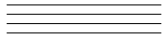


T H E O L D M A N B Y

T H E R O A D S I D E



A L A N W I L L I A M S O N

– no, crossing the road slowly, ignoring the cars,
with an implement in his hand – a motorized
lawn-edge trimmer, perhaps, on a long pole –
something that probably hadn't existed when he was a boy
and seemed too big for him now, requiring balance . . .
His gauntness stood out so, in that moment,
in the very late afternoon sun – as if, I thought,
the wrinkling of the neck-skin, drawing in on
the tendons tightening and standing out,
were the visible sign of existence withdrawing
a portion of its knowledge – knowledge, perhaps, of the year
when the boars were all eaten and the vipers thrived,
when German tanks rolled down the dirt roads, and partisans
were shot at places that would be marked with crosses
you came on in the deep woods, in the future years . . .
Would he have been a participant, or just a witness
as a frightened child? Whichever, when he goes,
when all his kind are gone, when the shrinking
will have reached the bones and eventually the heart,
all that will no longer be life but hearsay.
Fictive almost, to the ones I'm old enough to think
cut off from the real, behind their screens
of diffracting marvels . . . But their knowledge
will be life, too; will change with age; and will be gone.