

Jack Hitchcock

Patrimony

My grandad tended to old men when young,
The kind who'd spent a lifetime in the pit
And come away with bruises and black lung
And purple dermal chunks of coal and grit.
Just so his father, prisoner of war
Then casualty of blue austerity;
Just so my father, labouring before
The furnaces by night and day—for me.
Now my achievement's lauded as the best:
To get inky fingers in a Cambridge college
And pilfer the noble classes' ancient knowledge.
I think again of coal-dust in the chest.
If he who fell at Passchendaele had seen
My suit and gown, would death have seemed a dream?