

Squaddies

There's a street for ex-soldiers from all generations,
from Suez to Bosnia, by way of the Falklands.

It's serene and peaceful,
with a green in the middle.
Everyone leaves their door off the latch
and every handshake hides a private smile.

It's the kind of place you could imagine as heaven,
if you lived in the fifties
and had no imagination.

There's barely a scream,
when it's daylight, at least,
and the nights are submerged in alcohol and Valium.

Residents make their bed in the morning
with a precision that comes from years of training.
Not many of them ever see the doctor
and pitifully few are still with their wives.

Some have become adept over the course of the years
at making small talk with the emergency services,
but the sight of an argument can move them to tears
and they all lock their windows on Bonfire Night.

Some have hung on to some kind of weapon,
although the only thing they fight for now is their pension,
and to maintain some kind of rapport with their children.
None of them think they'll be going to heaven,

and that's what haunts the look in the eyes
of those who've seen chance toss a coin with their lives,
and, as long as we're happy
to send more to replace them,
we should wear our poppies with shame,
not pride.