Leaving Home

My first country appointment

Was the last thing we expected –

Three of us, caught unaware

By ignorance and faith:

Our dull-witted, frog-mouthed obedience

To the letter of the law.

Title is ironic – family really left home in 1951. This further communicates how Skrzynecki has adapted to Australian culture and society – extending the separation from his Polish heritage that exists in *Feliks Skrzynecki*.

Having been through so much, it can be understood why the family thought they might finally have time to be together. The system, however, again reduces the authority of Peter to make decisions for himself.

As immigrants, the family has learnt to blindly follow the rules, thinking it would keep them out of trouble. Their blind faith in the system led to Peter having to move.
Counting door handles, ringing telephones
And office boys with denture smiles,
I waited three hours
For a two-minute interview;
Watching myself outside in the rain,
My severed head under one arm,
Body upright – best white shirt and tie –
A black suit to outdo
The Pallbearer of the Year!
A red-and-white sign at my feet:
“Cabbages for Sale.”
The fiddler from Chagall’s village
Was inviting me to dance.

Finding his way through the maze; a journey of obstacles – a metaphor for the journey of the entire poem.

A journey in itself as he find his way to the interview.

Waiting. Still. As in prior poems, Peter is always waiting for the next step of his journey.

Growing up; he used to watch adults, and now he is one himself.

A metaphorical execution – giving up his identity to the institution, he is a mere professionally dressed man who could be mistaken as a Pallbearer.

“red-and-white” imagery resembles the colours of the Polish flag; reduces his Polish and culture and heritage to mere “Cabbages for Sale”. Also communicates the way that feels like he is selling himself as he attends the interview.

Chagall was a surrealist artist (possibly influenced the style of this poem). He used a violinist in many works to bring people together; here, he tries to cheer up Peter. It’s his own mind and thinking, so he is trying to cheer himself up – he is alone on this journey.

Parts of the poems are dreams; Peter foreseeing possible outcomes. This surrealist style shows a more sophisticated adult version of Peter than in previous poems.
Stanza 3

The man behind the desk
Never once looked me in the eyes –
His face the back of my application papers.
Hawk-nosed, crew-cut, with
A Tally-Ho paper skin,
He was the millionth person
That couldn’t pronounce my name.

No more, no less,
The verdict came the next day by phone
‘You must go.’
Stanza 4

We packed the car

Like a war-time train – clothes,

Books, records, the poems

I’d started writing;

Said goodbye so quickly

I forgot for a moment where I was going.

Always cramped in some form of transport – boat, train, car...the method of journeying is uncomfortable.

Simile links to *Immigrant at Central Station, 1951* and the experience in war-torn Europe. This journey Peter is on reminds him of the very reason his family immigrated – he must be questioning the point...

Enjambment – run on line – the structure of this stanza resembles the interruption to his life that this move has caused; he had no time to prepare.
Three hundred miles
Up the New England Highway, I stopped;
Unloaded my bags for the night;
Swore that Head Office
Would not see my face again
Unless I became my own Scipio Africanus...

Dreamt of three headless crows
Flying in a room
Whose walls were silently burning.
Bald, toothless faces
Stood at a window, laughing in the rain,
Clapping to a fiddle’s music –
Their naked, hairless bodies
The colour of sour milk.

Defiance – a dummy spit to himself; he is growing in confidence, at least in his mind
A great ancient Roman warrior who defeated Hannibal. In this metaphor Skrzynecki compares this ancient fight to his dealings with the Department of Education

Long journey

Symbolic of a decaying institution

The rain creates an atmosphere where happiness is washed away – the dancing fiddle referenced earlier is now dancing with the nameless bosses – they have ruined all chance of happiness – the journey is not one with a happy ending.

Their appearance is different just like their attitude and way of treating others

Sensory imagery – leaves a sour taste – dehumanising the institution.