

Work

I'm sitting at the kitchen table, working
on a poem, though that locution might amuse
the carpenter and his two assistants
who are in the basement and driveway
attending to the rotting bulkhead frame
and replacing a cellar window so far gone
I could stick my thumb right into the sill.
A small job, but still a day's actual work,
maybe two. I hear them calling measurements,
the shriek of the circular saw, a hammer
banging just under my feet, a loud, grinding
vibration that comes from I don't know what
infernal tool, an occasional laugh
revealing the play in their work. And here
is where I could begin maneuvering
into an analogy between carpentry
and the making of poems, hauling in
the whole vocabulary of woodworking:
level, plumb, dovetail, and especially *true*.
But that poem has already been written
a number of times, and it would ignore
the undercurrent of uselessness I feel
sitting at the kitchen table doing what
any respectable carpenter would call
nothing. And if that undercurrent is
one of the hazards of the job, it's nothing
compared to what could be done to a thumb
with a circular saw. Plus, they seem
much better than I am at getting things right
the first time. The poem I was working on
before I started this one, and which I've been

working on for several months, on and off,
is about pine trees, which is funny because
I'm sure the boards these guys are using
are pine. Not that they wouldn't understand
or even appreciate my attempts to get at
the druidical otherness of the trees,
or enjoy this poem that is partly about them.
But even if either poem were finished,
I probably wouldn't be taking it with me
when I go out to chat with them as they eat lunch.
I don't even point out the pines themselves,
rising above the woods not fifty yards
from where they sit on the tailgate of their truck.
They laugh at my dog eating sawdust
and ask his name. We talk about the Red Sox.
Their work looks good, and I tell them so.