

An Imaginary Portrait

A cream formica table surface,
poorly printed anthology between us,
plates with flakes of pastry, cups
were stage props in a narrative
of fluid gestures, sullied things
I set against grey apertured facades
and the intervening street,
its traffic dust, grime, heat haze,
a face's depth in an open window,
lips moved by chosen words.

Just talk, the ordinary things
of life you seemed to praise
in a depth of night, Havana,
its dollar shops and shortages,
without complaint supplied the need
and wants friends pressed upon you,
being moved to laugh or pity,
later, anger at the manner
your paragraphs were travestied.

Various words elusively opaque,
I saw the London daylight deepen
for, expecting to be strangled,
you too had let it happen
and no, please, unsettled me,
wanting too, to speak a little,
let your violated body speak.

Then tolerance of his mistake,
this also lay behind a look.
The shame you know, it is a shame.
Remember, all that I can say,
when kneeling I proposed to you
and kissed, embraced you in a play.
So a face's depth in an open window
accepts its wooden frame.

PETER ROBINSON