

Dwelling in the past

is no longer a viable vocation;
historians have been declared redundant.
They picked up pink slips
when no one else was in the office,
their desks already emptied.

Some went to their rooms and
wept on pillowslips embroidered
by a beloved great aunt; see the faint line
of dried blood where she'd pricked her finger.
Others poured a scotch—single malt—I
could tell you the year; it doesn't matter.

Lucky the ones whose severance
includes counselling to help them
move forward, always a long march
with little to drink, and a peculiar
sound at the back of the skull
like coal dropping.

They fill out forms that list
transferable market skills: 'implementation strength',
'temporal and geographical flexibility'. A shaft of sunlight
falls on the desk; it reminds them of something
or someplace they can't
quite bring to mind.

They meet former colleagues in a back alley
binning for a living; dumpsters the last
archive of urban beliefs and practices. Sometimes
they find the heel of a loaf of bread, once a scrap
of paper, blurred words
*Dulce et Decorum est**

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*Owen, W. (1917). *Dulce et Decorum Est*. Retrieved from
<http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/owen1.html#READINGS>

Line "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" originally from Horace's *Odes* (III.2.13).