love divine  
If there's no meaning for the carrion!

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- And now to this issue's poets . . .

- **Michael O'Connor**

Michael was born in Hartford, CT and graduated from the University of Connecticut. After spending some time in Ireland and Prince Edward Island, he returned to New York City to pursue screenwriting. After several successes in the film industry as a writer and independent film producer, Michael turned his writing to non-fiction historical works on the Second World War, publishing articles for the Centre de Recherches et d'Informations sur la Bataille des Ardennes. He has maintained deep interest for poetry, being influenced by Robert Frost, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce. Michael was most recently published in the Irish Examiner. He currently resides in the Boston area.

- A Fallen Tree

In walking into an autumn wood as  
Under the rise of dawn, my morning eyes  
fell swift upon a slow shadow breaking  
Earth's soft curve, hulking in its demise .  
A tree fallen, setting on its greatest branch  
In deep sodden tracks of crusted snow,  
As an aged man taking rest on a fence  
From a midsummer sun's blistering glow.  
Creaking under intensity of the night  
And singed all about by bitter cold,  
Struggling as a wounded soldier on  
A muddled field of battle, less he fold  
And expire, becoming as close with  
Earth in life as is possible in death.  
Yet under the silver mist and lunar  
Blush of the night the last breath  
Of the mighty tree remains unbroken,  
Fixed as Cerberus to guard a world  
Below the frozen crust of the earth,  
Black shadow in its eyes impearled.  
Weather and time will ensure it succumbs  
To the warmth of natural decay,

And the remarkable spirit that holds the  
Tree up, will wither with occasion away.

- Strings of a Harp

Oh pluck me a string  
Sweet resonate sound,  
And play to the fancy  
Of those gathered round.  
Collect up our minds,  
From dark wistful knolls,  
Awaken our hearts,  
Sow peace in our souls.  
Caress golden clarsach  
And bow to enthuse,  
Call forth the heavens  
To bring up his muse  
From a body at rest  
Under the moss,  
In green rolling valleys  
Of Carrickmacross.

- **Ralph Dillon**

Ralph is a retired Pharmacist whose first career was as an English teacher and Blake scholar. His few publications include: a scholarly article, a poem, a newspaper column, a winning entry in a "Writer's Digest" contest, and a very clever letter to the editor.

### THREE TRIOLETS

- I. Triolet on a Snail

a snail is neat,  
its shell quite tidy.  
it has no feet,  
a snail is neat.  
it needs no seat,  
hardly a body.  
a snail is neat,  
its shell quite tidy.

- II. Triolet on my Infant Granddaughter

Tender beauty in her face,  
Please God, no harm befall.  
A tear would seem out of place,  
Tender beauty in her face.  
May all her life have grace,  
Never a care appall.  
Tender beauty in her face,  
Please God, no harm befall.

- III. A Goodnight Triolet

Sweet dreams,  
Sleep well.  
Moon beams,  
Sweet dreams.  
Failed schemes,  
Oh well,  
Sweet dreams,  
Sleep well.

- Regina Brault

Regina Murray Brault's poetry has appeared in numerous publications such as: *Bloodroot Literary Magazine, Poet Magazine, The Hartford Courant, Cradle Songs -- An Anthology on Motherhood, The Mennonite, The Great American Poetry Show, Ancient Paths, Karamu, Grandmother Earth, Earth's Daughters, Inkwell Magazine, Mamas and Papas Parenthood Anthology, Midwest Poetry Review and Random House Anthology: Mothers and Daughters* among others.

- Removing The Tatoo

Your frayed sleeve brings to mind the blacksmith who  
removes his apron but cannot remove  
its stenciled shape etched like a fine tattoo  
upon his chest. What do you hope to prove  
by ripping off your used heart's public sign?  
In haste you leave the broken blind-stitched thread  
around a dark and empty valentine.  
Deception says, It never even bled.  
One spurned plays masquerade before the glass,  
denies the evidence he's doomed to wear,

pretends the tattoos of his life will pass  
and when they don't, pretends he doesn't care.  
But, unmasked hearts lay heavy in the weave  
when worn excessively upon the sleeve.

- The Promise of Butterflies

When winter spins, its silvery cocoon  
and resurrection's promises seem lost  
somewhere beneath a stretch of crystal dune,  
my fingers reach to etch a poem in frost.  
From deep inside, a fluttering new wing  
is fanning sparks of inspiration's glow.  
I close my eyes to wish the warmth of spring  
but butterflies lie silent in the snow  
like empty pages on my writing desk.  
I trace small wings across a barren page  
and as I shape and fold, a sculpturesque  
creation forms inside my finger-cage.  
The brush of wings unfolding signifies  
my poem of origami butterflies.

- From Hand to Hand

From Africa, on south, the weaver's skill  
was dragged; a steerage-chained and chattered thing.  
The strong black hands that bound the warp and twill  
would winnow rice and pass remembering.

The scent of sweet-grass rises from a field  
where fragile blades bend to the weaver's feet.  
A freeborn woman gathers golden yield,  
and breaths the scent of baskets; bittersweet.  
She twists the sweet-grass with a raven hand  
then binds it with a split palmetto frond,  
surveys the wood-ribs of her roadside-stand  
where fanner-baskets ply the ancient bond.

From hand to hand, sweet-grasses twist and twine  
to weave the baskets, warped with man's design.

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- Et Tu, Rorschach

Two grackles, mesmerized, brood back to back  
beneath the bend of April's sap-snow bough.  
They leave no trace of entrance, not one track  
of wing-tip nor drawn pinion's tapered plow,  
but wait for me to conjure up, then find  
their huddled blackness. Then perhaps, I'll pleat,  
or crimp, or smear, or leave them undefined  
and wrap the white around as winding sheet.

I crease the folds, the grackles take to flight  
on ink stained wings that blot the April sun.  
They fly as ashes, black to burning white  
and phoenix-like, escape oblivion.  
Two grackles are reduced to one small dot  
that falls to bough, to bend, to card, to blot.

- The Abdication

Great Uncle Edward makes a handsome corpse;  
white-skinned against whit-satined overlay  
that lines his box and cushions ingrained warps.  
He would have liked his eyebrows raised that way,  
Edwardian superiority.  
So like him to bequeath the family jewels,  
these ancient chains and chokers, unto me  
along with stick-pins honed by ridicules.

All through my life I've fingered crusted gems  
and felt their tarnish taint my Anglo throat.  
I've pulled paste diamonds from the diadems.

. . . I leave to you . . . Great Uncle Edward wrote.

Their weight is lead, so I must be discreet  
as I entomb these jewels beneath his feet.

## John Grey

Has been published recently in the Talking River, South Carolina Review and *Karamu* with work upcoming in *Prism International*, *Poem* and the *Evansville Review*

- Winter's End

As March winds sear through field and town,  
Snow cedes itself to gravity,  
Collapses from both roof and tree,  
Sheds all of its white heavy gown,  
Ice daggers snap and tumble down,  
And with each rise of a degree,  
The winter's grip releases me  
A little more, resigns its crown.

Another winter at the end,  
Is but a shadow of its worst,  
Mother outlook on the mend  
That once thought itself doomed, accursed,  
This stage of life, I see the trend,  
Depressions mount, depressions burst.

## 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. She's been doing poetry readings in the Oil City area, and has her art studio in the Transit Building in Oil City. She has poetry published in the October edition of *Snakeskin Review* and the Autumn 2010, Spring and Summer 2011

### Song for the Lost Bard

Your love is like a sable swan that flies  
In silence through the hours of midnight pain,  
And just the moon, in her mysterious reign,  
At times will bless the wings that she spies;  
The zephyr, with its fragrance, softly sighs  
In sweet caresses redolent of rain;

Our swan flies all alone. The soft complain  
Of singing night things raise their lonely cries.

Alas! For love and all it's courtliness  
Has languished in these years of change and chance!  
The bard that lifts a beauteous song of dreams  
Is left unheard, without the hearts to bless  
These songs, eternal songs, of old romance,  
And sings alone in tears in moonlight's beams.

### Aquamarine

The color of the sea is what it means,  
A hue of such sweet beauty it can sweep  
Away all pain: a soul will cease to weep  
Who's bathed in this: a bright blue cooled with greens.  
These are the waves that all of those with means  
Have funds to wade in: those where we, asleep  
In dreams, delirious, delightful, deep,  
All dive into -- light turquoise -- kings and queens!

As gorgeous as the Gods' Aegean waves,  
All aquamarines are Poseidon's jewels.  
Who owns one has a gift from mermaids: cure  
For grief and gossip, so serene it saves  
All mariners from harm; blue like the pools  
Of Aphrodite's eyes, with clear allure.

### All the Colors Blue

Hypnotic, soothing, all the colors blue  
Enchant me with their depth and with their peace.  
I've known blue waters where all horrors cease  
And death itself becomes a thing more true  
Than all the havoc I've endured. This hue  
Surrounds and heals, entrances me. Release  
Me to this color Father God! The fleece  
Of clouds has no serenity. The dew

Upon the lawn at dawn is none so sweet.



O turquoise--lapis lazuli--sapphire--  
This round blue opal of the planet earth--  
Spring bluebells--squills--delphiniums that greet  
Our eyes with glory--and the small blue fire--  
And those hues all cats eyes are at their birth!

- Indian Summer

As if in sorrow for these months of storms,  
Her strewing leaves and boughs upon the ground,  
Her burning languor with those sighs profound,  
Our Summer finally leaves. Mosquito swarms  
Have vanished. All the trees rank ravaged forms  
Are softened as the woods become unbound.  
Our goldenrod is with soft amber crowned  
As Northern air the torrid land transforms.

As if in gladness from the fresh'ning breeze  
The forest's filled with brimming songs of birds  
As flocks fly Southward from the cooling North.  
Now crimson sunset's roosting in the trees  
With flaming plumes too beautiful for words  
As Autumn calls her harvest grandeur forth.

Thanksgiving

The bounty of the earth has graced us all--  
The laughing vintage of the summer vines  
Has mellowed into jeweled autumn wines;  
The acorns and the orchard nuts enthrall  
The squirrels and all pelt down in each squall.  
O now's the hour that the Lord designs  
For thankfulness, when every family dines  
With fine abundance on the gifts of fall.

These are the blessings in a land of peace:  
Where fruitfulness is shared in hours of joy,  
When all the patient tending of the soil  
Results in all this plenty, though the geese

Are fleeing winter in the clouds, we toy  
With jests and have warm respite from our toil.

- **Michael Fraley**

Michael Fraley has had poems published recently in *Jones Av.*, *Pegasus*, and *Light*. M.A.F. Press published his chapbook *First-Born*. Tamafyhr Mountain Press published his e-chapbook *Howler Monkey Serenade*. Michael's poems have appeared internationally in five countries. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from the San Francisco Art Institute, and a Master of Arts in Writing from the University of San Francisco. Michael lives with my wife and daughter, and four cats, within walking distance of the San Francisco Zoo. Besides reading, he also enjoys photography and vintage cameras.

- A Choice to Be Made

Let down the walls of your estate  
    And walk among the wild,  
Where children learn both love and hate  
    And nature is not mild.

Too long have you been gazing far  
    And nothing reconciled,  
Transfixed upon a bloodless star--  
    And nature is not mild.

How can you turn your back on me  
    As if I were defiled,  
When my bright songs could set you free?  
    And nature is not mild.

The one you worship in my stead  
    Considers you a child.  
I offer you my hand and bed;  
    Your nature is not mild.

- Summer Swallows

I take great satisfaction in the flight  
Of summer swallows, swerving as they go,  
Rising and falling like a string-bound kite,  
Ascending to the clouds then skimming low

To kiss the lake where pleasure-boaters row.  
Like thoughts that will not settle, ranging free,  
They are constant in their inconstancy.

When beauty is made visible to eye  
It runs the risk inherent in all things  
Whose form we cherish, knowing they will die.  
And so the swallows touch me with their wings  
That are not merely ordinary wings,  
But serve to lift my circumscribed plain sight  
While also lifting swallows in their flight.

- **George Good**

The Gunfighter

His draw was quick and deadly was his eye.  
Spurs echoing on a deserted street,  
he walked tall till a bullet made him lie  
down in the dust, where fate and hubris meet.

The reputation he had coveted  
pursued him in saloons night after night.  
There always seemed to be some cocky kid  
with whiskey courage spoiling for a fight.

One sobered up enough to get the drop  
on him and rode off as the fastest gun.  
While Boot Hill adds a legend to its crop,  
the paths of glory lead his killer on.

- Friday's Advent

A man with not another soul  
to keep him company  
in essence is an animal  
philosophers agree.

God and a parrot, Poll by name,  
are my two sounding boards.  
One's silent and the other's game

is echoing my words.

Poor Robin Crusoe are the groans  
I pray the Lord to heed;  
a wretch who worships stocks and stones  
would even tend my need.

Yet on discovering one day  
a footprint in the sand,  
my mind and heart could not gainsay  
the trembling of my hand.

For what it is we most desire  
through solitude's despair  
will in reality inspire  
feelings of dread and terror.

Was Satan here or some brute blown  
by crosswinds to this ground,  
or could the shadow be my own  
whose token I had found?

With caution from concealment  
I went out to explore  
and ended measuring my print  
against the one on shore.

I might take courage if the mark  
proved smaller next to mine;  
its greater size, though, seemed so stark  
the source must be malign.

I fortified my naked cave  
with weapons and a wall--  
no Englishman will be a slave  
who's handy with a tool.

As years passed by these savages  
would leave much more than tracks;  
unseen, I viewed the ravages  
of their uncivil acts.

A dark companion haunts my dreams,  
whose true significance  
will be revealed when Master names  
that lowly eminence.

- **Roy Mash**

Roy Mash is an electronics technician living in Marin County, California. His poems have appeared in: *AGNI Online*, *Atlanta Review*, *Barrow Street*, *The Evansville Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, and *RHINO*, among others.

- Love of Slapstick

Come, spritz of seltzer in the face,  
implacable banana peel.  
Come, brickbats, pratfalls, amazing grace-  
lessness, the yowl of the schlemiel.

Away with wit, you clever flights  
of phrase it takes a Ph.D.  
to explicate. One good food fight's  
worth fifty Oscar Wildes to me.

A can of paint on Keaton's head,  
another on his foot: what bliss,  
God bless the doofuses who spread  
the net he manages to miss.

Come, whoopee cushions, slamming doors.  
Come, bops and jabs and spit-takes sprayed  
on brides by grooms with falling drawers,  
O heaven of the seventh grade!

No sadism this, no black desire,  
just Larry, Moe, and Curly's woes,  
the thousand gouges that conspire  
to make the milk come out my nose.

Come, O pie-faced end: my feet glued  
to the floor, my tie caught in the gears,  
the audience in stitches who

can't help but laugh themselves to tears

- Backache

1.

Waltzing in the wonder of why we're here.  
What with the ice pack, the pillow under  
my knees, the bathroom door like Everest  
beckoning—far, near, far, near—the lyric  
recurs consolingly. On the TV  
of memory Fred is meandering  
across the ceiling, and I am Ginger  
full of grace, twirling backwards and in heels.

Though one budge and it's like a tennis ball  
has been driven into a chain link fence,  
a lumbar bulge that focuses my mind  
(as the saying goes) wonderfully. Why  
are we here? What keeps these voluptuous  
W's dancing in the dark of my head?

2.

These days it no longer takes a couch lugged  
upstairs, bullied through a doorway, nor sacks  
of dry cement, nor an overhead smash,  
nor Sundays sold into the servitude  
of weeding. These days the teensiest twist  
of the neck is enough. Seeing someone  
one thought one knew, but didn't. The certain  
belief in a non-existent stair. Once

I was actually tearing off a bit  
of scotch tape (I swear!) when the voodoo stuck  
its white surprise into the small of me,  
and the universe collapsed to the head  
of an angelic pin, and the pain spilled  
out, and the floor became my only friend.

3.

That there was once a time I was able  
to put on my own socks, it hurts to think.  
Now every movement is a punishment.

Surely, I think, this must be how it is  
with the gods, plastered to their mattresses  
of hard cloud, ambulatory no more,  
pumped up on anti-inflammatories,  
so unsupple, so helpless to help us.

The ceiling, now Fredless, has relinquished  
its fascination to the window drips,  
which tango down the ballroom of the pane  
sexily, their twining thighs streamed beneath  
a mirrored globe. Look: there are two that bend  
to kiss 'til the tune ends. And it soon ends.

## **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.

### Trip to Town

Some Saturdays, the family goes to town  
To sell our garden things and buy supplies.  
When we're all in, the truck plumb loaded down,  
We children have fresh sparkle in our eyes.  
We do our business first, then drive to Main  
And park to watch the people walking by.  
We older boys lope down to see the train;  
The girls flit round as tireless as houseflies;  
There's dairy ice-cream cones for everyone  
And browsing in the Red Front clothing store.  
By five, we're ready for more urban fun,  
A dozen areas we should explore,  
But Pa says we must head for home, it's late,  
There's work to do, and evening chores can't wait.

### Prodigal Son

Pa took it hard when young Joe ran away

At harvest time to find a job where he  
(So said a note he left behind) would be  
Able to send home part of his first pay.  
We boys had known that Joe had gone astray  
And wondered that our parents couldn't see  
Joe's needs, which led him to debauchery  
With men, not women. He was what's now called gay.  
Months later Joe came home, drunk, filthy, ill,  
No money left of what he stole from Pa.  
When I got in from fixing fence, Joe was  
Sleeping in my bed, Ma's healing skill  
At work, Pa sitting close, his heart rubbed raw.  
I knew he'd take Joe back; it's what Pa does.

## **Ed Shacklee**

Ed Shacklee is a public defender who represents children in the District of Columbia.

### The White Rose

Inviolately pure of all stains  
and evocative of a ghost,  
only the whitest rose remains  
when vision wants color most.

Just as passion cannot abide  
what the intellect may pardon,  
white glows while other hues hide  
when evening tends the garden.

### The Fortunate Isles

I will never have the dark  
to cast my days in stark relief;  
they pass and fade without remark,  
becalmed within the circling reef.

For here the eagle cannot soar,  
the peacock does not strut and cry.



The lion gives a muted roar,  
the doves return a muted sigh –

and the curse, if I had only known,  
will like a cut flower unfold,  
till all I see has turned to stone  
and all I touch has turned to gold.