

## FOR YOUR LEAVING

It's a nice night for trains,  
for traveling,  
for insects that fly by the stars,  
but I know nothing of trains.  
I know the long solemn tracks  
that unfold for me in my long dreams,  
and in my long dreams I have paused  
for that pedestrian love  
which should never have overtaken me  
at the crossing gates of this (my brief  
my little) life, but poets I think  
should know something of trains.  
So I listen. I watch the tracks.  
My great grandfather, they say,  
built the tunnel through Lookout Mountain  
sheltering tracks that ran  
from Chattanooga to Vicksburg  
and during the Civil War  
Bragg's men fought off the blue  
in the tunnel my very Southern  
Alabama rebel ancestor built.  
But that is all my knowledge of trains.

I have stood by Moccasin Bend  
and dreamed of heroes on the tracks  
and wished I had made this river,  
laid these tracks, with my body  
for a spade hollowed limestone  
and left my purpled shadow dying  
on the walls of the tunnel.

I have prayed for some knowledge  
of trains, of journeys, prayed  
and strained to hear the sound of the tracks:  
dissonance and steel.  
If I knew of trains I might know  
why you watched your dreams  
blast-capping themselves, might  
drive the spike of some better lines  
for you. But I am ignorant.  
Nevertheless this is for you;  
my seal is on it, plain and frank,  
like you. These words are not praise  
dropped in the church-plate for guilt's  
sake, but well-spaced ties, because  
the audacity of your fiber

flows into me like dreams, or rivers.  
We will make our way alone, carving lives  
from piles of tar-pitched timbers and stone.  
I give you this because your bones  
have a typography theirs alone. They make me wish  
I were a traveler of trains,  
an architect of tunnels or possibly  
some bright fixed point in the heavens  
decisively spinning its mortality out,  
coming again and again to dragoon passengers  
through storms and lead them through the dark,  
a conductor of trains, arranging our destinies  
along these tracks, always going at night, following  
the lead-car headlight of our brightness gleaming,  
ignoring the vicarious freeloader of a  
river that runs below alongside our route.  
We would know only urgency and longing.

I know nothing of the greater urgency  
and secrecy of trains, why they go at night,  
but I have heard that once in Arkansas a maniac  
was almost caught by the police even  
as the train came by, that he escaped  
by jumping over the tracks just before it came,  
over the tracks and into the swamp.  
So I know a little of the saving grace  
of trains, how they take pity sometimes  
on the pursued and the pursuer and  
sometimes leave us to breathe  
our own days to their deaths, in muffled  
sleep, to bear alone the slow progress  
through clutches of Loblolly, hearing lonesome  
hushed continuities of winds in trees.  
I do know a little piece, enough, perhaps.  
I know that sometimes, left prostrate  
by so many choices, a train can come.

In the season of my innocence  
I have played chase with trains, played Christ  
with trains, asking if there is a way  
for one to pass me by, a way to jump  
in front of it and cross to the other side,  
to hear the crack of my foot on leaves  
on the safe side of the tracks  
and know that it is past, that every sound  
of leap and branch pronounces the shortness of time.  
I wish trains had never stopped to claim me.  
I wish I had never thought of trains,

never known grief, never despised  
this self-eating depravity of passion.  
But that is not the nature of trains  
or a watcher of trains; we must  
follow the little length of lonely track  
just ahead and not wish to have made it.  
We must be blameless and we must not blame.  
I don't blame you, boarder of trains,  
night-traveler. I make my little peace  
if you will take a little pity.