

These Trains Track Time

Before the rail, there was space.
Before the tracks, there was distance.
Before the speed, there was urgency,
and before the steam, there was a breath,
drawn deep by a people with the power
to dream beyond extremes. And what
is steam but water pushed to extremes?
And what is time but the continuation
of one long moment? And what is a machine
but the extension of man?
Two centuries ago, by binding hands and lands
and machinery, they connected county
to county across the country with a braid
that bound boundaries together in unity.
Every bolt here holds down a history.
Every stone that softens the weight
of every locomotive in motion, bears
not only the heft of the machine, but
the inherited heaviness of the railway,
and every journey made on its lines
is a testament to the glory of those engineers,
whose faces blackened through the tough
coal clough, and to the steaming engine,
which moved through the world with a chuff
and moved with something more than luck.
For we had made the world smaller,
though not any lesser. Towns were brought
closer, cities were drawn wider, distances
were deemed shorter but lifetimes
would be longer and lives would be fuller,
and families would be safer because
we were able to dart the difficulty off distance,
and shave the worry off grief, and to get home
before dark, and to find extra time for holidays
to the beach, or safe evacuation if the time came,
and access to education, or even just to courier
our messages faster.

Forged in steam were their dreams
like a trail of thought from A to B
on this two-hundred-year-long journey,
arriving and departing neither early nor late
in the rhythm of time on these iron lines,
with a white flag of steam flying upwards,
surrendering to the journey, hurtling forwards,
carrying motion.