Because of an oppressive silence
still in that fine late September weather
or, conceivably, others’
scars borne under our own skin,
they’d both not wanted to go;
but strolling past city-registered cars
and postcard stalls, we saw
through transparent altering water,
broken outlined, on the shallow floor,
a rowing boat moored to a jetty
had foundered in the swell
which flowed away from this side
- the stillness outlasting all wars,
you’d thought, but, dreaming the Republic,
that were they to stay in his city
the poets should be collaborators.

And on walls of an empty pizzeria
colour covers of the Corriere’s
illustrated supplement
showed exploits of their boys in Eritrea...
Comfortable couples on the lake front,
its forty intervening years
hadn’t managed to efface
how through the months their remnants tried
to cleanse the stain in blood,
that picked out lifelines as it dried
on a disembodied hand -
snatching out towards us
from where we’d failed to find
in desultory corners any plaque or trace.

A veteran wearing the green forage cap
shuffled from an arch’s shadow
as we drove away.
I glimpsed him for that second
like last fragments of an atmosphere
insinuating I should know
you were keeping yourself from yourself
in the lake water’s bits of broken mirror,
and, guided by an interior light
above the warring factions
- from being overmuch aware
of the emptiness in their rule of terror.

Though more than once you came
for a bed, a bowl of soup, a microphone
where gunmen would tread on the dream,
across Lake Garda’s silvered expanses
in still lasting peace -
impalpable light, its blinding waves
a dazzled refraction of ourselves -
it was as if you’d never been here.

Peter Robinson