



THE ROTARY DIAL *proudly presents* **THE**  
**BRIDGFORD** **ISSUE**  
*A Tribute to America's First Lady of Form*

ISSUE 20  
OCTOBER 2014

[www.therotarydial.ca](http://www.therotarydial.ca)

## CONTENTS

Forward 3

### The Poems

Bad Writing 7

Gone Are the Libraries 8

Inflatable Doll Masquerades as a Porpoise on Halloween 9

Inflatable Doll Is Mistaken for a Beach Toy at the Country Club 10

The Standard 11

Nibbled to Death by Ducks 12

Ragdoll 13

W.H. Auden 14

Cynthia 15

No 16

Misery Loves Company 17

Benign Neglect 18

Trains of Thought 19

Speaking Truth to Power 20

Trains 21

Notes 22

## FORWARD

This issue, *The Rotary Dial's* twentieth, marks the beginning of what we hope will be a new trend for the journal: to highlight, on a yearly basis, the versatility and talents of a single *Dial* contributor. Looking back over the last twenty months, we have been heartened and honoured by the support offered by our readership and especially our poets. A grassroots enterprise, dealing with limited funding and the lurching inconvenience of having one of its editors (me) temporarily on the road, we have been amazed at the generosity (and patience) shown by the wealth of talented writers whose works have appeared in our pages. Our initial aims were simple: to provide, from our humble Canadian base, a platform for formal poets (regardless of national affiliation) to gather and celebrate the intricacy, sonic beauty and hidden subversive power of metrical work. You, our readers and our writers, have rallied to the call, and for that, we thank you.

We have dedicated the first of these “tribute” issues to Kim Bridgford, past director of the West Chester Poetry Center and Story Line Press, editor of *Mezzo Cammin* and architect of The *Mezzo Cammin* Women’s Poetry Timeline (well on its way to becoming the largest database of female poets in the world). For all of her impressive administrative and academic achievements, the crowning glory of Bridgford’s career has been, in the estimation of many, her own creative work, encapsulated in eight collections, the most recent of which is *Doll*, published through Main Street Rag. Two of the *Doll* poems are reprinted here, along with ten other works that have appeared in this journal since its inception. In addition, we bring you three debuts. Like the rest of her work, these are elegant poems, diamond-clear, riotously funny, hauntingly sad.

There is no straightforward way to pin down what “makes” a Bridgford poem. There are, undoubtedly, elements of vulnerability: pining for days past, the longing to become actualized as human, the writer’s night-terror of mediocrity, the speechless dismay at seeing the powers of Good turfed for shadier causes. And yet, Bridgford rises to meet her demons with nary a flinch or a whimper, using her quiet and fierce wit to make her indelible imprint. “Gone are the Libraries” sketches out the unraveling of communication at its clunkiest and most perfect (the books, the magazines,

the fixed phone lines, the typewriters) but thunders along in its hell-bent triple meter momentum, evoking the despairing apocalyptic report of Stephen Vincent Benét's "Song for Three Soldiers." In "Inflatable Doll Is Mistaken for a Beach Toy at the Country Club," the eponymous heroine, distanced from any trace of sentimentality by the use of the cool-eyed third person narrative, is certainly an object, tossed into the pool, superficially an object of ridicule. But her male keeper is himself made a static object, suspended within the "traditional" iambic pentameter sonnet line, something made by external forces, hammered and tormented by the proponents of social norms who "like things as they were." The gloriously wry "Bad Writing" turns the villanelle into a crazed windmill of artistic neurosis, piling on the multitude of sins which hover around the head of any poet caught off guard (the renegade descriptors! The capitals! The small animals!) before settling into the sober and compassionate (but still grinding) acknowledgement of the writer's "weakness and [...] angst." "Benign Neglect" reflects on a king, a "kindly leader," denigrated and deposed for his attempts to "rule by inspiration." The same fate befalls the Cassandra-like subject of "Speaking Truth to Power" who, for all her adherence to duty, finds the call to honesty irresistible. Even as she is robbed and (superficially) humiliated, the final sextet of Bridgford's sonnet, with its anarchistic jumbling of rhyme pattern and sly turns of half-rhyme, show us that this individual will not be contained – by fourteen lines, by a job, by a culture and its deadening habits:

She thought it must be her imagination.  
She tried to work.

Then, they began to scare her.  
They showed up at her meetings and her office.  
They smiled, and told her to do much more with less.  
They moved her to a remote, secure location  
All by herself. And then they took her chair.

Bridgford does not shy away from describing, even in contexts as glorified and ephemeral as the realm of cinema (I here cite her excellent book *Hitchcock's Coffin*), the predicament of those figures who feel lost, half-made, forgotten. For a writer who uses form so delicately and artfully, she is never one to mire her subjects in traditional traps. On the contrary, there is

something of a release in a Bridgford poem. This came to me, in full realization, in 2012, when I finally had the opportunity to hear her read live. Impeccably elegant and poised behind the podium, she gave a reading I have never forgotten to this day, releasing her poems in a voice that vascillated between a swooping hypnotic sing-song and the steely resolve of a prophetess heralding the advent of an impending something, be it doom or deliverance. My father once used these terms to describe hearing Edith Piaf sing in a destroyed Paris, immediately following the Second World War. Certainly, we at *The Rotary Dial* believe that Kim Bridgford is a voice to hearken to, as skilled an augur as she is a craftsperson of the perfect line. It is an honour to have her as a friend and contributor, and we are pleased to be able to share with you these finely wrought – and uncontainable – fifteen poems.

Alexandra Oliver, Co-editor  
Glasgow, UK  
September 30, 2014

## THE POEMS

## Bad Writing

*Bad writing is always waiting. It comes to you – you don't need to seek it out.*

*– William Logan*

Like kamikaze pilots, or a drought –  
A bully in your e-mail who's obsessed –  
Bad writing waits for you and finds you out.

The adjectives and adverbs friend your site,  
And once the caps show up, no Robert Frost.  
Like kamikaze pilots, or a drought,

Such drama finds a path, and carves a route.  
The kittens have a turn, the puppies next.  
Bad writing waits for you and finds you out.

A mosquito waiting for the skin that's sweet,  
It searches out your bedroom. Like a heist,  
Like kamikaze pilots, or a drought,

With exclamations, it's immediate:  
You're shouting on the page, and YOU ARE LOST!!!  
Bad writing waits for you and finds you out.

You thought it was for truffles, but this snout  
Burrows for your weakness, and your angst.  
Like kamikaze pilots or a drought,  
Bad writing waits for you and finds you out.

## **Gone Are the Libraries**

Gone are the libraries, the card catalogues,  
The homework that used to be eaten by dogs.  
Gone are the libraries.

Gone are the magazines that very few read,  
But poets all yearned for, to be garlanded.  
Gone are the magazines.

Gone are the phone lines in dormitory halls,  
Where love twists its signal and crying appalls.  
Gone are the phone lines.

Gone are the letters, sent home from the war.  
Calligraphied thank-yous, the airmail that tore.  
Gone are the letters.

Gone are the typewriters that pecked at their truth,  
But so is Joe DiMaggio, and so is Babe Ruth.  
Gone are the typewriters.

Gone are the newspapers; gone are the shops  
Where real food was sold by old moms and pops.  
Gone are the newspapers.

Instead there is speed; and instead there is hype,  
And, instead of live interviews, we set up our Skype.  
Instead there is speed.

We find all this loss, when we're waiting or walking.  
Nobody's thinking, and everyone's talking.  
We find all this loss.

What have we done? Now we press and delete;  
We sleep with our phones, and we text and we tweet.  
What have we done?

## **Inflatable Doll Masquerades as a Porpoise on Halloween**

Of course. Just as you also knew she wore  
Her camouflage and arrogance to war.  
(They knocked it out of her, of course they would.  
That's how you treat the useful and the good.)

On Halloween, she wanted to be Flipper  
(Rejected Gumby, Cinderella's slipper,  
A balloon's sadness, a wiener dog of air,  
A highway mascot waving "Over here.")

How great to be a honeymooner's choice,  
The passion made of waves and short, barked voice,  
The shape of what is closest to a human,  
And yet can swim away, be mermaid, prawn,  
The manifestations ocean can try on.  
To be a living thing. For once think twice.

## **Inflatable Doll Is Mistaken for a Beach Toy at the Country Club**

She knows she shouldn't take it personally  
(People are who they are), yet she's thrown in  
With casualness, an open raft. Chagrin  
Apologizes, helps her out, to try  
To smooth the waves, to find the compromiser.

In country clubs, they like things as they were.

He asks her to be nice about it, win  
The others with her friendliness and sheen.  
Yet sometimes she's depressed. How would he feel?  
But then again he's like them, and he's real.

She nods, and does exactly what she should:  
Apologizes in the name of good,  
And makes a joke: "That happens all the time,"  
For Cruelty demands this paradigm.

## The Standard

O Whitman, it's so hard to make a list –  
Not only scrawled reminders – milk and bread –  
But one that is, through art, designed to last.

You bore a standard, not inherited,  
But democratic, tangled in the grass.  
A prophet, you included all the dead

As well as life in motion, fall and kiss,  
Soldier and nurse with bandage in between,  
The argument and its antithesis.

Compared to you, I find my lists are lean,  
Art imitating the impossible.  
You catalogued the world that you had seen,

And made it all-embracing in its scrawl.  
For you, it must be this, or none at all.

## Nibbled to Death by Ducks

They won't leave you alone, but you think this  
Is all they'll do to you: a soft distraction  
Draining your life. Suction, not satisfaction.  
*Just one more thing.* They are your only business.

Meanwhile the things that matter are now lost,  
Your life surrendered to what matters least.  
On a far, wide field stands your once-success;

Once, you swam in thoughts of happiness.

You're older now, and also cynical.  
It's easy to make fun of those who care.  
Your wishes hang on falling stars, your jar  
Of insects dead upon the windowsill.

The ducks settle in: they're soft and sweet.  
They wear the look of those with plenty to eat.

## **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.

## Cynthia

You lived in a cave to find out if you could.  
For a year, you lived, in stone, inside your head,  
And you knew time the way that nature did:  
The rhythms of the shadows and the shade.

Afterwards, in your house, in El Pauji,  
You sometimes needed to be solitary.  
You found yourself the way that flowers find room:  
Through twist of slightest movement, smallest bloom.

Then you'd go blank with noises in the air,  
For they'd become a part of who you were.  
You would want to say something inside this thought,  
But who were you in the immediate?

Grass? Cloud? Tree? Bird? An animal? An omen?  
Would you say *more* or *less*? Would you say human?

**No**

*Deadly Snakes Hatch in Toddler's Closet*

This is the snake effect, not butterfly:  
When parenting and sense have gone awry,  
Some lethal brown snakes fierce and warm with hatching,  
And no one, over toddling age, is watching.

Of course, you can step back. Who hasn't done  
A thing that seems as innocent, a collection  
Of shells, or fireflies, or dandelions?  
Who leans toward danger: not just mighty pythons,

But rabid dogs, or rats, or baby gators?  
It seems all right until investigators  
Ask how deadly snakes were hatched with clothes,  
The diapers, Velcroed shoes, and goodness knows

What else inside the darkness of the closet.  
It makes a person pause, and then to posit.

## **Misery Loves Company**

Misery is having a party tonight.  
Bent-Out-of-Shape is there, and so is Malice.  
Everybody's looking for a fight.

Whose marriage has fallen? Whose field has blight?  
Gossip prances in between Bitter and Jealous.  
Misery is having a party tonight.

The hors d'oeuvres are laced with bile and plight,  
And the wine that is served is Napa Salacious.  
Everybody's looking for a fight.

Misery is married to Just-Served-You-Right;  
The children are bitchy, each argument specious.  
Misery is having a party tonight.

Come in, and sit down. You're a welcome sight.  
Lust swings through the door, and hits on Curvaceous.  
And everybody's looking for a fight.

In walk Small-Minded, Cold-Blooded, and Hate.  
Martinis are handed to Sterling and Cautious.  
Misery is having a party tonight,  
And everybody's looking for a fight.

## **Benign Neglect**

The King looks out upon his enterprise.  
He's mild and good, and saddened by the lies  
Of those who try to take his kingdom. He tries  
To rule by inspiration, and through ease.

Yet envy drives the force of others who  
Take every opportunity to do  
A wrong to him. The lawyers try to sue;  
And those with malice undermine what's true.

Meanwhile, the King, whose vision sides with grandeur,  
Presents the world, much like a teacher does.  
The people love him, while the huntsmen swarm.  
Which is better: life dreamt or as it is?  
They want to see him fail, this kindly leader.  
How else see fear as comfort and the norm?

## Trains of Thought

I prayed my paper doll would come alive.  
The Bible verses whispered in my ears.  
Like Lazarus, she'd rise out of the grave.

Margaritas whirred. For me, God-love.  
At night, I steeped hands and chased down fears.  
I prayed my paper doll would come alive.

I hid her like a knife blade in my sleeve.  
Out in the kitchen, drinks unsalted tears.  
Like Lazarus, they'd rise out of the grave,

And later there'd be lunch, to settle truth.  
I held her paper body up to mirrors.  
Like the crèche at Christmas, she would come alive.

Like darkness, like a shaman, or like grief,  
I'd show what is essential, not what bares.  
Like Lazarus, she'd rise out of the grave,

Six inches high. My life, my 3-D *oeuvre*,  
She'd show the nonbelievers that God cares.  
I prayed my paper doll would come alive.  
Like us, she'd rise, look up, out. Suddenly grave.

## Speaking Truth to Power

First, they thanked her for her honesty.  
They liked that she was passionate, sincere.  
She found old files. She reported, as her duty.  
Yet little things began to bother her.

Their wings were bland and gray: and like a shadow,  
There they were, officious, writing down  
Her violation of Rule 1b. Ditto  
D, and f, and constantly rewritten.

She thought that it must be her imagination.  
She tried to work.

Then, they began to scare her.

They showed up at her meetings and her office.  
They smiled, and told her to do much more with less.  
They moved her to a remote, secure location  
All by herself. And then they took her chair.

## Trains

We used to count the cars in trains;  
We used to have no enemies.  
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

One day, we'd know how *this* explains  
The *that* of life. Like histories,  
We used to count the cars in trains –

Graffiti, livestock, various grains –  
Objectified the moving haze.  
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

The sky-cup brims, and over-rains,  
The colors in hyperboles.  
We used to count the cars in trains.

Now all seems different like the scenes  
Of archetypes, mythologies.  
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

Add one and one and one: just ones.  
The notion of a larger arc will tease.  
We used to count the cars in trains.  
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

## NOTES

After first appearing in Issues 4 and 5 respectively of the *Dial*, “Inflatable Doll Masquerades as a Porpoise on Halloween” and “Inflatable Doll Is Mistaken for a Beach Toy at the Country Club” were collected in *Doll*, a chapbook put out by Main Street Rag Publishing of Charlotte, NC, in May of 2014. Our thanks to the editor for letting us reprint them.

“Bad Writing” and “Gone Are the Libraries” first appeared in Issue 1 of the *Dial*.

“The Standard” and “Nibbled to Death by Ducks” in Issue 8.

“Ragdoll” and “W.H. Auden” in Issue 9.

“Cynthia” and “No” in Issue 11.

And “Misery Loves Company” and “Benign Neglect” in Issue 18.

“Trains of Thought,” “Speaking Truth to Power” and “Trains” appear here for the first time.