

# Old Harry

Bruce Dawe (1990s)

Like those trick birds  
in novelty-shops bending  
automatically towards a water-glass,  
I see you, first thing in the morning,  
bending over a bubble-tap  
in a school-ground, answering  
last night's wrestle with  
cheap plonk (drinking  
-bout for drinking-bout), then, finally,  
with drooping reddened eyes, straightening  
up your black-waistcoated back,  
your coarse white collarless shirt bearing  
the stains of indifference.

Gripping the shafts of your wheelbarrow  
we'd loaded with gravel, you begin rocking  
to and fro on your heels,  
building up momentum, not seeing  
the lump of sandstone someone had carefully placed  
in front of the wheel, at last tottering  
forward in a comical toddle,  
skinny sockless shanks flying...

There is enough misery in life, Harry,  
to keep most of us going  
forever, crusts to chew on like those  
you could be seen covertly hunting  
for in school rubbish-bins at lunch-time,  
or cigarette-butts we'd drop, knowing  
you'd be along to gather them up preciously as violets,  
come knock-off time, in the evening.