Poetry Series

Stug Jordan

- poems -

Publication Date:

December 2007

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

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Stug Jordan (18-8-81)

There are too many poets and not enough poems.

Thanks to all who have left kind words; I'm thinking of scrapping what's here, or bare-boning the lot at least. There's less conviction in it, and I've been dishonest with myself.

I can't pretend this is art, or therapy. It's only verse, but it seems to have the weight of both on it ALL the time.

There's too many poets in my mouth, and it's too easy to be kind to what falls out.

A Song for the Innocent Loner

A song for the innocent loner,
the plough-hand and fish-boner:
his slow pipe
lowers as he listens
to his own voice, broken through dreaming.

The call of some other flesh awakes
in his dry mouth, where a smile breaks -
the hunchback hills
climbing to the sea-line,
where his silhouette walks sometimes,

leaning, wandering, aching, self-singing
in his head, eremitically ringing,
pondering the shapes
of coin-bright stars,
and rain like shillings spilling into the street.

The dance of a derelict breeze
passes his face with infinite ease:
the splash of a limb
on the solitary rocks.
He looks about; baskets on cobblestones.

Stug Jordan

Admiring Death From Afar

Admiring death from afar;
A bicycle-shape closing
On the foot of a hill,
Where bird-drawn wings panic
Themselves at the prophesies
That spinning spokes inspire.

Meats curl their stiff smells
Through kitchen windows,
As steam blurs the cutlery,
And steaming oven-dishes force the thought
That, in certain instances,
Death looks better so much nearer.

Stug Jordan

Alpha Male

He looks
my way like a bull:
a hungry animal
reminds me of his face -
his eyes are hard.

Is he going?
my fear tells me
it’s almost a shame
not to be tested
by such barbarity.

Would I know him
in another age?
where eyes can only
meet each other with
a hint of civility?

I wonder
if his voice could kill?
In a soft spasm
from that huge face:
that graveyard.

Stug Jordan

And Adam Said

And Adam said he would prefer
To be alone,
Anaesthetised on god’s table
Before the operation,

But the drugs had conquered
Their first brain,
And sleep and surgery followed,
With poor Adam hollowed

So soon after having been
Approved.
Shortly god’s soft voice woke him,
But Adam felt just half a man,

And as he was left alone
To convalesce,
He didn’t know that it would be
For the very last time.

That morning his visitor
Arrived,
A small girl, and he called
Her Company, because she

Was not at the head of him,
Nor at the foot,
But was taken in his sleep,
Straight out of his middle.

Stug Jordan

And They Called Her Ophelia

And they called her Ophelia
But her name was Sue,
Though her serpentine body
Still knocked against the sluice gate
Like a terrible lump of litter.

And on that spring evening
They laid her to rest
In the twinkle of blue lights,
Her chapel a small white tent,
Her mourners buttoned black and curious.

Stug Jordan

And...

...if Jesus wore a mane,
roared in woodlands stifling
green pleasantries from locals
with an upraised hand,
then what a different town
this might have been...

a pub-sign lashed with rope,
hammered home,
and little Jesus all alone
in a pine-decked corner,
muttering.

And when the local boys
come in, grinning money, he wouldn't
raise an eyelid,

let alone the dead.

Stug Jordan

Another Life

New blood on the terraces, captions in black against pickpocket boys dressed always in summer: clothes strung like flags between balconys' warm wood, spectres of glass, and in the middle mad slags of grass – flat frogs of green and desolate of children.
I try to take my place here everyday, a seed of culture, pan-fried lugger, walking under lines of white in blue skies; exhausts cloud-mimicking, conversations in god-defying places.
Sketch me this, nameless deity, in a dream as you may have done for others. Let your artist's purse pore these sins and miracles into another life and take the old one to that dark room; clusters of urns, broken clay, emaciated dialects, centuries of sea-views unfinished.
Waking with the boys watching, moving full-pocketed past a yellowed motor grazing by the curb whose engine ticks over between open corridors of brick lattice. I remember; an unfortunate nostalgia. Somewhere the lord calls and all this comes to life, and the lion roars.

Stug Jordan

Apple

Hatred isn't the car-bomb,
blossomed smoke and shrieking streets;
nor the feeling of the mothers
to a grocer's son behind the wheel,

it's not an Ulsterish intolerance,
grafitti torn walls; nor the drunken
hammering on a moonlit door.

It's the sound of teeth crunching through
an apple, deliberate and slow.

And heaven, beyond the smoke-filled
skies and pseudo soldiers' alibis,
flowers in infinite gardens and sweet fruit,

that fall each autumn night to a hell
where hatred bites amid the groves
of the fallen.

Stug Jordan

Appointment

How ancient you look, old man,
How like a living antique
You look today.

How much your money has held
Me in this living death
Waiting for yours.

When I come to see you, old man,
How the other folk celebrate
My compassion.

For seven years, I've graced your
Flaccid bag of bones
And smiled.

But today you're looking so dead,
Old man, so dying
But so busy.

So tell me why your outline still
Declines to leave these
Sterilised halls?

Stug Jordan

As We Slept

I reached out
as we slept,
slowly waking
finding the bed,
behind eyes;
sweet dreams
inside our heads.

Looking in
at odd hours
as winter approaches;
its deaf tread
on ice,
across the frozen
flowerbed.

Bound together,
tight sheets:
arms like stone
as the winds throw
over lawns;
grey with the
dirty snow.

Your hands
reach in morning,
in a new sun
where flowers undo;
lined in soil,
heads bowed on
death row.

Stug Jordan

At Loose

When can we be lazy?
like two dogs, with eyes half open;
stretching our legs through the grass,
laying; getting almost nothing done.

We can stab through leaves
with our long legs, noses in the bush;
as happy as a pair of ponies,
released like birds into a muddy field.

Should we complicate the sounds
of the farm with our voices?
like two old cockerels, throwing up songs;
as free as if our wings could fly all day.

Where shall we sleep tonight?
huddled together like mice in a hole;
unobserved by the curious winds
that rattle above our heads in the night.

Stug Jordan

August Night

On an august night, a half-rain
stumbles glass; the child-bride,
in a bruise of love, endures her pain;
her eyes obscenities as she cries.

And there in flesh, the newborn;
animal of agony, cruelly evicted
from paradise, a shape of a smile torn
from its face as if convicted

of ante-natal crime – they lay broken
on the rippled-white, with crimson tears
where dead whispers, half-spoken
lie to her face, and undo her years.

Stug Jordan

Back of the Hunched Black House

Back of the hunched black house,
a garden’s white water
in a slow fountain, a sugar bowl.

A light goes lazy up the stairs.
Stairs ascend, descend,
ascend, descend –
a fluid in a hospital drip.

Two dogs sleeping ear to ear
smother the hearth’s vacant font
and the man breaths at the altar.

The clock has stopped,
a holding of breath between the thoughts
of perhaps ending it all.

‘Is there a back way into heaven? ’
the man wonders, planning
his escape from the hunched black
house in the night

as it slowly entombs him, and
the night entombs the house, and
loneliness buries everything.

Stug Jordan

Beauty in a Dark Glass

Twists her hips and grins
like the victim
of a parlour game.
And the black dice choose her;
a sweet-cheeks in black belt of noose.
She'd down me in one;
no blinking,
with my heart swallowed like a mollusc.

Stug Jordan

Beds

A nest is where a bird sleeps,
Feeds and flies from,
Above a black roof –
A kennel, which is where
The dog goes skulking.
And beside it is a house
Where we go
With our dog in the summer,
To hear the birds come home,
To send the dog to bed,
And to celebrate
Being older together,
Before the hill that looms
Behind the church where we go
Comes out of the summer,
To send us to bed.

Stug Jordan

Bird Fraught

Bird fraught with anger,
Sailing fury through skies -
The sway of provocative treetops,

Unbalanced by washed wind,
Pushed by that mouth of sea
That chews the land on all sides.

Gesturing in mid-air,
Flick of a hurried wing
Blatantly harrowing hillsides.

The little body swims air
Like a god, pressing stars,
Burying its head in the storm.

Stug Jordan

Blossom

She listened to them call the swelling
Of her pregnancy a bundle, like laundry
Unfolded before washing, to be spun
Around her belly:

A nauseating godliness inserted like a bulb
Into her Eden, an abscess blistering
Its shoots in a sunless synthesis,
Sprouting as their conversation does,

These past-mothers; as if it was them
Who were opening again, and them
Who might flower in agony.

Stug Jordan

Body Parts

Older body parts are the accessories for littler lives:
Older arms are the slings to be carried in;
Older legs are the stilts to stalk the earth with;
Sometimes an older hip is a convenient seat;
Older knees are to be energetic on, with the help
Of older heels and older toes, found on older feet.
An older back is to be heavy on, and is used
Like a ferry to go where crouching is necessary;
Older ears are the handles with which to guide us there.
Older belly buttons exist to be explored in by
Little mining fingers, provoking old eruptions;
Older hairs are the grasses that get played in,
To grow and change colour in little sunshines;
Older hands are the rails to practice caution on;
Older hearts are clocks to count out curiosities.
An older body is something to grow into,
And that needfulness is the necessity of older lives.

Stug Jordan

Broads Boy Poem

Waiting for the night to take its long effect
on the avenues' calm and winding wondrous walks;
a boy of just sixteen slips outside and stalks
the roads where lamplight leaves the moonlight wrecked
in catastrophic streaks, shimmering through hedges.
He moves about the rich areas of the village
like a conscript to an age, his hands primed to pillage
even the plant-pots that hang from window ledges.

But he is not a thief, and in the riverside homes
he sees nothing which he would inflict upon himself;
the lanky yachts where weeds in the water combs
his thoughts to the voices and the majestic sounds
that money makes: he looks, this is not wealth;
it's a frantic godliness, exchanged for pounds.

(The Broads: miles of man-made rivers and lakes in East Anglia, the edges of which are inhabited by swans, bitterns and the super-duper rich.)

Stug Jordan

Bug Poem

Life’s found me, atop your metal stairs
with sunset and a morphine silliness;
but the clocks cheat us, rushing age the raging
hours that for me, for you, seem stopped;
but still against the railing propped
I see in you a ME I never knew, so similar…
so Worlds apart,

but I’m willing to take the punishment
of minutes, of buses that tick past,
to be alive and locked fast
in a warm-legged daintily done Picasso.
And the eyes here have disowned their heads
and circle each other…

and if time really was a lover,
it would know when to stop each time
the eyes that shine between us see;
like when I kiss you, or like when you kiss me.

Stug Jordan

Conquistador

His smile is a zigzag on stone,
a face carved into a silent megalith.

His officers are represented by rocks;
small, well-rounded generals.

In the morning new blood will weep
and cry its way to heaven

on the back of a lime-washed bird,
its eyes two jewels and clouds for wings.

A simple Spaniard will be taken,
a cook from one of the camps.

And placed on these stones, a meal
for Thee, to take them all, Our Lord,

and spit them back into the sea.

Stug Jordan

Country Poem with Boy

The countryside sleeps,
feet on the fireguard,
and dreams of people
swelling its muddy banks.

Morning sees an early boy,
grinning displeasures;
bread-fisted.
His backbone is the spine
of centuries,

as clouds sail above
his damp hair
and a war-like noise punishes
the farms where he walks
in and out like a document.

He lays to sleep
by the countryside,
a bundle of clothes in the hearth.
What he doesn't know
won't kill him,

irreverent Magna Carta.

Stug Jordan

Delivery

Stacking its bike black on the fence,
morning delivers a sack of rain and is off;
leaving too the news that a meal tastes too much,
deals on fish wasted, butter set to sail
unmined by knives,
and knives in a crypt of cutlery locked.

Oh, and a note from a reputable source:
sooner than suspected these wet days will close,
and hunger will find me on the hill,
eating straight from the tree.

Stug Jordan

Doctrine

In the end she tried to say
that the best poetry
was like a line
of perfect symmetry.

And they believed
everything she said;
they took her food
and gave her a bed

in the dusty attic.
Come down they would plead,
every time
that she was needed

to clear up some
troublesome point of view.
She watered them
with words and they grew.

And she tried to say
that they were hers;
like a faithful line
of heaven-bound passengers.

And when the words
came from her lips
they measured them
and laid their manuscripts

at her feet like flowers.
Until she began to bend,
the line deficient,
the beginning of the end.

Stug Jordan

Dymock

A row of dead apples in a grove-tomb,
and the cider isn't pressed here anymore.
Inside, like sundials in agony,
round cheeses of wood croak when touched.
But outside... grave and spectacular:
a hat in the shade, tiny kites of sun
on gravel, shining through the gate's ply lattice;
        ghosts of words in the grass.

Stug Jordan

Elegy in Silence

The dull wind, muffled in secrecy,
lays the low lines of the river
as the cold hand, dressed in leather,
holds the ropes of the bells still.

By the seeming-centuries of a barn,
the twitching necks of flowers
flirt between the passing of clouds.
By an abandoned plough, in decadence,

a world happens, as a greyness
sets into the sky, the rigour of a thorn
mimics, on the barrels of a new frost,
the quick eye of the jackdaw.

The mourners stand in silence;
a mother holds a child’s sniff
as the boots fix themselves in mud,
shuffling with the death quiet.

In the sermon of his sad face,
his words suffer on the yard’s breeze;
and his mouth hangs, like a trap,
where flies take themselves on cold days.

In the summoning of the myth,
of the lie, and of the absurd,
the soil of the age-decayed farms...
noiseless as it falls nether-ward.

They turn and leave as earth closes,
and a hushed rain shines its stones;
tapping dumb, tight-lipped,
onto the mute, grief-broken grass.

They disperse, as a dead-eyed pony
passes on the lane, tiptoeing.
The sun ignored the church this day,
and the close-by river, too, held its tongue.

Stug Jordan

Erectus

Dangerously poised, arms and muscles set
like an Olympian discus thrower's statue;
warm morning sun on stone, and with visitors.

But today I feel a teetering, a near collapse
from effort and shades of love gone black.

So best to pull me down than let me stand half as tall,
like Saddam's leaning bow before the fall;
a stone's silence.

Stug Jordan

Eye

An eye in the wood winks
onto the wet road,
and the birds tremble down
to earth, lightly
and with worms to find.

Stug Jordan

Flower

In the garden a flower sits
brazenly in the dirt,

uninvited and unplanted,
but somehow there

in all her soft pink glory,
stealing the sun

away from my window,
from my life.

And she hardly trembles
when the bees come near.

Slag.

Stug Jordan

Getting Letters

As a child letters came and went;
fished from little hands and stacked away
or ripped up like sordid evidences.

A letter was the best thing to have.

And now? They knock before they drop.
Cough politely and raise eyebrows,
meaning something now and knowing.
And with words and numbers having
grudgingly been learned.

Now letters come, and never go away.

Stug Jordan

Glosa

Here you are drinking my blood,
drinking the humour of the child I was,
while my eyes are battered by aluminium
and drunken voices in the wind.

- Federico Garcia Lorca

Where's your face, machine America?
I only ask because you resist,
and having bit the hand that pushed
the button, are you sorry now?
Does the immigrant wheel still roll and
turn like an old snake in Mississippi mud?
Are you the grand leech, America?
You keep the fang well hidden
to convince me of your paternal good.
And here you are, drinking my blood.

Two drunks are singing in the square.
In the alley – a Jew and a dead dog;
pigeons fatter than a Harlem baby,
and a Spanish boy, or more Porto Rican
(papa America doesn't care which) ,
borrows a knife from his street hermanos,
and plunges it into a belly of darkness.
But America's fuse is still lit, unscathed,
and now I sit and sing with tramps,
drinking the humour of the child I was.

And in the morning the stars are replaced
by meteors of Manhattan buildings.
Running steel, pale bones and artefacts
reaching up like concrete hands in prayer;
ferries knocking about like bad bits
in the blood of the city's dark dominion.
Under the ground our teeth are extracted,
hands bound and hair pulled. I hear
friends tortured with glass and tedium
while my eyes are battered by aluminium.

Early traffic creeps slowly into roads.
Ambulances carefully tread between
black cafes and still-lit streetlamps.
I hope you are listening, King USA;
whose sceptre is lowered like a toll gate.
Forgive me America, for I have sinned:
The only things I remember
about this place that I take back home
are the toothless priests who grinned,
and the drunken voices in the wind.

Stug Jordan

Gotti and Letti

Gotti loved Letti,
and a house to let they got,
and Gotti was pretty.

But the town wasn’t happy;
built a committee
against Letti.

SO upset a lot was Gotti.
Cried in her sleep
so sad and pretty.

So a ring Letti got,
to hush the committee
and make her happy.

Now Gotti is Letti.

Stug Jordan

Hello to the Bird that Sung

Hello to the bird that sung,
when through my hand my fingers wrung
and all rings from my fingers drop,
the bird it sang and did not stop;
so goodbye to the bird that sung
when from my hands my fingers hung,
and reached with them up to the top,
up to the bird that did not stop.

Hello to the bird that flew
through the fields of wheat that grew,
and when all of the wheat was gone
the bird it flew and carried on;
so goodbye to the bird that flew
far into that sky of blue,
and from that sky the sun it shone
onto the bird that carried on.

*Request to reader
(should this be 'bird that sung' or 'bird that sang'? Anyone? does it matter?)

Stug Jordan

His Clocks Are The Tractors

His clocks are the tractors
that pass every five minutes
from the grainstore to the yard,

and the day is digging
and tipping and running
and maybe at the end of it a couple

of books, but the tractors
aren’t finished, so he continues
to jump and poke sticks through a cobweb.

Stug Jordan

His Father Was A Carpenter

His father was a carpenter: his daddy cut up wood
To put the dinner on, to make seats and spice racks.
He was one of the best in his field, not just nearly good,
But adequately good; he always carried his nails and tacks
On his person, just in case

A wood-like emergency occurred near the farm
Where they lived. As a boy he would climb trees
Just to watch his daddy plain away, the log of his forearm
Pushing like a battering-ram the pines and hickories
He'd helped him gather that day

From the mature end of the forest, where the tower tall
Trunks had toughened under the pat of his big hand,
That had slapped their skin before it let them fall,
To then shoulder their limbs to heave across their land
And pare by the lamp's light.

On the day his daddy died, he opened up the workshop
To find all those creations dusted off and sent away.
Just two short sticks that the old carpenter had let drop
To the floor remained; two testimonies of those day by day
Rites, still hammering somewhere,

The bangs that held in the shadows the hours spent
On crooked furnishings. He took the sticks into the yard,
One long, one short, and nailed them crossways to the bent
Old oak where he once climbed, as the rain, coming down hard,
Began turning it a darker wood.

Stug Jordan

His Lover Contemplates an Act of Violence on Him As He Sleeps

Hauled up from where they'd been left so long
in darkness, like bodies from a deep ravine,
the corpse-in-thought of her narrow, headlong

ways submits itself to light, as all those strong
desires of supremacy emerge and reconvene;
hauled up from where they'd been left so long

in the innocence he presumed on her, the wrong
impressions she always gave when seen,
the corpse-in-thought of her narrow yet headlong

flights of fancy, to live out the overdue love song
of her heavy heart. He discovered her when she was eighteen,
hauled her up from where she'd been left so long

to be his collaborator; he would take her along
to the waterfront bars, his attempts to rid or quarantine
the corpse-in-thought of her narrow, headlong

viciousness: she wakes before him, as his diphthong
air of a snore revives their sense of in-between,
hauled up from where it'd been left so long;
the corpse-in-thought of them both. Narrow, headlong.

Stug Jordan

Holiday

It was something else his wife mistook
for him – a form no less the same for that –
his shoulders slouching wires, his head a hook:
trousers folded on the bed by his hat
where dimpled curiosities remind her of his face:
not present at all, but in some other place.

They telephoned today, whilst she was gone.
He took the call and sat a while in thought
with the water left running and the radio on
as the words washed through him 'You've been caught.'
'Some people have talked, your guilt's beyond doubt.'
His constituents had found him out

'She knows nothing of this, ' he told himself
aloud, and allowing his glass to fill to the brim
he shivered out a toast, drinking her health
and carried himself downstairs for a swim:
his holiday ended by the wind-washed rocks;
his postcard in the ballot-box.

Stug Jordan

Home Coming

He preferred not to name the town.
When the holidays came he returned home,
to be tortured into confession
by numerous aunts and uncles regarding his studies
but always cautious not to say the word out loud.
The geography embarrassed him,
even though the town was a prestigious one,
as were its many colleges: and his was a good one,
but wishing to remain anonymous,
and like the others vaguely related to some saint or other.
Some saint or other plaque-faced
and hollowed of its mild religion,
covered, like his life, in the shit of a pigeon.

Stug Jordan

Home Poem#1

This street's windows, the family lattices
like picture book pies of glass
steam in the sun and homely cooking.
And life is a lazy effort of continuing:
boys throwing shoes in trees to dislodge footballs,
and even I, shaking salt straight
from the big tub, hoping to get a cellar-shake's worth.
And getting more than a cellar-shake's worth.

Stug Jordan

Hospital Song

(Sestina for catatonic patient in Ward__)

Her eyes insist on seeing shapes
beyond the fact her mind no longer cares;
they seem to fuse in beauty, in disgust
and reel like a million scenes of death
personified; wandering the halls
and wards – waiting for her to disappear.

In clockwork fashion they disappear,
the plates of food, still full of rancid shapes;
their smells suffocating the halls
as if cook-cum-matron really cares
about that line drawn between hunger and death,
(as if her creations where born from disgust) .

She glimpses humanity, verging on disgust
and filth, that wilfully disappear
from her view – as if watched by death:
she almost admires their shuffling shapes;
odd-socked and old, without their cares
as they trudge for sunlight down dark halls.

If a rat should infiltrate these rooms and halls
she imagines it would most likely quit in disgust;
but the sorry-looking cleaner only cares –
it seems – for the nurses to disappear
(though admiring, as they go, their loose shapes)
before he lights and opens up his lungs to death.

At night, she contemplates her death,
that fine day, being wheeled through the halls;
her grim procession, the following shapes -
who think nothing of openly offering their disgust
to this half-human creature – and who disappear
when she's gone – supposing one or other cares.

But every one of them, each old animal, cares
about their own unwritten brand of death,
as one by one they surely do disappear
into that night beyond their dirty halls;
the inbred object of their own disgust –
wrapped up overnight, their stiff indignant shapes.

Now no one cares for these abandoned halls
in their derelict death, looked on in disgust,
and whose ghosts disappear into far and distant shapes.

Stug Jordan

Hymn for Mr. Hedge

To you that was the man I never
Knew, but knew in others,
Mr. Hedge; your funeral has just
Passed me on the road.

I saw them crammed in the door
The place was so full,
All the heads you touched like
A loving old padre.

But Britain’s roads always do
Take the ones that have
Such better things to drive at,
And now you, Mr. Hedge,

Have joined a remembrance.
And will there be a cremation? No.
Not for the one I never knew
With a heart too big to burn.

Stug Jordan

I Always Let Myself Down (Like a Dinghy)

Worrying at the ape before the morning shave;
until the clouds of white are whipped away
and continents of skin show their ragged formations,
mounts of thought and tides in its delineations:
too bad no sun will ever shine on this face.

But an evolution emerges from the bathroom door,
with wet prints fossilised on the foot-worn floor;
a coming-of-age by half-past eight
and a confidence that the day might sleep without
having ever known that I'd tried my hand in it.

Too bad I wake it every time by having breathed,
in spite of myself, and feeling low pressures
surrounding my chin; and a storm of words
that despite their weather-worn ways
will always try but never win.

Stug Jordan

I Am Not A Poet

I am not a poet.
I have not been to university:
no old lecturers have singled me out
for special things to come,
I have no plaques, no artifice;
I am not the word-worrying kind.
I am not a teacher,
and so have no notes on the side;
(draws of folded manuscript in
both neat and shabby hands) :
I am not bald or balding,
as yet, and have no length of beard
to practice academia from.
I have no means to fund it,
and no fortune to parade it.
I am not a poet,
I have not made it.
Nor am I a church warden;
a retired councillor; a librarian.
I don't amass The Literature,
then never read it.
I am not so Irish. I have no blood
in Wales or France.
Nothing in me is of Portugal.
I am not a woman, soft-faced
and gentle, pushing poems
past forty, in a stream of horticulture:
semi-retirement and Latin flowers.
I am not a critic, nor a monarchist.
I am not a poet
these past so and so years.
I have no grant, no salary.
I have never looked my most solemn
in Westminster Abbey, and
thought of a retirement there.
My car is not old and worn out:
I don't own one.
I never ponder my train journeys.
There are never moments when,
looking back on those who are,
I think: If they were then as I am now,
why can't I….?
But I don't, because
I am not one of those.

Stug Jordan

I Heard A Radio of Songs

I heard a radio of songs
push hard against the door
of the cold room where I slept
unconscious on the floor.

I felt a push, against the door
and heard the hinges creak,
where there stood a lonely voice
that looked but could not speak

Inside the room where I'd slept
the blankets climbed the wall,
and the night time's eyes stared back
like echoes down the hall

Unconsciously, I paced the floor
my eyes fixed into space,
as long regiments of shadow
marched across my face.

Stug Jordan

If I Knew Now What I Was Then

If I knew now what I was then,
The intervening hours might have seemed
Less thunder-coloured by storms of years.
Back then, I often dreamed
Of all the things I'd never be;
And now those clouds, like spears,
Have fired wide in slanted skies, and the pen
I once exchanged for life has dared to come back yet again;
Emerging, like a continent from a sea;
In boot-shaped rock, to kick me in the rear.

But life was not always so literary:
Ancient tabloids, peeking through cat litter
Could almost qualify enough.
Because little boys don't always grow bitter
In their more frowning, furious days:
Each incarnation of the schoolboy learns to bluff
Its way through paper primates, lugging contrary
Pythagoras brains through bemused centuries.
Some of us found hells to raise,
And thought ourselves of darker stuff.

But learning picked us off in stages;
I cannot speak for all of them, but boredom
Hung from all our faces, as in English;
Being bullied with a little Auden,
Disguised amid arrays of throw-away rhyme.
Such pages seem to never finish
What they have to say, but it's these pages,
When they close at night, who in their rages
Kiss each other's vanities, like bedtime
Books, dreaming highly-appraised gibberish

Throughout their folded nights. Perhaps
We should be grateful for those hours, spent
On our shapings. These shapes were our lives;
Saying what we done, and where we went
On summers off. And later, when we were older,
They would name our children, choose our wives.
Because on reaching our twenties, something snaps;
And the lives we thought we built are filled with gaps.
A world is happening over my shoulder;
A new universe of speech arrives.

Stug Jordan

If I Was A Steve

A Steve, in many ways, is flawed
by all the women he's adored,
but I couldn't bring myself to leave
if I, myself, was one called Steve.

There's not a thing, or chance, or both
that would make me have enough
of her, if she, like an unfortunate Eve
had corrupted this most innocent Steve.

With any other name, it's true,
that I could simply squander you,
but if I was a Steve, I couldn't,
and even if I could, I wouldn't.

So if you want to put the blame
on me and my unfortunate name,
remember that I loved you anyhow,
if not so much back then, then now.

Stug Jordan

Il denaro è il suo dio

She strokes his hair to help him
sleep it off,

but his dreams are still full,
his breathing approximate;

and the bed-ridden deity she's
sure he is, is drunk,

but still she sells him kisses
for free:

'Poor imbrattacarte! '
A shape of souless shite drifting

in and out of hours,
too long for her count,

or dare to wonder when at.

Stug Jordan

Ion

How did you come about little ion?
One early April morning
You were born, a mildly drugged
Question mark.
We took you home and wondered at you
Like two gods ignorant of their
Divine abilities.
Something must have charged your
Features, the summer’s last lazy
Gardener,
Scattering seeds and shouting ‘Grow! ’

Stug Jordan

Killer Eve

She says her name in sunlight;
obelisk-voiced – a throaty grumble that
scatters birds from treetops;
a dungeon-mouthed sound that carries more
resonance than becomes a queen –
a sound that urges daylight into shadows.

Her hair speaks well for nature,
and does wonders for such age-freckled skin;
stretched through the stone-faced centuries.

She thinks nothing of walking snow
bare-foot, naked; wandering suburbs
like a sleepwalking Venus –
she doesn’t mind saying her piece:
her reputation’s not as important as it was.

The locals’ myths are already disproving themselves;
animals don’t expire as she passes,
random passers by don’t succumb to giddiness, faint or die;
flowers don’t shudder when she steps over.

She doesn’t feel bitter in her old age,
and even enjoys these walks in public;
outstretched fingers brushing trees
as she eyes the markets, browsing fruit:
her gun-barrel eyes are fresher,
and she is quite happy as a single woman.

Stug Jordan

Kiss Me, Immediately

Kiss me, immediately.
She does so.

And she smiles for my trouble,
walks like a princess;

ignoring the noises
from the swollen avenues.

I tip her, gratuitously.
Then leave.

A street lamp winks
good night.

Stug Jordan

Last Rites

He has thanked life for the occasional gifts
deposited throughout the seasons,
where sadness sometimes overtook the sun;
moaning in a still shape from the sky
to bury itself in the hump of a field.

And only now do the questions collected
through naps and nights, years of half-dreams
announce themselves before his nine-
tenths of a century, where before they'd
been left on the borders of sleep.

(he reflects…)

Has by now the stone thrown from boyhood
hobbled from the riverbed into the sea?
wandering weeds of continents –
his touch carried on ocean beds;
their cold faces oblivious to his.

His initials in scratches, crowd the oak
alongside hers, who back then
had a voice, and now never says a word.
Do their shapes shiver at night;
a couple-carved of vague existences?

Names he'd left behind then, long ago
suddenly recall themselves to mind.
Dead names.

……..

From where he is, a table on the lawn
blinks metal-framed in the rain;
the cold and wet that overcomes HIM
has no effect on IT: but they both ignore
the close-by, insisting voices.

He has a feeling of having gone through life,
but of only having discovered it now:
the sky that longs to be touched
beyond the window smiles in sunlight;
curious of his hands' lifelessness.

(head sunk…the looks of the walls…)

Now and then the girl smiles too
as she bows like a housemaid through
the door; her medicines rattling trays
with her intentions. Does she suspect
the thoughts he loves to think at her?

(open…)

He wakes without knowing he has slept
and shakes a limb to reconfirm that
he has not already gone that way.
Had he been dreaming of that far off place,
and would he know it again on sight?

(…close)

……..

His things are easily organized;
their new homes have been designated.

Stug Jordan

Lately

Lately winter came,
And gathered up in its arms
All its fixed frost
And sterile woodlands,
Its clusters of books
And tatters, old lumber,
And heaved it all out
Into spring to replenish
With life and colour.

And the country animates
In ugly blossoms,
Feral shoots on the fringe
Of these metropoles,
Inclined to nurture
Their flavorous herbs
Beside the butter-dish,
A newspaper folded
Across a rocking chair.

Stug Jordan

Lessons In Peacetime

Of all the boys who snipe and snigger
Through agitated centuries of Rigor-
Mortis, there is one who still stands out
More obvious than the rest, whose shout
Resounds still inside those classroom walls;
A boy who no doubt had more balls
Than brains:

His mind passed by those Alpine rains
Where the creak of the Holocaust trains
Shrieked their hollow songs through time,
And confused as to their contents' crime.
His eyes, it seems, refused to look back so far
As the living ashes in a railway car;
Half way

To a death that boys like him can't say
In all the wise words they throw away;
Their playground obscenities, voices charged
With well-thought thunder, faces barged
In corridors – all as far from a rifle sling
As is a winter moon from an eagle's wing;
Mid-flight

Through an army bivouac as midnight
Shadows of insurgent shapes, like Jacobites
In highland hills, swarm their slow death
On boys who share his age, his face and breathe:
He easily ignores the textbook photographs
Whose blank oblivions shudder as he laughs
His years:

The lovelorn looks of lofty Cavaliers
Arouse his humour, as do the bristling spears
Of Roman legions, for these squires and sticks
Both share, he explains, the description of pricks;
While around him, country graves of huddled bones
Lay in sleep, anonymously; minus headstones
And God.

Stug Jordan

Lineage

I look at her family as though
I had been born into it,
to imagine her ancestors as mine,
and that our relationship is almost incestual,
like two unfamiliar cousins.

Perhaps it's because my family's past
is so ambiguous, almost lost;
where a face like mine could wander
in and out of a census unrecognised,
or immortalised unknowingly
in the foreground of a Constable;

or else indefinite articles in prison cells
or reluctant conscripts,
finding their personal inch
in an acre of mud.

Whereas she is more of a blossom
on a shoot, sprung from a branch
with a root imbedded,
firmly with its gnarled decades
winding to the sun:

two horses fed first,
growing impatient in a paddock
where the two hands wrestle reins
between their fingers, awkward grasps
on leather, and dragging metal into the fields;

a low sun leaving a wedge of shadow
on the eyes under flat caps,
and inborn sounds, harsh syllables
like the sound of the twisted crops,
ringing in equine ears.

And then it's the onset of post-war efficiency;
a razorish hum of depressed engines
and accurate furrows –
a forsaken half slice of bread and awkward
butter unskilfully spread, assuming
a place on the table with tins of milk
while the noise fractures the earth,

like raking up the dead and putting
in the living, sowing a tree
where a stranger might one day decide
to hang his boots on its branch,

one delicate string to lace the two together.

Stug Jordan

Lives Hereafter

A ghost of a village recedes from the banks
In fright of what our hands might hope to touch:
Sleepy old yachts, rare flowers; not too much
Of a tantalising torment for the lower ranks
Of pensioners, who would still work if they could,
For just a little more than these days of odd birds;
Scatterings of them, like the old people’s words,
Lost on the breeze downstream as the wood
Clears from the view of the village church,
Where they, like me, can only hope to be buried:
For our remains will most likely stay here, to be ferried
At dusk like convicts’ bones, where a birch
By the old waterworks can cover our remains,
And dim the final view of our funeral trains.

Stug Jordan

Man Danced

Man danced
Woman faltered.
The room spun
Accordingly.
Ten past nine:
Night sky and
Music.
And Man danced,
Woman faltered.
Smile on a lip
And the Band,
Playing.
Nine past ten;
Man danced
Woman faltered.
But Man insisted:
Man and Woman
Danced.

Stug Jordan

Marriage

Struggling from their warm beds,
rolling out beneath the stars
machine-gunned into the night sky,
dreams still wet inside their heads.

(Owls turning)

The moon, like a smiling scimitar
winks at them through the clouds
above the black trees, where a thrush
sings to the hum of a slow guitar.

(Neck bending, long notes)

Pipe-smoke, drifting long and white
through a desperate dribble of rain,
and shivering in their thick coats
they watch the marriage of the night.

(Clock ticking, hands slow like the dawn)

The white bride of the morning
steps across the flowers,
lifting her dress over the horizon;
the sun stretches, half yawning.

(Eyes burning with pride)

And as the fire-smoke slowly eeled
over the wet, yellow rooftops,
ashes of snow dripped on shoulders;
white confetti across the fields.

(Flakes falling)

They waited long into the noon;
bells suffocating the cold air
as the skies made light of their love
in a fresh, bright honeymoon.

Stug Jordan

Mayflower

Was it safe to think of her
in her blue flannel,
white skin in gone summers?

Now America has her,
holds her close
and dries her sad eyes, her wet lips.

Conceited enough sometimes
to think that I drove her there;
her persecutor.

But I hate her there just as much
as I ever did here,
and thank whichever god

for the ocean that sails between.
Water to dilute her poison.

Stug Jordan

Mirror

‘How pretty, ’ she said sadly
but the smile was happy;
metal fringing her lips
and a crushed perfume scenting

her nimble surroundings,
like the cat waking up again,
and the fingers dancing on piano keys.
The oval friend she has never lies.

Stug Jordan

Montmatre

The little girls of Montmatre are uglier
than hoped for,
washed on their summer balconies
in coy perfumes,

or amassed on the bent boulevards
ignoring calls
from the holes of high windows.
But these girls

have each inherited a little wisdom,
and have planned
meticulously for that far off day
when the wedding

train rolls softly over the city’s hills,
dressed in flowers
and carrying them off into some other
Parisian twilight.

But Montmatre boys are less incisive
than their sisters,
spending hours on end kicking impossible balls
up steep stone steps.

Stug Jordan

Mornun' Mawther

He gets up when she does,
watching her change,
following her shape around the room
with his eyes, that aim her kisses.

Hair brushed in mirrors,
re-tying and tidying in a hurry,
she storms past his outstretched hand
as she hears the kettle click.

He rubs his eyes to see
cold fields, yellowish,
swaying sides into the sun:
her shoed footsteps echo in the hallway.

She reaches the door before he does,
rushing a kiss in sunlight
before stepping out with her keys,
like a warden, head bowed.

Stug Jordan

Mother and Child

Amongst the flowering pillows,
as morning drops delicately
on the mother and child sleeping,
his eye... half-open... peeping.

The soft corners of her mouth
open in a curious smile
as they lay dreaming, warm and white;
fresh from the turbulent night.

Inside the warm, stretched sheets
her shirt lays unbuttoned
and her hands, loose and fair,
hold around his soft dark hair.

His mouth sucks silent dreams
as his hands lay empty.
She touches his fragile brow
with her finger, soon, eventually... now.

She half-wakes, rubbing her eyes,
sore from those long dark hours.
She lays his hunger down,
holding him close, smiling a frown.

She leans against her tired arm;
her eyes, pale and blue,
his eyes alert, dark and loud:
and mine? ... quite naturally, proud.

Stug Jordan

Mr. & Mrs.

Just to think how close we came to ill repute
by signing off our names, to hold heavy hands
in the long corridors of the magistrate's court;
or to have the weaker of the two sold to the vicar,
and forced to live on just the scrawl of the one.

I might have come to think that this was ideal,
had its idea not barely missed my crotch with its
club-like foot; forcing me to hobble out my days
as half a person, with just one leg to stand on,
and the other's foot fed firmly to the grave.

What would they have thought if we'd returned
locked at the finger? A love skilfully performed
on its way to the cemetery, because it is less
than a lifetime between the ribbon on the bonnet
And the hearse moving slowly and more punctual.

Stug Jordan

No One Knows You, Baby

No one knows you, baby,
you loath to please but tease you do;
enemy of the obvious, you are.

Half-five, running fingers along fences
on the way to your house,
where you sit, extremely unknowable,

opened on the sofa like a Greek bible,
a softly struck enigma in sunlight.
Even my knock wonders who for?

And rummaging inside you
I find no evidence or clue,
just the salt of your skin before blood.

Stug Jordan

Noon Spring

Our coach turns softly like a hearse,
and the sun confuses us, a maze of weather
deliberately stifling the roads...

We wake up quickly, forgetting where we are,
but together in a brand-new spring
like a pair of blushing bulbs,

and above the skylight shifts through
a universe of green, laying on our backs,
huddled together in the narrow aisle.

Tell me when we get their my noon spring,
my spring of noon, my love laying on our backs,
our elopement rising like a balloon!

Stug Jordan

Not Just Cynical

Not just cynical, but downtrodden too,
is how some see themselves; a feeling in them that grew
from something lava-like, flowing
from their hearts without them knowing,
spreading ash in fury to cover up the day,
their resentment released on the turbulent Pompeii
that writhes under them like a dying city:
to die, that is, to stop for all eternity.

Not anything at all like the lives that others lead
away from those hills, the suburbs that breed
young lives to resist the urge that cynicism
spreads from the teens, the inside-atheism
that denies the god within; no whispering voices telling
us how bad things really are, how the shelling
of other cities reverberate on a young conscience,
how innocence only half cries out to innocence.

Black views like these are the gutters
that we build lives on; the white walls, soft shutters
shut softly against the guilt that lurks beneath
the pipes, the western graves that hold our death-
living: these we sleep above, these sound the night,
these tick over in a cynic’s song, to ignite
with their flash and echo the blinding, blackish heat
that spirals from the rooftops of a foreign street.

Morning clears this smoke from our breakfast
as the sun breaks through to cast
our overlong shadows on the paper where it goes;
smoke rolled up in unread headlines, proverbial crows
picking at the dead in print, until the paper unrolls
to be read, and the fires start again on car-shaped coals,
and a darkness, called Cynicism, starts to feel at home
with a warmth it hasn’t felt since it abandoned Rome.

Stug Jordan

Old Man

Old man, shrunk like a nut
Sits by a blackened fire
In his empty stone hut:
Scratches at his brown beard.

Birds visit, as loud as hawks,
He chews on his pipe,
The small radio talks:
Reaches for his warm whiskey.

Icy windows, holes in his socks,
Leans back in his chair,
It silently rocks
To the boiling of his sweet potatoes.

Oak table, butter slowly melts,
Dusty framed photos
On dusty oak shelves:
Horses’ hooves trot down the lane.

Cracked mirror, a curtain shivers,
A smoke plume rises
And slowly withers:
Hornets gather by the gate.

Damp walls, paper is old,
Age-stitched sheets
Glazed dark in mould:
The fireside clock strikes three.

Golden thorns, swaying thistles,
Smoky logs creak,
The kettle whistles;
And the day’s clouds turn grey.

Brisk evening, by the doors,
The small fire fades
The dog slowly snores;
And stars spread over the fields.

Shrunken old man, bolts up his shed,
The coal lightly glows,
He climbs up to bed:
The wind howls until dawn.

Stug Jordan

Opening

My windows are closed against the rush of noise
That the road brings with it, outside our home.
I take notice of it as if for the first time,
A glass-fronted earth becoming apparent

Beyond the slow work of the room: I could,
In a moment of impulse, open them to creak like old bones;
Releasing words as if they were pigeons,
But ones inadequately trained to return home.

A window in the adjacent flats is half open,
Looking down on mine as if they were mute children;
And persuading them to open just a little with a smile.
A white net waves gracefully from the high gap

Like a wedding dress being aired, taking in its
Allotted time of sunshine to be delightful in.
I go to the windows and open them, noticing as I do the
Photographs of the times when they were always so.

Stug Jordan

Overseeing

(In memory of a dead relative, unlikely to be looking down)

Her windows see me in the morning, where sky-blush
colours fill blank spaces between the stars:
her eyes must see the roof of the inn;
crouched in sunlight, rumbling its warm tin;
corrugated like her hair, streaming like a black bush
of river weeds. The world between us is always ours.

She watches pavements where the shadows meet
but never touch; the lifelessness of ignorant arms
that shrink their sides. A photograph I have shows
her arms unhindered by these body blows:
the tears invaded her eyes then; the flowers at her feet
lay motionless as she stood deaf through psalms.

These memories drag behind me on the ground,
as I imagine shadows where none are found.

Stug Jordan

Perhaps You Knew Me by Another Name

(a sestina)

Perhaps you knew me by another name,
As children, mad as dogs in a wood?
We could have enjoyed each other's innocence
And traded secrets in some corner lost
By nature during creation; where we lie
In constant splendour, untouched by age.

Could we have existed in another age?
Would I have shouted out your name
Through farms and trees, where rivers lie-
Barely moving; wrapping itself round wood?
Did we fly like birds over fields, getting lost
And knowing no danger in our innocence?

Would you have laughed at my innocence
And used your eyes to make me blush my age?
Maybe in your wilderness, you'd let me get lost;
Teasing me with that playful little name
You invented one day as we ran through the wood;
So far from the lanes where the villages lie.

Is this life we live, you and me, a lie?
Could you be a delusion of my innocence
In this magic world where water, air and wood
Are as real as money, awkwardness and age?
Even the song I once put to your name
Escapes the reaches of memory, irretrievably lost.

Could those years we claimed by force be lost
Forever where the trees we tumbled lie?
Can I only say the syllables of your name
In a voice that long abandoned innocence
To a time we conquered, some glorious age;
Long since interred in our overgrown wood?

And every time I dare myself to pass that wood
I conjure all those trees where love got lost:
And now no fingers can keep up with our age;
Like a pair of ghosts, our existence was a lie;
For I think you gave up your innocence
When you went to live by someone else's name.

And now in the wood, I watch you lie,
Forever lost, dressed in innocence,
With your age in stone, below your name.

Stug Jordan

Photograph of a Boy at Ten Years Old

My sister’s friends, when I was in my teens,
Would saunter in and complicate my world;
For they were very complicated girls,
Who never went with ‘justs’ or ‘might-have-beens, ’
But thought it fair to comment on a lad
Of ten, close-cropped and neat, whose face still had
A cleanliness of thought, a simple skin
For him to be untouched and simple in.

But teenage skin is a little more complex;
It breaks and folds, comes loose and falls away,
When a sister’s friend, looks at that photograph and says,
‘So, what happened? ’ to murder off the sex
That took so long to prepare, and keep out of sight,
And tear at frustrated in the middle of the night.

Stug Jordan

Poem As You Sleep

Of all the things your face suggests
as it delicately rests
on the bedside;
it's the inability it has to hide
those things when you're awake I wish I knew,
as well as those I think I never know but do.

Stug Jordan

Prelude

Lucky is the rain,
For its concealment is sublime,
When absorbed by openness
And rid of counterparts;
Suckling the night’s shade
In dry, warm fields.

Happy is the sun,
As crystal shivers blossom
In breath-held, bright mornings;
Pondering the shade,
As the sibling frosts
Nip each other’s toes.

Stug Jordan

Private Signs

Private: the sign reads,
do not pass the trees.

The boundaries are marked
by hedges of telephone masts;

each one distraught
in their country shackles

humming along
the unbusy roadsides,

and always gaunt and leafless
it breaks your heart,

(like the ancient dogs
of taxidermy,

looking on all marble-eyed
as the live collies nose their bowls) .

And in the wood the chestnuts
are still untouched:

Do Not Touch The Chestnuts
the sign says,

as five cyclists rush past.
‘Oh oh, ’ the branches point

as they spin between the banks,
‘just you watch it, not too close now.’

And those who remember
when the path was accessible

speak sometimes about the stream
there, that freezes in winter,

but no one ever sees it,
and it is always cold now:

Don’t Look At The Little Stream
the notice translates.

And now and then the ravens
and the pigeons think

about landing somewhere
in the thickest parts of the trees.

‘Boo! ’ says the sunset,

peeking over the shambling green

woodmade horizon, because the sun,
you see, has shares in everything.

Stug Jordan

Proposition

One boy makes one girl a proposition
as he walks her home one night, to within
yards of her door; an old sulky entrance
waiting like a mother or a guardian,
observing its little girl slip away quietly
into life,

and the full moon surveys the scene
with a glow of indifference,
letting the tall tips of branches hear the words
he tries so desperately to relieve of all enthusiasm.

It’s done,
and she turns and almost skips away from him,
leaving him with the smile banging
where she left him a kiss,
and she falters with the gate,
fingers furious though unseen

as she takes the kiss that tells on her own lips
back into the house, but heavily disguised;
all sealed up like an affidavit,
with the fervent words he left there, grinning
in spite of her.

Stug Jordan

Revival

He wakes up to rain on his window,
the wash of gutters and drains
in the street; an early car starting;
the yawn of a garden gate –
and love, with a homicidal stare,
nailed like a picture to the wall.

Alarm bells revive neighbour’s bodies
as the world ends again.
He thinks he might as well get up.

Stug Jordan

Rossetti's Mistress

Rossetti’s mistress in her Reverie
Looks sadder than sad could ever be.
Her hand, if turned upwards, could never hold
A head so irrepressibly cold:
But this right-angled wrist, just as it is
Could hold yet more mistresses’ heads, and his;
Their disproportionate love is evident
In a work so out of shape and irreverent.

I don’t know much else about the lives
My unlearned wisdom loves to criticize;
Was this a reverie for her or for him,
A captivity of thought, in masculine eyes?
I can’t help but wonder if she dies.
Did he suffer? Was each brushstroke a hymn?

Stug Jordan

Saddle In The Month

Ant bodies work in the sun, having clawed
A Rome out of the dry earth; they climb into
The catacombs where walls of cat's bones
Fork at the stones and decades of
Machinery's discarded loose change;

Ancient nuts and bolts of field-forged metal,
Pressing odd shapes in insect caverns.
Each citizen clamours over this graveyard,
Where one or two stop suddenly,
Feeling in front a matter beyond their knowledge,

Their experience being limited to only the solid
And the assailable. The firmness here has
A softness. A verdant taste of horse mixed
With sun-hardened hide, animal on animal,
A curiosity for the attention of the forum's gathering.

'An arch, you say, ' the conversation might go:
Less gothic than the owls know, and stitched
As well, with cross on cross, a tapestry
Of crucifixes buried in the borders of holy flesh –
The senate is notified at once, and the

Calendars they work by are notified also
For the opening of an acceptable ceremony,
Certain insect saint's days dredged out of the seasons,
The months that are the most
Auspicious, the correct hours to dig on;

When ant bodies, in a rush of activity, breach
The darkness of the hollow saddle that,
Through an age of neglect, sits
One quarter submerged in the muck
That heaps by the barn's lesser used door.

Their Caesar is escorted through the rust
Of abandoned tools, as the single-file
March that precedes him rounds up in
The reverence of a pommel's shade.
He enters: 'This shall be our church, ' he says.

Stug Jordan

Sleepless In Soho

(a Sestina)

She takes a long look at herself before coming down
for the first one of the evening – she feels so old –
and it's straight to work, and her European face
appears as if by magic, as if it hadn't cried in the night;
as if she had love enough for all paying Englishmen
– though a Turk comes now and then, and studies

her practiced look of vulnerability, while she studies
his feet, as she had been told, because down
in Soho they like them shy – and the first of a group of men
have come in drunk; a nervous eighteen year-old
brought out with the boys for his first night
with a mono-browed Latvian, or Czech girl with a face

like the papers boast in the builders yards, a face
to have your dinner off; and he coyly studies
each one with a red face; but like him, the night
is young, and eventually he picks her, takes her down
the steps of subterranean Soho; centuries-old
brickwork where years of boys have become men.

And outside the doors in the dimmed down lights; tall men
and short men in suits, each with the same set face
like sentries, one cracking an odd smile for the old
businessmen – paying more to have girls in their brown studies
and offices in the City – but meanwhile she looks down
at his fumbling and groping, his first clumsy night

as a man, and later he steps soldierly out into the night
with the troops' parade in full swing: initiate men
all of them; but he lies about her having gone down,
and can't quite shake off the blankness of her face:
a girl who once tried the cello, and business-studies;
a girl first doped to bed at sixteen years old.

And his virginity grows to be another day old,
for the two of them were like the dead against the night,
and tonight the Turk returns, and pays and studies
her again like a Maharaja, and then the faceless men
never end, but the boy will certainly not show his shamed face
there again, even though the lads all still go down.

And so goes the age-old story of men and women,
who trade secrets in the night, and face
the morning as it studies them; sunlight pummelling down.

Stug Jordan

Slumbers

A night-time of secret insomnias burn
in the streets’ windows,
fatigued artefacts of the dead day gone,
faces in a bathe of lamps

twisted in awkward pretence of sleep,
playing dead as the day
animates the night’s genuine dead;
office faces, overalls,

fresh out of the nakedness dreams
and ignorant of when
that coldness soothes the earth
before the day breaks.

Stug Jordan

Songs to Sing to Birds

All summerlong
We sang a song
Of how a love departs,
But leaving love's
Not good enough,
I never made the charts.

Our holidays
Are happy days,
And more so when we sing,
But it hurts the most
When we get by post
This anti-social thing.

All winterlong
We sang it wrong
And confused the words,
That through the trees
Had failed to please
The vicious, critic birds.

By Christmastime
We didn't rhyme,
And forgot to put out bread,
So now the birds,
In other words,
Are either flown or dead.

Stug Jordan

Sonnet

That voice reminds me of another place

In time, in reason and maybe in rhyme;
An act, a face that shows itself, a crime.

But how could I have ever known such a face?
A shifting, living ghost; a paradigm
Of even me, a town, a sleeping sea:

That haunting sound reminds me of myself
In years to come, in slow diminished health.

But could that vague and distant face be me?
Spoken in another space and time,
A martyr to a non-existent race:

In time, in reason and maybe in rhyme;
An act, a face that shows itself, a crime.

The words dwindle from dreams, but leave no trace.

Stug Jordan

Sounds

His face makes just a half turn at the sounds
that ring a never-ending constant crash,
from words that make even language tremble
in the rows of books it represents in print -
but he moves on, in splendid calm and form;
like a breeze in the park, startling grass.

He barely has to pass the couple, heaped on grass
to understand the nature of their sounds,
and contemplate that dangerous, hulking form
of man (legs entangled, like scenes from a car-crash…)
He waits for them to go, and sees their muddy print
where flowers lay flat and stones' shapes tremble.

He sits at stool, watching the pens tremble
on paper; their eyes, weighing up horse and grass;
their fingers running over figures in print;
they hum and mumble –the most curious of all sounds
as the door swings smoky with a crash
to show more hungry overcoats, studying the form.

Passing windows he sees the tragic form
of each old man, old lady, totter and tremble
and locking their lethal sticks in a crash;
discharging the finest examples of mud and grass
and murmuring those age-old, nostalgic sounds
that live in song, but never seem to last in print.

He weaves legs between each tyre-track and footprint,
absently avoiding humanity, in any form:
(but is soon reminded as the Sunday bell sounds
That six days of peace are lost at a rope's tremble…)
He flicks his fag past gravestones in the grass
as heaven thunders round him in a crash.

And outside his door, the slow melodic crash
of industrial existence, in rumble, mechanical print;
stretching their limbs through what's left of grass.
At night the noise drifts above his sleepy form
that barely blinks or offers a tremble;
no longer bothering to turn anymore at those sounds.
.....

The words seem to crash across the typed-up form,
in black, block-print, without a tremble
as he lowers under grass, oblivious of their sounds.

Stug Jordan

Still Waters

Still waters
Of wind-deprived seas,
With its daughters
In the form of rivers, breeze
Through landscapes,
Where the salty sons,
In silvery runs,
Of wild-feathered lakes

Break slowly
Over god-shaped lands;
Covering wholly
Where leaves argue in the sands
Of broken coasts,
And where on windless days
Nature always
Compliments what nature boasts.

Stug Jordan

Sucker

How wildly considerate, how infinitely nice
For life to play the same trick on me twice.
Just my fault for being so sweetly naïve
At the feet of the punishing descendents of Eve.

And there’s never a moment in the day
When I don’t regret being constructed from this clay.
I should have bust in the kiln, and taken my leave
From the bruising hands of the daughters of Eve.

So, how unnecessarily cruel it is then
For life to play the same old trick on me again.
And you’ve won, love, leaving me here to grieve
Once more at the windswept temple of Eve.

Stug Jordan

Sweep Spring

When all the mums sweep spring
From the doorsteps they let the boys
Loose on the summer,
A megalomania of new hair and teeth,
A small force of advanced height and attitudes.

And the girls get caught up in it and are flung
Into the park like butterflies following bees,
Watching who kicks a ball the hardest,
Woodworks hammered, those new netless
Goals they put up now.

And the mums can’t contain the nest
Long enough and are forced out on the end
Of the toddling blaze of big babies,
Muck-dummies and blank blue eyes
Chasing the dive and thud

Of the distant balls that glide like wingless
Shuttlecocks over summer’s playingfield.
But the community soon dissolves in calls
For ‘Tea! ’ – and the boys disperse with a lank gob
Like the fortune of a future England squad.

Stug Jordan

Tailoring

I am confused at the age of seven or eight
By the tailoring of my matriarchs, scissors in hand,
Laying out their fine paper in delicate plans
Of body parts, blue pencilled tracks running straight

Through a faceless woman's shape at the breast;
Sleeves marked out in outlines; the cut-out skirts
They compare on her; the noiseless cut that hurts
Her figure as they dissect it, only to let the paper rest

On ugly fabrics poor pencilled woman would never wear.
I rescue her as they crowd coven-like in the kitchen,
Fill in with colours the blank gaps of her stitching,
Give her eyes, a smile, a felt-green head of hair

To match the belt that nooses round her perfect waist
Like a tidy little ribbon; reorganise their blueprints
As if it will prolong her life. Now her face hints
A rebellion to the torture, a resistance delicately traced.

Stug Jordan

The Beginning

1.

Three months had already been spent
When he read a newspaper for the date;
'I thought tomorrow would have made three, ' he went
On, and on, until the shadows in the late
Sun broadened, and he realised his watch
Had stopped. Perhaps he'd laid on it
In his sleep, perplexed the hands with his crotch
In another dream of homely habit.
The trees rake him out of the side of the road
Like a hawk clawing at a stranded toad,
White skies and black birds hollowed
Out of heaven, drawing him on, and on
As the fourth month pursues the third one gone,
And the third too tired to care that it's followed.

2.

The watch is laid to rest in a canvas bag,
On this anniversary of his departure,
'A quarter of a year, ' he yawns: the days drag
Slower in summer, the daily light's aperture
Glowing through the overgrowth.
'Come home, ' her photograph silently implores,
'I'm so alone.' He knows: 'you and me both.'
Their years together had passed by like meteors;
So close to earth, lost in the atmosphere:
He looks again, she says, 'you should be here.'
He sleeps, and dreams, 'I know, I know my dear.'
And morning is cold, grey entrails of wood
Send ash through the leaves of two oaks stood
Above a low tent, where ashes disappear.

3.

Days pass him lengthways, like hours
Of continual traffic, as he huddles his thin
Sides whilst walking; vomiting in roadside flowers.
'Please, please, no looks, ' he says at the Inn
Door before he goes in: curious locals nod
Their enquiring eyes and curious heads
At a man so near to nature, so far away from god.
He sees the same announcement pencilled: 'No Beds.'
He shuffles into the toilet for his morning shave;
'No beds, ' he laughs, 'no life, no death, no grave! '
The water shocks him, as if it was a wave,
Pipes clamouring for passage behind the tiles:
'I think, today, I'll aim for fifteen miles, '
He says, 'if the weather and the roads behave.'

4.

The villages materialize from the black earth
Like flowers from the emptied coalmines.
Each one could be the place of his birth,
He thinks; it's been so long since those road signs
Called him home, as invitations to start over again.
How eremitical it might be to wash
In the river, or strip to the socks in the rain
Rather than shivering filthy under a mackintosh.
He listens to the thuds of children and footballs
In undulance from over the garden walls,
Replaced in the evening by older kids' catcalls
And slang profanities. He makes a cigarette
And listens to the hiss where the paper's still wet;
Writing subdued memos to the dying day, words in blue scrawls.

5.

Last night he was visited: maybe a fox
Had found him out; smelled the burned back bacon
In his black-bottomed pan, and left the heath's flocks
Of sheep untouched. In the first week his stove was taken
In a similar common: 'Who am I to scavenge from? '
He laughs. The sun complies with a breakfast
Of wrinkled fruit: 'I might have a little more than some, '
He considers, as the morning's shadows cast
Their hideous monument on the coming day.
He cultivates a midday meal of equivalent decay:
Cheap hard bread from a baker's; a bouquet
Of bruised carrots; mandarins to put colour
Back into the day; an autumn portent of duller
Daybreaks, shorter evenings clouding the motorway.

6.

And on, and on, he carves out a rambling passage
On his little earth; as cars steal weeks
On him, ploughing north through the dales' dead silage.
The photograph he carries seems to speak
As the miles increase: 'there's no longer any home, '
It even says now, a sadder, aging face now.
He listens to the distant bells of the church of St. Jerome
In the vale: 'Home was never home, anyhow, '
He says, 'not then, not now; ' as the slopes of old mines
Dispute his foothold, sepulchral coal-black shrines
Of England, a waste of land in gloomy anodynes.
And a man can be seen moving between the sheep
As the country closes its eyes and goes to sleep;
Fields darkening between the darker fences' lines.

Stug Jordan

The Clap

A monumental clap is singing,
Slapping echoes up through archways
And the watery seams of the city.
And curious inhabitants open doors,
Woken from a draught of malaise,
All wondering at the musicality
That can result from a second’s applause.
And it runs like rumour through the lands,
A revolution by two hands.

Stug Jordan

The Dam

He tried to construct a moat
when he was five,
and a single dam built between
his excavated
horseshoe of lifted sand.
And he’s so careful
picking out unwanted stones,
before impatience assaults
the dam at the tower’s side,
a castle crowned in sun and beach,
and the avalanche
that makes him dig again.
And for five he’s so meticulous,
excavating his moat
from sheer collapse.
A considerate architect,
the faithful believer
in the floor of blue stones,
lined like a nave for
the awkward waters,
the running spill from the sea.

Stug Jordan

The Face I Wish I'd Never Seen

And the face I wish I'd never seen still haunts me;
still terrifies me, shakes me, weighs
heavy on my mind, heavy on my heart.

It must be wrong for a human to have that power
over another human, two animals at odds,
confused in a bleak twilight.

Yes I could say I'd never love again, but....
show me that face or even one remotely like it,
and i'm in hiding, sneaking into alleyways,

finding the rhythm of my heart again.

Stug Jordan

The King’s Physician

The king’s physician
knew his patient well,

and on the bed,
inflated little effigy laid
king George,

no regalia,
no kingdom but his bed,
a horizontal throne.

Oh, what to do, what to do
thought the doctor.

Poor George inflated
by decay,
wasting day by day.

This won’t do,
said that royal medic,
flicking his needle

which hovered and spat
above the prone
little emperor.

‘God save the king’
he said as he pushed
in the needle,

and watched the king pop
and fly around the room.

Stug Jordan

The Less I Know

The less I know, the more I feel I can;
or just, to just enable what I know
to bend in machinery like leather held
taught for bridling foreign thoughts:

as in a valve releasing heaven through
an artery; and excess Seraphim to
complicate the foregrounds of Renaissance
paintings; and the ingrained smiles

of soft horizons to wash above a tide
the spills from some full Sargasso,
as meadows drift away from land to form
continents that are mirrored in the stars;

and miles of raping winds to banish
clouds from the swollen moon – these
things are what I know less of, but won’t
deny themselves to be felt of any less.

Stug Jordan

The Living

New blood gives way to the old and elite,
To cataracts, arthritis and coughing fits.
The nearly dead

Of letters, phoenix mumblings; poems.
Bottomless archives of knowledge and waste;
Everything still so neatly
                handwritten.

And life is in flowers, occasional verse
Potholed with provincial anecdotes,
And the living,

Not far from here but nowhere near,
Sound more like a struggle in the distance;
Killing time.

Stug Jordan

The man in the trees is green

The man in the trees is green
through leaves,
he speculates hourly
on his moss-coloured log;
a bench beside his table stump.

How pleased I was to learn
that I could turn
to that man’s green residence
without a ticket, or a
hefty National Trust membership.

Just as well, we said, just as well
when the trees fell
that autumn, and now
a lonely figure haunts a hostel,
concealing leaves in the brown carpet.

Stug Jordan

The Old Ploughman

He lifts the old cup to his mouth like a cross,
a breakfast table Communion of brown tea and toast.
He goes out, one foot firmly in front of the other.

He wipes his lined face, looking into the sun
with a hand against his eyes to read the clouds.
He kicks his dozy mare into consciousness.

The old plough rattles lazily through stones,
raking through the stubble of the dry field.
He coughs between furrows, unheard in his field.

He stoops back in, to bread and half a boiled egg,
his cup receiving its second baptism of the day.
He sits back slowly, his feet pushing the fireguard.

Stug Jordan

The Old Scarecrow

Retired from the fields of corn,
the old scarecrow stands
abandoned on the lawn;
old ropes, binding his hands.

Almost ashamed to be wearing
the ripped cap on his straw head,
his tall shadow tearing
sunlight from the flowerbed.

He stands, surrounded by the flock,
laughing at his disgrace:
even the baby sparrows mock
his scarf-hidden face.

Clinging to the wooden stake,
his stiff stick neck tied,
and arms spread, wide awake
in the soil – crucified.

Stug Jordan

The Path Knew Before the Footstep

The path knew before the footstep;
even before the ghost of a shape
passed above the stones and mud.

From weed-watch, wilderness eyes
followed shadows through wood;
breath held at the slow trespass.

The sun saw before the trees heard,
the flesh and blood, armed in fibres;
invading, foot first, through this garden.

Even before the smells of the sheep
were detected in the cold red nose
that same face walked oblivious in nature.

And the voice that runs over fields
would recognise the words of winds
before the lips had a chance to tremble.

The gate shut before the hand reached;
turning hinges above a hoof-print
that laughs in mud at the step of a shoe.

Stug Jordan

The Patient

The hospital has expelled the boy,
and sent him home to stagnate
with his stain swollen in a bandage.

Tomorrow he might watch other boys,
shy of girls as they fight in grass,
and indulge in a conkers competition

in full view of his invalid jealousy:
and when the sun settles on that game,
the tournament will dispel into odd calls

above random fences, and swapped
property between railings, where
he might spy those mischievous merchants

trading after bedtime. Whereas his bed
will no longer be a bed, for his being prone
to it throughout the day, and not a wink

of sleep provoked between his meals,
because of that stain swollen in a bandage,
and the boys fighting in the grass.

Stug Jordan

The Performance

They offered the boy a seat close to the front,
And then the performance started,
Some comedian in white, voice echoing
In the rafters of the room with his book of gags
Clutched faithfully in his left hand, while
With his right, he made a gesture, no doubt
It was funny, but the boy wasn't laughing
When he saw the coffin roll, like a parcel,
Into that stoked-up inferno. He never knew
That they did it THEN; no one had ever told HIM.
The comedian bought time for a couple of minutes,
Giving the front rows their money's worth,
But the boy was still half way through standing up,
Before he sat again, and swallowed what he'd seen
From that miserable seat at the front,
Where generations of sympathetic eyes burned
Into the back of his spinning head.

Stug Jordan

The sea and someone else

Like insoluble redcoats, they move down Prince of Wales Road like a great enigma in soldiery; boys in men's clothes – delicately furnished; a seasoned regiment. Bar by bar they sack the town – a glass rotates, catching the sun's last synthesis and just begging or borrowing time to stay whole: but no, down it goes into the unfathomable heap, the floors all fields of shattered grass. And now the boys have milked into the same machine; a choreographed shield wall, a juggernaut in concertina.
Meanwhile a train is sleeping at a country station. They are holding hands and grinning, knowing the risks. They are thrown together from necessity; fused cheaply by nature, like strange fruits moulded in haulage: a box of seeping tears. And the hiss and the crash rises over their heads and they kiss a curious kiss, leaving words unspoken, and the best thing they could ever do undone.

Stug Jordan

The Snow and the Coal

Two roads, one sign, a layer of snow,
Covering fields, on either side
Of the old school, the roof of the church;
The shivering gates of the railway crossing.

The dog bark startles the magpie;
Skipping its wings through wind, past chimney smoke
As the wheels roll past carefully,
Treading their tracks of sulphur-slush and mud.

Like a corpse slung into the road,
The little black rock tumbles to a stop;
Burying itself like an ancient meteor -
Shivering with cold in the fossils of ice.

In the piebald sky, the black clouds sink
Behind horizons of fields and locked-up cows,
Whose breath snorts foggy words
At the slow clink of the steady train.

Rigidly raining, bullets of snow,
Flesh-wounding the innocent coal;
Reunited with the earth like a pile of dust,
Dreaming of some warm, distant hearth.

A hedge, two tyre-tracks, a row of footprints,
Disfiguring the bird’s-eye view
That stares like a sentinel over this marriage
Of the earth and sky; stone piled on stone.

Stug Jordan

The White-Armed Statuette

The white-armed statuette
is transfixed by the night,

but gracefully moves to the masters'
'the best of the adagios'.

Tomorrow she'll break
in the back of a lorry at Felixstowe,

though only a slender finger.
Not enough to prevent her

from conducting the night.

Stug Jordan

Three

There are no more than three of them,
neatly unpicked from the cross-stitch
of a yellow country scene,
three strands of beings, fishing –

and rods arched over the river like
small inadequate bridges,
as they sit against the blue, hatted.
And here and there a shallow sound

baits the day, climbing back up
the reeds like a wet dog,
to cluster in their ears with the crickets
and the last threads of the evening.

Stug Jordan

Tumour

A body’s itch, a bison and a boil in the brain.
Gently turning over food in a pink-lit field, the beast shoots still, his fatness dissolving into art, his frame primitively scratched on a cave wall. Now he is the food and a thing of beauty still. The cave dwellers eke out a majesty; controlled fires and combs and in the corner babies bones.
And the ignorant skull.
And the unknowing smile.
The eyes blind and headaches beneath the earth’s crust. That delicate core and all men’s destruction.
Just the size of a hazelnut.

Stug Jordan

Useless Even Though I Try

A dream before death where boys
clamour for space on a wall;
a cool winter Bastille of slung mud
and fits of pity scurrying home.

I dance being the first,
erect though Boz or Giles-esque;
a sketched-in omnipotence
with the other boys shouting ‘REX’

with pink fingers piously pressed
along the battlement’s edge
like warning limbs.
But home’s halo slips, turning collar

then noose as thorns on all sides
prick sweet placentas,
dreams’ bubbles and the bloodless
finger of a man before death,

remembering false boyhoods
and adoration.
He smiles under the crow’s-feet
closed with an audible wind.

Stug Jordan

Verdict

Amid the tissues and scars displayed
by the photographic evidence
lies a single bullet in a plastic bag,
marked with its own special code, and signed.

A surgeon takes the stand and swears something
with a thumb nervously browsing Genesis.

‘Love, ’ he says, remembering his notes.
‘Louder, please, ’ says a caped, grim man.
‘LOVE, your honour.’

And twelve steely hearts at the room’s side
shiver with a collective remembrance;
dark days of youth’s tears on shoulders,
and the closeted years like private autopsies.

Stug Jordan

Vows

When coming in by way of the backdoor
Precedes sleeping on the living room floor,
With drink's remembrance clearly impressed,
And a shambling inability to get undressed;
The wedding vows of many men become confused
With all the other words in life they've used:
'And do you take, ' that vague memory of his
Hears as in his imbibed position he attempts to piss
Within the confines of that domestic portal
To the vulgar reminders of his being mortal.
'And do YOU take, ' he hears, and staggers through
Into that parlour of her daily magnificence,
To await her morning demands of full acquiescence,
Where he, remembering, will simply say, 'I do.'

Stug Jordan

Watching a Funeral

Hanging back in silence as they bring out the coffin
is an automatic art; all coughs stifled, and communication
reduced to odd smiles and inclinations of the head.

And now here comes the dead; a body boxed
on the shoulders of pallbearers, expert at knowing
their pallbearings as they slow-march in the sun, a sombre

rhythm, black-polished march, one of them no older than sixteen,
clean-shaven and shy through hours of being studious;
walking with a weight of age on his shoulder.

Their leader presides like a batonless conductor;
grey-gloved and white haired, perfectly professional
with the air of being a little mad on his days off.

And a cortege of black files through the green yard
as I wait as long as I can in the lych gate,
spying on the solemnity, the wood, the backs of a diminishing family.

Stug Jordan

Whimsical

‘Please close the gates after you leave’
The little council man reminds me,
Rubbing the cold from his nose to his sleeve
And patting me on the shoulder kindly.

But what he doesn’t know is out there
Shimmering above the heath;
My plan to close the gates before I leave,
And pick myself a cold wreath.

But the key skilfully picks open my front door,
And my body walks in and stares at the street’s
Lights from my place on the floor,
Holding my breath, listening for heartbeats,

And wishing that I had the brains or guts
To one day slip that metal latch before I leave,
And lie still for the military salutes,
And the tears of council men on buttoned sleeves.

Stug Jordan

Who Are You Anyway?

‘Jesus, let me think of something else’
The prayer goes, unreplied
For the hundredth, thousandth time,
As the birds scatter from the bells

Of the sad and lonely little church,
Field-set like a stone charity box.
And an eye fiddles with the locks,
Hoping to catch another soul in the lurch.

‘Who are you anyway? ’ he asks.
‘It’s me, I called last week.’
‘Go on then, child, speak.’
And so the spirit exits the thermos flask

Of heaven, and lands safely in me.
And instantly he knows;
His eyebrows like two crows,
His voice like a drum under the sea.

Stug Jordan

Winter Work

Daybreak damaged.
A score of elephants, packed
white and shining in
pale gold replicas of life,
two dozen camel, in caravan
across a straw-filled crate,
all delivered, one load.
Undamaged.

His hammer
sung, the anvil-headed
nail bitten,
a rifle-butt's smack
on the corner of the wood.
The animals are retrieved
from their coffins,
immaculate and bronzed
by death:

(Twin tigers' mouths
packed gnawing the sides,
a tip of eagle,
and individual cartons
of detailed Buddhas.
Eavesdropping.)

The dark room
is the end of their travels;
a dubious zoo,
a concentrated ark
of clicks where nails
hit the concrete floor,
and wooden boxes
loose their advantage
of skilfully measured
height and width,
to the hammer blows.

The dark room reels
under its one
swivelling bulb,
and one by one the animals
exit their broken boxes
and rifled covering,
to break into safari
on a table in the corner,

where a single jewel
is removed from each of
their hidden pregnancies;
twisted white, intimate plastic
eggs of powder.

Tasted –
Tested.

And the floor is littered
with the remains
of cracked bellies,
dismantled tusks and tails,
soft snow knocked
between the table’s gaps,
showing their hollows.
Until the last box:
long ears listening.
Words spoken.

The door clatters
like a drawbridge; hinges
fly like bullets;
gestureless black gloves
entering the black
graveyard, where the wintery
snow has settled,
and the winter workers
squat in submission;
caught with their summer
relics around their knees,

all artefacts of Trojan Horse.
Shattered.

Stug Jordan

Wise Words and Songbirds

Rattling leaf-top quarantines,
Dispersing sounds that sound
Like somewhere else,
They dance their wings across the greens,
Across the grounds.

Silence interrupts their rhythm
Only once a day,
When twelve o’clock
Stumbles uninvited on their ears’ dumb
And senseless state.

From the bell-shaped voices
That traverse the farms
And fields and sun
And force their flight to some noiseless
Place of less alarm.

The wise words in the steeple-song
Craft those rural hymns
In ways that make them stand
As tall as the saluting trees, or the long-
Disused mill’s lifeless limbs.

Stug Jordan