

## An Old Woman

An old woman stops,  
lowers herself  
on to the step, at the same  
place, each  
day. Her skin rustles

like old brown wrapping-paper.  
She sits, leans against the wall.  
Her walking-appliance  
waits, at her side, without love,  
to be of use. Stainless bright

metal, fiercely reliable, faultless  
of design, reflects the sunlight  
sometimes, a blinding twinkle.  
Her fist, a half-formed  
thing — the hand's rare structure grown

over burgeoning ages for response and use  
unshaped here, unshaping, an arthritic  
botch — has appended  
a polythene bag, for shopping.  
This pause intersects the two-

hundred-yard travel between home  
and shops, each day, there and  
back. The pitiless void  
face she turns on the variegated young  
who flow painlessly by,

pressed for time, is blankly  
unanswered: they're heedless  
of her stayed life, age-odoured rooms  
chock-a-block with photos and clutter. She is  
left, spare, unreachable; her function is disuse.

HUGH UNDERHILL