

"Work?!"

030197

moldy bread, not quite mummified, behind the books . smells truly green . *you know* who it is: Mr. Stench has arrived . "ack!" do lice have a sense of smell? do you have a sense of humor? tiny words squeak from a telephone earpiece . giggles split a grin . amazement: hey! *hay muchos Goosebumps!* piled on the floor . *World War I Tommy (Illustrated)*: uniform, helmet, gun, medals . FREE SOFTWARE EXPLODES YOUR BUSINESS! *i told* you not to go in there! the smell of smoke curls off her fury . duet of crying babies . the red-headed man placed it just out of reach, said: you never know when a pair of pliers'll come in handy.

Reverberations

racket & clash, clattering chipping-hammer, clanging hot metallic chatter in a haze of metal-melting welding-torch fumes, smoke, and acrid blue flames spitting slag-spray, stink of singed leather and skin and vibrating hull-humming head-aching whine of grinders on bulkheads, banging chipping-hammers chipping steel, flipping chips over floors groaning under two tons of torqued-up turret lathe, grating out grunts and hot blue chips, moaning carbide-tipped cutting-tool biting cold-rolled steel, peeling off spiral springs and chips raining, chips flying, while chipping-hammers hammer, chipping steel, chipping nerves, chipping eardrums, chipping hours out of life until the whistle blows and ears ring with silence

Two poems engaged in work, orbiting around individual experience: echoes of five years in machine shops and shipyards. memory traces of a day's work at our inner-city library with the usual cast of characters: the unwashed, the young & giggly, the fix-it guy, the pissed-off. (and yes, we actually have found bags of moldy bread behind the books.) work as CONTENT not contented to sit and be noun, subject matter, word fodder. work: "to form." yeah, FORM, our mutual friend with strange innovative habits. a way to get the brain buzzed, to be entertained, get thought processes bumped from their usual groove, undermine official versions of reality.

So what's the work of a poem, its purpose? "poetry doesn't need a purpose, it just IS." *well, find one anyway!* like finding identity? getting connected to alternate power sources: similar selves. connect to other minds, other lives. to understand: do you know how a shipyard smells? do you feel the grinders in your bones? or the strain of living on minimum wage? life goes cheap in eight-hour pieces: desolate desperate inconsolable inconceivable irreversible irrevocable irretrievable. the "wider view" seen from inside out. particular intractable details of one singular individual life suddenly seen as part of a pattern. make the connections. get self-respect.

Now juxtapose, cut & paste. exchange for brain work: work = words. the material of thinking/working life. deifying ideas. work constructed of bits of literary, social, philosophical theory. making distinctions instead of connections.\* think critically. ask: whose poetry is bad? define bad: subjective. failing to add bits of theory. no wider view, no analysis. superficial. having failed to meet intellectual criteria. BAD. so look for answers in innovation or form or effective analysis of power structures: "cultural capital" "symbolic capital" *what the hell y'all talkin about?* in-fighting, word-fighting. say it: where's the beef? *i mean the money!* call it work call it unpaid labor and what do we hope to get? R-E-S-P-E-C-T. extracting respect from intellectual peers, eager (or not) to be immortally entombed in thick anthologies. a way to dig in or infiltrate: outsider opinion transformed to insider source? respect respect respect respect respect. what we all want. coming at it from different directions. so whose life/work is more worthy? how do *you* decide whose poetic aesthetic gets to be judge?

\*is this why we're called elitist?