

Poets

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Foot Of St. Georges Avenue

The boxcars couple, they shunt into the railyard,
their wheels cry all night, they play. The late work
at the dry dock beneath the hull-filled vault,
at the grain elevator, at the shipping terminal
with vessels lying up against the pier
and floodlit containers being shifted
by whirling, roaring cranes, at rail crossings
where I chewed car-spilled grain until my jaw
ached, and made rough gum — is play. No one sees
beyond what he sees when he runs, swings, screams,
no one knows more than a child knows. A boy
will look up, call for a father to put
a crashed electric locomotive back
on its perfect circle of rails. He will see no one,
and leave the room to look up the rest of his life.
The tracks laid down along the pale insides
of a man's arms gauge the same loneliness. The train
makes its pass the way his blood makes its pass.
In the festering he will focus on it,
in the hole he tears he will find it, the one
thing that is real, and any memory kill —
the slamming of boxcars into a vein. Now he can go
anywhere he wants in the night. The train
will take him, the switching will never stop. Below
the city block where my balcony hangs
and the avenue ends, the work keeps on. I don't know.
I don't know how it is that paradise is so wide,
the junction in the head so narrow. If you shut
your eyes, in the dark behind them you will
watch while eyes are rivetted into you.
If you listen to the coupling, crying, clanging
continue down through you, it will become a chant,
and that chant, what you know; and whatever you are
will be forsaken then finished. The sleep
you crave yet fear will come, the sounds and lights
die into what rises within you. A ferry
sits in fittings, a freighter rests, its deck loaded,
boxcars stand still, ready to be hooked up again.
What you dream, what transpires while you lie there,
is the beginning of the day you will wake to —
a world assembling itself, both workshop and toy,
a Christ entering metal, never to return.

North Vancouver

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