

Alan Buckley

The Alchemist

The four-year-old boy knows the joy of it,
though he doesn't understand how it happens,
as he runs, snuggled up in a duffle coat,

on the sandstone ridge between
the windmill and the observatory,
pretending to be one of those trains—

woofing a trail of clouds behind it—
that's recently vanished from his world.
He sees his breath hang in winter's brightness.

He never gets bored of this casual alchemy,
the unseen made visible; something outside him
taken into his body, changed, and then

let go, a swirl of mist that's him
and not-him intermingled. Though this
isn't what the boy's thinking: he's remembering

a big black engine, its warm oil smell,
as I am now, both of us stood wide-eyed,
each printing his ghost on the generous air.