

Pretence

We moved to a red brick council house,
semi-detached,
a cut above number one Queen Street,
a better class of people.
Privet hedge, wooden gate, stepped path,
across the road from private houses.

Back gardens a different matter,
unkempt,
washing lines strung haphazardly.
Weeds and clutter, old mangles, broken fences,
tied up mangy dogs, dilapidated pigeon lofts,
the view from the kitchen.

So he painted on the inner wall
a trompe l'oeil.
A window, yellow curtains tied with red ribbon,
through which could be seen a green meadow,
distant hills brushed by blue sky with dry clouds,
sheep grazing quietly, birds frozen in flight.

He had always been able to pretend,
turn away from ugliness, create perfect pictures.
The innate survival skill that
preserved his sanity through the horrors.
Torture, leeches, starvation,
the war in Burma.