

David Phillips / SIX POEMS

DRIVING NORTH

never felt like this before, who cares
with stars blowing across the windshield,
bright green branches shaking the headlights,
staring past the glare, alert & glad

not knowing what lies ahead. is the power out?
so many places known & gone — friends,
ones loved, others
i might reach, not beseech

come, join me anywhere, i'm your heart.
i know, i had reason to go slow
near Middlepoint, tree across the lines.

but my nature takes me otherwise,
by the eyes, so to speak. that
is always the issue, who knows
another's truth, where in the world
are we. i'm tired of

going home the poets sing.
i also prefer motion. i'd rather
get carried away, wondering
what i'm after.

Diane would say: can't you drive
any faster?

CUTTHROAT

outside. never thought
i wanted to go there nor knew it a place.
cedars and fir overhead
& light rain. cutthroat aching to spawn
linger in the creek's mouth
waiting for the lake to rise

one swims near the gravel, red slash behind its gills.

strange drought for this coast
too warm for mid November. almost no rain.
outside, i know this

last night left the truck hanging on a cedar
up the driveway, cut the edge
too fine, avoiding the deeper ruts, hung there
in the blackness, close to tipping over

this is it
i thought. if i get too close to the edge
i won't be outside anymore.

no light to find the key to the house.
got one by touch, memory,
got back in. but i'll never
get back in now. i'm where the poets tread

precariously, yearning for the fire, the hearth,
order. but wild, courting panic. cutting
a fine line finer, thinking it beautiful

that slender green fish with the red slashed throat.
thinking it beautiful

FOUNDATIONS

alone in the heat, working,
ocean right there if i look up

summer sky's blue depth,
tying re-bar in the footings.

quirky habits of mind (a free man
in this labour?)

i could easily lie down & sleep in a heap
near yellow flowers i can't name,
gladness like shade come over me
or put down the tools,
walk to the ocean & dive in

forget i work for any reason
not even this — but i know
i'm held in something
like a spell & don't resist

the brief instance, glimpses
if the future holds.
is there still time in this poetry?
friends in other places (some dead)
would be glad
hearing this said.

still, the nature of the structure
haunts me — foundations, images of
permanence,

"the walls that do not fall"

faith in the imagination I grasped
like a man drowning,

shameless, frightened in its presence.

who wanted me
no other way.

a feverish search for an exact place.

panic, working alone in the summer heat,
should not have come here
but no choice now, this
is just the beginning

A NOTE

or passing by, not noticing
it goes without saying, is
personally a kind of dogma now —
who's doing that chirping, that
west sky, March clouds
stream & drift, open if i look
long enough, don't stop.
something's boiling. Robin
Blaser's poem speaks to the heart
reading, seeks
& restores the heart reading.
every word is
that place moving.
it ain't easy.
passing by alone
seems so but it's not.
writing out the heart,
simply said, is
wonderously near
impossible. try it.

looking out of, yes
the person, north
america's real place, prize,
seeking communion —
fear no one, look
out of yourself & be still

but not stopped

twilight, March 30, 1991

POEM FOR BARRIE (FROM SECHELT)

coming to the writing alone,
this house & some music,
good.

not practise for the end. the end?

want to think
the best of
each, any

not pretend their lives, even
near. a guess.
the practised certainty

beyond pretense. a promise.

sure, i've turned away & been turned
this way
& that. for goodness sake.

a stab in the dark. the point.

got here because
wishing makes it so.

summer air cups the house,
not think alone i thought.
the beautiful poets persist,
won't leave the room (world), cavort
in their impossible languages.

fill the blue rooms with a series of exquisite sunsets.
came here for something
i was supposed to know.
you don't say.

warm inside tonight, no insects got in.
outside, a moment ago, stars
& a white cloud like huge vapour trail,
transparent eerie light.
i looked up on purpose, for a sign.

wondering who spends the time well,
in mysterious circumstances write us.

they write us because they are somewhere at last
& look up or out or over,

because they are us

BARRY McKINNON SAYS THE IMAGINATION IS THE PLACE

consequences of habitual ways of seeing makes
place same, jeopardy, like stuck
or fixed, static, staid
there & back, makes

nowhere, not so easily said, as if spoken

broken tongue talk. but this place

is one actual, one imagined
exactly located.

 this is mind's play.

a cedar wax wing
yellow tipped tail, sleek
grey head, elegant.

one is civilization, poem's song
succession of location. think light liquid.

or passing Davis bay in the truck, not
stopping as if it's
there again,
 glimpsed & later made coherence.
meditative.

i haven't got time.

then that bird appeared, what
to make of it,
 the world it lives in,
speak,
 outside apprehension.

i drive to reach a conclusion, being
in place meant
zip, or so i thought the bird in motion

stopped me in my tracks, had me
by the eyes.

sacred instance?

beauty flows into the branches
of that small tree, red berries bright,

flies out