

## Feedback from the Assessment Centre

I'm too old for this.  
Sweating but competent  
I pass the numerical  
and verbal reasoning test,  
though I'm too aware of my feet.  
Do they realise who I am?  
But I'm old enough to know  
that as soon as the generic *they*  
turn up to be dressed down  
I'm lost.  
In the interview,  
my wizened judgement  
of the paths  
combines surprisingly  
with a stubborn late belief  
that things – my things –  
might work,  
and so make something fresh,  
with the clear eyes  
of a man of experience  
in driving spray.

It's by the roleplay  
I'm rocked back,  
in the lifelong incapacity  
to think on my feet  
when under attack:  
this young thespian hireling  
chief executive for the day  
snacks me for breakfast  
to demonstrate my lack of sidestep.  
It's a primitive transaction  
from way back where through red mist  
I would retaliate without a strategy,  
a neural disconnection  
channelled into burning cheeks.  
I didn't get the job.  
I got feedback and sympathy.

I think of my father-in-law  
under fire on the Normandy beaches  
at twenty-two  
laying out tracks for the tanks  
above a toppled hulk in a hole  
that had men in.

The morning after, the wind  
still whistles in my pockets.  
Returning to the old zoo

there's a few more cages empty,  
the possibilities thinned,  
more things I didn't do.  
My life still stretches out before me.