

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Christina Pugh**

**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Rotary

Closer to a bell than a bird,  
that clapper ringing  
the clear name  
of its inventor:

by turns louder  
and quieter than a clock,  
its numbered face  
was more literate,

triplets of alphabet  
like grace notes  
above each digit.

And when you dialed,  
each number was a shallow hole  
your finger dragged  
to the silver  
comma-boundary,

then the sound of the hole  
traveling back  
to its proper place  
on the circle.

You had to wait for its return.  
You had to wait.  
Even if you were angry  
and your finger flew,

you had to await  
the round trip  
of seven holes  
before you could speak.

The rotary was weird for lag,  
for the afterthought.

Before the touch-tone,  
before the speed-dial,  
before the primal grip  
of the cellular,

they built glass houses  
around telephones:  
glass houses in parking lots,  
by the roadside,  
on sidewalks.

When you stepped in  
and closed the door,  
transparency hugged you,

and you could almost see

your own lips move,  
the dumb-show  
of your new secrecy.

Why did no one think  
to conserve the peal?

Just try once  
to sing it to yourself:  
it's gone,

like the sound of breath  
if your body left.

Christina Pugh