

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.