

4.2 End of Track (1995)

You ask me how I am:
well – you see me
locked in this declining frame,
set square upon my buttocks
in this chair.
I have to tell you
that I cannot see,
I scarcely hear, and now
I'm far too tired to chase
my skittering thoughts
like rabbits round an empty field.

You see, I am the train
and I'm the track. I
have my back to the engine
and God knows where
we're bound. But why not ask
me where we've been?
Clickety-clack through
the mountains, along the
pristine sea, in the high old days:
I can tell you every
shining stone and every
God-made tree that
marked the way from
Durham's ringing choir.

And that's because the stoic
early formed in me would
not have dared to pray
to have such gifts along the way –
the advent of this other soul who
halved the whole I thought I was.
She matched her own austerity
with mine, and never quite
resolved the brightness and the shade
which she inherited.

What does the right rail
whisper to the left? If you'll
permit me to express it so,
it's something like 'Let's just
keep going dear: I really don't
make sense alone, but
something in me says you
shouldn't get too close'. If only
she had known (or I had told),
just how I missed this faculty of touch,
the simple need for nearness.

But then, if truth be known, I feared
the mystery and the power in her,
whose waking would have
loosened her from me –
perhaps I sensed this more than she.
Perhaps I also sensed
that dying wolf's fidelity in her
and knew the rails need never fuse.

Ah well! I've pondered this too much.
I've offered her the best I knew,
and learned to spell the simplest
words of gratitude – I think she
heard them once or twice, and
even played with them, but I'm
past caring now. So,
when you ask me how I am,
you'll only hear the whisper
on the water's face whose
depth will not be stirred again.

Canterbury - June 1995