

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Peripheral

by Steve Brown

The long sentence, always incomplete  
and stretching, even now: its absence  
of words, its fixed moorings  
on a tale of origins: the erasures  
of the past.....

The small rain spattered onto windows,  
seared beef fat, strained and ailing greens,  
and '*Family Favourites*' on the tin-voiced radio:  
the grip of Sunday – a world was out there,  
half-refused. Germany, Cyprus,  
a message from Kenya, Aden –  
families stretched thin by History.  
Ours were too much here – a nomadic tribe,  
fresh tents over land we did not own.  
No ground was haunted. The land was covered  
by our childish fresh paint: nothing  
to answer to – the cardboard pastoral  
of suburbia.....

Something might have happened over there, of course  
- though the neat, squat white clapboard chalets  
of displaced refugees had emptied,  
still, some bombsites continued intimate  
and gritty with their vanished bathroom walls,

embarrassed wallpaper, and a child from Belsen,  
all skull and ribs, still peeled  
on the stairway alley walls. All eyes  
were exhausted with the latest murders,  
while the long unspeakable names  
of Polish boys fell off the registers.  
Corned beef, cod liver oil, and milk threaded  
The smog-hugged days; the green wool  
of shrinking jumpers unravelled slowly.  
Shoes were solid, clunky: blisters and scabbed knees  
Were Fate. And newspapers opened  
from the back, on horses, football.....

Each 'Commonwealth Day', we slapped each other  
with our hard-peaked Cub Pack caps  
as Spitfires. In town for each royal wedding,  
I counted the red guardsmen keeling  
like tumbled skittles.....

Peripheral,  
where things are at once both sharp and blurry,  
like ghosts writing, insistent, wavering  
into view, a touching with long, uncertain fingers.