

“One of the saddest things is that the only thing a man can do for eight hours a day, day after day, is work. You can’t eat for eight hours a day nor drink for eight hours a day nor make love for eight hours—all you can do for eight hours is work. Which is the reason why man makes himself and everybody else so miserable and unhappy”—William Faulkner.

Things We Can Do for Eight Hours

A human being can sleep for eight hours.
Well, some can—though that variety
of slumber gave up on me years ago and
most often I sit, exquisitely alert, between
2:00 and 4:00 a.m., rewriting a poem
(or something).

Many men can watch football for eight hours,
or longer even—though I gave up on that
years ago, tend to fall asleep instead.

I will join you, however, for an eight hour walk
through any terrain reasonably preserved
in its natural state. Simply be prepared to stop,
now and again, if we stumble across berries,
ready for immediate consumption.

Poetry is work, of course, but not a variety
anyone is likely to consider
in terms of hours spent.
Who knows where the time goes?

Yet I remember, right after joining
the union, with no other employment
available, painting apartments
in New York City: three rooms per man
per day, running, exhausted at day’s end,
not-so-pleasantly light-in-the-head from
breathing the kind of air that painters
breathed too often back then
(still do sometimes), and caring not much,
therefore, how ceilings, walls, trim
had in fact turned out; happy simply
to escape without complaint.

And in this way we discover:

that when work
begins to measure itself as time

and time
begins to measure itself as money

human beings begin to lose a measure
of our selves—though

you may consider it prudent
to keep this revelation to your-self.
(I was not, actually, supposed
to let you know.)

We might each also have
an opportunity at some point
in this life to meet one of those
who have been trying to explain it
to the rest of us for generations.
You could even discover on your own
by accepting the following subject
for a small research project:

In how many languages
of indigenous peoples
can we find a word that means
“wages”?

Steve Bloom
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