



# THE ROTARY DIAL

ISSUE 26  
APRIL 2015

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

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LOIS WILLIAMS

## **Ceanothus**

*If you see a tree as blue, then make it blue. – Paul Gauguin*

Bees love them. Some folk call them Californian  
Lilac, which sounds like a paint colour for  
upstairs and not the blue botanical stunner  
everybody doubletakes and rubbernecks and walks

backwards from because you can't help  
looking at this freakshow flowering / this landgrown  
undertow pulling you by the eyes to another  
Eden where it's all Miles all the time. Kind of Blue

but bluer: perennial melancholy with a cobalt  
lining, but it's not all sad, it's bluebirds  
updrafting the eithersides of storms, Biba disco  
eyeshadow, the blue wool in Neruda's socks.

Best to see them early spring, big as gazebos on  
lawns the size of credit cards. Better still to sit  
under their leaves and stare up at a second sky.  
Even the painters put away their brushes, knowing

barely how to start: what on earth could grow so  
lovely and so strange and live among us? Look:  
until there's proof of heaven here's the sun,  
each blue spark, chasing all the thunder.

CATHERINE CHANDLER

Ballad of the *Picton Castle*

– in memory of Laura Gainey

Captain's Log, Barque *Picton Castle*, Tuesday, December 5th, 2006:

*Our first day at sea just fine, and while the moon leaves a wonderful sparkling light on the dark sea we look forward to our sunny and warm days, not too far away anymore.*

The *Picton Castle*, built in Wales  
in nineteen twenty-eight,  
was a simple fishing trawler then,  
though named for a grand estate.

Commissioned and refitted,  
she would bear the Union Jack  
and sweep for mines near Norway  
where she drove the Germans back.

Next, christened as the *Dolmar*,  
she hauled heavy freight with ease,  
and for the next five decades  
worked the North and Baltic Seas.

Once more the *Picton Castle*,  
after much cost and travail,  
as a tall three-masted barque she'd teach  
young mariners to sail.

The master had a business plan  
and deadlines will not wait –  
his ship must reach Grenada  
by a predetermined date.

The long-range forecast wasn't good –  
    although the sea seemed tame –  
it called for adverse weather  
    but she made sail just the same.

She left the port of Lunenburg  
    with twenty-nine aboard,  
December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006,  
    advisories ignored.

There was a single lifeboat moored  
    yet not one signal flare;  
a missing cook whose full-time tasks  
    the twelve-man crew must share.

No safety nets were rigged above  
    the bulwarks, for the swell –  
the captain thought – though rough enough,  
    would only last a spell.

An inland soul can't comprehend,  
    unless she goes to sea,  
the pure exhilaration  
    of unbridled liberty.

And Laura loved to climb the mast  
    to watch the royal unfurl;  
she'd finally found the joy in life  
    she lost once, as a girl.

Two days out, the winds picked up,  
    the *Picton Castle* rolled  
and pitched in seven-meter seas.  
    Belowdecks, in the hold,

sixteen fearful trainees prayed  
their lives would all be spared;  
4 p.m., states Laura's log,  
*The crew are sick and scared.*

The bo's'n later on declared  
how, earlier that day,  
he'd gripped the captain, whom a wave  
had nearly washed away.

*In twenty hours, two hours of sleep,*  
lead seaman Gainey wrote;  
she'd lashed down sea chests, cooked for hours,  
secured the storm-tossed boat.

At 8 p.m., amid the tempest's  
howling, raging power,  
Laura was told to rest, but also  
ship checks on the hour.

The rear deck, as a rule, is safe  
in wild, inclement weather,  
and rarely will a deckhand wear  
a harness or a tether.

But this was a mid-Atlantic gale  
where Gulf Stream currents crossed  
head-on with wind-blown waves until  
the *Picton Castle*, tossed,

and rolling heavily to port,  
took on a rogue so steep  
that Laura, drained though dutiful,  
was swept into the deep.

For hours they heard her cries for help,  
and nearly three days passed  
before Coast Guard and merchant ships  
gave up the search at last.

Many years have now gone by  
since that dark and fateful day;  
the *Picton Castle's* setting sail  
from Wharengaere Bay.

She'll head for Pitcairn Island,  
catch the South Pacific breeze;  
New Zealanders will wish her well:  
*Fair winds and following seas!*

But the latitude and longitude  
south-southeast of Cape Cod  
where Laura lies is known to none  
except Almighty God.

ANNA M. EVANS

**Abermawr**

*for my brother Stephen*

Each year we shivered on its shingled beach,  
a weak sun convalescing in the sky,  
summer a fiction that we could not reach,  
of heat, gold sands, clear seas. Still, you and I  
always went in, beginning with the toes –  
first shock so cold my heartbeat almost froze.

Then knees, then thighs, then hips. Oh, it was slow!  
I stood on tiptoe, rode each inward wave,  
to keep that bitter chill line just below  
my navel. Two years older, you played brave:  
dunked yourself once, then dove. "Coward!" you said;  
stung, I sped up: waistline, shoulders, head.

We called this, Getting used to it. That past,  
we bobbed around like baby polar bears  
for hours. I think of this, when shown your last  
beach vacation's photographs. Your hair's  
all salt and pepper now, your skin is tanned;  
you smooth your new wife's sleeve with a firm hand.

That frigid baptism – what gifts did it bring?  
Courage, stubbornness, the set of mind  
that one can get used to almost anything,  
and so leave almost everything behind.  
We got out numb, blue-fingered; our teeth chattered.  
Laughing, we called for towels, as though we mattered.

CHRIS O'CARROLL

## **Frigatebird**

This seabird could be done in by the sea.  
Poorly endowed with waterproofing oil,  
It can't land on the ocean. It would be  
Stranded; its feathers' sodden weight would foil

Liftoff, leaving it there to sink and die.  
Unfit to swim, with only airborne skill,  
It lives on fish and hunts them from the sky.  
Inches aloft, it soars and dips its bill

To seize prey from the surface. It can snatch  
A mid-leap flying fish out of the air  
Or rob another seabird of its catch.  
This acrobatic aerial corsair

Lurks high while rivals dive and feed – drifts, waits  
To swoop as a full-bellied hunter rises.  
The ambushed, grappled foe regurgitates  
Its fishes, suddenly the pirate's prizes,

Snagged with a swift precision as they fall.  
The brigand, swashbuckling in victory,  
Might glide so low it celebrates its haul  
With wingtip flicks that count coup on the sea.

MARYANN CORBETT

### **A Slightly Defective Ode to the West Side Y**

*A visit to New York, with apologies to Percy Shelley*

O noble entry on West 63rd  
whose image beckons from the Internet  
in brownstone arches (breathing not a word  
of shared baths, skimpy towels, and toilette  
too redolent of dorms back in the day);  
O great location, frugal nightly net  
of rate-plus-tax; O bright, five-starred array  
in blandishments, ratings that claim I'll cop  
a tidy bargain for my three-night stay;  
O plain-and-simple, nothing-over-the-top:  
Yo, West Side Y! I'm talking. Listen up.

(Which seems to be the more appropriate phrasing,  
since all this O is more than slightly twee.  
But I digress.) Done with the eyeball-glazing  
nonstop to JFK from MSP,  
I'm here, admitted to your inner sanctum,  
lugging my wheelie toward the mystery.  
The clerk has offered me my key; I've thanked him.  
Clueless within the labyrinth, I wander:  
Those fantasies I had? They're gone. You've yanked them,  
O dim halls clanking radiator thunder,  
archaic carpets dark with ground-in gum,  
wet bathroom floors. Later that night I ponder  
the howls of student athletes "having fun."  
I fantasize about a loaded gun.

But morning! Look to the right, and Lincoln Center  
gleams like the castles of *Les Très Riches Heures*,  
while opposite, the season's turned inventor  
of pointillist Impressionism, a blur  
in jonquil and forsythia. Magnolias

and callery pears and redbuds all concur:  
Winter is over! Several cardinal scholas  
chant early alleluias to the frou-frous  
of Central Park, the human centifolias,  
the garden social registers and who's-whos.  
Temperatures saunter toward the seventies,  
and marathoners blossom in pink tutus,  
crossing at the museum. There's a breeze.  
What jaded critic sulks at arts like these?

So it's a wash, dear Y. No, it's a steal.  
How can I whine about the noisy nights  
and soggy floors when all New York's more real  
now than it was? Look: when a poet writes  
*West Broadway glitters in a mist of rain*  
I know now with exactness how the lights  
conjure that disillusion in his brain  
and yellow cabs whoosh past him, three and four  
abreast. An image trumps a balky drain.  
It plants Manhattan in the deep heart's core –  
a solidness I didn't own before,

which is the reason I'll be flying back  
some spring to come, to start the day on Broadway,  
andante in the Starbucks line, and take  
my almond danish and my steaming latte  
under the gold-green trees at 63rd  
to sip beneath the measured gaze of Dante.  
Yes, I'm Midwestern, fashion-senseless, stirred  
too slowly for this town's up-tempo zing,  
fuddled by subways, gawking and absurd,  
but coming back, in spite of everything –  
wired up and giddy as this longed-for spring.

J. D. SMITH

**Bocca della Verità**

Though twenty years have passed,  
the memory still lingers  
of testing tourist lore.  
I really miss those fingers.

MARCUS BALES

## **Suddenly**

Suddenly the kids, the car,  
the house, the spouse, the local bar,  
the work, have made you what you are.  
What doesn't chill you makes you fonder.

Should you stay or should you go?  
The thrill you're looking for, you know,  
could be right here at home, although  
what doesn't thrill you makes you wander.

If, avoiding common truth,  
you dye your hair and act uncouth,  
will you find your misplaced youth –  
really, will you if you're blonder?

It doesn't matter if you're strong  
or if you sing a pretty song,  
something, and it won't be long,  
will come to kill you, here or yonder.

You're human in the human fray,  
and choose among the shades of grey.  
No matter if you go or stay  
what might fulfill you makes you ponder.

## Racquetball

He smiles with quick excitement, creasing balls  
With hard short strokes no matter what the score  
And leaves opponents nothing left to play.  
He crushes winners hard against the walls  
Or kills them in the corners at the floor  
While others die untouched to roll away.  
He doesn't like to win, he likes to beat  
His victims, beat them down until they feel  
They're beaten, beat them till they never heal,  
Till when they see him they still feel defeat.

What's he lost that hooked its barbed demand  
To be regained so deep? And though he's not  
Unfriendly in the focused way he's got  
To prove he's good, I still don't understand  
Why everybody else has got to lose  
Before he finds a triumph he can use.

## **Four in the Morning and Me**

*for Alex Bevan*

And then all at once I'm already awake –  
And wherever I am, it's the same old locale,  
I've put down my bet and my whole life's at stake  
And we're waiting to see what will happen, my pal  
    Four in the morning, and me.

Images leap from my childhood of course,  
Matt Dillon, Bonanza, the OK Corral –  
But here we are now, with no saddle or horse,  
And Ohio is far from the high chaparral,  
    For four in the morning and me.

Oh, once we were carefree and daring and young  
And we didn't need memories to lift our morale;  
I pick through the chords of the songs I have sung  
With the birds warming up for their morning chorale  
    With four in the morning, and me.

You who are playing more modern guitars,  
You're as close as I get to a good rationale  
For spending my life playing concerts and bars  
And wondering what happens next for my pal  
    Four in the morning and me.

## Leaning

I'm leaning toward a trip to Tennessee,  
To lean against a fence, and watch the sky,  
And smell the dusky coming-on of night:  
That scent of cooling-down and work-day done.  
I'll watch the sun retreating up a high  
And rounded hill of blues and greens that turned  
To reds and golds fading in the failing sun.  
I'll feel the urgent stretch that every tree  
Will make uphill to catch the sunlight's last  
Bright shine, as if the highest hilltop burned  
With flaming leaves that beckoned up to me.

I'll lean as if I walk against the grade,  
To stretch uphill myself, my shoulders past  
My feet, inclined to try and stay upright  
On any cant. I wish that I were there  
Already, leaning on my slanting pitch  
To keep me climbing upright toward that bright,  
Brief beacon, struggling up the hill  
Where everything must lean into the true;  
I wish that I were up there on that height,  
And stretching up and leaning toward that light  
To catch a little bit of that final shine,  
To claim that something beautiful is mine  
Before the cold and dark take hold tonight.

LEWIS TURCO

**Ruminating**

A Robert Herrick tailgater bluesanelle

*Thus, thus we live, and spend the hours*  
Like cattle on the lea for hours  
Gnawing the cud that life devours.

We think we think; therefore, we are.  
We ruminate, but here we are  
Gnawing the cud that life devours.

We think that we are living life,  
Living it up and living life –  
Thus we get and spend our hours

Wasting lives that are not ours  
But of some entity of hours  
That gnaws the cud that time devours.

The cattle standing on the lea  
Browse about, graze lazily –  
Thus they live and spend their hours

Eating dandelions, thyme,  
Vetch and eyebright, never time,  
Gnawing the cuds their life devours.

But in our way we ruminate  
As well. Our days accumulate  
To fill our crops. We spend these hours  
Gnawing the cud that life devours.

BRIAN STANLEY

**Fever**

He sits there, past endeavouring,  
his homework due at next day's bell  
a tentatively started shell  
on which his name, and mine, appears.

He's still there, hedged by fifty years,  
his thoughts too atomized to jell,  
his eyes closed as blue curtains swell  
to let in sweet, confounding spring.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Lois Williams** is a writer and conservationist. Her poems and essays have appeared in many venues on both sides of the Atlantic, including *Verse Daily*, *New England Review*, *Antiphon*, *Mslexia* and *Granta*. She lives in Norfolk, UK.

**Catherine Chandler** was born in New York City, raised in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and has lived and worked in Canada for many years. She has held the academic appointments of Spanish lecturer at McGill University's Department of Translation Studies where she also acted as International Affairs Officer. Winner of the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award, she is the author of five books of poetry, including *Lines of Flight* (Able Muse Press, 2011) and *Glad and Sorry Seasons* (Biblioasis Press, Windsor, Ontario, 2014). Catherine currently divides her time between Saint-Lazare, Quebec, and Punta del Este, Uruguay.

**Anna M. Evans'** poems have appeared in the *Harvard Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, *American Arts Quarterly*, and *32 Poems*. She gained her MFA from Bennington College, and is the Editor of the *Raintown Review*. Recipient of Fellowships from the MacDowell Artists' Colony and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and winner of the 2012 Rattle Poetry Prize Readers' Choice Award, she currently teaches at West Windsor Art Center and Richard Stockton College of NJ. Her new sonnet collection, *Sisters & Courtesans*, is forthcoming from White Violet Press. Visit her online at [annamevans.com](http://annamevans.com).

**Chris O'Carroll** is a writer and an actor. In addition to his previous appearances in *The Rotary Dial*, he has published poems in *Folly*, *Measure*, *Light*, *Lighten Up Online*, and *Umbrella*, among other print and online journals, and in the anthologies *The Best of the Barefoot Muse* and *20 Years at the Cantab Lounge*.

**Maryann Corbett** is the author of three books of poetry and two chapbooks. Her most recent book, *Mid Evil*, won the Richard Wilbur Award and is just out from the University of Evansville Press. Her work has appeared in a range of anthologies from the randy *Hot Sonnets* to the reverent *Imago Dei*,

and in a like range of journals including both *Christianity and Literature* and *The Shit Creek Review*. Her poems have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and *American Life in Poetry*. Recent work appears in *Rattle*, *Think Journal*, and *North Dakota Quarterly* and is forthcoming in *Asheville Poetry Review* and others. Her web site is at [maryanncorbett.com](http://maryanncorbett.com).

**J. D. Smith's** third collection, *Labor Day at Venice Beach*, was published in 2012. *Notes of a Tourist on Planet Earth*, a humor collection including both poetry and prose, came out in March, 2013. He holds an M.A. from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University.

Not much is known about **Marcus Bales** except he lives in Cleveland, Ohio, and his poems have not appeared in *Poetry* or *The New Yorker*.

**Lewis Turco** is the author of over 50 books, chapbooks, and monographs including *The Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics* (UPNE), and his latest collection of poems, *The Familiar Stranger* (StarCloudPress.com, 2014). His epic written in Anglo-Saxon prosody with bobs and wheels, *The Hero Enkidu*, will appear from Bordighera Press in 2015.

**Brian Stanley** was born in Madrid and educated in French until high school. His poems have been longlisted for The Montreal International Poetry Prize (2011) and published in *The Literary Review of Canada* and *Encore*. He lives in the Eastern Townships of Quebec.