

## 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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