

Work Poetry / Poésie de Travail

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WORK POETRY/ POÉSIE DE TRAVAIL

“Why write: as soon ask, why rivet? Because a number of personal accidents drift us toward the occupation of riveter, which pre-exists, and most importantly, the riveting-gun exists, and we love it”

John Updike

In this city
where some of us write
about work

the owner of a construction firm
near bankruptcy
last year

killed his lover
and himself
with a riveting-gun

Why write?

“Work is a kind of prayer”
Dannie Abse

If work is a kind of prayer
it is a prayer to things handled

as the things handled
pray back to us

When we handle things and then write words
we speak of that interchange of prayers

But when we handle only
pens

we begin to pray to our pens
for words

that are solid
excuses for having let go

In July 86 I gave notice at my proofreading job in Toronto,
because I had been invited to *Split Shift*, the first work
writing conference, August 21 - 24, in Vancouver.

When the clear plastic overlay
of this two-colour coupon is lifted

the bullets prices and logos
that will come out red when printed

seem to hover
above the base blue copy -

effortless clouds above the prairies
are hovering also all this morning

their shadows unconnected below of those hard-won patch-works of ground

Proofread these coupons 5 more weeks
then settle back in a window seat

and look down / as now
as always: for flaws

7.18.86
Toronto

Come Daylight

Shriek of stellar jay -
how long has black been blue-black?

The self-pitying nasal chant
of a saw starting up -

has the cleared slope's image bristling
in the raised lake

White bone-wood fuzzed with frost
warms down to wet grey
along the demarkation lines of shadows -

pushed through the teeth of that whining chain:
furious light
by the board-foot

Near Gold River, B.C.



“Working Up-Island” is what we (me, Calvin Wharton, Tom Wayman, & Glen Downie) called our mini-tour of northern Vancouver Island in the spring of 1985 during National Book Festival, or “National Bug Festival” as one woman who was hard of hearing called it.

The Chore/ography Of Getting

From the peak of lateness I see I love
even the woman who stops abruptly
in front of me on the escalator -
excuse me excuse me

Phantom Hosiery
pinks yellows
hobbling or balled-up
fist-sized in drawers

Fierce grey drag of worth
- he throws his long butt at the wheel
pushes onto the bus behind me
blows smoke into my hair

Resigned
oozing stumped
dreams bumper
to bumper

The driver despite my silent entreaties
that he stop for nothing must
stop beside the Beckers store
and waddle in for a coffee to go

Penguins broken
open stories grafted
forgotten plots
of sleep

From the peak of lateness I see I love
and despise the chore/ography of getting
each morning to my drafting table:
papered incline / root-cellar door. . .

Advertise
with Val-Pak
of Metro
222-4300

Sunday

I dream fact:

Windsor/Detroit
The slash is the river
in winter pre-Seaway
pre-tunnel

Houdini cannot find the hole
he went through
The current is too strong

He scrapes his nose
raw on the ice
He glares at ice
inches thick

Air bubbles get him
down-stream alive to open
water near Zug Island
steel plants

I wake to fact:

Another actual Monday
has thickened against us
during the night

Heart of Saturday Night
we pushed to the limit
like always

I go back down
to dream more fact:

There are no holes

Phil Hall

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