

Wheel-Turner 200 years

Tunnels, viaducts, arches, soot-black
As white steam hisses, engines chug
Through embankments and cuts.
Open carriages and smuts,
Hot ashes and wooden seats racing
Faster than a frightened hare in Turner's painting.

The judder of locomotives, like giants
Waking from their tar-soaked sleepers,
And sleeping children dream of shining rails,
Journeys, and holidays, seaside tales.
When bells and whistles and crossing gates
Sweep all before them.

And labelled packages of children,
Gasmask-ready, see a different world
Of uniforms in khaki, blue and grey.
Leaving loved ones in dismay
To fleets of bombers; other engines
Of juggernauts in the sky.

Diesels and electric are today's standard.
No flashing Mallard or Flying Scot
Pinning timetables, fixing the hour.
The world has shrunk, tomorrow's power
Is light and wind, sailing ships on land:
The Temeraire returning full circle.

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