



# THE ROTARY DIAL

ISSUE 37  
MARCH 2016

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

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DEREK UPDEGRAFF

### **Eighteen Wheels**

The billboards pointing out the porno shops  
that dot this stretch of 70  
are placed conveniently  
a mile or so before the service stops.  
It's clear where one can pull aside and enter  
Passions or The Lion's Den,  
especially in winter,  
when the roadside scenery is pretty  
desolate on route to Kansas City

or St. Louis. Most frequenters are haulers  
of the goods embodying earned dollars,  
the men whose work confines  
them to a cab for every shift.  
False hope embeds itself in vibrant signs,  
a lift of heart to stave off loneliness,  
a whisper or a cry  
reminding weary passersby  
that life is not comprised of only this.

MARTY STEYER

## **The River**

Though flowing fast, it was immovable,  
grooved into ground by force of gravity.  
Its course, though true, was still unprovable,  
outdistancing what we could plainly see.  
As we sat around the cabin's woodstove,  
our memories were like rockers: back and forth.  
We spoke of Maine, where we had learned to love  
all things spare and sparse and farther north.  
We spoke of riding west through head-high grass,  
of rubbing star on star until each glowed,  
of sliding down an icy mountain pass,  
of thrills where melted snow, in rapids, flowed.  
That night the river rose without remorse –  
broad, muddy, fast – flooding past our doors.

HANNAH HACKNEY

**Bezel**

Two glossy pigeons peering from the archway. Turn the handle,  
in the stairwell the solid, rounded smell of an extinguished candle.  
Through a door a baby wailing in one long unbroken tone.

On the nightstand through the bezel's aperture I see a hair of mine  
you'd coiled against the smooth raw surface of the stone.  
It's nested in the silver that roots the jewel to your finger  
quiet as the strip that bridles mouth to tongue,  
a rim around the border, and underneath the matrix  
bearing up the tensions that bring the ring to form.

STELLA NICKERSON

### **Unloving Song**

This is a song for the unloving ones,  
those with the bodies unsuited to zeal,  
cool-hearted daughters and stone-throated sons.  
While others – the softer ones, so quick to feel –  
are crying and swaying and knocking their knees,  
they will be standing by, awkwardly still,  
spines stiff, thoughts clicking like typewriter keys.  
They are unburned by the chemical spill  
of anger and hunger and wanting and wrench.  
And when something breaches their steel-banded sides,  
they'll hold in their tears with a cold-muscle clench.  
They face open-eyed bitter March and its ideo,  
as somebody has to so others can cry  
as much as they need to before the Long Sigh.

BARDIA SINAEE

## **Performance Review**

You seem attached to methods we've discarded.  
We've noticed an indifference to critique.  
The focus here has shifted since you started  
yet you seem attached to methods we've discarded.

Sticking to this new course that we've charted  
might improve your numbers week to week,  
which reflect the methods we've discarded.  
But we've noticed an indifference to critique.

MARYANN CORBETT

## **Open Verdict**

They interviewed her office mate.  
He groped for insights, which were small.  
I didn't know her well, he said.  
Nice girl, but unremarkable.

The self co-workers thought they knew  
seemed pleasant, laughed its well-bred laugh,  
billed hours and planned vacation trips,  
smiled for the annual photograph,

but left a stable office job  
abruptly, as though forced to flee  
by demons draped in chalk-stripe gray  
cloaks of invisibility

over their asset-column souls.  
Were any of them actual friends?  
Nobody says exactly that.  
She turned her key-card in. There ends

the evidence we have. The life  
stops leaving traces. No report;  
no missing person.

In the fridge,

the food was years beyond its date

and moldy dishes filled the sink  
the day they came to seize the flat  
and found the skeleton, before  
the sightless television set.

ANTON YAKOVLEV

### **Some Words Were Said**

One contest win transformed my elder friend into a man unfit for human warmth. He went from trying to be understood to letting everybody know who's boss.

He won with a short film. The night before, he said in confidence, "I know I'll lose." Suddenly he was quoting his own scripts with confidence. By God, was he in charge!

"You see, the things that made me a success..." he lectured friend and foe, with or without solicitation, with a righteous air implying only wimps would fail to heed

his valuable advice. He questioned my intelligence and tact when I misspoke. "Just look at that big idiot – Anton!" he'd say out loud in public, as a joke.

"So what," he would confront me, "if I'm rough around the edges? Stick with me, you'll get places it would take you fifteen years to get without my guidance – mark my words!"

He justified his lack of tolerance: someone around here's got to have control; unfortunately, you don't get control by being nice to people. Others shrugged,

made other plans and quietly walked off. At first I did my best to look beyond the obvious. I stuck with him – but then some words were said, and we fell out of touch.

Years passed. Sometimes I'd see a trembling kid who, I'd find out, worked for his studio. All others would be normal in the room while his employee sweated like a sponge.

Roommates of friends would tell me that my old acquaintance had lost weight, all bile and nerves: fame did not come, no other contests won. Electric bills were getting hard to pay.

One day he must have looked me up online and noticed that I, too, had won a prize for something I had written. The next day I got an email: "How the hell are you?

It's been – oh Jesus, it's been much too long! What are you up to? What a lovely win! I'm glad you're getting noticed! Let's grab lunch, got to catch up on everything." I sat

in gathering twilight. The forthcoming storm tickled my neck. The window made a sound. Standing out on my balcony, I thought back to the little movie he had done:

a bowler, striving for a perfect game, spoke to the screen: "You have to keep it light. That's how you get them all to give you space when you are near your goal. Don't look behind

your shoulder for approval – that's the key!" The movie ended with that perfect game. I closed the door, went back to my PC and pressed "Delete." We never spoke again.

CLAUDIA GARY

**Author Event**

My talk today will not extend  
to anything that terrifies.  
This century is not our friend,

but pessimism may offend  
those technophiles and other guys  
who talk today. Let me extend

a welcome. Glad you could attend!  
Now listen to my soothing lies.  
This century is not your friend,

but even so, I'll try to blend  
your fears with hopes. Let's compromise.  
You talk of days that won't extend

much longer, but you must suspend  
your disbelief and euphemize  
our century, to be its friend.

Put down those books that recommend  
a course of action. Rest your eyes.  
My talk today cannot extend  
the century. But be my friend!

SUSAN MCLEAN

**Miss Emily Dickinson to Sir Andrew Marvell**

“The grave’s a fine and private place”—  
on that, Sir, I agree—  
yet assignations there—would comfort  
neither you—nor me—

for You—a Hawk among the wrens—  
with appetite—for Flesh—  
d disdain to dine with Vultures  
if the Meat—be less than fresh—

while I—at Deprivation’s board—  
such ample feasts have known—  
that rest is all I crave—and I  
prefer to sleep alone.

DAVID LeBLANC

### **A City Song**

The wind has found  
each lighted square  
and fills the town  
with forest air.

It carries crushed berries  
and maple sap  
and leaves them glowing  
in sidewalk cracks.

The winter's sting  
is lost among  
the streetlights singing  
cicada songs.

We watch the street  
through open windows,  
warmed by sheets  
and evening candles.

The wind blows;  
you lean your head  
against the window  
above our bed.

You part your lips,  
you loose your hair  
to fill them with  
the forest air.

I hear your song.  
I sing your prayer.  
I'll soon belong  
to forest air.

E.V. WYLER

### **The Dreams We Dared To Drain**

Where ghostly sentinels are silenced silhouettes standing in vain,  
bleeding our shades of blended shame on blight-lined highways below,  
their shadows remind passing drivers of dreams we dared to drain.

The crumbling, brick carcasses of boarded-up apartments strain  
to display truths we're forced to face if the trails of traffic slow  
where ghostly sentinels are silenced silhouettes standing in vain.

Rush-hour bottlenecks bemoaned by most motorists as their bane  
help those hindered pay homage to hollowed homes of long ago;  
their shadows remind passing drivers of dreams we dared to drain.

When daylight's drowned against the windowless dam of a plywood pane  
so a building's abandoned bowels flood with blackness, who dares go  
where ghostly sentinels are silenced silhouettes standing in vain?

Perhaps some doll left beside a spray-painted stoop must remain  
to testify tenants once entered its apartment's portico;  
their shadows remind passing drivers of dreams we dared to drain.

Once darkness descends, and the caravans of commuters wane,  
journey through the desert of an injured, desolate Jericho.  
Where ghostly sentinels are silenced silhouettes standing in vain,  
their shadows remind passing drivers of dreams we dared to drain.

CHARLES HUGHES

**Small Prayer at 2 A.M.**

Wind, lightning, thunder, rain.  
Then things – briefly – get quiet,  
Till all hell breaks loose again,  
Less thunderstorm than riot.  
A man, exhausted, falls  
Against the locked doors of  
St. Peter's, cardboard shawls  
Pulled snug, and doesn't move.  
But morning finds him back  
At Clark and Madison,  
His text his utter lack.  
Maybe a modern John  
Of the Cross, he preaches to  
A rush-hour congregation  
How Jesus changes you  
And called him by privation.  
Listening late at night  
To the wind-whipped rain collide  
With shut windows holding tight,  
I picture him outside  
And hear freak gratitude:  
"Ain't got a lot but God,  
But God – praise God! – is good."  
Bunched lightning flashes prod  
Thunder to lunatic glee.  
*Lord, let my faith keep warm  
And dry – I cannot see  
Love's tender energy  
Illuminate this storm.*

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Derek Updegraff** is the author of three poetry chapbooks and a collection of short stories forthcoming from the Stephen F Austin State University Press in the fall of 2016. His poems, translations, short stories, and essays have appeared in *Bayou Magazine*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Rosebud*, *The Classical Outlook*, *Oral Tradition*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, and other places, and he is a contributing writer for the forthcoming Wiley-Blackwell *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*. Currently he is an Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at California Baptist University.

**Marty Steyer** lives in the Seattle area. His poetry has recently appeared in *Measure* and *Teaching English at the Two-Year College*. He is a recent winner of the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award.

**Hannah Hackney** has writing published or forthcoming in such venues as *KIN*, *Raintown Review*, and *Lemon Hound*. She is the co-creator of Dyad Press, which publishes small handmade books of art, poetry, and photography. In addition to her work as a journalist and technical writer, Hannah currently works in polymer research in Montreal.

**Stella Nickerson** studies engineering in Arizona. Her poetry has appeared in *Cicada*, *Strong Verse*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Mezzo Cammin*. Links to her work can be found at [www.stellanickerson.com](http://www.stellanickerson.com).

**Bardia Sinaee** is a poet living in Toronto. His poems have been published around Canada in places like *Arc*, *The Malahat Review*, *The Walrus* and *Best Canadian Poetry 2015* (Tightrope Books).

**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 was published last year by 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 *LIGHT*, *Measure*, *River Styx*, and *Poetry East* and is forthcoming in *American Arts Quarterly*, *Ecotone*, *The Evansville Review* and others. Her website is at [maryanncorbett.com](http://maryanncorbett.com).

Originally from Moscow, Russia, **Anton Yakovlev** lives in Ridgewood, New Jersey and works as a college textbook editor. He studied filmmaking and poetry at Harvard University. His work is published or forthcoming in *The New Yorker*, *Fulcrum*, *American Arts Quarterly*, *Measure*, *The Raintown Review*, *Angle* and elsewhere. He is the author of chapbooks *Neptune Court* (The Operating System, 2015) and *The Ghost of Grant Wood* (Finishing Line Press, 2015). He has also directed several short films.

**Claudia Gary**, author of *Humor Me* (David Robert Books, 2006), became a third-time Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award finalist in 2015. Claudia's recent chapbooks *Bikini Buyer's Remorse* (humorous) and *Let's Get Out of Here* (war poems) are available via the email address in [pw.org/content/claudia\\_gary](mailto:pw.org/content/claudia_gary). Her reading of love poems is at the 28-minute mark here: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/newmercurymedia/2016/02/15/pnn--salute-to-love-2016>.

**Susan McLean** is a professor of English at Southwest Minnesota State University. Her first book of poetry, *The Best Disguise*, won the 2009 Richard Wilbur Award, and her second book, *The Whetstone Misses the Knife*, won the 2014 Donald Justice Poetry Prize. She has also published a 2006 poetry chapbook, *Holding Patterns*, and a collection of her verse translations of 503 Latin epigrams by Martial, *Selected Epigrams* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), which was a finalist for the 2015 PEN Center USA Translation Award.

Much of New England poet **David LeBlanc**'s recent work attempts to reconcile a personal pastoral past with an urban present. A graduate of the Stonecoast Creative Writing MFA program, he will be starting a Ph.D in British Literature in the fall and hopes to one day read, write, and teach for a living.

**E. V. "Beth" Wyler** is a middle-aged homemaker who lives in New Jersey (U.S.A.) with her husband, Richard, three children, three cats, and a Beta fish. In addition to *The Rotary Dial*, her poems have appeared in: *The Storyteller*, *Feelings of the Heart*, *WestWard Quarterly*, *The Pink Chameleon*,

and *Nuthouse Magazine*.

**Charles Hughes** is the author of the poetry collection, *Cave Art* (Wiseblood Books, 2014). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *America*, the *Anglican Theological Review*, *The Christian Century*, the *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Measure*, *The Rotary Dial*, the *San Diego Reader*, the *Sewanee Theological Review*, *Think Journal*, and elsewhere. He worked as a lawyer for thirty-three years before his retirement and lives with his wife in the Chicago area.