

Blow us up slowly

The trains are the thing –
Or at least, they were for a century or two.
Now, they derail and explode
And fill the tv screens with shocking balls of fire.

Alas, even before the fear of trains,
Before Lac-Mégantic and Aliceville and a score of others,
Before the formation of formal opposition here,
There was the crushing of earth in the Upper Midwest,
The fouling of air,
The polluting of rivers and streams
And the stripping of boreal forests.

Before Casselton and Philadelphia,
 Before Lynchburg and Mount Carbon,
 (near Boomer, yes, “Boomer” West Virginia),
 Before Gogama and Galena and Heimdal and Maryville and Culbertson...
 Before the NEXT Big One,
There was illness and death in Alberta,
Whole Native communities threatened
And witless beautiful creatures set to run or die.

The trains aren't really the thing.
Though they threaten our wilderness, farms and homes,
The trains aren't really the thing.
They're the most visible sign of the advance of death
From the black bowels of earth in the distant up north.

The coupled engines of this whole thing
Are human greed
And the momentum of an industrial age ...
Blowing us up slowly.

*Roger Straw
(...with thanks to Roberta Flack)
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