



how **ART** makes england & england makes **ART**

Windows, Lakes – Jackie Kay

I always wanted a house with a bay window, my mother said,
Reading the estate agent's window in Kendal.
Imagine – sitting in the sun and reading a Simenon – heaven!-
In a cushioned bay window in an L shaped room of a bungalow.
It took me back to the houses of my mother's imagination years ago:
The ones with turrets and wings and open plan kitchens
(Space for Aga) with conservatories, entrance halls,
Ground floor cloakrooms, ooh la, with three double bedrooms
(one en-suite) with dining and drawing and reception rooms.
Double fronted Georgian townhouses with shutters and sash windows.
The years of window-shopping dream houses.
She never moved from her 1950s semi-detached Wimpey.

Wouldn't you have just loved a conservatory - she said,
Peering at another in the Kendal window - 4 beds, 350 grand-
To grow cherry tomatoes, read the Sunday papers in the sun?
All landscapes exist in the imagination, Naipaul said;
My mother's best houses were in her head.

I picked her up at Oxenholme, that nostalgic station.
I saw her searching for me through the train window
She climbed gingerly onto the old platform,
William Morris walking stick in one hand, suitcase in another.
The train she got off of sped into the past.

Lovely days in the beautiful B and B in Kendal!
Lovely houses in Kendal and so much green!
We wound our way round the river and the one way system.
We stopped for the lights of Howard Hodgkin at Abbot Hall.
Then our days ran out. As we left, a man was washing the windows
Of the B and B. We walked under his ladder.

I drove my mother the scenic route to Carlisle
Through Staveley, past Beatrix Potter's Troutbeck,
Over the Kirkstone Pass - Grisedale to the west,
Beda Fall to the east, past Patterdale,
The tail end of Ullswater, Place Fell, Matterdale End,
Little Mell Fell gently waving hello,



how **ART** makes england & england makes **ART**

Snaking and winding our way, singing
You take the high road and I'll take the low
Drinking it all in, the plains and vistas:
Beautiful, beautiful, my mother said,
I always wanted to see the Lakes,
Wordsworth and Shelley, Grasmere and Windermere.
But here, nothing compares to our Campsie Glens, our Fintry Hills.
My mother said, kissing my cheeks at Carlisle,
And pulling herself onto the train for Glasgow,
Too busy finding her seat with her stick and her bag to wave
through the train window. I stood watching the train gather speed
Along the track, until just the lines were left,
The double lines of the old train track.

I drove down the M6 back to Manchester,
The windscreen wipers wiping the tears,
past Penrith, past the turn off to Kendal and Windermere.
I gripped the wheel, stared through the car window
Remembering the imaginary houses years ago:
the big bay window, the bay horse and the play doh,
the half open baby grande piano playing fah soh lah ti doh.

Copyright Jackie Kay 2008

Disclaimer: the views expressed in the copyrighted poems and essays are the views of the author alone, and are not endorsed or otherwise by the BBC or Arts Council in any way whatsoever.