

## Default setting

I thought for many years  
that we might reach some kind of understanding,  
some way of living,  
some escape from our sad and dull routine  
of argument and shouts,  
of day-long silences,  
of miserable meals when nothing is said  
(or so very little  
— ‘would you pass the salt?  
Thank you.’  
— ‘Ask your father  
if he wants a cup of tea.’)

I thought we might grow,  
grow together, grow up,  
mature,  
put behind us our late middle-aged adolescent urge  
to best the other,  
to win, to win,  
to own that last word  
(which was never owned by you or I  
never the last but always trumped).

I hoped that our love for our children,  
our fear and concern  
(we talked about it so many times  
when we tried to sort out our love)  
that letting them live, soak up and grow  
in noise and anger  
would not let them see  
that ours was not the only way,  
that our angry home was not  
the only kind of home,  
that some families did know a steady peace and love.

And then they left and now are gone,  
beyond our love and concern.

And then you died,  
long, long, long before it was expected.

So now there can be no change, no compromise  
no steady peace and love.

Now it no longer is  
but was.