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Volume 1 *Fall* 1974

Article 12

August 2014

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Recommended Citation

Wayman, Tom (2014) "Three Poems," *Ontario Review*: Vol. 1, Article 12.

Available at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol1/iss1/12>

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Three Poems

TOM WAYMAN

The Factory Hour

The sun up through a blue mist
draws its own tide: this is the factory hour.
As I drive east, I pass dozens like myself
waiting on the curb for buses, for company crummies,
for car pools: grey plastic lunch buckets,
safety boots, old clothes. All of us pulled
on the same factory tide.

The plant's parking lot
is the dock; the small van of the industrial caterers
has opened at the furthest gate through the fence: coffee, cigarettes,
sandwiches. Walking in through the asphalt yard
we enter the hull of the vessel.

The great hold is readying itself for the voyage. Steam
rises slowly from the acid cleaning tanks
near the small parts conveyer and spray booth.
We pass to the racks of cards; sudden clang of a rolling machine
but otherwise only the hum of voices, generators, compressors.
Click and thump of the cards at the clock. The slow movement
of those already changed into blue coveralls.

The hooter sounds, and we're cast off. First coughs
and the mutter of the forklift engines.
Then the first rivets shot home in the cab shop's metal line.
Air hoses everywhere connected, beginning to hiss, the whirl
of the hood line's drills. The first bolts are tightened:
the ship underway on the water of time.

Howl of the routers: smell of fibreglass dust.
Noise of the suction vacuum, the cutter, the roar
of dollies trundled in for a finished hood. And the PA endlessly calling
for partsmen, for foremen, for chargehands:

Neil Watt to Receiving please, Neil Watt.

Jeff Adamanchuck to Sheet Metal.

Dave Gibbard to Gear Shop . . . to Parts Desk . . . Sub-Assembly.

The hooters marking the half-hours, the breaks,
the ship plunging ahead. The PA sounding

*Call 1 for the superintendent; Call 273; Call guardhouse; Call switch-
board.*

Lunch at sea: sprawled by the hoods in ordinary weather
or outside at the doors to the parts-yard if fine; whine of the fans
and the constant shuttling of the forklifts
show that the ship still steams. Then the hooter
returns us back to the hours of eyebolts,
grilles, wiring headlamps, hoodguides, shaping and
sanding smooth the aircleaner cutouts. On and on
under the whirl of the half-ton crane, rattle of the impact wrench
grating of new hood shells as they are dragged onto a pallet.

To the last note of the hooter: the boat returned to its City.
A final lineup at the timeclock, and out through the doors
to the dockside parking lot. Late afternoon:
I drive into the tide of homebound traffic, headed west now
still moving into the sun.

Untangling

A man and a woman living together a long time
are an organization, a small makeshift company
operating from a storefront, a tiny corporation
that creaks and groans and has its own peculiar filing system
that nevertheless can usually be made to produce
what those running it want to find again.

Working for it is deeply unsatisfying:
no matter how hard you try you can't seem to do a good job.
On assembly, you're always parts short,
the specifications have been changed,
the one part of the job you figured you had cold
the leadhand has just told you he doesn't like how you do it.

Personalities get accommodated
with the automatic gestures of two men carrying a board
they have already lifted each day for a month.
Or with all the effort spent in bringing a pet cat
into somebody's room: food has to be stored away, a catbox
put out, certain windows must be kept shut. Then it's a year
since you last really looked at her face.

None of this considers events: someone crying
at the breakfast table, while somebody else
goes calmly on eating. On shift
you can't wait for coffee and for quitting time
but walking out to the parking lot you feel a little incomplete
off work until tomorrow. Or maybe leaving for good:
that means a part of your life
marked off and left back there like yesterday's timecard,
like talking about the details of your last job,
like starting again to look for
another necessary tangle.

Gold Coast

I am back in Shaw's Cove after four years
this April, lying in the sand under a hot sun.
Cry and coo of the pigeons
in the nearby palms and eucalyptus. The surf
fills up the sea beach with its wind: in the bright day
the water swells easily, peaks
and crashes again onto California—the foam
pours up the beach with its hiss. Here and there
one surge of thin white water crosses another
bubbling into tiny pillars of froth in the rush, recoiling,
but always moving up the already-wetted sand
as a hand slides smoothly along a surface of polished wood.

Much of the County has changed.
On the green-brown hills where the fields were
where the rangeland was
carpenters are hammering where there never were trees.
Miles of condominiums going up:
the County framed in, the free air
boxed and partitioned into tracts, developments, the order of money
as forecast: the last of the empty coastline going.
Only the ocean is the same: at Laguna the wide Pacific horizon
still suddenly spreads across the morning like a gift
rising behind the highway businesses, the palms, and the real estate.