

The Beginning and the End

The girl, standing at her bedroom window,
sees her baby brother asleep in his pram
under the cedar tree, one escaped hand pale on his blanket.
Her mother is hanging out nappies like flags.
Across the grey brick wall the neighbours are there again.
She counts the heads. Sometimes one vanishes overnight.

Where do they go? Barely human, without sound, without motion,
without shape, they are baggy heaps, like things already dead,
like a trick,
like not-people.

That night she creeps to the wall
and pressing her ear to the space
between the chimney breast and the wardrobe,
she hears moaning, rasping, and
through the wall she slides.
She is in a room, a dim-lit mirror to hers,
and there's a bed, tall with blankets.
She reaches in and pulls out an old man,
his hair sticky-up, his eyes bleary blind.

He is a rag doll.

She sees him, tenderly.

She props him in a chair, feeds him milk,
smooths his brittle hair, reads the Bible to him.

She reads the beginning and the end.

She reads the Alpha and the Omega.

She reads to him the Creation and the new

Creation and the mystery of the seven stars.

He is not listening, his head sags.

Carefully, carrying him back to his high bed she tucks him in.

He, waking for an instant, seeing her fade mistily back though the wall,

remembers how the disturbance on a film of water calms itself.

In the morning dressed in his thin grey suit

he's wheeled out into a bright shining garden he sometimes

remembers, with the others, old dumb faces he does not know.

Over his head the wood pigeons sound

and looking up he sees a pale reflected moon,

her small face pressed in an upstairs window.