

THE LOCO

(The old Locomotive Works on the waterfront at Kingston)

On the corner dockside of a three acre plot
A coal stockpile looms as tall as the factory,
Lakeshore sun casts shadows over Kingston
From the coal and the buildings for building locomotives,
From black steam engines in the days before diesel.

The forge, the boiler shop, the erection floor,
The travelling crane for lifting locomotives
And setting them down to the tune of a hundred hammers,
To the clamour, the pinging, the clank, and the hiss,
To the low harmonic moan of the furnace.

The scrape of heavy pieces sliding home,
The axle grease, the tocka-tock oilcan,
Drill press, flange press, nickel-steel billets,
Slotting machine, tools the size of monuments,
The hydraulic riveter, the kid who tosses rivets.

Side rod, piston rod, piston heads, crank pin,
Driving wheel, idle wheel, supplemental wheels
Raised and lowered on tracks. Work equals motion,
Equals coal bin, boiler, fire box, throttle,
Equals couplers, tenders, the numbers painted gold.

Steam whistle, steam dome, smokestack, flue,
Reciprocal motion, a weekly pay packet;
Bright infinite rails, motion equals time.
Up the city sidewalks they head home for dinner,
Past hammer dressed stones in rusty, fading light.

Shirt cloth beneath jackets begins to feel cold,
Sweat dries; they scuff in heavy, stained boots,
Their ears ringing high and clear as if a finger
Ran its wet tip round the rim of a wine glass,
And the grey smoke drifts out over the lake.