

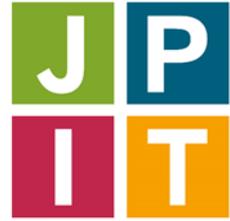
That's How It Was

It is not enough to say:
“We will remember them.
We will remember them!”.
We don't remember them.
We can't remember them.
How, in this world,
shall we remember them,
when what they did when
and who they were then
was (mostly) done - and done to death -
so far away in time and place?
The memories, of how it was, aren't ours.

Go to your neighbour-lady eight-doors-down
who lost her dad in one of our big wars.
Ring on her bell.
Get her to her front door,
on her slow-walking-frame – and ask her how it was.
What was he like, your dad?
How did he die?
Ten-to-one she won't remember him,
Having been too small.
And being British she will not know
quite how he died.
Probably her mother neither...
Exhausted officers, writing bad-news letters home,
said nice things in those days like:
He died instantly, in no pain, a hero.

She won't recall either any
wailing or gnashing of teeth;
the daughters of these islands
exercised just the pulling down of blinds
and stiffening of upper lips against
the screaming despair beneath.

Not like the daughters of Canaan
mourning their sons, fathers and husbands.



Or Goliath's children carrying him home,
to his mother's door
and the keening of Gath.
That is how it was.
That is how it is.

You could ask here, now,
(in these islands),
the exiled orphans of Rwanda,
what they remember...
But they are trying to forget, whilst never forgetting;
as we are trying to remember whilst forgetting.
That is how it was.
That is how it is.
Too many loud cries rise
upon Earth's lonely hills.

Go to this land's sad towns,
this earth's sad towns,
anywhere where battle-clothes have been removed
and bodies washed and gently prepared
for lying in earth
for what we nicely called The Long Sleep.

Go and ask the ones who know;
and they will say: it doesn't end.
That's how it was.
That's how it is.

©2018, Lucy Berry