

## Overture to a Dance of Locomotives

*Williams, William Carlos, 1883-1963*

Men with picked voices chant the names  
of cities in a huge gallery: promises  
that pull through descending stairways  
to a deep rumbling.

The rubbing feet  
of those coming to be carried quicken a  
grey pavement into soft light that rocks  
to and fro, under the domed ceiling,  
across and across from pale  
earthcolored walls of bare limestone.

Covertly the hands of a great clock  
go round and round! Were they to  
move quickly and at once the whole  
secret would be out and the shuffling  
of all ants be done forever.

A leaning pyramid of sunlight, narrowing  
out at a high window, moves by the clock:  
disaccordant hands straining out from  
a center: inevitable postures infinitely  
repeated--  
two--twofour--twoeight!  
Porters in red hats run on narrow platforms.  
This way ma'am!

--important not to take  
the wrong train!

Lights from the concrete  
ceiling hang crooked but--

Poised horizontal  
on glittering parallels the dingy cylinders  
packed with a warm glow--inviting entry--  
pull against the hour. But brakes can  
hold a fixed posture till--

The whistle!

Not twoeight. Not twofour. Two!

Gliding windows. Colored cooks sweating  
in a small kitchen. Taillights--

In time: twofour!

In time: twoeight!

--rivers are tunneled: trestles

cross oozy swampland: wheels repeating

the same gesture remain relatively

stationary: rails forever parallel

return on themselves infinitely.

The dance is sure.