



**Down
This
Crooked
Road**

**Modern Poetry
From The
Road Less Traveled**

Edited by
RD Armstrong & William Taylor Jr.

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Introduction

by William Taylor Jr.

A little while ago Raindog and myself were throwing around the idea of doing another book together, and at some point RD, I think, suggested doing an anthology of sorts. He invited me to solicit work from a handful of my favorite poets, and we'd go from there.

The idea excited me and it didn't take me long to make a list in my head of the writers I wanted to include. They pretty much came to me right away. Not only are the writers collected in this anthology all wonderful poets whose work deserves a large audience, there is something about their collective work that seems to especially shine when gathered together in a single volume.

The poets included here are not from a particular school, at least not one that has been invented as of yet. They don't all hail from a particular region, though RD did point out that none of them are from Los Angeles, which means something in the world of LummoX. For those keeping score, four of the poets (including myself) live in California, two from more eastern regions of the U.S. and we have the lone Miles J. Bell from the UK.

What connects these writers in my mind is obviously not location, or even style of writing, but more a spirit that I feel shines through in the work of all involved. All the poetry contained here is accessible without being mundane, well crafted without being academic...Poetry for people who might not realize they like poetry.

It is my belief that your average reader can pick up this volume, open it to any page, read a bit, and think: This makes sense to me. *This is a fellow human sharing their vision of what it is to exist, and it inspires me.* Or, it could well be they'll think something more along the lines of: *This is some cool ass shit!* That works too.

In any case, the authors collected here are writing some of the best poetry out there right now, period. I'm excited and honored to have my work appear alongside them. The death of poetry is a silly, vicious little lie, and this volume attests to it.

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In Every Place The Sun Drags It's Light,
& In Every Shadow That Aches For It,
In Every Single Place That Exists,
& In Every Single Place We Can Imagine...
In This Our Darkest Night,
In This Our Age Of Stillness,
Of No Light, No Insight, No Inertia...

Love, My Monster of Grace

My Dracula enters the room on his fingertips
there on the small space of wall, space
of air, between our mouths open, with
repetition, like this, this and this, the

exchange. Twang of keys, unlocking, unlocks,
the hinge of empty air, air that we breathe.
Breathe in you and me, the soft ping, ping, ping,
ping of the piano keys, this is art. Light

surrounds the mundane and muted air.
Heart like the train station in Amsterdam
in the winter, even the birds listen to
the ting, ting, ting of time, blind. Time is black,

tender as a moth's wing, your canvass, I
could never write into lines, the iris
open, opens. Bleeds, drip, dripping, life into air.

The Baptism of the Alchemists

I pour the gasoline
You light the match
and we stop
take in the view
a red sky burning
the sun coming
to an end
as we touch.

Our clothes come off
we take pictures

of the skin of the soul.

In the hotel room
we believe in good luck
we believe
that we see
the right path

and then we are lost.
All that we wanted
was a little warmth.

Touching the fire
is too much. There is nothing
like the burn of us.
You touch me
and we disappear
like pale blue smoke.

GO

it makes no difference
how you paint,
just paint.
it makes no damn difference
how the clay
is lumped and shaped and smoothed,
just
sculpt.
it makes no difference
if it drips or runs
or rolls over
or screams or
begs or tears or
breaks in half or in a million
pieces or
dies or weeps or yearns
or hurts
or leaves or stays or
returns.

play your instrument:
too many of us

on this turning rock
only hold the thing
in our timid hands,
waiting for it to play
itself.

carve the words
even if your fingers
bleed from the flowers
in the stone.

last meal of the night

he looks at me with
red eyes
through thick round
glasses, heavy black frames
slipping forward
on his human nose.

it is two minutes until closing.

I tell him,
“go ahead man, what do you need?”

the kitchen grumbles, I can feel
anger rising upon my neck in
hot tired waves.

he mercifully orders
the easiest thing on the menu.

his will be our last meal of the night.

the cook is fast, throws it to me
and I bag it up.
he reaches out to take it
and asks me my name.

I tell him.

he then reaches to shake my hand.

“I know you are trying to close
but I really needed this food.
my brother is up the street
at the university hospital
and he is
probably going
to die tonight.

he is still holding my hand and I can see
his eyes, the space beyond his eyes, shielded
sort of by the thick lenses,
grow wider

but not very much.

“thank you for your kindness.”

he drops my hand and is gone.

the hunger
we cannot stand to bear
alone,
but must.

**Half-full for me despite my protestations to
the contrary**

So if as it seems
the wages of hope
are disappointment
and cynicism's
just not worth it
how then to pull off
the balancing act
on a thin wire
6 feet from
nothing at all?

modern life
some sage said
is rubbish
the world compels us
to find fault with ourselves
the things we fill the gaps with
are never enough
and reaching is dangerous
fingernails removed by satellites
beaming advertisements
into our illusive emptiness

not to be carried away
by excesses of happiness
or misery
we're told
is the only safe path

but all I want in this
blink-of-an-eye life
is to not reach the end
fighting for
one
last
breath
thinking only
life was everything
I expected

and
less.

Unlucky

The soft, disappointed yellow
of old streetlamps
twinkles from every imperfection
on this frozen road.
Stars on the ground.
All those pennies
I never picked up.

Slow

It's true,
I am slow.

In most things.

I am slow as I type this,
hunting and pecking at the keys,
pausing between lines, words and letters

to look at my cat
or out the window at the cars passing by.

I will pause to look at an old photograph
or to listen to a song on the stereo.

I will pause to read part of a book
I have read many times before.

I will pause to do nothing at all
for minutes or hours.

Some days I try and wake early
telling myself I will get things done

and then the next thing I know
the sun will be late into the sky

and I will have little to show for the hours
that have passed.

I take a slow walk around the city
and feel more akin
to the trees and the buildings

than to the people.

The trees wave at me and I back at them,
understanding

there is so much in this life
not to do

and so little time not to do it in.

Christmas at The Brown Jug

You know the holidays are near
because Nadine wears gold sequins

and a mechanical snowman
dances on the bar

to the music on the juke.

The woman on the stool next to mine
drinks white Carlo & Rossi
in a pint glass over ice

and says, *we're all nice people here.*

The woman on the other side
has three teeth
wears a reindeer sweater

and declares
*I am not an abomination, my sweet lord
loves me!*

Outside
there's some kind of altercation,
strong words and threats of violence

despite the sign on the lamp post
declaring this a hate free zone

and you can already hear the sirens.

An old yellow sign always hangs above the bar
saying

FREE BEER TOMORROW.

It's funny
if you think about it.

Saved

my lover arrives with a litany:
the kid with fetal alcohol syndrome
and his abusive parents,
her mother with dementia,
the French immigrant,
(her husband),
lonely, jealous-
all I want is to be quiet
and just make out-
we lay together in my bed
in the dark , kissing,
not letting go
but not doing much more
her phone rings
friend in a wheelchair is
drinking again,
crying-
she answers:
“Alcoholism is the easiest thing in the world to cure!
Once you quit, it’s easy! You’ll be healthy again!
You can do anything!”
I want to tell her most of that is a damn lie
but I keep my mouth shut-
after the 3rd call
she hangs up,
and crawls between my legs-
she’s saved me more than once
and sometimes lying quietly
or quietly lying
is the best a man can do

**On the Assumption of My Usefulness
(for Silvi-Ann)**

I am not one hundred percent able-bodied
nor all that mentally astute
I don’t assemble anything more complex
than instant oatmeal-
to the degree that I am useful
for people less competent than I
(mainly the elderly and the very rich)
I get paid for it-
and further
I don’t move furniture for friends, only clients
and again, I get paid-
and also
I only assemble fish tanks for women
I am sleeping with
and since I know nothing
about assembling
fish tanks
or broken women
I am currently celibate
and will most likely remain so-
that is until fish
or women can evolve
or de-evolve enough
so that
a half cup of oats, a half cup of water
and half a man
are all that’s required
for their survival

Come Home

Outside my window,
and four stories down,
there's a tree without leaves.
A sweatshirt is hanging
from one of its branches.
Looking up from the street,
you could see me
a guy pulling out a draw from a smoke.
Every now and again
a light like an orange firefly.

But you wouldn't see the years.
"Come home!"
"No."
"Please?"
"Give me one good reason why."
"Your clothes are killing the lawn."
It's an old song,
and many have heard it sung.
And tonight
I am home.
And I'm wondering whose clothes are
killing that lawn tonight.

It Will Never Be My Turn

once again I'm facing the end of the month without
a job and without rent money.

I'm listening to music in my hotel room.
i feel a coastal breeze,
and taste the salt in the air.

I'm nearly 50 years old,
and I'm beginning to
understand:

it will never be my turn.

**In Every Place The Sun Drags It's Light,
& In Every Shadow That Aches For It,
In Every Single Place That Exists,
& In Every Single Place We Can Imagine...**

...the irrefutable, undeniable
truth
is that
despite maybe
wanting to,
we
cannot
do it all
alone,
our humanity
prevents
it—

for the
better
I think.

**In This Our Darkest Night,
In This Our Age Of Stillness,
Of No Light, No Insight, No Inertia...**

...we've allowed
our inner machinations
to convince us of
so
much
madness
that we now have to
struggle
to even turn
our faces
to the
sun

&

smile.

**This is only a sample of the book.
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Traveled**

"Writing the infinite in plainspoken English...William Taylor Jr. wonderfully weaves everyday happenings with fluid sounds and clear visions along with that little something extra that can be read and savored time and again."

– *Raymond Hammond, New York Quarterly*

"Bell's poems tend to turn over the smallest stones of experience and find new possibilities underneath. His poems uncover a darkness as well as a simple beauty in everyday life."

– *William Taylor Jr.*

"Ms Chavez has, more than any other poet I've read in recent memory, made a real case for the validity of poetry in the 21st century."

– *John Sweet*

"Christopher Robin is a true survivor. His poems were not written in an ivory tower but on the road, in a Section 8 apartment, at the carnival, in the depths of hell. Christopher Robin is an ebullient son of a gun and I'm very glad to know him."

– *Misti Rainwater Lites*

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PO Box 5301 • San Pedro, CA 90733-5301

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