

David Wood

RETURNED SOLDIER

Mornings were different — the hoyden sun
spendthrift in greenery, in profusion
fantasias of flowers, from shining glass
pools of a fountain the birds scooped light.

A garden planned like a mathematical equation,
studiously measured: until the night
infringed upon its rows the dark
tiers of the houses, a stacked wedding cake,
lights in the windows flickering candles.

Opaque the glass, the greenery
when the sunlit trees shook huge shadows out
dotting the hills like dungarees,
a flamboyant storm skirting about
the line of the sky: across to Mt Coot-tha
a rake-thin man peers through mended spectacles.

At first his shuffle we thought to be
a bird, skirling leaves, a trick of wind;
bayoneting the earth, yellowing memory
in corners of the garden the relentless sunblade

death to this lamb, this trembling flesh and bone
penning the air with shaking fingers;
in his cradle of greenery alone
rocked by the world into innocent sleep:

guns peeling metal from the armoured sea,
the troop trains running north, day after terrible day
old murder stalking its whispered glory.