

## **My father's old dog**

Good old Death - always comes when called  
at a pitch that only he can hear.

My favourite dog for hard farewells.

Loping in from rabbitted paddocks  
and sloping lawns above the dam,  
nudging the garden gate aside,  
into the house and darkened hall  
past the startled cake-stiff guests  
and crisp nurse pursing with intent,  
to leap on the bed, snug in your lap.

You stroke his mud-spattered hair.

*Is that you boy? Is it really you?*

You try to pick a burr from his ear,  
stroke his face. The last thing  
you feel is an answering rasp

of his tongue, a quick tidal wetness  
tickling your hand, so grained, so dry  
so long away from pitchfork days,  
licking you away to nothing, a nub  
of filmy sky in your once-blue eyes.