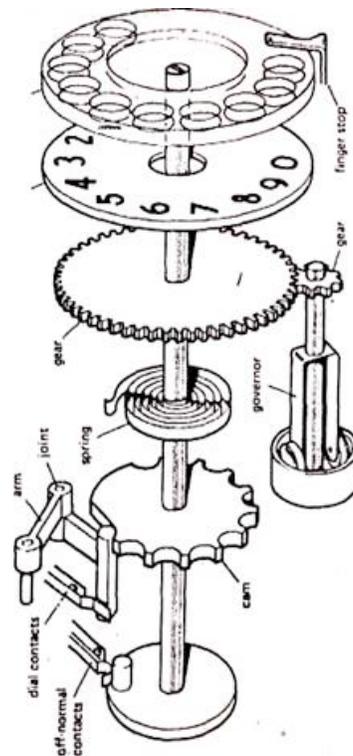


# THE ROTARY DIAL

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CONRAD GELLER

### **Structure Words**

The way from When to Now is never straight  
but crooked, narrow, dangerous, immense,  
its perils not apparent to the sense,  
with fearful consequence for coming late,  
with no important treasure to defend,  
and only stale provision at the end.

Faint lines connect the space from What to This,  
from Why to But to Yes, from Where to Near.  
Lines barely designate Away from Here,  
or tell me how to find a turn I miss.  
The schedule shows a prospect, How to Deed.  
The path is marked, but not so I can read.

A boy stands on a spit above the sea  
that stops his passage to another side  
where, he is certain, lovely girls abide  
and lemonade and licorice are free.  
He lingers while the minutes fade away,  
and slowly, surely, comfortable decay.

## **The Aging Rake**

I have dallied, once or twice,  
with eager girls all sweets and spice,  
flighty girls who would not stay,  
timid girls who pulled away  
and angry girls who had their say.

I never reckoned what it cost.  
A smile, a kiss, and all was lost.  
I love them still, although it hurts,  
the proper ladies and the flirts,  
those girls in jeans, those girls in skirts.

So boys, take warning from my tale:  
a smile, a kiss will not prevail.  
Cleave to one who's kind and smart,  
who'll make your bed and take your part,  
and tether her to your wild heart.

JEAN FREE

**Love, 1987**

I guess when school is over  
we'll let this love thing die –  
its nature flips direction,  
intentions go awry.

I'll love you till the black  
on my nails begins to chip,  
till the zipper on your ripped up  
jeans just won't unzip.

I'll love you till the mix-  
tape that you made for me  
unwinds and melts and Memorex  
fades into memory.

Till the sordid notes I folded  
become something that you store  
with family Polaroids  
in your bedroom's catch-all drawer.

But twenty years from now  
you'll find me on the screen  
we practice typing on,  
and tell me at fifteen

you didn't know adulthood  
was hitched to emptiness.  
You'll Instagram old photos  
and voicelessly confess

that everything you are  
is tied to who we were,  
the things we thought were fads  
rebelliously recur.

You didn't know that love  
would not grow up, but fight,  
like a die-hard aging punk  
who sticks around for spite.

## Transforming a Bad Tattoo

I see potential here. What used to be  
the thorny stem could double as a bar  
I'd use to build the cage you want to free  
the bluebird from, to cancel out the scar

you gave yourself then got this sketchy rose  
to camouflage. I think the rose is worse;  
instead of hiding cuts you just expose  
your own clichés, like rhyme to force a verse.

I'd rather see the stitch marks on your wrist,  
but an open gothic iron gate it is,  
with a floral flourished spire you insist  
you're gonna love forever. Now, to change his

name is difficult. Is he the bird  
who's flying out? I'm lost in metaphor...  
Let's try a quote or ageless, poignant word –  
one easy to amend or underscore.

## **Jilted**

You never call, but I still wait  
and mentally I recreate  
the conversation when you said  
you'd move me out. But I've misled  
you times before. You're always late,

rewind your Swatch to compensate  
and maybe you mixed up the date  
and came by yesterday instead.  
You never call,

so I don't know. My sad estate  
is packed: my albums in a crate,  
the posters tubed, duffel on the bed.  
You're either angry or misread  
me once again – a dead debate  
you never call.

MICHAEL R. BURCH

**Lean Harvests**

*for T.M.*

the trees are shedding their leaves again:  
another summer is over.  
the Christians are praising their Maker again,  
but not the disconsolate plover:  
    for i hear her berate  
    the fate  
    of her mate;  
she claims God is no body's lover.

KIM BRIDGFORD

## **Ragdoll**

Quintessential doormat, or a sponge,  
The ragdoll is ideal to throw around.  
The ragdoll will adjust to you, expunge  
Aggressions, and will suffer any sound.

The ragdoll has no will. That's key. It's why  
A bully has such power in the workplace.  
The ragdoll women are made to acquiesce.  
When one does not, he'll take the time to try

To teach that girl a lesson. Ragdolls cry.  
Ragdolls like attention on the sly.  
The ragdolls help the boss; they laugh and preen.  
They like the strong-willed one to be brought down.

The alpha woman takes another job;  
In private, she is loved more than his mob.

## **W. H. Auden**

Dear Auden, Iceland's changed since you were there,  
Although I loved the journey that you made:  
How you loved people (not the roads), and said  
The most to Byron in letters out of air.

You wanted to stay home; the things you missed  
Were things that England would have given you.  
Granted, your trip delivered up a view,  
But what won out were all the things you lost.

I stepped in Iceland, and it felt like home:  
The heat that trembled underneath the ice;  
The sagas offering up a history  
Without a king, and valuing the poem.  
In Iceland, there is room for both of us:  
The ones who want to stay, and those at sea.

CLAUDIA GARY

**Switzerland, in Passing**

“Here, see me here!”  
Summoned from sleep  
I lean on the glass of the Wagon-Lit window.

Climbing and crouching,  
the track winds and twists.  
Is it a light or a song that has called?

Syllables race  
and ring through the air:  
“Now, see me now!” cry the hills through the wheels.

Sparks from the track  
have gilded the Alps  
and turned them to bells.

## Mozart's Alphabet

I.

Whenever Mrs. Glicker babysits  
she brings crochet hooks and a ball of twine.  
While Mom and Dad see movies, she outwits  
toy stores and factories: She can design  
a sweater for each doll in your collection –  
sometimes a dress or skirt – and turn it out,  
a swirly-patterned wool or lace confection,  
all in an evening's work. You have no doubt  
she is the best, so when she asks one day,  
"Are you folks Jewish?" you, of course, will need  
to ask your mother. Mom says, in dismay,  
"I've been remiss!" and soon you have a creed.  
Mom's insecurity has lit a fire.  
At least the cantor lets you join the choir.

II.

Each week you have to learn a Hebrew text  
and taste the flavors of a holiday –  
Hamen's hat stuffed with poppy seeds is next –  
but since this is your story, we can say  
the sweetest thing you find that year at Temple  
is polyphonic music you can sing.  
Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, are ample  
with no part sung by any god or king.

A choral alphabet may have been meant  
as practice, but for you it reigns supreme:  
unlike the school tune, this is eloquent.  
This alphabet spells heaven in your dream.

Some other song may hold words of a prayer,  
but those are just words. This song takes you there.

CHARLES HUGHES

**November Song**

Hostas die back, don't simply die. The first  
Hard frost, I rake their raggedy leaves gone pale  
And crooked, though the fall's been wet. You call me

To come indoors for lunch in your young voice –  
A memory partly, partly a wish rehearsed  
For years, for our long love. I'd sing you summer

And warm June rain, but we both know the yard's  
Deciduous lei of limes, green-golds, blue-greens,  
The roots now burning with a perennial thirst.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Conrad Geller** has published more than a hundred poems, electronically and in print. His awards include the Charles E. Tuttle Prize, Bibliophilos Prize, and several awards from the Poetry Society of Virginia. A Bostonian, he now lives and writes in Northern Virginia.

**Jean Free** earned an MA in Poetry at Johns Hopkins University where she also works. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Little Patuxent Review*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Lines + Stars*, and *Free State Review*. Her unpublished chapbook was a semi-finalist in the 2013 Barefoot Muse Chapbook Competition.

**Michael R. Burch** is the editor of *The HyperTexts*, online at [thehypertexts.com](http://thehypertexts.com). His poetry, essays, articles and letters have appeared in hundreds of publications which include *TIME*, *USA Today*, *Writer's Digest – The Year's Best Writing*, *Light Quarterly*, *The Lyric*, *Measure*, *The Chariton Review*, *The New Formalist*, *Pennsylvania Review*, *The Chimaera*, *The Flea*, *Able Muse*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Trinacria*, *The Neovictorian/Cochlea*, *The Best of the Eclectic Muse* and *Iambs & Trochees*.

**Kim Bridgford** is the director of the West Chester University Poetry Center and the West Chester University Poetry Conference, the largest all-poetry writing conference in the United States. As the editor of *Mezzo Cammin*, she founded *The Mezzo Cammin Women Poets Timeline Project*, which was launched at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington in March 2010, and recently celebrated its third anniversary at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in affiliation with the exhibition *The Female Gaze*. Her collaborative work with the visual artist Jo Yarrington has been honored with a Ucross fellowship. Bridgford is the author of eight books of poetry, including *Bully Pulpit*, a book of poems on bullying; *Epiphanies*, a book of religious poems; and the forthcoming *Doll*. She has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Connecticut Post*, on NPR and the website of *The News Hour* with Jim Lehrer, and in various headline news outlets.

**Claudia Gary** writes, edits, and composes (tonally) in the Washington DC

area. Her articles on health have appeared in The VVA Veteran and VFW Magazine. Her first poetry collection was *Humor Me* (David Robert Books, 2006), and another is in the works. She has been a semifinalist for the Anthony Hecht poetry prize, a finalist for the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award, a Pushcart Prize nominee, former poetry editor of *Edge City Review*, and a panelist on poetry and music at the West Chester University Poetry Conference. Her poems have recently appeared, or will soon appear, in *American Arts Quarterly*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Antiphon*, *Chronicles*, *First Things*, *Light*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Poet Lore*, *String Poet*, *Trinacria*, *Umbrella*, and anthologies including *Villanelles* (Everyman Press, 2012).

**Charles Hughes** is a tutor at St. Leonard's House in Chicago and a retired lawyer. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *America*, *Angle*, *The Anglican Theological Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *First Things*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *The Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Measure*, *The Sewanee Theological Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and other publications. He lives in the Chicago area with his wife.