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! Poised horizontal

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--

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.