

Poetry Series

Tony Jolley

- poems -

Publication Date:

November 2010

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

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Tony Jolley (17th June 1958)

I'm a University Lecturer who loves teaching, but who is beginning to find that the yen to write from the heart for a non-academic readership is more important than to write from the head for a narrow academic audience of cognoscenti. That said, I have started my own business in France: 'Tonyversity' (www.tonyversity.com) doing management and English coaching for business people and finessing of English translations. Am presently building a personal poetry website called 'Tonyverses' (www.tonyverses.com) but it is slow work!

I used to play guitar and write music in my early years and had, until recently, thought that the muse of my youth was lost to me. She isn't. She took me by the hand and led me home to a place where there is no barrier between the heart and the page anymore.

I no longer have an office. It has become a study, a library, a haven where small miracles happen every day between nib and nap.

Oh, and did I mention... at long, long last, I love and am truly loved.

Works:

Let the Dust Wait (2004)
The Light of The Shade (2006) Forward Press [me plus 9 other poets in an anthology]

(Red) Indian Summer

Today you'd have been a happy-go-lucky girl:
A teenager up to your eyes in make-up and Maths,
Chatting on MSN and mobile,
Reading chick-lit
And surfing certain bits of the Web
You'd probably prefer
Your parents didn't know about.

But you were born into a nation and tradition
'On the cusp':
One Custer your clans could have coped with
(And did, rather comprehensively, I recall) ,
But countless, crashing waves of White Custers flooding relentlessly West
From Prairie to Pacific,
Set upon pushing you 'into the sea' both literally and historically....
That would be another, all-too-short a short story:
The peoples of Manitou, the Mystery,
Driven out by bigotry, technology, opportunity and inevitability.

One man saw the extinction in action: the dimming and dying of your light, realised
that the last echoes of the oral tradition torch that had sustained your culture for
thousands of years was all-but snuffed out forever:

One Edward Curtis.

There was just enough of the fading light left to leave an impression on photographic
plate; so while that first and last, sad Red 'Indian Summer' lasted, while you were
being shouldered aside and swamped by civilisation's wake as its ship of state drove
thoughtlessly through your still waters, he toiled this thirty-year twilight with a more
benign white technology to act as witness to the last will and testament of your way of
life.

Somewhere in this Herculean task of 20 volumes and 40,000 plates, his lens happened
upon you, captured your carefree essence peeking playfully from under Buffalo hide....

And there it was
There it was in you – for it was you:

The heritage of generations,
The hopes of your nation.

You're long gone now, Clayoquot Girl, I guess,
So I lift you and your peoples' mystery
To the mercy of The Great Mystery
That you might not be forgotten,
That we might be forgiven.

Tony Jolley

00.04 25.12.04

Don't understand deliberate hurt.
Just don't.
Never did.

Can't conceive of the calculation:
The clinical cut to dead centre;
The surgeon's pinpoint precision;
The coup-de-grâce, graciously granted,
With all the blunt, high-impact benevolence
Of a snub-nosed shell,
Shot, point-blank,
From the barrel of a smoking phone-gun
At precisely 00.04 on 25.12.04.

Tomorrow's fish 'n' chip wrappers will read:
"Just another Saturday night, drive-by texting".
But I won't be around to read it.

Don't understand.
Never did.
Don't want to.

Tony Jolley

14: 18 Old Armand [Hartmannswillerkopf]

Armand.
Vieil Armand.
Old Armand.
Almost silent Armand.
....Almost....
There were birds.
They were singing
[... Though they obviously hadn't read the script
And the more muted kind of respect
Required by visitor expectation
Of one of the hallowed shrines of the nation...].
None, however, seemed at all anxious
To break cover and perch like a sitting duck
Upon any one of the army of marble and granite markers
Ranged, row upon row, irrespective of rank:
Generals, Colonels, Privates and Majors
Parading in permanent, parallel immobility
Toward their own, cold immortality.
Resting places of the high-born and the low,
In death, all level now.

Strange.
Strange to learn
It was far quieter back then
Up here where the lines were drawn and dug
Well within whispering range.
Silence broke out suddenly on both sides like a plague:
Sergeants still barking their bubonic commands,
But now as laryngitic shadows of their former selves -
Too many secrets to harbour and hide
From too many an enemy ear and eye;
'Til, in 1915, the silent stalemate shattered
And its loud, hot lead shards
Shrouded the hopes and hearts
Of thousands who mattered
To thousands who now
Lay entombed and battered.

The first of this far-too-Many:
One: 'Armand' -
Perhaps the eponymous 'Old Armand' himself:
Lying, first cross to the left of the left hand path
Leading down from the rather bleak memorial,
His legend [like all the countless others']:

'Mort pour la France'
Really?
Was he?

Me, [I think],

I could chose to give my life for family,
For friends ... possibly,
But for country?
Could I?

Three or four rows on -
To the Christian headstone, a solitary exception:
For Saïd Saïd-Arab, one of Islamic tradition;
Called by dint of French colonialisation
To defend the borders of the 'Mother Nation':
Plucked from life under an African summer sky
To serve on Alsatian winter soil, wither, and die.

His marble is sadly all too new to be 'true'....
No doubt replaced after being vandalised:
Brutalised by a bunch of bigots
Advertising nothing but their own ignorance
In taking it out on the softest target
Who didn't deserve it;
And with whom the lying legions would have stood
Shoulder to shoulder, as one, if they could
To defend their comrade's humanity and honour
From those who are simply not worth dying for.

'Mort pour la France'.
Really?
Was he?

The concrete commemoration platform appears to me
To be less architectural memorial and more monumental 'folly':
Sculpted after Mayan temple design
With a large bronze 'altar', North-South aligned,
Bearing reliefs all around of the regions and regiments
Whose 'young guns' were sacrificed without ceremony
To the unworthy gods of this world
Who wouldn't rank humanity over nationality.

'Mort pour la France'.

Really....?
Was he?

I looked at my watch on leaving the scene:
It had stopped.
The time...?
14: 18

Tony Jolley

7670

7670

A number very much towards the thin end of infinity:
Three times the number of Tesco stores
But only a third of McDonald's;
The number of years needed to take us back to the dawn of recorded time -
Well past the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Maya and the Pyramids
To the very first 'modern' human settlements,
To the beginning of the end of transhumance,
To Sumer and signs and shapes in clay
That would be buried then uncovered & decoded in our day.

7670

Someone's PIN number,
Tapped-in times daily like a crazy magic,
Translating digits into all kinds of currency:
Food, clothes, cars and iTunes downloads -
A sort of key to the Door of Infinite Variety...
Provided the software sentinel guarding the gateway
Gives you leave to enter,
Else you'll be locked out of your personal Eden
Like Adam and Eve after that Tree of Knowledge apple.

7670

A product number for a Star Wars 'Hailfire Droid' Lego construction kit;
The Paris postal address of a Chambre d'Hôte
Beside the famous Père Lachaise cemetery
Where serious types like Balzac, de Lesseps, Molière & Champollion,
Rub cold shoulders with the likes of Marcel Marceau, Oscar Wilde & Jim Morrison;
A Gas Cloud in Pisces, recorded and catalogued -
23: 27.2 (hours: minutes) : Ascension,
-00: 11 (degrees: minutes) Declination.

7670

The grand sum of the days of twenty-one years
[Duly calibrated for the 5-odd February 29ths]:
The time you've been 'Grace', my daughter,
[Though I had been wishing you into being from far earlier,
I so wanted to see you, hold you and talk with you].
It's been a privilege to watch you grow into yourself, your prime
And I hope, at 21, the life of your time.

Tony Jolley

A Breed and a Half Apart

She made my day,
Though she will never know it this side of Heaven.....

Sitting in the lee of a wonky, wooden beach-hut:
An amiable old codger of a bulwark
Against the rising tide of brick-built ne'er-do-wells,
Faces hove vaguely into view barely half a groyne away,
Resolving themselves, grey and damp, from a feature-fogging mist.
Few showed sign of a smile for their life or their lot,
A monochrome veil of melancholy drawn down from faces to feet
Dragging their personal contribution
To the woes of the world
In their wake.

Kids were a good breed-and-a-half apart from adults:
Capable of seeing through anything the day threw at them
To the potential for play
Hiding, but never beyond the seeking and finding,
In every waking moment.
A vanguard of high-velocity voices
Heralded the charge of a small Seventh Cavalry
On skate-board and scooter-back
Looming, ghost-like, out of the mist
To put the fear of god
Into any under-employed deckchair attendant
(or other available 'enemy') .

From above a pretty pink 'armour' of elbow pads
And below the protective presence of a sturdy cycle helmet,
Two dark brown eyes met mine.
I didn't see the whole smile -
Her bike-speed saw to that -
But the first half alone was more than enough
To burn off all the mist
In a month of Bank Holiday Mondays.

Tony Jolley

A Faller at the First

I stopped watching for Lady La Poste
Late last week;
Finally gave up waiting
For the belated, promised greeting
Just this minute, as it happens.
Almost convinced myself
'It's only a card,
Only sent out of duty,
(Probably) ,
To sit on the shelf',
But I fell at the first fence
Of fooling myself.

More hurtful things have happened
Yet I've always let go
Without them coming back and besieging me so.

This thing I thought
Would just be the same.

But it wasn't to be.
How could I see
It coming,
(Or not coming, in this case) ,
To me?

Cyberspace silent,
Telephony too.

Not a single
Word
To me from you.

Tony Jolley

About Your Skin

What is it about your skin?
I touch you and it is as natural as breathing,
As right as being
That I don't even have to think about it.
It's not about conscious or subconscious:
Just about us.

Wonder whether Adam knew Eve
With such insouciant tenderness:
Love in a unique completeness;
Whether what we feel has ever been felt
By anyone in this life, anywhere, anywhen.
Like being deep in a natural forest
Wondering whether anyone has ever set their foot
Beneath my soles,
If he or she had ever wondered whether
Anyone would ever follow in their footsteps: -
A virgin moment:
Unbroken snow
Stretching to History's horizon
In all directions;
A whole world:
Our world;
Populated only by the desires of our hearts
And our limitless imaginations
Of the infinite possibilities
Of you
And me.

A whole world.
Our world.
My world.
Your skin.

Tony Jolley

After Me

Mostly I'll be steam.....
Plus the smoke of the elements of me light enough to fly
And small enough to squeeze through the crematorium chimney filters.
Some of me, maybe, will have to be cleaned off these scrubbers
By someone with a high-pressure hose
To surf and sluice me down some drain or other
As dirt destined for culvert or watercourse,
To become a silt deposit at the mouth of a harbour
Flushed twice daily by fresh and salt water –
Who knows:
Maybe I'll become the grain at the heart of a grey pearl
Strung about some sophisticée's neck or studded to her ear.
Me, more likely,
I'll be stuck between the treads of a wading kid's yellow wellies,
Hosed off at home in some suburban back garden,
To enjoy a traditional eternity of pushing up daisies.

The me too small to be caught in the filter's clutches
Will rise and fall and fall and rise to meet and mingle with moisture-laden air
Becoming cloud-seed, molecules of damp clinging,
Making of me a droplet, then a dropp too dense to dance upon cloud nine,
Falling earthward as stair-rodding summer rain
To smash myself to smithereens on a steaming patio
Sizzling like the sausages on a now deserted barbecue.

The me that didn't smoke or steam himself up and out of the last place I rested entire
Would be ash barely an eighth of my baby-weight
[Strange after a lifetime of growing and living I'm set to leave as so much less]
I'll be scattered along Dancing Ledge: the cliff coastline of our courtship -
I like the idea that that'll produce infinite possibilities and permutations
Of the what-was-once-me meeting the what-was-once-you
And falling into each other's arms again and again
In a wished-for wheel of somewheres, somehows, somewhens.

Whether we're sand grains together,
Cheek-to-cheekily conspiring
To nourish Marram Grasses deep down below Studland's dunes
As private places for young lovers to do what young lovers love to do;
Or once in a Blue Moon falling as dancing snowflakes:
Spiraling and pirouetting around each other
[just as we did around the kitchen],
To settle, side-by-side, into a perfect, soft, linen-white bed
[just as we did under the beams of Bruebach];
Or gushing out of the Earth's mantle in our deep red-golden, newborn glory,
Metamorphosed and molten-married for the millionth and not one time too many:
Whether and whatever,
My Darling,
I long to love you in all Eternity.

Tony Jolley

Against the Weave

The Crack of Dawn
Rent the sky's heavy grey winter greatcoat
From seam to boring seam,
Tore it the hard way:
Against the weave,
For all the world as if
God were revisiting His moment
Of Temple-curtain-tearing violence.

Now, as then,
Few people pondered
The sight or its significance
As day drilled down,
Linear and bright,
Upon the quick and the dead alike.

The Heavens opened
And for once it wasn't rain
But light, streaming like stair-rods,
Breaking all the Torah
Of simile and metaphor.

Tony Jolley

Airport Lounging

Sometimes there's nothing will placate them,
Can stop them bawling and wailing
Like inconsolable, Eastern, coffin-cortège mourners,
Being torn away from what they're wanting.
No degree in Toddler Distraction Technique will do,
Not even promises of more and greater later;
Above all when it's a:
Purple-sparkling,
Wheel-a-steering,
Moving,
Turning,
Revvng,
Driving
Toy to end all airport concourse toys.

Wild horses wouldn't drag them away, the boys,
Just one desperate dad, to a whole lot of noise.

Tony Jolley

An Elephant for Aristotle

Whatever possessed him? –

King of the greater half of the Earth in his mid twenties,
Founding force behind wonders of the world:
The Library at Alexandria
And the Pharos,
Now both lost to antiquity
And almost consigned to the realm of mythology
But for intriguing slivers of surviving history.

Whatever possessed him? –

Of all the riches of countless conquered nations
On three continents,
Of all the jewels and marvels of life and learning,
Of all this,
What does he see fit to send to his old friend and teacher,
To Aristotle...?

An elephant.
An elephant!

Not the easiest of parcels to freight, I'll warrant,
But why on earth [or on Alexander's half of it] an elephant?
I don't suppose it would have fit in the schoolroom.
Was it a sort of an outsize playground prank:
A power-play from the student-turned-master –
A sort of apple-for-the-teacher
Any ruler of the known world might send? ...
... Or perhaps a bit of 'payback'
For his having published the keys to the learning 'kingdom'
Which his prodigy feared might inspire threat and competition?

Fine present or fit of pique....?
Either way, I hope he also shipped a shovel.

Tony Jolley

Angst of a Thousand Days

It takes more than 15 minutes to count to one thousand.....

Now imagine, if you will,
Each and every single, solitary one
Of those small, split-second slivers of time
Lasting 24 hours, end-to-end, in a line:
A thousand days worth of ceaseless working,
A thousand nights of worthless wondering.

That's how long it's been, it's been.
That's how long a thousand days seem.

Remember, remember when the war with Iraq
Was going to be one, decisive attack,
With the lads all home safe for Christmas victorious;
When some believed in a Blair still glorious,
And Brown was a colour - not a successor colourless?
One hundred or more soldier-lifetimes ago,
One can hardly believe that it was ever so.

That's how long it's been, it's been.
That's what a thousand days really mean.

For one thousand and one nights Sheherezhade spun
The tales with which her freedom was won.
For one thousand days Queen Anne Boelyn sought
To keep her head, but all came to naught.

One thousand days. One thousand nights
Surely time enough to set to rights.
One thousand days since you've shown your face:
Happy Birthday number 19, Grace.

Tony Jolley

Are You Sitting Comfortably? (I'm not)

Plugged in, powered up,
Clicked-on, dropped down,
Zoomed in, scrolled up
I-conned, let down
Frozen cursored, screen stuck,
No escape, my luck.

(That's 'luck' as opposed to a f-f-familiar rhyme
You'll surely have used in moments like mine)

Do I want to send an error message?
No I bloody well don't
Even if I wanted to,
The computer damn well won't.

Control-Alt- Delete - what stupid command
To crash a system in trouble unplanned.

May I make a few suggestions?
What about one nice, new:
'Beam me up, Scotty',
'Go sit down and have a nice cup of tea while I sort this out for you',
'Don't Panic Mr Mainwaring! '
'Are you sitting comfortably...? Then we'll begin (again) '
Button.
I'd even go so far as to be not too unhappyish with one that said:
'Sorry about that, I'm as confused as you are, I'll see what I can do
(but I'm not promising anything) '.

Is it too much to ask Mr Microsoft-in-the-head
For the merest bit of humanity in adversity? ...
(Like Heineken) ...Probably.

All that just to face the fear
Of the empty page.
The final frontier.

I'm told there is a non-PC way
Of writing available offline today
They call it something like 'paper and pen'
I'll be off to try some then....

Tony Jolley

Autumn Crowds for a Second Coming

They'd been waiting, moments, minutes or hours
After their air-borne journey down.
Dressed in their finery:
Every conceivable shade, fashionable and seasonal:
Yellows, reds, golds and browns,
From bright amber to burnt umber,
They thronged the pavements and verges,
Feet deep and desperate to dance.

At my coming,
They came alive,
The crest of their Mexican Wave of colour
Constant at my window
No matter whether I speeded or slowed,
The more impetuous among them
Spilling onto the road behind me
Like some glorious wake,
Frantically rushing and racing to keep up:
Failing of course,
Gradually to scatter to the gutter,
There to await a second coming.

Tony Jolley

Back to Bruebach

Me, I'm in Bournemouth,
You, you're in Bruebach:
Only just got here;
Can't wait to get back.
The hours don't fly,
The days drag by
And as for the weeks:
It's enough to make you cry.

I'm stuck here
And you're over there:
You're set to come here
But I long to be there.
Roll on the day
When neither is away
And wherever we are,
Together we stay.

Tony Jolley

Ballet 'in Flagrante' [the Modern Ballet Virgin]

They say you'll love it or hate it and there isn't much room in-between.
I was sure I was going to squeeze into that slightly grudging middle ground:
Appreciative of training, skill, strength, grace, movement and artistic interpretation,
But left slightly untouched because I've two left feet and little affinity with the
dancefloor
And even less for tutus and tights.

I was wrong.
How I was wrong.
Not a tutu in sight last night;
But a sublime release of energy in nano-degrees of expression
A perfect continuum between the still and the explosion:
Beauty at rest and Beauty in motion;
The epitome of supple gracefulness when need be
Shape-shifted at will into a contrasting angularity.
An overwhelming sense of shared spirituality, complicity,
Never so uncouth as to be launching and catching,
But all Mantra, Kata, 'Pushing Hands' and Tai C'hi'ing:
Bodies at worship of one another, weaving and writhing,
Slow arcing, Space-Time warping and bending,
Rendering Gravity's unavoidability a mere inconsequentiality
Overcome, at will by liberating choreography.

I can't begin to explain or even to understand: it didn't work at that level with me -
I simply didn't have to disassemble or analyse anything to appreciate its staggering
beauty:
It embodied the human form and all its potentials and possibilities;
Entwined in the arms of its lovers: lighting, staging and musicality
Making a love so tender, yet with such intense expression
I felt and shared their in flagrante delicto passion.

Tony Jolley

Battle Lines

[Upon a Poetry Reading Workshop at Avignon University led by Stephanos Stephanides]

We got more poetry than we bargained for:
Poetry as per the programme;
Poetry under the Plane trees;
Poetry conjuring other places,
Other times,
Other insights
Through other eyes.

Yes, all that and more
As the soft, stone façade
Glowed the warm jaune-crème
Of a quiet understanding
Borne of generations of learning,
And, en face,
Upstart acres of glass
Glowered back their pretensions
With an assurance
Only the arrogance of youth may afford.

Between these battle lines,
Oblivious to their meagre histories and vanities,
Nature was quietly busy
Writing her elegant, eternal poetry
Upon the wind
In fresh, green symphony,
Strolling and stroking its way
Through the forest on my forearms,
Stealing me away from listening,
To writing:
Recording the history of the briefest of moments
Perhaps no-one else noticed.

More than I bargained for too.

Stephanos, thank you.

Tony Jolley

Beached Bamboo

It lay incongruous:
At an angle oblique to its own belonging,
Languishing lonely between retreating tide
And the blind feet of the Good Friday beach brigade
Displaced,
Disinherited,
Denied even a footnote
In the watermargin of either world,
A shadow of its former self,
Reduced in circumstances and stature:
Stunted;
Truncated;
Torso slit and split from navel to neck,
Innards systematically shredded
By the assiduous attrition of salt and sun.

One knot remained resolute,
Its tightly-drawn integrity
Girding and guarding
Its fast-failing fibre 'wives',
Husbanding them,
Hopelessly,
Heroically,
To the very last vestige of its tender tension.

Tomorrow there would be another leaving,
Another landfall to test its ring of wedded resolve;
But for today,
Today it had been enough.

Tony Jolley

Being 'It'

No, not the school playground game of 'tag' –
That marginally less aggressive version of 'British Bulldogs'
Where whoever was slow and out of favour:
Inevitably the 'swot',
Was condemned to a playtime purgatory
Of so near yet so far
And put out of his misery
Only by the bell.
No, not that 'it'.

Not even the girls in the 20s,
Screen-testing upon countless casting couches
To establish whether or not they had 'it' -
Or at least enough of it
For a slot on the chorusline.
No, that's not the 'it' I'm on about.

The 'being it' that bugs me
Is the motorbike morons
And scooter cock-a-snooters
Parading their 'Look at me: I'm it' shit
At an ear-splitting, baffles-out volume
Even a heavy metal rocker would have a problem with,
Helmetless at a hundred mph or more
In a sleepy village where kids still play out of doors..

Feel like an old fart making mention of this,
But it seems life has become a one-sided coin:
Heads their 'right' to do just as they please
Tails an empty space for 'responsibilities'.

NB. Please note I have nothing against bikers - they are mostly great people relaxing with the wind in their hair, but rather it is the teenage poseurs with the 50cc bee-in-a-bottle at full throttle that get my goat.

Tony Jolley

Being One

Being One:

Neither
Dependent
Nor
Independent:

Inter-dependent.

Being One:

Self
Becomes
Neither
A
Necessary
Nor
Sufficient
Condition:

Shared.

Being
One

·
One
Being.

Tony Jolley

Between 'Now' and 'Then'

Life.

It starts.
It ends.

It's the bit between
That depends
On the vagaries
Of the lottery
Bound up in the verb to be.

Some with an average life expectancy of many years
Barely having time to take a breath
Before being taught their first and fatal lesson
By the chalk white claws and incisors
Of the jungle blackboard's hunter-teachers.

Mayflies draw the shortest straw:
Just a single, solitary day,
And then only if they keep well out
Of the Rainbow and Brown Trout's way.
Dragonflies don't fare that much better
If the truth be told,
Four or five glory-filled days at most:
Enough to mate – never to be old.

Most birds manage to see the seasons turn
Once, twice or more
Provided they aren't taken
By heatwave or winter's ice-white jaw.
And Man's Best Friend is thought generally lucky
If he gets to see the other side of a decade
Even with the benefit of the comforts of home
And all the veterinary advances made.

Man.
Theoretically three score years and ten,
But really just the time between 'now' and 'then'.

Tony Jolley

Biography

If someday scientists could reconstruct us from scratch –
Not just the skin and bones
But the personality to match:
Mind, emotions, values, judgement, belief, sensitivity:
The long and the short of it, not part of it: all of it,
I wonder how close a copy they could create
Using just our biographies for their 'Us Two' template.....

For all the painstaking research,
The pouring over periodicals and journals,
The meticulous validation of sources,
Interviews with all and sundry who claimed to be 'close'
To get a 360°, wide-screen, hi-definition picture
To project onto the printed page:
Just what proportion of a person can be pulled together
Piecemeal, like this: 70%,37%,11% or less.....?
Can anybody be really 'known' in fact not fiction or faction?
Construed, surmised, approximated, guessed-at at best, yes,
From events, decisions and second and third-hand recollections.
But how reliable are our witnesses in the courthouse of our lives,
Seeing all too often only what we want seen or they wish to see
And misinterpreting us innocently, negligently or downright deliberately?

If the individual at issue were to scan the sum of his biographies,
Would he recognise himself at all
Or perceive just a poor pastiche with a passing resemblance
To someone he might almost have been on a good or bad day?
But then again,
Can anyone really know his 'me'?
We all spend a lifetime exploring our undiscovereds
And seeking solace and meaning in our uncovereds....
Perhaps we're what we're believed to be:
The sum total of who we think we know we are
And what others suppose us to be.
So I don't imagine an autobiography would be any the better,
As Counsel, Judge and Jury in the Tribunal of Me,
Painting myself and my image by numbers to the letter
Prosecuting one water-tight, me-monopoly
With a 'Get out of Jail Free' guarantee.

So why do we do it?
What's this fascination that fills our shelves
That we have to know so much of our otherselves?

Is it for the comforting feeling of knowing we're not alone
In our confusions and delusions;
To satisfy some voyeuristic impulse
To get under someone's skirt, shirt or skin;
.....Or might it just be
That life lived is all we have for certain to hang on to
And we would willingly bequeath it to others
If it turns out we don't get to take it with us,

For fear,
That otherwise
We might ourselves leave
No residual ripple
On the eternal Lake of Life
To say we were ever here?

Tony Jolley

Bloodied but Unbowed

He wasn't carried from the ring
Upon shoulders of adulation and adoration.
He wasn't paraded before the populace
As 'Local Boy Made Good'.
He was neither victor nor vanquished:

He simply went the distance for you.

Tony Jolley

Book of Days

Yann Arthus Bertrand's
Photo-Book of Days
For the 8th of January
Shows a field of pack-ice forming.

To me the magic of this frozen moment
Lies and lives in the layout
Of this hyper-natural jigsaw:
Billions of bits and pieces of blue-white ice
All growing,
All changing,
Reshaping
And moving to the muses
Of the cold currents and freezing forces
That dominate this bleak but beautiful Arctic domain.

Are there bored deities looking down from the skies above
Or their immortal cousins of the deeps staring up
Possessed of the power
And depressed enough in eternity
To want to puzzle this puzzle out
And fit the fragments together
With no box-lid template to go on,
'Til there is nothing
But a seamless, uniform nothingness,
Stretching endlessly north,
Sealing the sea for six months or more
Beneath a solid shell of itself?

No?
Then maybe it is just Mother Nature
Playing with herself.

Whatever it was, is, or will be
It will forever be a photo that affected me.

Tony Jolley

Bottles and Buts

All the anticipation, expectation & prognostication having systematically considered
Every one of the almost infinite permutations and possibilities,
Assigning each its own probability,
The mediation meeting should surely have held not a single surprise.

Sure enough: it didn't..
I'd plotted the point with such microscopic measure.

Then why, when it came,
As familiar as a family face,
Did I feel my fingers fumble
For the business-like bottle of branded water
Only to feel it flinch, frozen from my grasp:
Its condensation recoiling
From an unwelcome arranged marriage
To the sweat standing proud on my palms –
Palms that felt as dry as the strangled cry stuck in my craw?

Maybe it wasn't me.
Maybe the water-with-a-will
Was simply sneering at the no-name plastic cup:
Its all-too-unattractive, decanted destination.

"Love you.....but can't.
Love you.....but won't.
Love you.....but....."

But to me, everything but love can have but;
But then..... is this love?

Tony Jolley

Bovington Ranges

Beauty upon a battleground.
Wilderness within a war-zone.

..... Ironic really.....

On the ranges
Nature appears to prosper
Far better under fire
Than elsewhere under the protection
Of peace and planning control.

Tony Jolley

Brazen

Not caring for cover of darkness,
She ran,
Naked as the day she was born;
Ran,
As if she heeded
Nothing
Of convention,
Needed
Nothing
For protection;
Threaded her way
Between the knots of courting couples
And the solitary strollers,
Between the push-bikes
And the rollerbladers,
All strutting their respective stuffs with style
Along the prom.

She turned heads –
How could she not,
As she sauntered and slinked
Her hips down the steps
To the sand,
Her body language subtly changing,
Responding
To the soft feel under heel
As she made for
The water's edge,
Head thrown back,
Hair streaming in the breeze,
Breathing in the ozone
As if it were her own personal Ambrosia.

She paddled her way away along the shore
Until her dot merged
With the monochrome of dusk
And we could make her out no more.

We were all thinking it:

Brazen!

Brazen vixen.

PS. Yes.... she really was a fox..... what WERE you thinking!

Tony Jolley

Brief Blindspot

She wasn't exactly labouring
Under the lop-sided load,
But 'listing', rather;
Her frail fingers paying the price
Of having the temerity
To wage a Wednesday afternoon war
Against the god of Gravity.

Through the lens
Of a vacant stare
She might once have called
'Resignation',
She appeared motionless:
A metaphor
Hanging
Between the here and the hereafter.

Then she was gone:
Lost to that brief blindspot
Between rear-view and wing mirror –
To become the bent back
Of a fast-fading memory:
A memory of someone.

Someone.

Someone I'd never know.

Tony Jolley

Caught by the Cold Callers (For Kev)

Good evening,
May I speak to Mr Wells, please,
Mr, err, sorry, can't read the screen...
Mr ... Krevin (?) Wells..?

Already you know
That he knows
You know
He doesn't know you.

It's about our new deal:
We're in your area, see,
And have double-glazing
On offer for free...
But sir must understand,
It's for this week only.

No thanks.

But it really is free,
Honestly...

Still 'no thanks', honestly.

Not even one window?
No weathered wood frames
Or need of some panes?
A new set of patio doors perhaps?
For the attic conversion, maybe a Velux?

I live in a brand new bungalow
That hasn't got a patio.
So, no-go:
No thanks.....
No.

No need to be like that, Krevin -
May I call you, Krevin, Krevin?
Or do you prefer Krev, Krevin?
Only trying to do my job, Krev
And earn a crust
As everyone must

Cold-calling's dire in these difficult days
... I take it there's no aquarium or greenhouse to glaze?

Tony Jolley

Chameleon the Great

Saw my eldest daughter yesterday
For only the second time in seven months.

The first I nearly didn't recognise
Her high-heeled, turquoise, spectator-out-of-water,
As the Blood Red Sea parted and drained down
Upon the floor of the marriage morgue
To leave her all the higher yet none the drier-eyed
Between a father's rock and a mother's hard place.

The second, she didn't deign to register me
Upon her Richter Scale of Consciousness:
Absorbed, as she was, in plaintive prayer
To Chameleon, that Great god of Camouflage,
Bidding him blend her blondness
Into the bus queue blandness
And cloak her with invisibility against only me.

The look didn't quite kill
But her words mugged me
Of my wallet of hope
Of any real reconciliation
This side of the summer and
This side of the sea.

Tony Jolley

Changing Sides

For no reason I can rightly recall –
Maybe curiosity,
Or just a change of scenery,
Maybe not sleeping so soundly:
Anyway, one of those times
When even your favourite duck-down pillow
Won't do its duty
And stubbornly refuses
To contour itself to your nape
Or to cosset your aching neck,
Declines even to hold your head
At anything like the right angle
To draw you near to the Land of Nod.....
For no good reason like that,
Last night
We swapped our sides of the bed.

I felt as weird as a Thirteen Pound Note:
A country mile from legal tender,
A shilling and sixpence short of shrift.
Suddenly I understood
Cups with left-handed handles,
Why McCartney's Rickenbacker looks wrong,
How my Dad could play cricket the right way round
Yet swing a six-iron only as a sinister.

Even the heat of your body
Came out of leftfield.
Your breathing sounded strange
In the wrong ear.
My left foot didn't 'breathe' for my body
As efficiently
Stuck out of the duvet
As my right leg,
Now marooned
Deep in deep-heat middle ground.

Changing sides:
I'm a sort of dyspraxic, insomniac Mata Hari...

At least dawn came
And I woke up unshot.

Tony Jolley

Changing Sides (Me 'n' Mata Hari)

For no reason I can rightly recall –
Maybe curiosity,
Or just a change of scenery,
Maybe not sleeping so soundly:
Anyway, one of those times
When even your favourite duck-down pillow
Won't do its duty
And stubbornly refuses
To contour itself to your cause
Or to cosset your aching neck,
Declines even to hold your head
At anything like the right angle
To draw you nearer to the Land of Nod.....
For no good reason like that,
Last night
We swapped our sides of the bed.

I felt as weird as a Nine Bob Note:
A country mile from legal tender,
A full shilling and sixpence short of shrift.
Suddenly I understood
Cups with left-handed handles,
Why McCartney's Rickenbacker looks wrong,
How my Dad could play cricket the right way round
Yet swing a six-iron only as a sinister.

Even the heat of your body
Came right out of leftfield.
Your breathing sounded strange
In the wrong ear.
My left foot didn't 'breathe' for my body
As efficiently
Stuck out of the duvet
As its mirror brother,
Now marooned
Deep in deep-heat middle ground.

Changing sides:
I'm a sort of dyspraxic, insomniac Mata Hari...

.... At least when dawn came up
I woke up unshot.

Tony Jolley

Coffee Event Horizon

First it was a foetus
[Naturally enough]
Umbilical cord and all
A la Leonardo,
Until it became a pint-sized Pangea
Parting its continental components
Like mega-mitochondria
Courtesy of tectonic contractions
Borne upon convection currents
Surging from the scalding café core.
Next a face:
Frowning,
Stretching,
Whirling like a spiral galaxy,
Trying to squeeze itself
Into some sort of cosmic, coffee 'singularity'
Before whose dark eternity
Millions of nano-sun supernovas
Exploded then faded forever
Beyond the event horizon.
Eventually even the broiling brown vortex
Shallowed and slowed
Then fell prey to the pull of surface tension,
Its faint remnants
Skidding and sliding down the cup diameter
Like unlike poles to each other.
Spent,
All that remained
Was perhaps coffee background radiation:
That faintest of echoes
In the taste of a cooling libation.

[Was idly watching Ellen stir her coffee and when she lifted out the spoon, the Brownian Motion, centrifugal force and surface tension of the liquid began to interact and play with the creamy froth....]

Tony Jolley

Colossus

So large in life
He
Bestrode your childhood
To motherhood:
Your personal Colossus.
Held you so safe
In the arms of all he was:
Father
And Godfather both –
An impossible alloy
Of tempered steel and tenderness,
With, as you would say,
'Not just a little of the tarbrush
About him'.

For all that,
Chocolate looms strangely large
In his legend:
The Bourneville Boy
Sporting Cadbury's
Tin lid soles to his shoes;
His WW2 medals
In pride of place
On our mantelpiece
Inside his Dad's
WW1 trench-Christmas chocolate box:
'For Services Rendered'.

So many little 'lights' like that
For memories to hide him in,
Residing there like
Manna and milk
In a daughter's desert;
Yet never enough
To even begin to assuage
The hunger
Of your yearning soul.

Not a trace.

No map or marker
To anchor your sailor
To a time, a place...
No stone or inscribed seat.
No plot in perpetuity.

Not a trace.

No brass plaque
To be wax-rubbed and wondered at
By Future's carefree children
Trying to make sense

Of life,
History:
His story,
Their story.

Not a trace.

Not a trace,
For you,
Looking out,
Of your Colossus.
But for us,
Looking in
At you,
He is ever with us.

Tony Jolley

Coming To Terms

Silent steps from the deep end of Eternity
Seem to echo more mournfully down the corridors of your life.
The long march of a tall man
Casting his lengthening shadow slowly toward your fretful feet

Every minute: missed
Some days: distressed
Every week: wanting
Some months: mourning the more
Every season: seeking still

Each year, a year of no lesser yearning
A year yet lacking resolution: learning,
That a coming to terms with 'coming to terms'
Comes only in its own time...
Only on its own terms.

Tony Jolley

Concave

Winter 1963 –
You know,
The one that makes you think
Of that line from the carol:

“Earth as hard as iron ...
Water like a stone”

Or possibly
Frankie Valli’s
Impossibly tight-trussed:

“Oh what a night –
Late December back in 63 ...”;

Well yes,
That one;
That one I learned the time-honoured tradition
Of ‘joined-up writing’
[Do they still call it that now?],
Not from my class teacher
[Mrs Troke or Mr Ingram – I can’t remember],
But from Mr Brooks, the Headmaster himself
Who clearly saw writing as a rite of passage
Demanding none other than he at the helm.

I thought I’d done well enough –
At least it looked more than a bit like it should have,
But then his shadow eclipsed
My bright hopes and slight self-confidence
With his well intentioned ‘help’.
Apparently,
[though my words were as well-formed as anyone’s]
My fore and index fingers
Were pressing with too much pressure,
Were ‘concave’ and ‘stressed’
[Not that I knew what either meant then],
Weren’t convex,
Weren’t relaxed.

I couldn’t for the life of me see
How it could be
As lighter meant looser
And loss of control to me.

Fast-forward forty-odd years
And maybe forty thousand self-penned pages
And I can still recall his reproof
Clearer than his face and his pinstripe suit.
But today I watched you writing your journal
And marvelled as your words
Fountained and flowed their way across the page

With all the effortless elegance and grace
Of Torvill and Dean in their 'Bolero' prime: -

Your fingers as wonderfully concave as mine.....

Tony Jolley

Condemned

Faces.

Faces fashioned by the genes of a generation long-gone.
Faces sentenced to serve an eternal half-life after death
Imprisoned within the walls of a single, monochrome microsecond.

Faces.

Faces exposed in life to light on plate
Caught and condemned by judge and jury in camera.

Faces.

These faces and their past-time porters
Have gone to ground, to grave,
Dressed in all the pomp and circumstance
Their hopes and dreams could muster;
Naked but for faith
And the Ferryman's fare still glinting dull in their eyes.

Dead, they died a second, slower death,
Fading from the collective recollection of family and friends...

First the hole each left in life was full-size:

A made to measure grief;
The solitary seat where none would sit in spite of its vacant comfort;
The suit he once wore, steeped in his smell,
Still remembering his shape with fondness
Like some old and faithful hound pining for his departed master,
And holding fast to hope against a rising tide of reality.

Later, hand-me-down tales, mementoes and memories –
Those legacies of a life lived and lost –
Suffered in translation
Like autumn leaves blown free from the family tree.

Eventually even the dying out, died out,
With none to mourn its passing.

Faces.

Faces in a photo.

Faces out of their time-frame....

..... but somehow still in mine.

Tony Jolley

Conjuring Lead From Gold

Object of your gruesome experimentation,
You stuck their megavolt electrodes
Of hearsay, revisionism, hatefulness and received un-wisdom
To my temples past, present and future
Like some screwed up anti-chemist:
A Pavlov with no need of dog
Salivating at the prospect
Of conjuring Lead from our Gold,
And threw the 'Old Sparky' switch
With such dispassionate detachment
I couldn't recognize you
Though you looked so much like me.

I convulsed silently, internally,
As ampères of indifference and rejection
Surged their shockwaves through
Rivers of blood suddenly thinner than water,
Feeling my DNA helix slowly unravelling:
Unpicked at the stiletto steels
Of knitting needles and crochet hooks
Cropping me head-first
As fast as your Mme Defarge fingers
Could unmake me.

Static.
No longer shaped like me.
No more kinetic.
No longer shaped like you.
Relegated to an inert element
Not even a sun's nuclear reactor
Can transmute:
.... Only a daughter's.

Tony Jolley

Connoisseurs and Counterfeits

Branksome Beach had a 'feeling' about it this morning,
(Less of a one this afternoon)
Only it was playing its cards too close to its chest for me to call.

The haze was part of it, but it wasn't it.
It was something more, rather than something else:
Something related -
Related in the way that time relates to life
And pain relates to pleasure:
Implicitly, imprecisely,
Interestingly: unsettlingly.

It was so very near to the natural,
Close to congruent
But for that haunting, sneaking feeling
That Nature was somehow lip-synching
A tune intended for a decidedly different day,
As if its attention lay elsewhere,
Upon some better beach.

Put 'Today': the original and the counterfeit together
And there's not a connoisseur could divine between them:
To all intents and all purposes the same.
But I'm the poor painter who intended and purposed
And to me they're both original, both authorised;
Still one doesn't 'feel' right - and even I don't know why.

Tony Jolley

Contradiction

You say: "I love you",
And you do:
To the uttermost limits of yourself and of all eternities.

I say: "You are my world",
And you are:
There is no horizon for me beyond you.

We say: "We are one",
And we are:
Rossetti's children, we neither have use for 'I' or 'mine'

You say: "Distance has no dominion over us",
And it hasn't:
We remain 600 miles close.

I say: "You never leave me",
And you don't:
Your heavenly hands stay ever about my spirit.

We say we are: "Home... and home for all time"
And we are:
Safe, secure, content, in our one-up-one-down-with-a-sea-view.

Yet today

Yet today:
I could not touch your cheek – not even to make a fleeting moment of memory;
You could not share the deepening orisons of my eyes;
We were not free to be one for anyone;
I could not catch a plane to you – not even with ticket and passport in pocket;
You could not find my fingers upon your silent, lonely frets;
We were both 'a la maison', yet we neither were 'home'.

Yet today....

Yet today:
We both knew that had we heard 'anything' had happened to the other
We would have moved all heavens and every Earth without a thought
To be where we know we must be.

Then why, Oh why, My Love, does 'nothing' keep us from 'we'?

Tony Jolley

Cook-in Sauce

The Old Beams
Was an 'oldey-worldey' pub
On the right-hand side of the Ringwood – Salisbury road,
Rather too rich for our combined, courting-couple resources:
The sort of place parents would prefer
To go of a Friday or Saturday evening
To wine and dine
And wind themselves down from the working week;
Gracefully leaving available in the process
Six sweet feet of green Drayton sofa
Or the significantly more explicit
Adult invitation
To that dark, horizontal heat
Beating black and deep below
The duck-down duvet
Spread
Wide and linen-white upon my very double bed
Offering infinite,
Intimate
Night-time opportunity
To explore and exhibit
Each other's unseens and untouched
From a variety of interesting, only-imagined, angles
More advantageous
And far more adventurous
Than the average vertical would allow.

Sometimes it had all the Seventies sophistication
Of a Homepride White-Wine Cook-in Sauce,
Coupled with the soft, seductive shades and shadows
Of candlelight,
Romancing us along a teenage, hormonal highwire,
Teetering precariously but deliciously
Between
A very nearly chaste,
Hour-or-more-long, breathless embrace
And tearing off each other's clothes
As frantic to feel as to be felt
Barely before parents' backs were turned
And the sound of their car slid,
All too slowly out of earshot...
...Still that stirs in me
Far more than mere memory.

Yes, the Old Beams, (though of course it never knew it)
Provided much-needed possibilities
To our youthful means and seriously playful motives.

Now, a generation on,
We live, love and lust
Under the 'seen it all before' benevolence
Of far older beams

Which frame and brace our French farmhouse
After a fashion with which
Shakespeare would have been eminently familiar;
Spanning the centuries
With that same, timeless ease
Which carries his plots and sonnets
Safe and sound into our present day reality.

These older beams
Present even greater potential
For us to pursue our pleasure,
Vaulting and thrusting at obscene angles
Above our heads,
Over our bed:
Mortise and Tenon couplings and socketings;
Ten-inch, heart of Oak dowling pins,
Thicker than my thumb:
Males hammered hard home
Into their accommodating, made-to-measure,
Female mate-holes,
Forcing and fixing each hip joint
In the perfect position
To spread the load
Along the length of these splayed limbs
And bear its weight,
Compliant,
Without complaint.

Tony Jolley

Couldn't Call

Couldn't call.
Wasn't sure why.

Couldn't face the mournful music of polite rebuff:
My own words deflected
Or reflected as if in some strange, monosyllabic mirror -
Dirge-like delivery,
Devoid of intent to introduce
One single shred of personality,
Or of any promise other
Than putting this pretence out of its misery.

Couldn't bear the charade
In which I would 'play the part' of a parent
Because she wouldn't let you let me be me.

Tony Jolley

Cruel Comfort

He
[Or 'she' – how does one tell?]
Was some:
2000 €,
10,000 km,
200 vertical feet,
20 °C,
40% humidity
Infinitely too much humanity
And a continent and a country
Away from the company
Of its own kind:
Of home.
Yet,
So desperate for even caged consolation
He inclined his head,
Offering his nape,
As if before the Sultan:
To strike or to stroke
Inviting contact,
Any contact:
Cruel comfort or sweet release
From a steel-bound existence
Prey to a gravity
He once could negate at a thought,
His former unchained reality
Now sadly relegated to fleeting dreams
Be-deviled and broken
By 24-hour daylight security.

Alone in abject slavery,
Yet still he craved contact with me.
Me: representative of all who would not see him free.
We don't deserve animals, do we?

[Lament for the lot of the Gabon Grey Parrot in a cage in the Botannic Garden Centre]

Tony Jolley

Deep and Indelible

Rooted, by pride restored,
In the rich, Rhine-wrought soil of Bruebach
The very day the Bosche were booted out
(The second time, that is) :
Now ramrod straight and mast-high,
Competing only with the medieval church tower opposite
For lofty ascendance and local reverence
Our garden's 'Sapin de la Libération'
Seems to bear all of its 65 rings
With the quiet, green dignities
Of memorial to the moment and to French 'Fallen',
And of the visceral memories of survivors of invasion and occupation,
Still bearing the scars more openly than inwardly
As if it were yesterday....
And 'might just be again another day -
Who knows anyway? '.

History writes itself deep and indelible in the souls of its witnesses.

The young, nouveau poor come touting for work
[and who can blame them for trying?]
Offering to lop it, chop it and otherwise reduce it
To sap-spitting fuel for a winter open fire
And sadly, but understandingly, forego
All hope of its exploitation
After our short explanation,
Leaving, head bowed,
In regret or recognition.

As ever, it's not that simple -
This is Alsace, after all:
A land with a long-chequered heritage
Of belonging and language,
A prize of enviable proportion;
A pawn at the mercy of powers and princes
Who would possess her for her position:
Cradled between the blue hues of the Vosges
And the stark black of Schwarzwald,
Gateway to Swiss Alps and south to Italy,
Rhine and plain, vine and wine.
'Leben wie Gott im Frankreich'
So the (German) saying goes:
And as they've tried it at least twice
I guess they should know.

The 1939 blitzkrieg across the Rhine
Saw Fernand, our old French friend and neighbour,
Conscripted at the sharp end of a Schmeisser
To wear Wehrmacht grey
And frogmarched to the Eastern Front as expendable,
Non-Aryan fodder for Operation Barbarossa.
Some major miracle or ministering angel

Spared him from Stalingrad
And Stalin's standing orders
To take no prisoners.
Retreat before the Red Army,
Inevitably,
Brought him hard up against the Western Allies
As their two-front trap squeezed and finally snapped shut
Upon the remnants of the 1000 year Reich,
Whereupon he was mortared
And almost mortally injured by the Americans,
Saved from the foxhole that was fast becoming his grave
By some foolhardy-brave Ranger Medics
Who heard him praying to his Father
And self-administering the last rites in French...
Only to be shot on his way to safety
By a bullet from a German machine gun.

Targeted by two sides,
Touch and go,
He woke up in England:
A German POW
Until somebody with an ounce of sense
Realised the reality of his nationality,
Separated him
And then, promptly losing the plot, tried to repatriate him
To a country rife with lynching-party reprisals
Exactng summary justice
Upon the heads of all easy targets like conscriptees and collaborators,
Which would certainly have finished the job in peacetime
Which neither side had quite managed, despite their best efforts, in wartime.

He was helpfully, and, I hope, deliberately 'lost' by the British system
And spent a good few years re-building a bombed-out Southampton
Before daring to embark for his home in Bruebach
And the Libération sapling
Which would shelter and shade his twilight aging.

No hero's reception or victor's laurels for Fernand:
His own, beloved country, for whom he would have fought
To his last breath if he only could,
Had revoked his French nationality -
So he had to suffer the indignity heaped upon multiple injury
Of applying for his own 'Re-integration'
Like a criminal to be released back into society
In the face of all the anathema
The much diminished, yet still imperious,
Might of the State could muster.

No wonder Alsace is somehow 'separate'.
No surprise some of its older citizens
See themselves
As Alsacien first and foremost

And French a long way second...
Or, unforgiven,
Unreckoned.

The wounds of history everywhere run deep,
But here, unhealed, the blood still seeps.

Tony Jolley

Deer-ly Departed

Just before: it saw.
Just perhaps, it knew.
But in that fatal, final second
Did it think like me and you?

Just before: it saw.
I hope to God it knew,
That in that frantic, braking battle
I'd done all that I could do.

Tony Jolley

Departure Lounge Diva

"DIVA"

Declared the Darling's pink Tee-shirt, departing.

"SO MUCH TO DO"

It announced, emphatically, arriving.

[Yet thankfully without the obligatory adult addendum of:
'So Little Time']

Unbidden, the plea surfaced:

'Pray God she has the time –

But let it be for the being:

Let not the daily doing crowd to cloud

The long view from a young life'.

Then I allowed myself a little rumination, reflection.

As a child I was, on all accounts,

A whirling dervish of doing

[Except when there was no doing to be done]

and having nothing to do was the end of the world.

Yet now, au contraire,

Having to do nothing seems a luxury locked away at the world's end.

Surely, between these polarised positions

There must have been some equatorial equilibrium –

A day when the doing beautifully balanced the being...

...But when?

When was that?

What year?

What date?

And how did I not see it and protect it, preserve it?

How did I fail to feel the see-saw's slow swing away from me?

No lament.

No blame.

No recrimination

No pain...

Just a not-quite-so-academic-a-question

From a not-quite-so-career-peaked-academician

Who tips his own mortar board today

To the tender, timely teachers who taught him lately

That between his all-too-short coming and going

He is a human being not doing.

So may the Diva grow.

So may the Diva know.

Tony Jolley

Deus in Retriever

...And God saw that it was good...
But perhaps it could be better,
So like any a craftsman worth his salt
On his 'day off' he was tempted to tinker.....

So to that pint-sized brain, he came again,
Focusing all his creator power,
Vowing to beat the 'Big Blue' he knew
Would beat Spassky in under an hour.

Never has the world seen such a probability machine
All wrapped in a russet-blond suit:
Four paws, one wet nose and a waggy tail that shows
She knows that she's just too damn' cute.

But what if they knew (as you and I do)
She's a food-seeking missile inside,
That guides her every action with no hint of distraction
To have her 'cake' and yours besides.

That playful look is just a 'hook':
A man-trap for the unwary,
For she never misses with her sloppy kisses,
Seduces hearts by being so hairy.

Giving paw's a sign she aims to dine
'Pon whatever is there on your plate,
So keep a weather eye on that table top high
Or for your dinner you'll be too late!

Tony Jolley

Diab[olical]etes

Sometimes from birth.
Something inside that just doesn't work
Or that gives up the ghost without much warning
Much later when you're not looking.
It can be like that, 'Type 2': sneaky -
Creeping around camouflaged under cover
Of pregnancy recovery,
Everyday tiredness
Or typical, middle-aged, weight-gain discovery;
Only poking its head above the medical parapet
At the hypodermic point of a routine blood test:
Results within bounds of the 'normal' distribution
One would expect within the population...
All bar one or two,
Off the scale,
Under the heading of: 'Sugar'....

Diabetes.

Bugger.

Tony Jolley

Different

"It'll be different! ",
He said,
Not perhaps knowing
Quite how right
His light-hearted line
Would prove to be.

"It'll be different! "
It was one of any number
Of comments and encouragements
Rather than judgements:
More excited exhortation
Than portent or prognostication.

"Let's see if I haven't got this right, "
He said....

"You're leaving your country,
Your home and your family,
Going to lecture in a French university,
Reawakening a long-lost language facility,
Moving from town to a village mentality
To marry the lass you lost in your history
To love her and the kids and give them security...?
It seems a pretty tall order to me
But to you it doesn't appear to be –
The weight on your shoulders has lifted: you're free;
So JFDI, no more wait n see! "

Well, I went
And it was
And we are
And will be,
Just as my old Dad
Told it to me.

NB. JFDI = 'Just 'effin Do It'.....

Tony Jolley

Dining Out

Happy 75th Birthday, Mum...
Though' I guess you're not keeping score anymore
[Unless it's 21 and never, ever 'out'!]

It's not too easy either to envisage
Anything you might need or want in your mansion,
Which, come to think of it, is just as well
Given the delivery distance
And the price to be paid to The Ferryman.
I'll play postman when I'm in the neighbourhood, ok?
No – I don't know quite when:
Sometime between 'now' and 'then'
But probably sooner than I would wish
And a whole lot later than others might want!
They say: "Life is in the journey" –
Ironic really, given giving up the ghost is the one-way ticket.
Bet you dined out on that one!
Point of fact: can you dine out on any one?
Indeed, do you dine at all?

Despite the distance
I guess you'll have heard the news
That I finally allowed myself to admit
I couldn't make the marriage work
And faced up to the fact
That it was pointless pretending
I could survive a loveless life anything like intact.
For Life is the only ocean of opportunity to love and be loved,
Time the tide that sweeps it to our shores
And Will the power that pitches us headlong into the current of our choosing.
So I finally left upon the late tide,
My Ever Love to stand beside.

I've tried all I know of right and reason,
Applied all I have learned in the way of wisdom and waiting,
Sought the sanctuary of justice in extremis
Only to find a travesty where a father doesn't feature
And possession is ten-tenths of the ass of law.
So, Mum, could you keep a weather eye on the kids for me?
No matter how far in space or time
I guarantee your vantage point is better than mine.

I miss them as you know I miss you...
Yet they feel more lost: my two.

Tony Jolley

Divorce

"Don't give me all that! "
She shouted,
Her bitter barbs flaying the skin off his spirit's back
For the god-knows-how-many-hundredth time.

So, for the first and last time –
He didn't.

Tony Jolley

Do Dreams Dream?

I am watching myself, well a part of myself
Apart from myself,
Watching my left thumb absent-mindedly caress
The you that is the soft, fist-furled index finger of my left hand.

You are my index, My Love, the first and only finger,
The doyenne of digits who catalogued and kept my dreams vouchsafed
In your world without walls.
You set them free and freely to you they returned,
For in truth they never left you, Love -
Why ever would one dream-dropp dream
Of exile from its own Eden?

Why is it, when I'm writing that the thoughts I want won't come,
Whilst those unwelcome and unsummoned announce their arrival with a drum?

Today's uninvited...?

"Do dreams dream? "

There was a time – a dry desert of a half-life of a time
I would wilfully lose myself in dreams,
In dreams of anything but the guttural, discordant tones
Of a language I no longer wanted to hear or speak.
So I would court their seduction of me,
No, rather I'd run to the open arms of that sweet siren song
Whose melody and harmony:
Unique;
United,
Sprang as sparkling water from the very moment when discovery dawned,
A new breed of mathematics was born
And 3×2 became forever one form.

But now my dreams, themselves they dream – they would that they will wake,
For what is not has had its day and this they would forsake
To walk into no waking dream but love's reality,
That sweet oasis-ever, that is known to both as 'we'.

Tony Jolley

Do the Math.

Go...but don't leave my side.

Add altitude, but don't subtract your feet from my terra firma.

Multiply the miles, but don't divide me from 'My Slice of the Divine'.

Go...but please stay.

Tony Jolley

Don't Dig Dog!

No more holes
Like upside-down moles!
Minty, don't you dare dig, dog!

No more mucky paws
Making prints on the floors!
Minty, don't you dare dig, dog!

No more shaggy coat
Black from tail to throat!
Minty, don't you dare dig, dog!

..... But if you really, really can't stop:

Please bury your bone
Not my mobile phone!
Minty, please don't dig, dog!

Tony Jolley

Drawing Lines

You know how you draw lines –
Sometimes with a flourish of the fingertips,
Sometimes with a white-knuckled fist
With such pressure and power
Even soft graphite
Tears the paper to bits?

Well, it was kind of like that ...
And yet not.

It wasn't deliberate:
I didn't plan or plot the points,
Didn't take aim,
Take care or concentrate.
Didn't bother with a ruler –
It wasn't that kind of straight edge -
But it was there all the same:
The discontinuity:
The line
Between you and me.

Tony Jolley

Dust Dances

Dust dances but on borrowed time
To some unfathomable, divine design
'In his image', we are told, 'a trinity':
Body, soul and spirit: me.

A thin-skinned, sensory mobile-home
With stature and features all of its own
Mind and emotions – to think and to feel
But the spirit alone, he sits at the wheel
(Until body and soul – both are spent
when spirit lives yet to pay God's rent)

Woman, we learn, was drawn out of man
Re-uniting the two is God's precious plan
Alone neither party can hope to fulfil
His (or her) true potential, despite force of will

So just how might love seek to intercede?
And what the conditions for it to succeed?
Two bodies, two souls, two spirits: all six
Can there be such a thing as the perfect mix?

Tony Jolley

Ecce Everyman

Everyman came to town today:
Didn't roll in effortlessly by the wide white route,
But came the long and narrow way round,
The only way round
Via the hard ground:
Via Montgomery,
Via adversity and history:
Via Dolorosa,
Nunc Via Gloriosa.

He looked like me –
Though we share nothing remotely
In the way of height or weight,
Neither colour nor race.
Still we looked the same
In the singular mirror of that moment.

He resounded in me;
Struck a chord so deep below the waterline
I felt sea speak to sea
And hope's high tide of possibility
Drown dither and doubt and float free
A whole fleet of opportunity
To catch the winds of change
That wait beyond the lee of party politics and nationality.

Friends, though we've never met
And almost certainly never will
Outside those quiet places of the soul
Where we share and dare wonder
Who, how, what if and why not,
I hope he'd recognise me, on sight:
I'm not of the US,
But I am of the kind of 'us'
That is ready for the kind of United States of Mind
He has in mind.

Tony Jolley

Elemental

An Espace with space to spare
Skidded and skitted slowly
Round our snow-cosseted corner,
Retreating from view.
Retreating with you.

Six seats empty -
Room enough for another
Swedish forest of furniture
From IKEA Fribourg -
Yet full to the gunwales
With my world:
The warmth of you,
The want of you:
The wonder of you.
A world the entire Earth couldn't contain
Between its Big Bang beginning and its final fiery curtain;
A world within a world
Yet beyond the bounds of East and West:
An elemental identity Mendeleev never mapped
And neither Magellen nor Cook ever charted.

My world is in her classroom now,
Playing large upon the stage of her life
And I wonder whether there might just be
Another living soul there alive to see
The glory my heart finds in she.

Tony Jolley

Eleven Past Nine

The angle of light cast by the low-voltage downlighters
Produced a seagull-shaped shadow
On the station-style clock face set upon our piano,
Banking the bird ever-so-slightly to the right
On its eleven-past-nine wings.

Even manufactured, artificial,
Contrived in my mind
It was still effortlessly beautiful -
Metaphorical:

Time;

Time flying;

Time flown

Above the photo of my parents:

That photo.

That last photo.

The one before I became singularised

And downsized

In the only heritage department that matters

Or ever will.

You brought me into the world,

Though you paid a daughterless,

Son-plus-less price for the privilege.

I took the photo:

That last photo,

With my beloved OM 10,

Your 18th birthday present to me

Which faithfully served its in-built purpose

And registered your image:

The pink blouse with the high, ruffed neck

You'd bought in M&S;

The green, so-soft-it-felt-like-velvet denim jacket,

Size 8 or less, that you'd had off Tess,

All leaning into Dad's neck

And his pride and joy, Pringle polo-shirt

The same way you used to slide

Your gammy leg behind the good

Out of comfort and habit

To hide the hurt scored into the scar

That Time would never heal,

Could never heal,

And I could never undo or unmake

No matter how hard I might hope or try..

Or pray.

I squashed a chocolate marshmallow once.

Squashed it right into the suit skirt

You were shot wearing on your Blackpool honeymoon,

Your legs still strategically crossed, of course,

[Though that was a barely-acquired and not yet ingrained habit

Courtesy of the bike crash on the East Lancs Road

Which almost swept you and any hope of me away with it.]

For the life of me,

Or the death of you,
I can't remember whether
I really remember it,
Or whether I only remember being told I did it.
Either way,
You were beautiful to me
In a way that language can't contain.
You were amazingly you
Though I wasn't yet me
Any more than
'Could be', 'might be',
Or 'maybe someday':
I was merely possible, potential...
Conceivable.

In 25 years you would leave early.
Abruptly;
Carried off by a coronary:
A 'myocardic infarction' -
A line that lives only in 'Emergency Ward 10' scripts
Or in your worst nightmares -
Which dropped you like deadwood to the carpet:
The last chime of the genetic timepiece ticking you down inexorably
After all the illnesses insurance proposals prefer you not to have
Had taken their toll and stolen your future from us both.

Freak chance dictated that, for once, I wouldn't be there...
I would be masterminding some senseless, meaningless
Shopping centre exhibition somewhere.
'Masterminding' be damned:
I was no more than a glorified mule,
Humping and heaving supposedly easy-erect stands
And reams and reams of pointless promo-paper
Extolling the pleasures of:
'Poole: it's a beautiful place'
Or 'Christchurch: where time is pleasant'.
Maybe I should turn my toes up in Christchurch, then;
But you died that day in Poole
And whatever beauty it might have had died to me too.

Me, I ended up returning Dad's call
From a piss-reeking phone-box
In a dirty grey loading bay -
God forgive me
Irritated that he'd been ringing me
When I'd got more than enough on my plate.

No more doing when he told me.
No thinking.
No more being:
No nothing;
No feeling.

Nothing:
An eternity where not even deity can hear you scream.

In your sudden prison
No walls to give the comforting reassurance of an echo:
No rebound;
No reflection,
No reminder.

Memory frantically ransacking its cabinets
To find something of you to hold on to
And scraping its fingernails down the cliffs of failure
Like Wile E. Coyote
Falling out of sight in slow motion down the canyon wall
A look of sad resignation set deep in his eyes.

She'd gone.
She'd gone and some bastard had stolen all I had left of her.
Or had I just lost her myself?
And could I handle the guilt if I had?
Surely I could conjure her.
Who could know her better?
For god's sake I'd kissed her forehead at 6AM,
Leaving her a PG Tips tea she probably wouldn't wake to find warm,
But I'd smiled and left it anyway...
Maybe I left toast too, I can't say.

No going back now.

No going home.
No going on,
Just a going.

Going like an Okie in the Dustbowl days:

Somewhere;
Anywhere;
Out of her;
Out of here.

Eyes raw, glazed and open
Like a stuck sash window,
Staring blankly as the scenery streamed past
Like the backdropp to a poor stage show you'd prefer to sleep through.
Only way to stop the tears from coming
And my heart from leaping out of my throat
And hurling itself willingly to whatever oblivion
Might be waiting outside the carriage.

Taxi rank for Waterloo was 50 deep.
Waited for 10 minutes,30 seconds or four hours
And it was still 50 deep.

Couldn't take it.
Walked to the head of the queue.
'My Mum's died... would you mind if I....? '
Don't know if they did.
Took the next one anyway in a trance.
Couldn't have taken any more unwelcome time to think –
Hurt too much.
Had to be moving.

Must have been about
Eleven-past-nine,
But there were no bloody seagulls around the station clock this time.

Tony Jolley

Eleventh Hour

The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month,

Loaded with significance,
Charged with a memory of a reality
We shouldn't want to even try to imagine –
Even if we could.

Just one life left now,
Just one solitary one
To bear witness,
At 106,
To that insanity heaped upon humanity
Upon a continental scale
Known as The Great War, The War to End All Wars,
[Subsequently sadly revised to: World War One
After its inevitable sequel-working-on-a-series successor].

Warfare where the weapons were human,
Sacrificed as expendable political pawns
On a battle-board of notional national boundaries
In some sadistic parlour-game of attrition
Played by knights and kings of both sides
From the safety of their castles and shires.

Today the leaves were more eloquent
Than all the statesmen and commemorations put together,
Falling, as they were, in battalion strength before the biting wind
As men before the bullet, bomb and blade
Went, whistled on and over the top by others' whims,
To their early, unmarked graves
After so sad and short a summer.

I never realised,
Perhaps I never noticed,
But the buds of the next generation
Are there today on twig and branch
Waiting to be born.
Perhaps they spend their winter gestating,
And wondering
Why man, with all his freedom and wisdom,
Can see Spring yet scorn Summer so
That he could contrive to leave this life before his season is through.

Tony Jolley

Ellie's First and Forever Rose

I brought you roses on your sixteenth birthday ...
Nearly twenty-six years ago.
The stems were long, lean and elegant
In almost exactly the way that I wasn't.
There were thorns to cut to the quick
With the razor sharp wit
Of the suave, sophisticated and stylish
Which had somehow passed me by on the other side,
Giving me berth wide enough
To show me the mark I'd missed.

But the buds were all 'me':
A little shy in the knowledge of their own simplicity,
Giving themselves entire, safe and free
Into the care of your lovely young life,
Your tender touch;
For there lay neither fear nor judgement,
But the gentle eye of grace,
The sweet heart and hands of honour.

Every petal was me, My Love:
My outer layers some had seen,
Yet beneath lay your realm alone:
An ethereal land of spirit and second-sight.
Even I didn't know
How my interior would look in the light,
But I did know you wouldn't turn away
And you knew how I longed for you to stay.

That first bouquet was me - is still me, My Love:
We both knew what lay soft and eternal in the gift,
And had I by divine design my time again,
I would always choose to be:
Ellie's First and Forever Rose.

Tony Jolley

Eternity's Sell-By Date

“What if there ever comes a day
When you no longer feel this way.....”

Then Mankind will have chosen peace,
The Raptured risen to their release,

Everest worn as flat as a board,
History will have ceased to record,

The Sun will have swelled and swallowed the Earth,
The universe enjoying a constant re-birth,

Past the sell-by date of Eternity,
Time itself will no longer be,

Even then, My Darling,
 Our love will yet be young,
And 'we' not 'I'
 Will be where we both belong.

Tony Jolley

Everything's Gone

Everything's gone.

Everything's gone tender,
gone soft,
gone - between a breath and a sigh,
gone down the dawning distance between My Love and I

Everything went.

Everything went with her,
went with her falling tear,
went with the sound of her unseen footsteps,
a l'Est de St. Lazare.

Everything's gone...
Everything went ...

So why am I still here?

Tony Jolley

Fallen From Grace

I don't know what,
Don't know when,
Don't know why or where or how.

Now I'm not even sure about the who.

Is that all you'll ever let me see of you?
All there'll ever be, for me, of you?

Tony Jolley

Father Time

Today you had time on your hands,
Held time in your hands:
Old time;
His time;
Your warm gold time:
Ticking, living memory
Of the father of your time.

His heart always kept good time:
The right time;
Kept you two
In time,
On time;
His hands showing your hours and minutes
Gentle upon
His
Face.

Now you clasp his second hand in yours:
Home.
Safe.

Tony Jolley

Faultline

Shot.

Don't think I'm dead.

[Checks self for signs of entry or exit wounds]

No Blood.

Not yet.

Too soon, I guess.

[Blood takes a long time to well up from the soul]

Different.

Feel different.

Something living lopped off the family tree.

Felt it crack the length of my faultline –

Spirit torn from flesh before its time.

[Eyes too hot, too raw, too dry for tears]

Felt it fall,

Fall free of me,

Fall headlong, slow and silently screaming

Into the black beyond redemption's reach.

No echoes, reflections, reminders, recollections.

Less.

Shrunk.

[Not missing a bit of me at all, but a bit of all of me, that's all.]

Tony Jolley

Fire on Your Finger

Fire on your finger,
Fire in your eye,
Fire in your spirit,
Fire that won't die.

Fire in the bare bones of being,
Fire to uphold what's right,
Fire in the heart of darkness,
Fire to fuel Love's light.

Fire to burn but not consume,
Fire to learn and not assume,
Fire to live and give living room,
Fire to love and sing her tune.

Tony Jolley

Fishing

Still can't believe it.
Still reeling from the six-word shock
From a future, former friend who was never a father:

"Maybe they're better off without you? "

Torn between being appalled
By the bite of the barb on a man-hungry meat-hook
Spliced to the end of a 25-year-friendship-breaking-strain line
And being too damn' tired of dealing with unnecessary hurt
To bother to rise to the bitter bait,
I watched the weeds of blind judgement snag fast his fatal intent.

He cut the line without trying to loose it.
I cut my losses: no choice but to choose it.

Tony Jolley

Flamenco Fan

At times a whale tail, diving slowly, elegantly,
Sliding through the surface tension to a ripple, barely.
At others, flashing fast as a Hummingbird wing:
A red-black blur of will she / won't she seduction activity;
Then graceful, slender fingers and a supple wrist
Arcing and wheeling in a heady, Iberian ballet
Being all but explicit for those with blood red enough to see.

Tony Jolley

For the Birds

In their impatience,
In their petulance,
And with eider elbows flashing fit to fly,
They jostled and jousted
For position 'A' precedence
Hard on the heels of mother in her web-foot wake,
Squabbling and babbling their battle around the lake shoreline,
Whilst, some hundred or so metres beyond,
The same scene was being played out -
The mother of all petrol tankers
Steaming steadily up the forest road to Feldberg,
Followed, line astern, by her brood:
A restless road-full of four-wheeled frenzy
All overanxious to overtake:
Accelerating,
Risk-taking
Then frantically braking
Their race up the ranks,
Throwing all caution to the little wind there was
As if they were one-down and last-ditch-effort desperate
In the final few cup-final seconds.

That would be me in the morning,
But today it was 'for the birds'.

Upon watching this play out on and beside Lake Titisee and thinking that I was glad I still had a few hours away from the 'rat race'.

Tony Jolley

Forgot the Dog Food

There was the not wanting to get up, for a start:
The insufferably-insistent, banshee-wail of the alarm
Slicing its shrill through my sleep like a searing hot knife through butter;
The vague, dull awareness of there having been a dream,
Now shrouded by a bleak and impenetrable pea-souper of Dickensian proportions,
Forever beyond the reach of recall.

Creeping gingerly, still-half-asleepedly over a pair of Retrievers on the stairs,
Toes cursing mildly under their breath at the cold french carrelage
And the long-lost intent to replace the slippers the dogs had dismembered.
Discovering the storage heaters had not delivered
On their remote-controlled, digitally-confirmed promise
To charge up cheap overnight and take the edge off the morning chill
Habitually creeping its unwelcome way round window and door frames,
And that one unit was still stubbornly stone cold,
Even if it's circulator fan was faithfully wafting
Glacial air to all four corners of the lounge.

The dinner party crockery we blithely decided could 'wait 'til tomorrow',
Now making more than a compelling case for our immediate attention:
Congealed 'Yeller Fish' leftovers merrily self-supergluing knives & forks to plates,
And producing a feline olfactory orgasm to attract every stray in our street.
The bathroom linen basket skyscraping its raffia coolie hat heavenwards
Under the uncontainable, volcanic magma-mound of a weekend's family washing.
The car engine taking that extra heartbeat or two to cough into life
As the winter mornings begin to take their toll and thicken my engine oil
Making me wonder whether it'll make it round to Spring without a full service.

No space in the car park.
Having to prowl the one-way system like a panther
Hoping to make a parallel-parking kill before the lion's close in.
Booting up, plugging-in and logging on
Only to find that someone's stolen the data-projector
Leaving three wires and a ceiling pole
As some kind of annoying memorial.
'Plan-BLT', then: 'Before Latest Technology'
Better known in the trade as 'chalk & talk'.

Quick trip to the supermarket on the way home,
Trolley pulling relentlessly to one side like an over-sized, headstrong puppy.
'Where d'you put the ones in need of repair? ', I said, helpfully.
Came the one word reply: 'Nowhere'.

Home.
Some sign of heat – Hallelujah!

Forgot the dog food: Bugger.

Tony Jolley

Forty-Five

I am forty-five
Born barely three months ago,
When I crashed into my new world
Shocked and shaken,
Naked but for
The twenty years of blood and hope
Harboured by she who birthed me –
She who propelled me into be-ing
By the impassioned contractions
Of her certitude and faith in the me I knew not,
Her tender, rhythmic determination
Bearing down upon this child of potential unrealised
That I must become, must be,
Be never less than me.

She was there: one thousand miles close
When my eyes first opened
To an assault, a riot, a rage of clear, bright colour
Sometimes whispering, sometimes shouting for joy
In tongues this newborn alone could understand instantly:
Words, which wrote themselves, their glorious simplicity
In a most delicate hand
Upon the pristine folios of my spirit.

There in his Lakeland delivery suite
God himself appeared to hold me,
To dangle me upside down by the ankle
And deal my tend'rest parts
A single, stinging smack
From the Truth of His right hand:
A stimulus to awaken to Beauty.
My first intake of breath lasted a full two hours;
Not so much changing or adding to the range of senses,
Rather altering their focus and my perceptions.
Spirit was speaking to spirit
Without the soul or the hand holding the pen
Getting their well-meaning preconceptions and stereotypes in the way.

In the exhalation which filled two pages,
I became me.
I recognised myself in the mirrored surface of the Lake
And now, a stranger to self-deprecation,
I liked what I saw.
I had seen the reflection before in her words:
"You have to write, Tony. I have always known.
You have to write – You'll see. You'll know."

As ever, her Love knew, knew me; knows me naked.
I was born, of her, a writer in my forty-fifth year.

Tony Jolley

Found in Translation

After a while you don't think about it anymore:
Don't translate,
Don't worry,
Don't try.
On est Là
[Or at least close enough to 'Là' to Rock 'n' Roll]

OK, it has to be admitted -
There are moments and messages
That fall through the listening 'net',
Odd things that appear, well, odd,
Or suffer in non-translation,
Especially at dinner parties,
Where the cut and chase of exchanges
Can get away from you
Faster than a Ferrari from a feu rouge.
But that's just how it is -
There's no 'playback' facility in real time
And 'rewind' comes with too much of a price,
Is a bargain bought and bought dear:
A chance to maybe, (just maybe)
Understand marginally better
The fast-fading echoes of phrases past,
Set against the almost certainty
Of the loss of the present sentence.
It's a no-brainer;
No goer,
No pointer:
A conversational, translation,
Lose-lose situation.

So cut yourself some slack,
Get out of the linguistic pressure cooker,
Turn down the self-inflicted heat
To the temperature of a well-chambréd Claret
And relax into it as you would
Snuggling up with a good book
Under a duck-down duvet
Gently pre-warmed by electric blanket
And having your lover come climb in beside.

Now that type of translation
Is pretty much guaranteed appreciation.

Tony Jolley

Friday-Night Elephant-Keepers

Is the Pope Catholic?

Does the Sun always set in the West?

Is grass green?

Is water wet?

Are 'The Poor' still with us?

Do Elephant-Keepers grow great roses?

Do Donkeys like Strawberries?

"Would you like me to stay Friday night as well? "

Tony Jolley

From Everyman

You were the background music and accompaniment
To my first, and as history would have it, only real love.
Our lips touched to 'Something Fine's 'You say Morocco'.
Her hand nonchalantly, desperately upon my thigh in the car,
Windows down, hair in the summer breeze,
Alive and vocal to 'Runnin' on Empty' and 'Rosie',
We were living the story you were yet to write:
Turning pages we were years from the learning.
We had no barricades in our heaven, Jaks,
But I built one anyway called:
It would be better for both our sakes
To which there was no earthly redemption she might bring.
'Stay', your loving anthem, I turned to our mournful retreat:
An emblem of what might, no, should have been,
Retiring over some rational hill and out of earshot
Yet still within the reach of one
Who should have recognised himself as The Pretender
And turned himself in.
We had sung it so often – had it down word-for-word
Yet still I failed to see it: the pretender in me.

We fell in love to you,
Loved to you.
I lost her to you,
Gave her up to you:
Saw our future evaporate into history to the strains of you.

You stayed friends with the both of us,
Though we fell out of touch with each other
Yet not out of wondering, not ever out of yearning.
Your grand career continued as our shared and singular life's soundtrack.
She held on to some of your vinyl and my trusty 12-string:
Talismen of forlorn hope or faith?
Time would tell.

We 'wrote' to you in our loss and lack
And you replied with tender comforts
Of 'Shape of a Heart' and 'Call it a Loan':
Never quite healing, but keeping alive the possibility of 'interest' repayment.

I, we, have to confess that we deserted you too at times
For the exquisite pains of Linda's 'Prisoner in Disguise'
And Karla's 'Water is Wide' and 'Someone to Lay Down Beside Me',
Still....we always came back to you, you know.
By then we were separated
By continents and commitments of twenty years standing;
Yet you sang us together again after my years of searching
'Had come up torn and empty':
She found me - her heart had been 'looking for mine' all the time.
The time? Well I had just bought tickets for your Bournemouth gig
(remember you saw a film before the show?) .

Le premier pas – j'aim'rais qu'Elle fasse le premier pas
Out of your 'Sky Blue' and into the 'Black' where my life languished,
She found me -
Found me in time.
Our hopeful hearts rubbed shoulders online, on the telephone.
First we talked in code
Using your lines as our own
To find our feet and our voices
Which surely brought us to that point of no return,
That Rubicon of admission, confession and absolution.
It was mine to swim to her;
So like her, she chose to meet me half way across
In the deepest and most dangerous curl of the current.

The pretender received more forgiveness than he deserved,
His tears filling the pitcher of his Lady of the Well to overflowing
With his life, love and future.
Now the 'Naked Ride Home'
Is no longer an event we shared in our history, Jaks,
Not a blessed, painful memory,
But a truth.
On our ride home, which will take us a lifetime,
We both are become transparent to one another again,
Yet this time the moreso: known. Utterly known.
Do you know Mary-Chapin's 'Naked to the Eye':
'When you look at me Baby, I haven't got a prayer, naked to the eye.'?
Home is naked now, not merely the ride.

Now 'Sleep's Dark and Silent Gate' of regret
No longer preys upon my troubled slumbers.
The past is truly another country,
The future is guaranteed to none,
But the present,
The present, Jaks,
Is ours to sing with you
Now that together we live, we love, we am.

One day, if you don't mind, (and even if you do)
When she and I are together in a place not unlike Isla Negra
Where watches can be cast into the sea of pointlessness,
Then we will play 'Stay' no more.
Till then it will underscore our stolen moments:
Borrowed and brought forward from this future
To accompany our longing, our desperation for one another,
Just as it always did.

We began together with you, Jaks.
We came together again on an English summer hillside:
We two, a blanket, a guitar and you:
Your anthology and our history.

'To the Dust', Jaks, 'To the Dust' is our toast to you,
But this is our song in the writing: hers and mine....

One day we'll play it for you.

Tony Jolley

Funeral (of being bereft)

The funeral was an `event':
Carefully catered and choreographed –
A place for everyone
And every one, most assuredly, in his allotted place.
A forced march of the malingering
Heading for Hamelin rather than heaven.
The Pied Piper of Protocol
Paid from beyond the pale
To make the lifeless limbs of liggers
Dance to a dowager's dirge.

Now think on this if you will
(and even if you won't, you ought) :

If life be the ability to choose,
The power to move,
Then who is most lost to life....

- The deceased who pays the piper and still calls the tune?
- Mechanical mourners thoughtlessly following her feet to their own funerals?

OR....

·The one who sees, knows and writes (or reads) yet has not the courage to change
and vote with his own feet before he find them pointing, pointlessly, endlessly
skywards?

Your call.

Tony Jolley

Furrows

Furrows in the aching brow.
Furrows in the wakening earth.
Both scored deep by the power of the plough.

Furrows in the brow:
Following fault-lines,
Beaten into submission
By circumstance and situation -
An unattractive portrait of aging and suffering.

Furrows in the earth:
Parallel productivities in loam
Dug, dark and lifted
Aired, turned and shifted -
A masterpiece weave of technique and mystique.

One fruitless: turned astern - stunting pain and past history
The other fruitful: looking ahead - all growth and creativity.

Tony Jolley

Gabardine and Greatcoat

Gabardine neatly folded and draped,
Public school-style,
Over my left forearm;
Cap in hand,
Parents to either side of me,
I was shown around the school
In which I was about to spend
More years than I'd been alive,
Let alone years I could remember.
An eternity yawned and fell away from my '11-Plus' feet:
A sheer 'O' and 'A' levelled hangman's drop,
Vertigo rearing up, clawing at my fragile confidence
Drawing a cold-sweat noose tight about my neck
While I waited for the trapdoor
To snap.

.
Greatcoat hanging heavier over his right arm
Than the Steppes snows
That soon would be his shroud and stone,
He was halfway into the pit of inhumanity
Dug and now filled by friends and family,
Positioned so that the murderous momentum
Of a single lead Luger slug
Would topple him and lay him out
Atop all he had ever loved.
"One for the album! "
And some sin-sick Sonderkommando
Snapped his shutter
Before the trigger
Was squeezed by another
And he fell, left-handed,
Into Heaven from Hell.

.
After reading an article in the New York Times in Oct 2007 concerning a French priest
who is revealing the fate of millions of Ukrainian Jews murdered by the Nazis in WW2.
The article had a particularly harrowing and haunting picture.

Tony Jolley

Gentle Gravity

Silent at first;
A duet danced and sung by eager eyes
Across a distance ineffectually imposed
By dining-table dimensions,
The conversation continues.

The merest movement of the least lash or lid
Received and read at the Speed of Sight,
Yet Einstein's Constant seems somehow estranged,
As if the gentle gravity of our love and longing
Pulls, bends and slows every photon almost to a standstill.

The image of my face plunges, headlong
Through your beautiful pupil portals,
Those dark, dilated isles
Set in their emerald oceans,
Diving deep to register upon your retina
An upside-down reproduction of reality
Ready to be righted unconsciously.

Thereby miraculously inverted, translated
Am I to multiple memories of me related:
All I am, have been and ever shall be
Gathering about this new comrade captive –
An orderly crowd of possibilities
Vying for the opportunity to be selected and connected.

You orchestrate your instruments of mind and matter.
You choose and your chosen memory
Is matched and married to the moment.
You find yourself a well-wisher
Watching her newly-weds
Run gaily giggling
Under the blade-sharp incisors of a pearly-white guard of honour,
Through the Kissing Gates
And on into revelation:
Conversation.

Yet before they set sail in their romantic carriage
Bound for sound:
Exotic lands of hearing, listening, thinking and responding,
Know, My Love, that I see your Spirit,
I know your Soul,
That an 'Iowan Conversation'
Though silent's still whole.

Tony Jolley

Girls Don't Always Have Fun [with apologies to Cyndi Lauper]

Girls don't always have fun
When you stop to think about it.
If you stop to think about it.

For some, early-onset puberty arriving inconveniently.
My wife tells me of a poor friend
Who got the shock of her life in the Primary playground -
Thought she was bleeding to death:
At 9, far too early, really, to understand
Or to have to live with too grown up a concern,
Beating her Mum's half-dreaded and wholly unprepared
'Birds and the Bees' talk to the punch by a good few years.

Then a repeat performance pretty much every four weeks
From fourteen to forty or fifty-something:
Four or five hundred months
Of three or four days ache and discomfort.
That's 2000 days or more:
A full five years of the tiredness and tension
Associated with Mother Nature's egg-relocation,
Plus further symptoms one might mention.
And that's when the tell-tale cramps do arrive on time -
But what when they don't...?
What of being 'late' and of the 'waiting game'
When she'd give anything to feel that familiar pain
Rather than have to entertain
The possibility working on a probability
Then facing up to the 'clear-blue' certainty
Of an unplanned or sadly unwelcome pregnancy?

And what of those for whom 'late'
Would be cause for cautious celebration,
Who've tried it all:
From time-determined copulation
To programmes of in-vitro fertilisation
So desperate are they for conception?

Girls don't always have fun...
There seem to be so many risks to run.

Tony Jolley

Goodbye Edith

Awkward silence
Darkened room
Drapes drawn
Hearse soon

Sombre suits
Best plates
Small talk
All wait

Limo leaving
Glad to go
Bentley black
Stately, slow

Short service
Production line
For eighty years
So little time

Silent tears
Family, friends
Life remembered
At its end

Ashes scattered
A final goodbye
By your beloved
Forever to lie.

Tony Jolley

Gratuitously Retrieved

Sunday 07.30
Felt like 05.30, frankly:
More a case of over-indulgence than overtired;
But most of all it felt like
A long, hot, rasping Retriever-tongue
Bed-bathing my face
With its own personal hygiene system...
... And that would be because it was.

Ever had your nose-hair meticulously showered,
Flanneled & hot-breath blow-dried
And your ears surgically Q-tipped
By a living, shape-shifting
Boring and drilling machine
With copious saliva lubrication....?
No?
Then keep it that way.

As wake up calls go
It falls well short on sympathy
Even if it makes up for it in efficacy:
Believe me -
You DO wake up.

If by (hopefully for you) remote chance
You find yourself in the self-same situation,
May I offer you one important and impeccably-researched
Piece of advice....?
.... As you struggle desperately
Towards the surface of consciousness,
Resist at all costs the all-too-natural temptation
To open your eyes
To see what the hell might be happening to you -
You'll only find your eyelids snapped up and out
Whilst the tip of a tongue
Windscreen-wipers right round the back of your eyeballs
Like an old-school, Fifties femme de ménage
On her first visit
Lifting the edges of your carpet
And tut-tutting deliberately not quite under her breath
In that accusatory tone
She has spent a whole lifetime refining and honing
Before shoving the Dyson's Dual-Cyclone nozzle
Unceremoniously underneath to slurp and choke
On the muck of ages past,
Simultaneously casting a condemnatory scowl
In your direction
Fit to convict a saint
And sentence him to eternities of torment
In a Hooverless hell.

But think before you shove or shoo

Your assailant away too –
Or you may find
The weight of one 30kg Retriever
Transferred through the small surface area of two paws
Amplifying the pressure impressively
And applying it mercilessly to what the French call:
'Les Bijoux de Famille'...
Believe me,
If that doesn't get your attention,
Nothing will.
It certainly did with me!

Tony Jolley

Guilt-Edged

No foregone conclusions
No faites accomplis
No ducking of decisions
No get-out-of-jail-frees;
No rocks or even hard places
No devils or deep blue seas
No copper-bottomed promises
No gilt-edged guarantees;
No time for fence-sitting
No more 'wait and see'
No reason to do nothing
No room for apathy;
No moment like this moment
No better opportunity
No time but the present
No other certainty.

Tony Jolley

H(anna) h Akhmatova

You surprised me – and I am not easily surprised.
You amazed me – though I am not easily amazed.
You brought to me the song of your spirit
On the very day you gave it voice.

Duschinka, Daughter,
In all my years
No such sound has reached my ears,
Soft and gentle as Nat 'King' Cole
Yet possessed of the power of Rock 'n' Roll.
You're a balladeer: a Sting, a Jackson Browne –
Your 'Message in a Bottle' profound.

You set it free so all could see...
Yet, you gave it first to me.

Tony Jolley

Hairsbreadth

They're our stock in trade:

Persuasion;

Coercion;

Negotiation;

Compulsion –

We wield them all as weapons of war undeclared

Upon the eternal theatres of 'Us and Them'

And the only slightly smaller stages of 'Me and You';

Determinedly pushing back the other's frontiers and frontlines

To where we would personally prefer them to be

In some spectacularly myopic perspective on reality

With attacking formations of Division-strength information,

Artillery bombardments of laser-guided arguments,

Platoons and dragoons of situational analysis

Designed to decimate and induce paralysis.

To every proposition a counter position,

For every suggestion a stock 'No' rejection,

Ever a ploy or a trump to be played,

Every inch of ground - a mile to be made;

And yet.....

If we ever would wish to take the peace dividend

Recall our forces, put this madness to an end,

What on earth could we hope to hold in common

With a foe whose injuries can't be forgiven or forgotten....?

Stray a hairsbreadth from where you know your heart true

No matter what anyone would have you to do,

No matter how close or loved they may be

It'll rankle and hurt you eventually,

And similarly.....

Try to think before you would seek to implore

Someone else, for your sake, to leave their own 'shore',

For they're sure to leave something of themselves behind

Not the least of which, their peace of mind.

Tony Jolley

Heart and Hand

They were suddenly all around me.
Every sense told me they were there.
Then they gathered me to them
As if the eye of History
Had blinked, stayed open
And sucked me in through its black pupil
To free-fall down the long lens of time
And see, simultaneously, recorded upon its retina,
Every soul who had ever set his heart and hand
To some purpose within narrow compass of me:

The master carpenter who cut and crafted the beams
When power tools were but unimaginable pie in a very future sky;
The mason who set the cottage cornerstone firm and fast
With nothing more than bare hands and a keen eye;
The wheelwright whose work once made the world go round
Amazed to see it now static,
Adorning drive gates in some quaint, faint echo of local tradition,
And giving way, every day to its rubber-shod, horseless carriage successors;
The lads who laboured long to dig the drains and tarmac the tracks,
Seeking respite from the heat in the cool, tripping waters and shades of La Natte;
The old boy who jury-rigged his fence, pro-tem, with a spider's web of wire
But never quite got around to doing the job properly;
The couple who built a summerhouse, one spring, for the autumn of their life,
Glad they never lived to see it forlorn and failing in its own last winter years.

You know,
I could even feel the carts rolling, rumbling, swaying and grumbling their way
Over the river-rounded pebbles under my feet,
Carrying the harvest and a whole host of families' hopes
For a fair price from the maize market merchants
Who would sell it on up and down the Rhine for a far fairer profit.

Why there? Why then? Why me? ...
I don't know;
Perhaps those whose lives were played out upon another shore
Are closer to the surface of Time's ocean than we suspect
And sometimes,
Just sometimes,
Its tide sweeps them across our beaches:
Grains of sand that slip through our hand,
But in that moment they glint and gleam
A whole lifetime,
An entire eternity.
At least they did, today, for me.

Tony Jolley

Hope Hurts

Left no stone unturned, fighting to be the father I am,
Though frankly, it feels more like 'no turn unstoned'.
Pray God, may the years be kind.

Never stopped hoping – though the hoping hurts:
Weighs dull and heavy along the shoulders of the soul
Yet sharp as a blade, slicing belief from man into meat.
Pray God, may the years be kind.

My voice returns void: an unheard echo
Off the distant, implacable walls of regulation and mediation,
Those walls without ears,
Without hearts to hear.
Pray God, may the years be kind.

In what warped world can't dads see daughters?
In this one, it seems;
In this one, where justice hides its face
And jaundice usurps its place.

Please God, may the years be kind ...
...for the Law is uncaring and blind.

Tony Jolley

Hot Salt Rain

Tropical torrent:

Hot, salt rain pouring from my every pore,
Splashing, soaking, saturating your heaving, forest floor;
Each and every dropp shining, shaking,
Surface tension fighting for foothold
Upon unusually unstable ground,
Wracked and rent by fearsome, feral forces
Raging from the epicentre of the earthquake
Deep in the pit of you,
Where your body, soul and spirit,
Made molten in the furnace of desire divine,
Are fused, aflame, afresh with mine.

Through a stinging veil of involuntary tears: joy & salt-sweat,
My focus shaking to the random rhythm, two-left-feet-beat,
Of twitching nerves in locked-out arms on their last legs,
I watch in exhausted wonder,
Beheld and beguiled
By the utterly uncontrollable beauty
That is
You.

Tony Jolley

How the Moments Come

Strange.
Strange how the moments come;
Those moments upon which one's world turns.

Some seeming insignificances - pure coincidences:
Chance at its most mercurial
Dealing hands which break the bank or bust,
Or less a case of 'Lady Luck'
Than life's 'Savings & Loans'
Finally coming good for work-weary bones.

All moments could be of the former form
Or just as likely the latter,
Or maybe 'fate' or the finger of God
Seeking a dividend on his investment divine.

So where do you and I stand on probability and providence...?

Me? Well, I wouldn't bet against 'chance' -
Let's face it, it's an odds-on favourite!
And though the justice the world metes out
Falls far short of fairness for all,
Generally the books seem to balance.

... But fate? .. Fate I can't fathom.

Maybe I'm too mechanical,
Too straight-laced, too stupid
Or just too plain rational,
But for me fate flies full in the face of free will -
Presumes I'm powerless - my preferences pointless:
So I don't 'buy' it.

[Sly thought: if fate existed, it would have to be free -
After all, who would buy fait-accompli? !]

Unless, of course, fate really is
Nothing more than holding by chance a 'Royal Flush' in hearts, or
Nothing less than deity dealing your cards.

Tony Jolley

In Every Sense of the Word

Touch: Our first kiss: light, lingering and yet so explicit and explosive
I can still feel the reverberations behind my smile.

Taste: You, so sweet on the tip of my tongue I didn't dare drink for a week
for fear of washing 'you' away.

Hearing: Your singing, ringing bright as a bell chock-full of Rock & Roll angels.

Sight: You almost wearing that bikini!

Smell: Your Aqua Allegorica Parfum in kiwi.

Touch: Baby's fist furled around my little finger – all pink and perfect.

Taste: Freybourger's Jambon au Crémant at Félix's First Communion celebration.

Hearing: Jackson Browne's 'For Everyman' from first time on the turntable
[and every play since, from vinyl, via tape and CD right through to MP3]

Sight: The Girl in the Yellow Kagoule beaming from my start-up screen.

Smell: A noseful of Minty's 3-month old puppy fur.

Touch: The strong arms that kept my head above water and towed me stiff to shore
when cramp and cold had got very much the better of me off Durdle Door.

Taste: José's Sylvaner Cuvée Particulière and Chandesais' St Aubin Les Charmois
deux-mille trois.

Hearing: The rain beating its rhythms against our bedroom Velux window tumbling
Matrix-like patterns down the pane.

Sight: You spinning me round on our first ramble up to the Reservoir
to face a panorama of Alps viewed from our own 'back door' –
and knowing you'd saved up that surprise rather than merely tell me.

Smell: The olfactory orgasm that was the old 'Transport Caff' at Fisherman's Walk
where Dad used to take me for a bacon butty of a Friday lunch if I were lucky.

Touch: The sleek feel of the fretboard on the Taylor you treated me to for my 50th.

Taste: Sunday's beans on toast brunch [courtesy of the 'Bruebach Breakfast Fairy'].

Hearing: Laughing together fit to bust in bed last thing the other night and, in fact,
giggling most other nights.

Sight: Did I mention: that bikini.? Ah, I did? Well, it sure rates another, believe me!

Smell: Nuzzling your neck on the pillow, drawing a last deep draught of your sweetness

to keep me company me `til morning.

My Darling,
You are all of the above:
All ways and always.

Tony Jolley

In The Shape

This was written as I saw it happen on a No6 bus to the train station in Bournemouth on 6th Nov '03. Oh, and the 'JT' is James Taylor and the 'Shape of a Heart' song is Jackson Browne....

They sat opposite me, 'side by each' as JT might have observed,
The young mother, perhaps 20,
Her daughter, maybe 9 months
Cosied in pink Parka and pushchair
She was almost at the last stop on the Sleep Express:
Eyes barely open,
Widening a fraction
Only in response to the bus'
Steep right hand turns,
Chattering change machine
And raucous air brakes and doors.

At one particularly loud and unwelcome interruption,
Shocking her to wakefulness
Her arm stretched left across her mother: a signal -
A left turn to reassurance and comfort.
A single finger found her palm
And she closed her tiny fist around it:
Safe; secure; certain.
The relief spread to her features
And her windows on the world saw their heavy drapes slowly drawn.

So right, yet worthy of remark.
Wouldn't one expect
A mother's wagon train
To form its surrounding circle
About the most defenceless young settler
In her land
And not the other way around?

Gradually (it took three stops)
The slumber suffused her frame
And the increasing weight of her little arm
Overcame the weakening grip on her mother's reality.
Such gentle parting brought neither sorrow nor disquiet,
For the impression, the image, the reassurance remained

.... In the shape...

I have to say it. I have to.
Have to interrupt the flow, the story, the very last line.

Do you know how hard I tried to struggle
Against the urge to write:
"In the shape of a heart"?
How the luscious lyric and melody
Invade my creative consciousness?
How much I want to give myself over to it

And all its precious connotations and associations?

I even wondered if I should tell you at all.

But I have.

Was I right?

.... In the shape....

..... in the shape of a hollow fist.

Tony Jolley

It's

It's the hollow at the back of your neck, just under the hairline.

It's the infinitesimal, yet infinitely significant gleam of incisor:
That infallible indicator of your soon-to-be-smile.

It's the shape of your amazing mouth,
Redefining perfection as it does so effortlessly.
And those are your lips at rest! –
But, Oh, My Love, when they move,
Whether to speak, to sigh, to kiss,
Ah, then maybe Moyet made it right:
For my knees do go 'weak in the presence of Beauty'.
You don't see it, do you?
You really don't...
And that is lovely too,
But, My Darling, it is as I wrote before:
Whole worlds live upon those lips:
Vast vistas of kissing;
Entire empires of earnest conversation.

It's the glances you steal
When you think I'm not looking,
(But I am and you know that I am!) .

It's the words we don't have to say
Yet delight to say anyway!

It's the last line you leave
This side of Lethe's leisure...

It's my whole life, Love:

It's you.

Tony Jolley

Last Leaf

The Last Leaf of autumn's last lease
Fell under leaden skies
Weeping winter over the lanes of Landser.
Torn from its twig
It rode the wind a while
Upon brittle-brown Sycamore wings
To 'land' in a puddle
Of soft, yellow-orange lamplight.

No mulching for the forest floor
Or succour for the pulsing shoots of spring,
Not even the faintest memory
To remain
Of that lush, green former glory;
But the ignominy
Of being drowned,
Then ground
To little more than nothing
Between tyre-tread and tarmac.

Gone,
But in these few lines,
Written
Upon this shroud-white, memorial
To its family felled and fallen:
Not forgotten.

Tony Jolley

Last Pick

Against the elegant, if ageing, shuttered façades of Old France,
Sweeping their stylish, nineteenth century architecture in voluptuous curves
Along the avenue
Toward the high-glazed garishness of the new concrete city,
The house was an anachronism:
It stuck out like the sort of sore thumb
Only ever to be found on the non-hammer-hand of a carpenter's first-day apprentice.

Squat;
Square;
Unwanted;
Unwelcome;
Indecent in the insufferably uncompromising rectitude
Of its highly-calculated horizontals and verticals.
It had not learned the lesson
That too much precision
Just offends the vision.

It implored.
It insisted.
It imposed
With all the immaculate symmetry of its walls and windows
And the dead-centre design of its doors.

It failed.

It was the wallflower by the dance-floor,
The suit at the party kitchen sink,
Last 'pick' in the playground football team.

It was a house.
It would never be a home.

Sad to say, it seemed to know it.

Tony Jolley

Laying the Bones

While the going was still good to firm underfoot
And well before Nightmare armed itself to the teeth with hot-lead terror
And stormed the barricades of the waking hours;
Under skies so benign and benevolent
As to belie the sea-change in the weather to come,
Which, in a mere few months, would transform
Peaceful, green-gold to live and to love in
Into grey-brown mire to fear and to die in;
Under this pristine, endless-summer, cerulean blue
They came, with their khaki-clad camaraderie,
Marching and singing of invincibility
And an 'in the bag' victory:
Fodder straight from square-bashing on provincial parade grounds,
Buoyed up by an incendiary cocktail of bullshit and belief,
Seemingly without a care in the world,
Most away from home for the first time,
Apron-strings as fresh-cut as their pudding-basined hair,
Hell-bent on adventure and learning enough of the lingo
To hope to persuade une (ou peut-être plusieurs) des belles filles françaises
To consent to what the girls back home didn't, or wouldn't dare do.

Soldiers?
Lads barely out of boyhood,
Apprentices in life and love as much as in trade and travel:

Innocents abroad

Their billett and board found and generously funded by the General Staff
Acting as some sort of Army Thomas Cook parody,
Packaging all the pieces: the trains, the boats and planes
To get them safely to their overseas destination,
[Or rather date with destiny].
Tickets issued were only one-way:
The return leg
Would depend on how many might still have legs
...or a lease, however tenuous, on life-force.

But they didn't know that then, of course.

Thousand upon thousand of bed and battle virgins
Ready to be blooded:
All too eager to lay the bones of both to rest,
To be able to say that the deed is done.

September came in Spades.

Someone somewhere cut the first sod,
Slung forward the soft, loamy soil as ordered:
A supposedly impregnable shield against enemy snipers and shells,
The space it once occupied now an embryonic trench-womb
To shelter safe the nine months until it must surely all be over
And, born-again, Life resume.

But in an agonising irony far too few would live to see
No earth-mother proved their Mother-Earth...
Her womb-waters bringing only Death to birth.

Tony Jolley

Like the Second Kiss

Dawn comes soft here:
Soft like the second kiss –
Long, deep & languorous,
Pale light and pastel land
Lip-to-lip
Conceiving colour
To birth their dawn 'baby'.

Contours come slow here:
Slow like shape from shade and shadow-
The first faint tint of a thought
Glimmering toward the realm of consciousness,
Yet still unformed, unborn.

Tony Jolley

List of the Lost and Missed

'Lazy Ginger' for two very laid back chefs;

Malt vinegar because carpe frite is the better for it
(even if it is [not exactly] 'fish 'n' chips' as we know it):

Wytch Hazel for bumps and bruises because it works and they don't believe in it here;

Tamanu (and some orange-coloured ingredient I can't remember) massage oil from Boots if they still do it because there's nothing like it;

Terry's Chocolate Oranges because you wouldn't swap one for any amount of Suchards or Lindt;

Ten ton of tins of baked beans in tomato sauce (anybody's!) because we're desperate for a bloody good fry-up and it just isn't the same without it;

Boring British sausages because the Minister of Administrative Affairs, Jim Hacker (of 'Yes Minister' fame), was right when he said that no amount of Bratwurst or Salami saussices can ever hope replace the humble banger in the hearts, (or stomachs) of those home grown on memories of heroic holiday guesthouse breakfasts.

Thai sweet chilli sauce because all the natives think it's wonderful...and I've kind of hinted I make it - so I'm loth to own up to it! !

....Next to none of this will go in our cases, I guess
So I know dwelling on it's pretty much pointless
But I like imagining nevertheless....

Tony Jolley

Little Yellow Hands

'Yellow. ... Little yellow hands', you said.

Geography of rivers of love
Flowing through palm plains
Formed of graft and grist;
Deep fjords cutting cleft to cliff
Your lifeline long,
Born of ever having your hands
Where your heart says they belong.

Traces of skirmishes past
Scored in a host of scratches and blemishes
Obstinately refusing to relinquish their remembrance in the flesh.

Little yellow hands.
Hands of a Far-Eastern dancer
Painting exquisite tapestries and histories
With such elegance and mystery.

Little yellow hands.
White gold, diamond hands,
Hands that hold the whole world in their thrall.

Little yellow hands:
Hands helping, holding,
Making, moulding;
Hands comforting, calming,
Soothing, stroking;
Hands blessing, bestowing,
Balming, booning;
Hands tending, tracing,
Gentling, gracing:

Your Little Yellow Hands.

Tony Jolley

Lörrach

Tall man walking with his head on one side,
Hell's Angel's handlebars way over-size,
McDonald's run like a well-oiled machine,
Wonder what such strange signs mean.

Even the river's got regulated flow,
Like the traffic I'm in: all stop 'n' go.
The whole town seems to long to break free
Wishing just to be let be -
Perhaps it does, but it might not be
It's just how it felt, today, to me.

(Impressions of a whistlestop trip to Lörrach [close to the German border with France and Switzerland])

Tony Jolley

Loving You Quietly

Today I love you quietly, softly.
Why?
I don't know – I just do.
Amidst the cleaning and the packing,
The last minute floor-washing and drying,
Quietly is just how I've been loving you.

Today I don't have words.
Don't know where they went.
They're not on strike,
Not taking a private holiday
Or jour de congé,
They just seem
To have curled up inside me
Like a contented cat on a carpet,
Basking in the deep red heat
Of glowing embers and coals in the hearth:
Replete;
Complete;
Asleep;
Yet no further from awake
Than spark from flame.

Today I've been loving you quietly;
But then,
There's always tonight.....

Tony Jolley

Low-Fi

The face was far older
Than either of us remembered:
The 'laughter lines'
No longer a laughing matter –
More Vulture talon-trails than Crow's feet
Scored into once soft flesh
Like a low-fidelity, analogue recording
Of the years past and passing faster,
Awaiting only a suitable 'stylus':
An occasion of some sort,
A good bottle of St Aubin
To produce the best playback
Memory can provide: -
A little bit rough round the edges;
A little 'rosy';
A little scratchy and hazy,
Maybe,
But they're my memories,
My mirror recollections:
The sum of all the histories
That make me me:
Visibly.

Tony Jolley

Man Maid

Monochrome motoring: gloom; glare.
Ruling red: stark; stare.
Systematic standstill: ahead; astern.
Window watching: look; learn.

Passenger profile: female; face.
Driver desire: touch; trace.
Silhouette shapes: locks; lips.
Heavenly highway: hearts; hips.

Colour command: green; go.
Kiss curtailed: seductive; slow.
Moving merging: further; fade.
Timeless traffic: man; maid.

Tony Jolley

ManKind

Though I accept that our planet's fruits are finite and failing,
The rate of population growth rapidly rising,
And that somewhere along a line I'll probably not live to see
This is doubtless going to force mankind
To do very much more with very much less than it would like it to be,
I reckon our problem's got more to do with distribution
Than overall resource diminution:
It's always those with next-to-nothing
Who end up with nothing next.

Whilst we are arguing how to 'draw in our horns a bit',
Cut back, cut down and 'live within our means',
'They'...
[Meaning anyone that is not 'we', ie:
Anyone out of sight,
Out of mind and
Outside our 'I'm Alright Jack' island mentalities],
This 'They',
This growing majority,
Lack not only the means to live,
But the meanest of means to survive.

I don't see this getting any better – do you?

With 'Globalisation' and 'Global Warming' on the world's agenda,
Our 'First World' will be watching with one eye
Its money literally evaporate 'into thin air' -
[Going up, but for once, not 'in smoke']
In hope of slowing the rate CO2 makes it thicker;
Whilst the other will weep bitter tears at the sight of jobs hemorrhaging Eastwards
As our own industrialists move technology and investment
To sources of lower & lowest cost labour in China and India
In search of higher margins, profit performance and better yield management.

If that all adds up (or rather subtracts) to stagnation,
What then becomes of the 'First World' nation?
More insularity, I guess, and 'starts at home' charity.

The 'Second World', I might venture to suppose,
Will be frantically focused upon its own, long-overdue, industrial revolution,
Relishing the realisation of its potential,
Consumed by its own myopically kinetic energy
And it's world-beating, and above all, West-beating, opportunity.

Most of the models and projections I've seen appear to predict
That the 'Third World' will be hardest hit
By the dramatic, sadistic indifference of climate change
Which won't lose sleep at kicking the world's weakest and poorest full in the teeth.

Prophet I am not,
But sadly I foresee

Whole nations,
Entire 'Third World' populations,
As refugees,
Walking for Water,
Fighting for the Right to Food.
Darfurs will become a common occurrence:
Ever at our doorstep,
Ever on our conscience.

Are we who have only just less than everything
Prepared to share with those who have all but nothing
The benefits the accident of our birth came bringing?

We don't do it now if we're honest,
And if I'm right about the way we're headed
[And I hope to hell I'm not ...],
I can't see us delving any deeper into our pockets – probably the opposite.

If we don't, or won't then I for one am resigned:
We should change our name for shame we're not ManKind.

Tony Jolley

Meltdown

How come some elevate annoyance to an 'art form'
Have got Degrees in 'On-Goat-Getting',
Masters in 'Mucking People About'
And PhDs in 'Pissing Off' *summa cum laude*:
Red Brick, Ivy League, cast iron, copper-bottomed
Pains in the posterior all.

What is it makes them so
And grates them so with me?

Maybe my 'suffering-in-silence' threshold
Has subsided with the years and the miles
'Til there's no tread on my temperance tyres.
Maybe a sort of societal 'global warming'
Has brought about a meltdown in manners:
The sea level of stupidity, senselessness and selfishness
Steadily swamping my soggy, sandbagged refuge.

Then there's Tsunamis –
Confluences of circumstances and certain people
[you know who they are – they know who they are]...
It's as if they've been biding their time
Waiting for propitious portents,
To vent their volcanic vitriols at the vulnerable.

Their waves roll & roil and break and boil
Yet in the end they must come to an end:
For every inundation a dissipation.

The barefaced lie and seek to deny:
"Never happened. Never did. Never would."

The bullies defy and dare to justify:
"I did it – just because I could."

Then there are those
[God knows why – who knows],
Who think they can choose to 'take it all back'
By demanding to be forgiven
And a right to absolution
With 'sorry' their one-word restitution.

I may be softer in the middle these days,
But I'm not so soft in the head –
No more the silent, 'sitting duck'
They can aim at their mirrors instead.

Tony Jolley

Memories of 'Walkin' in Memphis'

I remember the moment
You first learned to play this line
Back in those 'kinder years'
When I was yours and you were mine.

I remember watching
Your quest for every note
Slowly building, bar by bar
Upon the stave there as you wrote.

And I distinctly remember feeling
When it all clicked into place:
The sudden freedom in your fingers,
Success' smile upon your face.

I remember hearing you
Sound exactly like Marc Cohn
And wondering if one day he'd
Try learning one of your own.

Do you remember me sitting
And silently willing you on?
Is it a moment you treasure
Wherever you have gone?

For Grace, wherever life may find her.....

Tony Jolley

Mercury Rising

Mercury rising to three-figure Fahrenheit.
Fridges working an overtime freezing frenzy.
Tarmac turning back to its gloopy, embryonic glory.
Scorching sands searing young and old soles.
Lobsters on loungers thermidoring themselves
Slowly but surely
In a haze of factor eight bronzing 'baste'.

Kids crying with sunburnt shoulders,
Suffering the inevitable shivver-shake, after-sun shock.
Calamine, caladryl and sundry creams and concoctions
Selling like ironic 'hot cakes'.
TV weathermen's warnings gone unheard or unheeded.
Hospital burns units overwhelmed
With the all-too-casual, self-inflicted casualties.

Melanoma, for so long biding its invisible time
Under cover of cloud,
Now making its mournfully malignant move
In some baleful, doleful holiday 'lottery':

"This time it could be you."

I pray God it's not.

Tony Jolley

Middle Man Sandwich

In the beginning?
In the middle: Man
In the end?

In the beginning: who knows?
In the middle: Man
In the end: who cares?

In the beginning: ... God ...?
In the middle: Man
In the end: ... God ...?

In the beginning: The Big Bang
In the middle: Man
In the end: just a Big Nothing

In the beginning: God.
In the middle: Man
In the end: God

Tony Jolley

Mixed Marriage Mariachi

Old men,
As old as the tattered wooden trams
That rattle and battle
Their standing-room-only routes
Up and down the narrow streets and steep
Between Alfama and Baixa,
Lean into their latter years
With a tender, well-worn, grace
And an olive complexion
Those from northern climes can only envy.

Their wives wear an effortless elegance,
Which, so subtly understated,
Becomes the more accentuated
Against the garishly gleaming
Livery in yellow and blue
Of the far inferior
New tram carriage interior.

Belem, - pronounced Bel-eng
(How do they make that ending of it?) ,
And a summer Sunday flea-market
Beside a Tagus quietly dreaming
Of discoveries and former glories,
Where the dogs lie cool in the shade
And only the tourists are on heat.

The Portuguese alone, with consummate ease
Could conspire to combine
Horses, Huzzars and a marching Mariachi band
And hope to make this very mixed marriage work.
Yet carry it off they did,
In a spectacle more surreal than serene
That just begs to be seen....

Ah Lisbon.....
I'm glad I can say that I've been.

Tony Jolley

Monet Morning

Yesterday morning,
Monet
Must have had a meeting with his Maker:
The mother of all masterclasses
In Pointillism Perfection
Was being played out
Upon a December dawn
Hung between here and Heaven,
Framed by the ruggedness
Of the Vosges and Black Forest ridgelines.

Their palette awash
With violent purples, preternatural violets and marauding mauves,
Raging reds running the whole range of hues
From the palest pink to the blackest of blue-black royal bloods,
And golds:
Golds that glisten and glister only in realms of Glory,
The immortal pair painted upon
A cloud-canvas of cirrus and cumulus,
Leaving Light to stage-manage
The slowly-changing, mise-en-scène:
The Sun's inclination
Altering the effect of the illumination
For the benefit of those yet a little lower than the angels.

God must have got hooked on the whole idea,
For today Turner's hand clearly lay behind
The watery mists and limpid shades
Softly shrouding and muting
All figures and forms
And hinting at what might lie,
Lightly veiled from view,
Just a little further off
Behind the stroke of the brush.

We saw Monet and Turner's
Work and pleasure
At the Paris Grand Palais,
But never did I expect
To see them at work
On my way to work
Taking turns on our slice of sky.

Tony Jolley

Neither Here nor There

'They've all gone....'

Sorry?

'No-one left....'

Left where?

What are you on about?

'Gone.'

Oh... I get it:

Were in Neither-Here-nor-There-Land:

Between Living and Nod.

Nod:

Cain's exile East of Eden.

East of Eden.

Film of Steinbeck's book...

James Dean, wasn't it?

Was it?

Not sure now..

Who else?

... If it was him in the first place.

'No-one left. ... All gone.'

Who?

Where, Love, who's gone where?

Hmm, 'Who's on First':

Abbott and Costello.

Is that Abott or Abbot or Abbott...

And why don't I know?

Did I know once?

'Where's on first' wouldn't have worked,
would it?

Wonder if they wrote it,

Or if there was some

Barry Cryer-type gag-writer

Paid a pittance

To make them look good?

Did they have movies then?

Maybe it was just 'sound good', then.

'On the beach...'

Which beach, Love?

Shell Bay?

Dunes to hide and make love in;

Or that time Barry Pike

Kicked the football into the nudist camp

And hadn't got the balls to go and get it.

Wonder where he is now ...

And whether his nerve arrived with the years.

'But they're gone! '

Yeah, I've got that, Love:
They've all gone...
To the beach maybe?
Would be fun today in the snow.
Snowball-fighting on the beach: crazy!
Then maybe a dare to plunge in.
Hang on you idiot, you did that once in 5°C
But that was well before you were 50 -
You remember the statistics
For middle aged heart-attacks:
You don't need me to tell myself again do I?
Mum died at 56.

You're right, Love,
You're right:

They're gone.

Tony Jolley

Netherworld

Chance, shrouded by his sombre suit of grey fatality,
Stalked the campus corridors
With an implacable, yet indiscriminate, finality.

He'd been there before:
Knew every room and hall,
Window and wall,
Better than the back of the hand
That held the Book of Time
Which would draw one last line
Under a life not unlike mine.

And we who remain
Will reduce the rubble to reason:
The science of Chemistry
Systematically employed to deduce its own demise
In some bitter (yet inevitably successful) irony
As effect is wedded to cause:
Mendeleev's magnum opus
Its silently compelling witness.

Though evidence will doubtless be found
To fully explain the What, the Where and the How,
The Why will lie,
Forever buried,
In that faint and foggy netherworld
Whose compass points are:
Fact and fiction,
Action and inaction.

But what of the Who?
Not the one who did or didn't;
Not even the one who once could and now can't:
Rather, what of the Who that is me and you?

Who are we? -

Are we more, or less, than we were?
... Or merely more-or-less as we were?

Written a few days after the Chemistry School at the University of Haute Alsace,
France, had been destroyed by a massive explosion with the sad loss of one soul and
more injured and 'not yet out of the woods'.

NB. Mendeleev was the Russian scientist who first had the vision of the complete
Periodic Table of Elements...despite the fact that a little over half the elements were
actually known in his time [and therein lay his genius]

Tony Jolley

Nine Years On

Bought a bottle from our local supermarket –
They were clearing their cellar
Of the odds and sods forgotten and forsaken
At the bottom of their bins.

You never know how it's going turn out:
Corked, turned to vinegar or barely drinkable:
Maybe better if you're lucky....very.

Took our chances with a Cahors 2000
For no other reason
Than we like Cahors
And someone's taken the trouble to store it
In controlled conditions
For some eight or nine years.
If ever it's going to have the chance
Of being good or great
On the back of a thirsty throat
Then it's now (or never) .

Uncorked.
Not corked, but ever-so-slightly vinegary, maybe.
Decanted.
Carafed.
Sort-of ushered up a bit of a wino's prayer...
Are you allowed to pray for wine?
If so, to Belteschazzer, Bacchus or le Bon Dieu:
Who knows?
Well anyway,
Time bided and a little bit of room temperature
Did it no end of good.

Not going to lose you (or me)
In a whole lot of guff about
'Romantic tones of smokey, autumnal fruits' –
My palette is not nearly so sharp or sophisticated,
But it knows what it likes,
And this....

It likes.

Tony Jolley

No Need

We have no need of trust:
For this implies a lacking - an absence of some vital commodity
Which must somehow be made good or compensated.
We have no lack; no lack in need of filling.

We have no need of hope:
A suggestion that there is yet more to be secured
Which requires a deposit as evidence of eventual guaranteed delivery.
We are already completely given in all the presents that will become the history of our future.

We have no need of time:
No time for the stereotyping of young and old
Which pointlessly measures glasses half-full or half empty.
As Jesus gave - so is our love become: once and for all time.

We have no need of doing:
The desperate cramming of all available time with white-knuckle movement and activity
As if to win some lifetime 'doing race'.
We have learned that our life is in the be-ing and the be-coming (And the doing we do will flow from this) .

We have no need of judgement & second-guessing:
The fear of treading on toes and the overstepping of marks;
The slide-rule calculations of others' actions, perceptions, interpretations and reactions.
For we have no limits now we are utterly open and completely known to one another.

We have no fear of loss:
The haunting, back-of-the-mind worry that 'easy-come' may also become 'easy-go'
At the will of some dice-throwing, malevolent deity.
We do not 'have'; do not possess anything capable of the losing: we simply 'am'.

We have no fear of death
That great unknowable leveller and disrespector of persons
That antithesis and implacable enemy of all the living.
Our loving dust dances yet - and will waltz together the eternal winds upon Dancing Ledge.

Tony Jolley

November in the Rue de Mulhouse

It's heavy.
The kind of heavy you can't carry,
Aching dull down deep to your marrow,
Weighing against all your good intentions and better inclinations,
Slouching your whole being steadily toward the 'slow' end of the spectrum,
Grey-washing your entire outlook on life
And synchronising you subconsciously
With Nature's inaudible, yet inescapable, hibernial heartbeat.
Lethargic as the tired smoke that took one look at the sky
And decided that 'up' just wasn't worth the effort;
As bored as the wind that had clocked off early and headed home
To its slippers and armchair by the fire.

As day's go, this one seemed be staring Eternity full in the eye...
... And it wasn't for blinking.

Tony Jolley

Obama and Cleopatra

Saw you when I least expected to:
There in the front row of Obama's election celebrations,
Your face full of exultation and expectation,
Cheering and waving
As the words that would be cited a trillion times tomorrow
Made their dramatic debut on the world's stage
And wafted and weaved their well-crafted magics about you.

See you often.
Often when I'm least expecting you.
Sometimes only one sense gets the slightest scent of you,
Then you are gone, having never quite arrived,
Leaving me in a momentary flat spin
Wherein
Faint hope, hibernating in a four-or-more-year winter,
Metabolism slowed to the faintest fraction of its full force,
Is woken with a jump-start, lightning-jolt
Your name surging to my heart and catching in my throat,
Thumping against eardrums and ribcage,
Crashing against the walls of the daily absurd reality
In which you are...,
Yet are not,
My daughter.

Then, like the crowd in that Chicago park
That eventually took its leave,
You left,
And I was your empty stage,
Your forgotten flag underfoot,
The rapidly-receding echo
Of something once of singular significance:
Perhaps never to fade fully into the forgotten,
Yet never, ever, so visceral or vivid
As that moment ago, now gone.

Then, for me, came the slowing down,
The curling up,
The final furling of hope's flag
And its ritual burial, but deeper this time
Than daily consciousness can divine.

Then welcome, like Cleopatra her serpent release,
The so-tired-of-it-all, steep descent into sleep.

Tony Jolley

Obverse

Will I go singing: looking ahead?
Will I go mourning: looking back instead?

Looking back at the may's and the might have beens;
Looking back at lost days and the almost seems.
Wondering what poor proportion of potential
I realised within my span existential.

Where does it go: that famous: 'what if? '
To some parallel universe at the end of a spliff,
Where some other me was never a poet
For the lack of a love if he did but know it?

Are there lives lived there the mirror-match to mine
Lying just the other side of the clock face of time,
Where my right is his left, his up my down,
His better side a smile to my frown?

Do I, then, ride his roads not taken,
Walk the miles he missed, take his turns forsaken?
Does he toss a coin to help him decide
And does it fall on my mistakes-down side?

I wonder if he wonders what it's like to be me:
The antithetical obverse of all that is he....
Am I the living sum of his greatest regrets:
The thing above all he'd prefer to forget?

Tony Jolley

Odd Bits of Today

Breakfast with a breathtaking view:
Tuscan hills, Val d'Orcia, but most of all: you.

A strangely cute but short of cuddly
Underwater aqua-vac
Patrolling the pool deep end and back
Like some scuba-puppy on a long leash.

Cursing at every corner our hire car
Whose windscreen frame seemed
So absurdly wide at the side
It'd hide a ten-ton Italian truck:
More 'See it No-No' than Fiat Bravo.

Playing 'Hunt the Ospedale',
'Dov'è Doctore? ',
'Trouvare la Farmacia':
'Medicino in Montalcino'.
'Good Game. Good Game'
As Bruce Forsyth might say.....
Not!

Finally to the winery: Brunello di Banfi and Fontanella,
Served by Antonella, Daniella and Francesca.

Tony Jolley

O-le-Coma City

On the leading edge of life
Where the world no longer turns
And the Sun neither rises nor sets,
Where even Time is held 'on-hold',
His hourglass grains frozen in freefall
Upon the bitter cusp of Forever;
There slumber the grey, unwaking shades
Of that other world
That lies within, yet without, the Land of the Living:
Those silent citizens of sad O-le-Coma City;
Immobile flesh and blood,
Unwilling or incapable of movement:
Some from shock;
Others from falling into an auto-hypnotic sleep
Where the magician-self has 'gone under' too –
Both now lost in depths far beyond the reach
Of the emergency services of consciousness;
Souls incarcerated in personal prisons of perfect inertia,
Dreaming unknowing,
Or silently screaming
To be let back into their own life
Before it passes them by.

Miracles sometimes happen in O-le-Coma City:
Some find their way back.

No one knows why.

Tony Jolley

One-Horse Town

The Stars & Stripes flew, or rather hung, from the horizontal:
A startling statement in this 'one-horse-town'
That has, today, become my home.
It's not the 'Land of the Free',
Yet, at the risk of rhyme, it is to me;
Hidden deep in the green of another red, white and blue,
This Tricolore Francais of we: me and you.

In another age, une autre langue
It was 'Left at the Carpenter's Arms',
Now it's 'A droite a la Rue de la Natte
En face du Horseman's Store.'

It qualifies as a town in exactly the same way
As AFC Bournemouth qualifies for the European Cup:
Never in a month of Sundays
And only in its wildest dreams.
To take the title of 'village', even,
Bruebach would have to punch way above its feather-weight.

As places go, it's a bit short on stature.....
But then, that makes two of us, I guess.

Tony Jolley

Our Birthday

Love waited to deliver,
Had been waiting more than 20 years
To give birth to the potential she felt steadily, beautifully, growing inside her.

Contractions had been getting stronger, more frequent;
Even back then, past the point of false alarms and flutters and fantasies:
Way past the point of no return.
Love's labour had emphatically begun
A fact which wouldn't have required a midwife's meditation
So much as the merest look from lovers
Who would instantly have recognised their own reflection.

But children can be awkward in the womb....
We were.

Somehow, somewhy, we weren't ready,
Or were ready but didn't realise we were.
Love lost that life-launching rhythm
And the tempo slowed;
And the music faded;
But the tender bassline remained,
A deep, dependable underscore,
An entrée to an inevitable encore
Which would slowly seduce
Fingers onto fretboards and keys
Making fresh melody and harmony
Bringing into being Love's long-overdue creative crescendo.

Contractions commenced with a phone call in May,
Took-off with tender texts,
Intensified in email,
Lengthened with letters written in an o-so-familiar hand.
Love's hips splayed at our summer sharing.
Waters broke with words more potent than time or tide.
Head crowned to Cotswold confessions and communions.

Love delivered us upon her Bledington bed
And holds us to her breast as none before.

Tony Jolley

Papal Bull [aka Re: House of Card(inal) s]

A nine-year-old, for God's sake,
[yes, for God's sake]
Even less than a slip of a 'slip of a girl'
Reportedly, repeatedly raped
And now impregnated by a father-in-law
[what sort of 'father' and what sort of 'law'?]
Dying from the twin lives growing inside her.
It would have been murder by life
Had she not lived for the tale to be told,
Saved by surgeon's scalpel and incision
Rather than a cardinal's holier-than-thou
[and wholly ineffectual]
Intercession.

Then the hell she's been spared is vented
Like a bitter spleen of vindictiveness
Upon and around her trauma recovery:
Cardinal Re backs the Archbishop of Recife
[Re for 'repugnant', presumably]
Laying about him
With the well-honed weapons of his work
Excommunicating all and sundry in sight,
From any doctor who might have touched her
To a mother who sought only to save her;
Excluding, of course, the father-perpetrator-in-law
He, apparently, is not to be condemned so utterly and irrevocably
For the so-called 'sin of nature'
Which, so committed, would have otherwise slain her.

Sure as sperm fertilises egg, the cardinal's pontification
Is followed by a pope without equivocation
Wrapping his man in his 'cloak of infallibility'
As if we're too stupid to see through such insanity.

Did God create Adam & Eve, and maybe on the 8th Day,
After sober reflection, a remedy,
A sort of 'God's out-of-office' service:
An Earth-based 'papacy'
Blessed with inhuman infallibility?
No way. Not any God I could believe in anyway.

And who dares dare the wrath of the Almighty
In condemning any man to severance from sanctuary,
Excluded from a love bought by Love's crucifixion
Making shameful dilution of the power of resurrection?

To the grace of God commend the inconceivable,
But for God's sake don't give us all that Papal 'bull'.

--

Musing upon the story of a young Brazilian girl in the news
in March 2009 and the inhuman reaction of the catholic church

and cardinals to the saving of her life. If you can find it, listen to Francis Cabrel's 'Les Cardinaux en Costume'.... in the same vein as this poem... but you'll need some 5th form French!

--

Tony Jolley

Patient Place

Two steps,
Three feet
And twenty-odd years
Down below these ephemeral footprints
In the surface of the sands of our time,
My fingers found the frets,
The shapes on strings,
The songs to sing
To make you mine.

From above and behind me
You denied yourself
What everyone else sought to see
And sat at an angle too extreme to the eye
Yet with perfect 'line of sight' to 'me'.

Though I found myself facing the faces of friends,
I couldn't concentrate at all on the chord runs and ends;
For I was feeling the defining moment of my life
Steal soft about my spirit in the shape of you: my wife.

I felt you walk freely in my patient place
Where the husband was waiting to be
And watched as you honoured all that you touched
With a grace meant only for me.

The world in front faded - fell silent and still
As if all creation bowed low to our will
And blessed this first moment in which our eyes met
And the charts upon which our life's course was set.

In that instant Love's wisdom dispensed henceforth
With all need for knowing and seeing
And bound us forever, our spirits together
In a life of Becoming and Being.

Tony Jolley

Pavements and Partings

The pavement waters parted...
No need for a Moses:

On one side an old man
Engaged in an eternal struggle
Trying and failing
(Or succeeding so excruciatingly slowly
It was impossible to tell which)
To evenly balance the two meagre shopping bags
On each side of his rickety old handlebars
As if just an ounce or two either way
Might topple him from his precarious perch,
His bike frame,
Tailored to the length and strength of his youth,
Now seeming to have outgrown him
By a good two or three sizes:
His 'S' to the stainless steel and chrome 'XL'.

On the other,
Another was lovingly easing his lady's delicate bones
Into the passenger seat of their car
As softly as one might set down
A see-through bone china cup upon its genteel saucer.

The mountain ranges of older ages
Were casting their first faint shadows
Upon our middle ageing valley.
The metaphor wasn't lost on me:
We would be raised up
Before we're finally laid low –
That much was plain to see.....

Tony Jolley

Pete Townshend, Shakespeare and Penzias & Wilson

Does the 'Big Bang' of living
Leave a sort of Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation behind it –
The faintest of faint echoes
Reverberating below the waterline
Of the hubbub of everyday life,
Softly whispering of who we once were
To ears that can't hear?
Like the last vestige of some gargantuan
Pete Townshend power chord
Struck on a '58 Gibson Les Paul Custom (in black, of course)
Thrumming through an over-driven Marshall stack the size of the Moon
The sounds of humanity's poor players
Who once strutted and fretted
Their short 60 minutes or years and now are no more.
Is the 'idiot's tale' still told?
Does its sound and fury
Signify some nano-mote more than nothing after all?

..... Where are our Penzias and Wilson
When we need them?

[Don't suppose you'll believe me if I said that the spur to this was seeing an old house knocked down..... I just wondered where all the echoes of the lives and loves lived therein went. Hope you get the allusions: and science-loving guitarist will... or should....!].

Tony Jolley

Petulance

In their impatience,
In their petulance,
And with eider elbows flashing fit to fly,
They jostled and jousted
For position 'A' precedence
Hard on the heels of mother in her web-foot wake,
Squabbling and babbling their battle around the lake shoreline,
Whilst, some hundred or so metres beyond,
The same scene was being played out -
The mother of all petrol tankers
Steaming steadily up the forest road to Feldberg,
Followed, line astern, by her brood:
A restless road-full of four-wheeled frenzy
All overanxious to overtake:
Accelerating,
Risk-taking
Then frantically braking
Their way up the ranks,
Throwing all caution to the little wind there was
As if they were one-down and last-ditch-effort desperate
In the final few cup-final seconds.

That would be me in the morning,
But today it was 'for the birds'.

After watching ducks on Late Titisee (Black Forest, Germany) during the morning rush-hour and seeing the traffic on the mountain road beyond.....

Tony Jolley

Picardy 1: not Silent but Screaming

"The War to end all Wars"

"Dulce et decorum est" ...

Stirring sentiments and epitaphs all:

Familiar footprints

In blood-black sands

Upon body-strewn beaches

Stretching the endless coastline

Of all human history

Half a heartbeat,

Barely a breath,

From bare bones

To bullets and bombs:

Here, all the way to the Hereafter.

The fear-stained fire-step:

One command to Nomansland

To do or die, [more likely: do and die].

Sheep:

Dumb, yet not silent, before their shearers:

Screaming their last gasp of life

From lead-riddled lungs,

To their holy mothers on Earth

Or not-so-holy Father in Heaven

Who could let this happen:

Whoever would have them.

Whoever might save them....

...If only they had that long to frame the thought...

Easy for me to say:

I wasn't there [thanks be to them].

Haven't seen war.

Haven't felt fear leak hot down my leg.

Haven't known the daily nightmare of death.

Haven't heard a man plead to be put out of someone else's misery.

Haven't smelled the red-acrid stench of the charnel-house

And known it would never leave my nostrils.

Never had to clean a man's guts from my blade

After rattling it around his ribcage

To find and cut the last cord holding his body and soul together

Like some sort of sick midwife to the afterlife.

Never had to pray:

O God, please God, forgive me,
Though I know exactly what I do.

O God, Dear God, forgive me,

For those souls I've sent to you.

I've never had to live with death for the duration:
So what the hell do I know?

I know those who knew the fields of France
Are all but fallen now:
Are barely, but a handful;
Ten old men with tales to tell.

I know those who knew the fields of France
Are all but fallen now.....
But their lives are living legacies
That can keep us from that hell.

Tony Jolley

Picardy 2: Off the Hook

In Picardy I saw the wraiths arise
From every hallowed foot of greenfield peace,
Unscrewing themselves slowly,
Solider by soldier,
Spirit by sprit,
From the coffins death never afforded them,
To spiral in their misty millions
Before the sun of my generation.

No ranks.
No dog-tags.
No uniforms.

No sides:
No 'Us';
No 'Them'.

Under the earth truth taught them
What they already knew full well
But were forced to deny for nations' pride:
That they were all the same:
The same under the uniform;
The same under the skin.

They're quietly impatient now:
Marking time at the end of their time;
Waiting for the last of their legion
To close the final few gaps in the ranks
Before marching towards what we owe them.

I wonder,
When they're gone,
All gone;
When the last of the very last has left
And the direct line to the living
Finally rings off the hook forever,
I wonder,

Will we really be any the wiser about war?

Tony Jolley

Pigtails

Pigtails.
She had pigtails.
Long pigtails:
Out of the ordinary pigtails,
A too long to be true,
Can't help but stare
Sort of pigtails.

You're picturing a young girl,
Aren't you?
A Heidi.
Fourteen or fifteen
Running across a prairie....

She was tugging them down
From under a black, tea-cosy-type hat:
All warm and waiting for winter,
Pulling them about like a pair of unruly puppies
Who wouldn't stay where they were put.
60 rather than 16,
Toting all her worldly goods about
In a big, black, bin-liner bag;
To those 'above the lifeline'
A lost soul falling off the frail frontier
Of self-respect and state subsidy,
Sliding slowly but surely into invisibility
To our supposed civilised society.

But she still cared for her hair:
Her own small glory.

Clearly, so very evidently:
Here was a lady.

[Just a brief glimpse of a woman on the Rebberg Hill - a rich area of Mulhouse, France
- her situation contrasted dramatically with her surroundings, but in her 'previous
life-before-the-fall' I have this feeling she knew the area well]

Tony Jolley

Plastic Fish

Beats me they're still there, actually,
The amount of time our Félix forgets to feed them;
But they're there alright,
Still swimming round and round:
A constant contradiction
To the configuration of their aquarium
In defiance and negation of its angular tedium
Demonstrating a degree of demersal distain
That only fish can muster and maintain.

The filter clogs and the power's been cut,
The temperature falls and the curtains stay shut,
Holidays come and holidays go
How they survive God alone knows;
But winter, spring, summer and fall,
They're there like ducks on a sideshow wall
Every young kids easy-care wish:
Live and kicking, plastic fish.

Tony Jolley

Plenty More Fish in the Sea

'Plenty more fish in the sea! '

No. There aren't.....sadly.....

Tony Jolley

Poetry Before Birth (with apologies to Mr Macneice...)

I am not yet born; O hear me
Let not the daily distractions
Or the inane chatter of fools or the wise unto themselves
Cheat me of my birth and breath.

I am not yet born; console me
For I fear that life's long lists
Will with doing divert me,
With bureaucracy pervert me
To timetables tie me
Upon lonely shelves lie me.

I am not yet born; provide me
With quiet to quicken me,
Paper to page me,
Pen to procure me,
Memories to muse me
And a song I can see in my soul and hear in my hand.

I am not yet born; forgive me
The call irrevocable I must make,
The ache endured for my stanzas' sake
That itch where you can't scratch me
The frustration of failing to find me
My meanings when mistaken by many
Or not known to any.

I am not yet born; rehearse me
To be poetry-prete-a-porter for the world of today
Where precious few mind me or make to unwind me
Some they despise me, revile and revise me
Publishers move to marginalise me
Where wise and fool alike lack the time for me.

I am not yet born; O hear me
Let not the moribund mind
Or the soul sans compassion come close to me.

I am not yet born, O fill me
With light against those who would quash and quench
Would consign me to a rest home of irrelevance
Would make me a mere mark on a school syllabus,
An unlearned lesson, a bore
And against all those who would choose not to see
And deliberately, casually, carelessly
Or with apathy underscore me.

Let them not make me unheard or unread
Let them not deplore me...
Otherwise ignore me.

Tony Jolley

Refused

Saw your picture
From a year,
A country,
An imagination away.
Drank you in
Like cool spring water
But your refreshment
Refused me.

Wondered.

Do you love me,
Hate me
Or just not 'do' me?

Wondered.

Would I ever know?

Don't know.
Just don't know.
Don't even know
What good the knowing would do.

Tony Jolley

Ridgeline

In wild abandon we made our love on the ridgeline of our youth
Our bodies spoke of intervening years, our spirits only truth:
Truth dormant not diminished
Truth yet incomplete – unfinished
That our love, long-left to linger,
Is our life's song and we its singers

Tony Jolley

Rummage Bag RAF

Form the bottom of the rummage bag,
Buried under assorted pendants and brooches,
Their chains all muxed up like a bird's nest on a fishing reel
(and I've had a few of them in my time!) ,
A fresh-faced, freckled smile
Beamed up at me
Perhaps as surprised to be found as I was to find it.

It was a smile now almost certainly long lost,
A headshot of less than a thumbnail,
The size of a sixpence,
Set in a silver round
And pasted, dead centre, to an inch-square of Mother-of-Pearl
Hanging from a small chain
Attached to a safety-pin-type clip:
The sort of affair a wartime Ward Angel
Might have worn
Fastened to her breast
To suspend her upside-down watch:

Watch. One.
Blood Pressure timing for the taking of.

The pearl plaque, chained at one corner,
Would hang diamond-like
Rather than square on.
The maker had set the photo in the same orientation,
And, with a suitably dry sense of humour
And not a little eye for the aesthetically pleasing,
Had aligned it to the diamond points and chain
By an arrow-straight vertical
Running along the razor sharp ridgeline
Of the young RAF officer's cap,
Perched, as it was,
Almost more off his head than on it,
Courtesy, perhaps,
Of the gravity-defying properties of Brylcreem
(A not altogether inappropriate a talisman
For one of The Few) .

So young.
So very, very young.
A boy,
Barely a man
But for his being on intimate terms
With burning lead and fuel-flame,
And being frightened of counting his friends
For fear he'd have far too many fingers.
He measured his minutes as lifetimes,
Riding his luck on Fortune's filament
Trying to trust to God, his skill
And RJ Mitchell:

Any or all of them –
Whoever, Whatever would bring him home.
Victory?
Victory would have to pray for itself.

Am I looking at a 'keep-him-safe' keepsake
Worn religiously
By a proud and prayerful mother
Or a fearful and desperate lover,
Or maybe a memorial medal
That could hold its head up high
In the company of a whole host of
Victoria Crosses?

I would like to think this badge of honour was borne
Upon a mother's breast
His young face, forever,
To his Mother of Pearl pressed.

Tony Jolley

Sanglier... (Wild Boar)

Saw Fear today.

It was pounding its grey-brown hide, very literally hell-for-leather
Across the fresh-ploughed slabs and furrows
Bolting for hoped-for cover
Like the bullet that would otherwise overtake it,
The product of a primeval 'fight or flight', self-preservation mechanism
Triggered by acutely mortal senses, simultaneously overwhelmed
By what had 'no right' to be there in Danny's Wood:
Luminous, luridly unnatural 'Don't shoot me – shoot anything else that moves!' vests;
A cacophony of football rattles viciously clacking and gnashing their teeth
Like a pack of ravening hounds baying for blood,
And, above all, that unmistakable, sickly smell,
Harbinger of the ultimate predator,
Spreading and encircling like a stalking plague,
Cutting off escape,
Closing in for the kill.

It was still going,
Charging over the ridge
And lost to line-of-sight of one rifle
After both barrels had missed their mark.

Seconds later, from the other side of the hill,
One solitary shot rang out,
Its six or more distinct echoes
Ricocheting and reverberating off every slope between
Brunstatt and Bruebach:
A sort of sorry, last salute for a Sanglier:
A worthy adversary,
But for me more a sad memory
Of a man-made murder unnecessary.

Sanglier = French Wild Boar. They keep themselves pretty much to themselves in the forests here, but that doesn't stop hunters from hunting them down for sport. This was the first I'd seen not in bits on a butcher's block.... Ten frantic, fearful seconds later that was exactly where it was headed.

Tony Jolley

Sat. Sitting. Still.

Sat here,
Right here,
Once in the snow
And thought about
That dismissive message of yours.

Sitting here again.
Thinking again.
Again.
A gain?
No.
A loss.
Still a loss.
Still at a loss
To understand.

Tony Jolley

Sciatica

The heavy amour rolled through my Poland late last night
Gouging and spurting flesh like mud under its tracks,
Scouring deep welts down my flanks,
Spitting out gristle, guts and gouts of blood
To seep back and fester, black-red and congealing, in the ruts
Whilst the feral me
Convulsed in agony
Transfixed in the cross-hairs
Of the unending lines of Stukas
As they steep-dived their unmistakable dihedrals
At the base of my spine
Pulling out only at the point calculated as most critical to my pain
Dropping their singular back-busters
To explode in my lumbar
And concatenate and concentrate their concussions
Down each leg and back
In some murderous, magnified, sadistic echo.

No defence,
Not even a pain-killing wall was left standing....

....It finished only when they were done with me
When there wasn't much left of me.

Tony Jolley

Settled

The seat was a settle:
Lighthouse Lime and Puce –
More modern art than padded pew.

That strange 'flat' at the back of my skull
Fitted flush to the headrest:
Familiar;
And, eyes shut,
This time-transporting seat
Brought me hard up against
The rough stone bar-wall at Bledington
And soft up against you:
Temple-to-temple;
Thigh-to-thigh;
Touching your dreams
Tasting your desires
Sharing soul and spirit:

Settled.

Tony Jolley

Shore and Simple

Shells and Stones.
You and Me.
Singular, simple Majesty.

Tide and Life.
Sands of Time.
Nature perfect: Yours and Mine.

Weathered, Worn
Clean and Pure.
Home, upon this Shared Life's Shore.

Tony Jolley

Short of Home

Lost.

That's the word to describe it.
Not the only one perhaps,
Might not even be the best,
But it's the one that springs to mind with economy
Rather than a restless search for the 'mot juste'.

Lost.

Dark doorway;
Little light
Emphasis on emptiness:
A house in mourning-
A long Ellen way short of 'home'.

Cold hall.

Silent lounge.

Put music on.

Loudish -

The sort that can still

Dance the feet off a reticent, two-left-footer at 50.

It's there in the background right now

But sounds somehow powerless,

Distant,

Disinterested.

It's caught wind of my mood maybe,

Or can't play off the hair rising up on the back of your neck,

That sends that 'irresistable tap' down your back, hips and legs

And shifts you into your joyful overdrive,

Sets you off spinning, floating, flying, singing

And careers you across the floor, beaming, into my arms.

Put pen to paper.

Cheating really.

Not planned.

Just to be doing.

Doing something.

Anything.

Anything to swallow the pill of time

That stands obstinately between me and mine.

Should stop there.

Makes poetic sense of a sort;

But this isn't poetry as I've told you:

It's cold-blooded murder -

The killing of time.

Going to crank up fingers and fretboard

And lose myself

In some amplified rock 'n' roll somewhere,

But no matter the volume

I'll hear her key in the door

And feel the house become a home once more.

Tony Jolley

Shut Eye

Eyelids shut.
Paltry protection
Against the teeming billions of high-energy photons –
Those rejected scion
Of the atomic anger
Of the First Lord of Fusion,
Ejecta of his immutable law
Of nuclear reaction.

Barely eight minutes
And ninety-eight million miles after their creation,
At the envelope-edge limit of Einstein's Constant
And what God (that well-known non dice-player) will condone,
Those estranged sons of Sun
Smash into my flesh
Bleeding a raw, raging crimson curtain
Across my vision.
Strange shapes:
Dark-dot islets
Tossed and tormented
Upon waves and cascades of corpuscular lava
Surging and seething across my sight
Like Odysseus at the mercy
Of Poseidon and Aeolus,
Running the gauntlet of Scylla and Charibdis.

Strange....
Eyelids shut
Yet still I can see,
But were I to open them
Then blinded I'd be.

Tony Jolley

Sirius ('Jenny' to us)

She was a small, slate-grey & white ball of frightened fur,
Cuddled deep down in an old cardi'
Cradled on our knees
As we cornered carefully home to Kinson from Hampshire....
... Remember? ? ?

Her fear fell away with evidence of safety, security and love
And she grew happily and shaggily enough –
[All bar the odd vet-visit and Cleo's perennial hissing].
Then came the first outing
Supposedly by the riverside
Where her exuberance and speed
Exceeded her cornering control
And she careered over the bank
Like an unguided, hairy missile,
Her first flight
Cut sudden-short by ice-cold water fright.
I slid down the sludge into the Stour,
Wading out into the current to grab her
And throw her terrified form
Up to the comforting heaven
Waiting inside warm winter anoraks.
Sadly, she was never much for water thereafter:
Not past the 'undercarriage' her mantra –
.... Remember? ? ?

Once had a full-blown asthma attack
With Jen still attached.
I collapsed;
Spectators watching dog drag man
Face-first along pavement
Spluttering to catch an ounce of breath:
Her turn to rescue me:
Taking me home
The only way she knew how.
.... I remember.

In that photo: the one above Warbarrow Bay
There she is snuggled between us –
A fully fledged member of the family
In her rightful place:
Front and centre.
What can I say? –
Jenny:
Our One and Only,
Our Own Hairy Dog Star.

Tony Jolley

Sisyphus Hill

Thinking.

Not quite thinking.
More aware of being aware of
Not quite thinking.

Like seeing a sign:
'Thought ahead',
And absent-mindedly
Turning off the road
Before being stuck
In a traff-think jam.

Or
Relentlessly rolling
An overweight
Almost Thought
Tantalisingly close
To the top
Of
Sisyphus Hill
With its
Promised perspectives
Clear to
Heaven and Hell,
Only
To feel the failure:
The fallback:
Its faintest echo
Evaporating,
Fading forlornly
Through the misty
Fingers of intangibility
Toward its own, unborn, infinity.

Tony Jolley

Six Degrees

Gate 13 wasn't overly busy:
Just one or two persons per row of seats;
Still there were some 50 of us
And still there would be
The customary, unnecessary crush,
That unseemly scrum of ruck and rush
The moment the flight was called.
[And sure enough: there was].

But I saw hundreds more in the shadows
Hovering around the heads of the 50:
Each person spawning
The collection of connections
That make a life indisputably unique:
Husband, wife, 'significant other'
[What a stupid, made-in-America descriptor],
Sons, daughters, father, mother,
Famille du sang,
Famille du coeur,
Acquaintances, colleagues
And the occasional neighbour.
A list never-ending –
Except that it isn't:
It gradually frays at the edges
With a whole host of
Lost-touches,
Cooling feelings,
Fallen-out-withs
And dearly departed;
All sliding off the slippery slopes of our lives
In a sort of strange slo-mo,
Like a song lacking a proper ending
Fading softly into silent oblivion.

We've all heard about
"The Six Degrees of Separation"
And its test-bed, cinema proof-game:
"The Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon",
That so-implausible-it-must-be-possible theory
That any two people on the planet
Can find a connection between them
In fewer than six moves
If only they look closely enough –
Well, I wondered,
Was my life in six-step range of any of them
And if so, who and how and when?

The French girl with the high, Indian cheekbones
And impeccable fashion sense? – Perhaps.....

The thirty-something strutting his be-jeaned stuff
And boasting of his business successes? – Hope not!

The lass with the impossibly thin legs
Confined to her wheelchair
And in need of special assistance,
Or, better yet,
[May it please the God of Airport Departure Lounges]
A minor miracle
From the crumbs from his Starbucks table? – Maybe....

One day, perhaps, I'll know.
One day, maybe, I'll see;
Until then I guess its time
To toe the scrum-down, party line
And board the great be-wingéd beast
And head for home and South by East.

Tony Jolley

Size Matters

Size matters –
Doesn't it just...

Not the hoary old joke
About how many inches of English oak
A man's member must be to make a maid happy,
But size of an altogether more cosmic proportion...

Saw a shot from the Hubble Space Telescope
[After the astronaut-ophthalmologists had fitted
Its new prescription lenses]:
A cluster of five, stunningly-beautiful galaxies
Some 260 million light-years away
And maybe hundreds of light-years across...
And all that ineffable glory named after one human:
One 'Stephan'.

'Stephan Who?' I thought;
Who can possibly rate such an outsize accolade?
Général de Gaulle has a street named after him
In just about every town in France;
Robin Hood gets countless cafés and a Kevin Costner film
[The one without 'tights' in the title
But with the Bryan Adams/Michael Kamen anthem];
Nelson gets a column – though I guess he'd have settled for
Another night with Lady Hamilton;
Wellington, remembered not for Napoleon's defeat,
But for rubber galoshes made for de feet.

So who is this 'Stephan'
With more Milky Ways to his name than Cadbury's....?
Who knows – surely someone does?

But here's a thought –
Maybe [just maybe],
On an insignificant planet
Circling and equally insignificant sun
Somewhere in a quiet backwater of one of Stephan's Five Galaxies
There's intelligent life...
No, really intelligent life – not like here;
And maybe they've got their own Hubble aimed at us:
A pretty, faint nano-pixel lost in the 'Kevin Cluster'.
And maybe that eponymous Kevin:
Is the boyfriend of the girl astronomer who discovered us
As a smudge on her lens;
An inter-planetary, rock-guitar superstar
Hero-worshipped in as many languages as there are suns in the system,
Or a quiet, unassuming poet who speaks to the heart.
Maybe all of the above...
It figures:
In space, there's a hell of a lot of 'above'....

Tony Jolley

Sleepers

After a life lived lying down on the job,
(Mostly with an uninterrupted view of the sky
Save for the occasional blinding blur of bogies
And clanking carriages overhead
Which rattled ribs in serried rank
And spattered their unblinking wooden eyes
With great gobs and gouts of grease and oil) ,
They were unceremoniously
Uprooted
From their hard-hoggin beds:
Unspiked;
Stripped of the twin steels that measured their meaning;
Craned onto a rickety old flat-bed
That had seen better days itself
And carted slowly up the line
As the line itself was being steadily ripped up behind,
To be racked and stacked
And stranded in some siding somewhere:
Then stamped:
'Surplus to Railway Requirement'.

Jammed cheek by jowl,
Having ridden the rails now themselves
(Apologising all the while to their wooden brethren passing below) ,
They reflected, in the way only the old and retired can,
Upon all that had ridden rough-shod and unaware over them: -

The mail-train racing billets-doux between beloveds
Faster than her fragrance could fade from the pores of the paper,
So her essence could caress him
Even before her words could kiss his heartache
And leave so much lipstick upon his longing
It'd last til their lips touched again.
All this at the same speed as the last red bill before the bailiffs
Could hunger and salivate its un-thinly-veiled threats
Onto some poor sod's unwelcome mat.

The troop trains of two sides in two wars,
Chock-full of bravado-fueled fodder for the frontline.
Standing room only for the outward journey
Towards the known, but never spoken, statistics of attrition
Whose deathly truth has its living memorial
Graven in the granite countenances of widows and combat veterans:
That the return service will have seats to spare
Whilst new ghosts strap-hang a silence the living may not dare.

Freightliners hauling and drudging coal, ores or other heavy-duty cargoes
Bound for the factories and furnaces,
Then returning with the gleaming firstfruits of their productivity:
Cars hitching a free ride like well-heeled hobos;
White goods heading for the family kitchen and indispensability;
DIY bits 'n' bobs looking for a mug like me.

Passengers from first to economy class
Eating up the meals and miles
Trying to make sense of the high-velocity scenery
Streaming past them more rapidly than the eye can see.
Sabbath-keepers herded more cruelly than cattle:
Compressed, choking, dehydrated, starving
To freeze or fry the distance to death or death camp.

The sleepers, they remember -
And their memories are long,
They're deep ingrained with our joy and pain
Our silences and song.

The sleepers, they remember -
They have nothing else to do
But to pour over the sounds they've been under,
And wonder about me and you.

--

Upon seeing and ruminating upon railway sleepers used as a garden fence / retaining wall of a home in Didenheim, France. Strange that sleepers spend all their working lives in the horizontal plane but are raised to the vertical when they pass away... whereas we spend our lives in the vertical and finish up flat!

--

Tony Jolley

Slow Down

Slow, down duvet
Hanging, 15-tog heavy,
Hugging
The early morning valley floor
In its ephemeral embrace:
Smother than silk,
Softer than baby hair 'gainst cheek.

Valley villages
Nestling still,
Cuddling down deep
Under the warm caress
Of their Sunday slumbers;
Hoping not to hear,
Trying not to heed
The call they knew would be
Shortly sounding
From every sainted steeple,
Resounding off the walls
Of consciousness and conscience
In search of that
Long-installed, ritual response
To its insistent invitation.

In stark contrast to this comfy lethargy,
Life above the snowline was
Crisp air,
Children shelling each other with snowballs,
The crump of snow under boot-sole
And squint-inducing, streaming sunshine.

Such a different day
On either side of the duvet.

Tony Jolley

Softer Incline

No need of a `cru': grand or otherwise –
The wine of `nous' is simply sublime:
Vines grown in groves of tenderness and grace
Upon the softer incline of our lives.
Rooted a country and almost a generation ago
In the sandy soils of the chalk-contoured coastlines of our youth
Tended by the sweet kisses of the Daughters of Destiny
And the safe hands of the Sons of Steadfastness,
Our lately-come fruit is grown ripe and plentiful,
Watered by the cool, plaited streams
Tripping down from the rolling hills of our home.

The taste on the tongue is neither rich nor regal –
Lacking that confluence of complexities
Of the twisted plots and dramatis personae
So beloved of the `buffs' of Love
That mewl and moan from Mills and Boon
And leer lewdly from the outer reaches of the top shelf –
Yet it is life-long and true:
Laid down at first sight, first song, first kiss
And husbanded and wifed in careful constancy
In the safe-heart-cellar of our spirit.

Now family and friends drink the draught
Of the love of our lives
And see
And know
And share
The patient fruits of our years of waiting and wanting
And the Singular Beauty of the Time of our Being.

Tony Jolley

Spermatozoa and Shooting Stars

Silver trails streaked down the green-waxed slope of our parasol
As raindrops gathered,
And their combined surface tensions couldn't contain their contents
And submitted themselves joyfully to the laws of Physics,
Two seconds of high-velocity glory
And a spectacular swallow dive into granite shale
Turning its muted shades into richer reds and brighter blues.

At first I thought:
'Shooting stars',
But the tail-wagging shot that idea down
Faster than the rain was falling:
Shooting stars seem straight as an arrow
(Even if the both are bent a bit in reality
Courtesy of Newton and Einstein's Relativity) .
Then it came to me:
'Spermatozoa'.
Flashback to a school hall
Full of embarrassed and uncontrollable, catholic Testosterone
Forced by the Fathers to face up to countless images
Of ejaculation and conception:
[but strangely, I recall, no copulation]:
Manhood to fatherhood
In one not-so-easy lesson.
We all said we knew it all,
But even our long tried and tested, boy-bravado
Rang all too hollow in our own ears to bear belief.

Here am I:
Two daughters and thirty years on -
But I know a tail-wiggling spermatozoon when I see one!

Tony Jolley

Splitting at the Seams

We grew apart:
You with your incessant thinning and shrinking;
Me with my middle-aged middle spreading its largesse
Beyond the bounds of your acceptability
'Til we didn't look so good together anymore:
Steak and chips
Had made us chalk and cheese.

We didn't fit,
Didn't suit,
Didn't go

... And so...

You felt yourself over-stretched
Trying to accommodate the way I'd changed;
And I suffered you as a corset of claustrophobia
Hemming and seaming me in on all sides like a straitjacket.

We'd outgrown each other:
Simple as that.

Something in our warp and weft just had to give
Before you strangled me with your too-taut stitching
Or I tore myself clean out of your cloth -
Sloughing you off like a snake its unwanted skin
So I might breathe again.

In the end, I did the giving:
Gave you up for good and all:
No trial separations
No negotiated preconditions,
No hope of future reconciliation.

I got you packed.
We said our goodbyes
On the threshold I had carried you over years before,
And I opened the car door for you that one, last time.
Then you were gone:
Half-empty drawers and closets
Your only memorial
Until I could colonise them again
As if you'd never happened.

Today I learn you're on your way to Portugal
Suit-cased full of hope and expectation
Heading for a new home.
And a first shot at a second life
On someone else's arm.

We didn't make it 'til death us do part',
But our differences and divorce still don't stop me

Wishing you well
Close to the skin of some other soul
For as long as he'll have you.....

.....Or before you finally fall apart.

I gave my 'grown out of' clothes to a family
that takes them to people in Portugal
who are in need of them.

What do you do with yours?

Honestly, you thought this was about
something else, didn't you?

Now read it again and you'll see (I hope) !

Tony Jolley

Starbucks Stanstead

"Harvey! ! ! Come Here! ! ! "

Your Latest delayed departure time is now 6.15.
EasyJet apologises for this delay.
Refreshment vouchers will be distributed in 15 minutes

"...Yeah! Not Half! We sat on the plane for 90 minutes,
then they off-loaded us: 'Hydraulic System'."

This is another boarding call for Flight EZ 311...err.....9..?

"Two Chicken and Smokey Bacon Ciabattas and a Skinny Latte! "

....Wish you all a very pleasant flight.

"I'm coming! ! I'm coming! ! Mummy: I'm coming! "

....Will be boarding in ticket number priority order.

"I know: it's just the way Mother was..."

...In the meantime, please remain seated – your flight will be called shortly.

"...'Scuse my French – but I'm frightened of flying! "

....Wish you all a very pleasant flight.

".....If I ever get there: yes! "

Tony Jolley

Start Point: Geology

This middle-aged Man o' the Bay
Wasn't so much Starting out
As already sailing, full-steam for France,
Arms spread wide in greeting
From Start Point to Stoke Fleming;
Solid shoulder cliffs
Leaning lovingly into their future
With such tender intent;
Headland eyes scanning horizon for sign
Of that long-awaited, approaching coastline.

My ancient orogeny was Hercynian:
A gently-dramatic, moving magma of feelings
Molten from man-mantle to core,
Which set solid our state
For all human history,
All geological time:
Her life metamorphosed
Beautifully, inextricably, into mine.

But the erosive agents of teenage time and tide
Wore down and weathered our ground
And an unintentional, unforeseen Atlantic
Seeped, then suddenly surged,
To form a formidable blue barrier between us:
A featureless,
Future-less
'Gulf-of-less'.

Yet, at the continental end of our syncline
Your bedrock remained the same as mine:
Joined below the surface of life and living,
Deeper than the depths of all other loving.

Tony Jolley

Still There

She's still there, thirty years on,
Smiling and glinting from the mother o' pearl fretboard inlays
Of my 21st birthday Ibanez Vintage acoustic guitar:
Though gone twenty-five summer seasons now - my mum.

Auntie Alwyn's contagious, heart-as-big-as-a-cabbage eccentricity
Running deep in our refectory table grain
And in the comfortable, convivial creak of chairs
Drawn up daily by family and friends
To eat the meat and chew the fat.

Nell's open-featured, rosy round face,
Stroke-riven arm crooked rigid to her chest,
Her voice's criminally constricted, yet infinitely expressive vocabulary
Of: "Aye me" and "Tanley"
Echoing warm and tender down a lifetime of lost years
As I stroke the name she wrote (when she could still write)
In the flyleaf of her copy of Emerson's Essays
That now occupies pride of place on my bedside shelf.

Liz's grit, guts and dogged, ever-so-slightly cantankerous determination
Ringing in the memory of every turn and twist
That Tuscan country roads could offer
And in the impossible range of tones of green
In landscapes that have to be tasted
As much as seen to be believed
And sparkling in the wedding ring of white diamond fire
Reflected and refracted like rainbows in my Ellen's eyes.

Granddads' World War 1 chocolate boxes
[their contents long gone but for the faintest whiff of Woodbine],
Their brass bumped and bruised
From almost a hundred years of battle
In the trenches and in the hands of kids and grandkids,
Now resplendent records and reminders of the valour
And cussed sense of survival
Which came home against the odds
And cast the family tree forward to you and me.

The half-hunter and chain
Ever setting off all the airport metal-detectors
Giving you the opportunity of showing and sharing the pleasure
Of feeling the Waltham weigh its solid-silver, Empire quality in your palm
Gently ticking your father's time from past into present.

They're there.
All there.
Still there.

One day, when I've long gone over 'there'...
I wonder if I'll be found by those still here.

Tony Jolley

Stuck for Words

Not very impressive is it, for a poet:
"Stuck for words",
Yet I am;
How could I be otherwise
On a day I've longed for half my life
And feared I might never see the other?

I'm soon to walk with you, arm in arm,
And friends and family in tow,
Across the way to the Mairie and our marriage.
I'm shaking my head now and pinching myself
That it can all be so true and truly beautiful:
That you love me and choose me as I do you.

My Slice of the Divine,
A greater grace than even heaven can afford,
You seem to be to me in every shared moment
Between waking and sleeping and sleeping and waking.
You're the same Girl in the Guernsey from all those years ago,
The same lovely lass still sitting watching the sunset on Evening Hill,
The same seductress with the merest hint of a glint of a glance in my direction,
Yet you are so very much the more a 'grown into you' you now:
The woman who marries life and experience like no other can or ever could,
As mother, friend, partner, teacher and lover
And makes of it a simple, everyday wonder of wonders.

You're not aware of any of this are you? ...
You can't be, I think, for then perhaps you would not be who you are.

Ours is to be, My Love;
So come be just and only ever you:
Come live out endlessly the love in your heart with me
As will I fearlessly with you,
And let our one being always lead our doing
For therein lies the sheer joy of the 'we' within our 'wedding'.

Tony Jolley

Supple Spines

Twilight gave you to me,
Framed your delicate forms and features
In a way the summer sun could only hope,
In her wildest of dreams, to do.

Gentle curves,
Supple spines:
Altogether Grace-ful,
Hannah-ful lines.

At once:
Two girls-a-twirling,
Leaning into their spinning
And unashamedly courting the centrifugal force.

Then again:
Two elegant Edwardian ladies,
Best bonnets borne and all dressed up for dancing.
Yet the occasion got the better
[Perhaps even the best] of them
As they threw back their heads,
Reeled, rolled and raised the rafters
With their infectious laughter.

Today Twilight painted pictures
In shades of silhouette,
Talking tenderly to Tony
Of his lasses and losses.

Sometimes she's silent, Twilight,
But not tonight.

Tony Jolley

Tail-end Charlie

My mother had an older brother –
Name of Charles: 'Chuck'.
Think she must have adored him all the more
As her feckless father had upped-sticks
Before she'd even entered the world.
Not sure how much older than her he was,
A fair bit, I think,
But anyway it was more than enough
To have him 'called up' in the 'Last Lot'
When she was barely in her teens.
He became a well-named:
'Tail-end Charlie, from Lancs on Lancs'
Who, with the luck of the Irish (tho' he wasn't) ,
Managed to run the gauntlet of the ever-increasing
Regulation number of 'Tours'
'Til he was 'stood down':
The 'Old Man' still well shy of his mid-twenties,
Talisman to the Squadron:
A living, breathing proof
That survival in a battle of attrition,
Outnumbered by shrapnel shells and lead-spitting Messerschmitts
Was at least a statistical possibility –
Well at least you knew it had happened to somebody.

So the second-hand story goes,
Some wet-behind-the-ears 'Charlie'
Wanted to bunk-off base to propose to his sweetheart,
So he needed or pleaded a one-off swap
In which, somewhere over Essen, Düsseldorf, Hamburg or Dresden
Chuck's luck finally fled the fuselage at fifteen thousand feet
Leaving him to fend for himself
Against conflagration, airframe failure, panic and explosion.

His spirit never touched down,
His body never was found.

One Charlie got wed,
My only, never-met uncle, sadly, dead.

Tony Jolley

That Last Damn' Duck

Your voice wore a 'different dress' tonight,
One that didn't sound quite right –
A tender pale-tone shade of blue
That couldn't keep the tears from shining through.

Prosaics and pleasantries – a thin disguise
Insufficient to hide your water-welled eyes:
Eyes invisible on the end of a phone
Yet not to the one by whom you're known.

One who cannot bear the thought
Of not being where he knows he ought.

One whose spirit, tho' with two-left-feet,
Would dance the miles your toes to meet.

One who's simply marking time...
Until that last damn' duck's in line.

Tony Jolley

That's Life

Esther had a word for them in the 70s:

'Jobsworths'..

As in: "More than my job's worth.": -

Petty-minded, embittered 'desk-jockeys'

Poorly positioned, overpromoted and empowered

Way beyond their deserving or discerning,

Determined only to wreak as much gratuitous pain and grief

Upon others as is possible;

All in aid of washing water under the keels

Of their own unsinkable, Titanic egos.

Bears of very little brain

And even less inclination to use it

For anything remotely helpful, positive and sensible,

They brag and bluster up their own fundamental orifices,

Trumpeting the discordant brass of their own self-importance

Like some 'C-List' sometime starlet

Lately to be seen hawking her tawdry wares at the darker end of Downtown,

Or one of Wharhol's deluded, 'fifteen-minuters'

Whom Fame conspicuously eluded.

One such picked on our lad today,

Sought to put him down and lay him out

By inventing spurious rules and specious regulations on the spot

To deny him what is rightly his and honestly earned.

This Jobsworth crowed his supposed victory from the rooftops,

Preened his feathers and clucked like a barnyard Turkey

Who doesn't know it's Christmas Eve;

But he couldn't look us in the eye today:

He knows we know he knows he can't win,

Yet still the Jobsworth won't give in:

More fool him.

In the 1970s the BBC had a programme called 'That's Life' fronted by Esther Rantzen that had a long-running slot on 'Jobsworths' and gave a 'Jobsworth Award' every week for the most stunningly ridiculous piece of unjustifiable action by officials from parking wardens to bank managers. They ought to introduce it here in France....

Tony Jolley

The Alchemist's Feet

Invisible to the mortal eye, but not to the spirit's sight
When you move – it moves, goes everywhere with you
Softly, unobtrusively, but surely;
Neither leading nor following: accompanying.

Your touch is its living origin,
Whence, at a radius of less than an arm's length,
Extends its creative, protective compass.
Attached, seamless as a shadow, to your feet,
It lives and breathes:
Your sweet and constant companion.

For this circle is to me a special place: the special place,
The Point of Presence where the world meets 'My World'.

Boundless within this small border
Lies a realm of pure and gentle alchemy
Wherein you engage with all the elements in the Periodic Table of Life
And where, with such simple apparatus:
A clear eye; a listening ear; a quick mind and an open heart,
You reduce and refine, catalyse and create
Upon a workbench forged of love and experience
With two wise and willing hands for tools.

This is a blessed marriage of the magical and the miraculous,
Where the 'simple' is queen and the 'ordinary' king
Whose children are known as Beauty and Honour.

No traveller in time or territory leaves this land as he came: unchanged;
For the treasurehouse is full, free and open
To all who would invest themselves in life and love;
Whereas, woe betide those poor fools in search of easy-pickings:
They will find themselves caught between tigress and cub:
Beyond the help of hope and prayer.

I have been searching all my days
For the place where life and love meet,
And finally now I've found my home
Beside the Alchemist's feet.

Tony Jolley

The Answer's 'No'.

No where you are not there
No moment you are not present
No time you are not mine
No thought where you're not sought
No step ever taken where you are forsaken
No single sensation:
No tears, no elation
No sleeping, no waking
No giving, no taking
No reading, no writing
No losing, no finding.....
No thing;
Nothing I am or ever shall be.....
.....has not its root and branch in we.

Tony Jolley

The Armchair of Inevitability

Sometimes it used to get me like that:
Hung me up,
Wrung me out,
Seemed to stop me doing what I knew I should
For some reasonably unconscionable reason
With just about enough momentary validity
To be sufficiently attractive to me,
And send me sheering off tangentially
In search of that which shouldn't be.
Then I'd sink (not entirely unwillingly)
Into an armchair of inevitability
Clawing at me,
Clutching at me,
Sucking me slowly and steadily
Toward a comfortable, mild insanity
In which I'd be short of salvation by phone or pen,
But no longer caring much, by then.

Tony Jolley

The Belltower Ghosts

Bruebach's early medieval church belfry doesn't have bats,
I'm willing to bet,
But this year it does have as pretty contradictory a bunch of bedfellows
As one might imagine:

Kestrels with an early-bird baby taking to its first flight
A full month or more early, perhaps thanks to global warming,
About as warily as Wilbur and Orville Wright –
Stayed airborne only about the same time too
Before a not-too-controlled a crash landing
On the church's steep tiled roof
Then slipping and sliding down and off it
Like some virgin ski-jumper
Just making it to the top of our tree
To the loud rebukes of its mother wheeling above
Admonishing this poor performer
With the Kestrel equivalent of a frown and a sternly wagging finger
Whilst the pigeons crowed their derisions from a safe distance
Fatally forgetting that once he wins his wings there'll be no such place.
Still somewhat ungainly, he barely made it back to the belfry.

At their customary eleven-thirty
The unseemly wails of a pair of Screech Owls
Heralded the arrival of these graceful ghosts,
Reverse silhouetted, their long wings
Scoring stark, white arcs against a squid-ink sky.
I wondered why God had given one of his more beautiful creations
One of his all-time worst voices: a real discordant, ear-rattling rasp:
A bit like having Claudia Schiffer
Speak like a Scouser
And swear like a trooper –
Perhaps he'd knocked off early from saint school
And left the job of finishing off
To some trainee angel suffering from
A long, Good Friday liquid-lunch date
With a bunch of cute seraphim.
Also, why handicap a night-hunter
With those great white wings:
A dead give-away to intended prey?
Maybe he was evening up the odds
Or embodying his legendary sense of fair-play.

They circled the tower together the once,
Then one peeled-off this close-formation flying display
Like some Spitfire closing in for the kill,
And shot straight into the belfry,
Via an aperture that seemed all too small
While its wingman mate did another tour of the tower
Before streaking on in.

Three Kestrels and two Screech Owls
Using the same entry and exit

To a space barely six metres square
Seems uncomfortable, even improbable
(Or in this case improba-bell, if you'll forgive the pun) ,
Yet they appear to have come to
Some kind of an accommodation with each other
And with loud, peeling bells on the hour, half and quarter.
But if push comes to shove as it just well might,
My money's on the belltower ghosts in white.

Tony Jolley

the Day that Never was

Day off.
Hot.
Too hot.
Swim.
Salad from garden.
Wine.
Itchy eyes.
Streaming nose.
Hay-fever.
Tablet.
Double dose.
Weary.
Woozy.
Siesta.
Bed.

Later.
Storm.
Lightning.
Bolt upright.
8.10 panic:
Got get Nathalie.
Friday morning.
Is...is it?
Isn't it?
Calculates.
Yesterday kids off -
Ascension Day.
Thursday.
Holiday.
Morning.
Friday today.
Got to be.
20.10 Teutonic, synchro-clock.
Never wrong.
Storm stopped it.
Short circuit.
Must be.
Dresses.
Shorts.
First foot.
Second catches crutch.
Falls.
Bed-post.
Thigh.
Pain.
Curses.
[Softly]
She asleep.
Stirring.
Confirmation:
'Friday...? '

'Thursday'.

Thinks:
Yesterday Thursday -
Today Friday.
Checks.
Double-checks:
Had kids yesterday.
Thursday.
Slept.
Woke up.
Friday.
Must be.
Friday.
Not Thursday.

'Thursday.
Still Thursday.
Evening.'

Evening?
Just up!
Evening! ?
Don't see it.
Can't be.

'20.10
Siesta.
Evening.
Thursday.'

Evidence.
Fact.
Disoriented.
Thursday...
Thursday again?
Thursday still?
Hard take in.
Need lie down.
Sleeps.
Wakes.
Tentative:
Friday.
Friday?

'Friday! '

Go get Nathalie.

Tony Jolley

The Day There Was No Tomorrow

The day there was no tomorrow
No-one stopped to care;
No-one paused to ponder
That it might no more be there.

The day there was no tomorrow
Was a day like every other,
Was the day that life neglected
The wisdom of its mother.

Tony Jolley

The Edge of Thirteen

Silence is loudest
On the end of a phone,
When the one you want answers
But there's no-one home.

You can hear the sound of thirteen
Around her,
You can just 'see' to the edge;
But beyond,
The view is obscured to you
By a bitter Ex's hedge.

No Christmas window,
No Birthday gate:
An exclusion zone
Policed by hate.
A moat as wide as former friends
Too blind to see
They're pawns to such ends.

An open line:
Eleven minutes unspoken.
A loving Dad
Even less than 'token'.

Tony Jolley

The Edgington Boys [Two Sides]

I knew them.
Knew them as well as one can know two names engraved,
Side by side in granite, lead inlaid:
Henry and William Alfred, a brace of Edgington boys
Born and bred in Mickleham,
A mere speck on a map so much shorter than its name,
More hamlet than parish or village;
To this day still a little lost in a rare, rural timelessness
That seems to have hung on here against all the odds.
Whilst others capitulated to life in a faster lane
Mickleham has resisted and remained all but the same.

The 'Great War for Civilisation',
Stole a baker's dozen from Mickleham,
Their names solemnly recorded on the front of the memorial:
'To the glory of God and of the Fallen'.

Less than twenty-five years later
That 'War to end all Wars' would prove a horrible misnomer:
A localised precursor to a more murderous successor
And a second side of sad, lead-inlaid letters.

The warning is there if we've eyes that would see:
That leaves two other sides still ready and free....

Tony Jolley

The Flesh of Heaven

The Vosges are blue:
A function of moisture in the air and refracted sunlight.

Not yesterday evening they weren't.
Oh no.

Yesterday evening above Cernay they were all moody, black and magnificent,
Stark-silhouetted against a raging, blood-orange sky:
A ridge-mouth full of bare, jagged teeth
Tearing a bite out of the flesh of heaven.

Tony Jolley

The Glass God

There's this old guy, you see,
And he's sitting in his back garden with his back against the wall.

He's basking between radiated and reflected heat:
A late septuagenarian lizard lounging
In a warm September siesta sandwich,
Dozing his dotage, glass in hand,
And wondering whether his life will cast a shadow
On next year's summer walls.

Head bowed,
His body as rumped as his half-buttoned raglan,
He looks as if he looks at life still
From a 'glass half full' perspective.
Even if his glass is statistically far more than half empty,
He would admire the glass,
Remember when he held the rod,
Turned and spun it and its molten maw in the furnace
Feeling afresh the fire searing and scorching his fingers and forearms;
Then the magic,
Then the miracle,
Then the craft the Guild had guarded like a sacrament
As his breath gave birth to his imagination's Adams and Eves:
Gave them form,
Gave them purpose,
Gave them life,
And in return they had given him his living.

Even empty,
He would always have his children:
Even empty,
He would always have his glass.

Tony Jolley

'The Glorious Dead'

The cenotaph sighs
Under weight of the words:
A marble-white marker
Bridging two worlds.

To the Living, still searching
For meaning in mourning,
It's the solace and strength
To survive through 'til morning.
Finding glory in death
Not some future foregone
But a timeless, selfless triumph
Over power of gun.

But for the Lost it was nothing but slaughter:
Meat and blood upon the block,
Murdered to Hell or to Heaven
With the rest of that pitiful flock.

The cenotaph cries,
Tries to make itself transparent
So the Living will learn from the Lost, at last,
The lesson all too apparent,

That our glory lies only in life as it's lived -
Never in death and the dying.

The cenotaph knows the truth:
Its very own legend is lying.

..... 'The Glorious Dead' is the most prominent phrase emblazoned upon the London Cenotaph.....

Tony Jolley

The Gossamer Ghosts of May

I was on a 'bit of a roll' really:
The day, thus far anyway, had not lounged as some somnolent Lion,
So much as chased the day's prey like a hungry Cheetah
Out on the endless plains of Higher Education.

Tutorials – showdowns for angry young 'Rhinos':
Lazy 'Johnny-Come-Latelys' – all bulk and no brain.

Seminars – exam revision for mercurial Meercats,
Suddenly transmogrified into question-spotting sentries and sentinels
Scanning the far horizon for the merest hint of a hint.

Email Inbox – herds of digitally-enhanced Wildebeeste
Driven by some primal urge
To hurl themselves headlong and senseless against the other side of my screen.

To this point I was still in control – still 'on that roll':
Nothing on the plains to phase me
Yet for all my native training and vision
Unaware I was being softly stalked,
Tenderly traced and tracked.

A shrill cry from the office undergrowth nearby –
My hand shot out without look or thought
To fasten my fingers around
The slender, yet surprisingly cool, neck of my quarry
To lift the creature, suddenly shocked into silence, aloft,
Its open jaw pressed firmly to the side of my face.

"Good afternoon...Tony Jolley..."

The call of the wild duly answered with the traditional ritual,
I waited.
Waited; coiled yet confident.
Still in control.
Still 'on that roll'.

I knew.
I knew before I knew who,
That this was an encounter of an altogether different dimension,
For the answering silence was too loud...too long;
Effectively giving away your position
Whilst yet concealing your identity: your mission.

"Hello, Tony.... It's Debbie."

The tall, sun-scorched savannah grasses
Waved, unhelpfully, across my memory's line of sight:
A veil too light, too intangible to lift,
Gossamer ghosts, morning mist.

'You could hide an entire pride in there –
At three or four Debbies a year for fifteen years –
A pride of fifty....'
...Then- it hit me:
Not a Debbie:
The Debbie.
My Debbie.
And not fifteen years: twenty.

My coil relaxed, unwound, serpent-like, of its own volition
Its widening orbits releasing captive muscles of ancient aspiration
From their life-sentence incarceration
To flex free and move and breathe
And dare to dream and hope again.

I saw this slow-motion unravelling,
Watched it, as if a spectator, from the bleachers in the Stadium of Me,
It was so slow as to be almost imperceptible
To all but the naked heart of the most ardent of supporters.
The process began after realisation -
Was finished before any conversation:
Less than a second on the telephone line
Relativity at work wound back to our time.

Small 'how are you' conventions completed,
I could feel my spirit shouting; no, singing:
'She's here! – She's here! My Debbie's here! '
And wondering whether you might hear,
No.
Hoping you could.
Praying you would.
Thereafter I would know why the disciples were
Thought to be 'drunk' at Pentecost
For I had both Joni Mitchell's and Diana Krall's
'Case(s) of you' inside me:
Sweet white invasion -
Tender red intoxication.
[I Preferred Diana's wine – but that is for another time.]

I could recount the sad news imparted:
The friend we loved barely days departed.
I might equally mention milestones shared
And not forget those moments compared,
But that would be to miss what words could never say:
That our future had become one that day.

Receiver to rest, the sounds of the Savannah returned
But kept a respectful distance
As if they were aware the world had changed its tune.
The peace confirmed what Silence already knew

That Iowa was once Savannah too
That you love me and I love you,
That we would soon be one, not two.

Tony Jolley

The Healthcare Hydra

Full surgery – caseload queue surging out of the waiting room door
And curling down the corridor
Like some sick snake
Swallowing a cocktail of complaints
From Portnoy's to the all-too-common cold;
Bemoaning (albeit quietly) it's lot:
Patients waiting as patiently as impatience can permit
For prognosis or placebo –
Medicine or minor miracle.

Most seeming fit as fleas or fiddles
Yet harbouring some undiagnosed weakness or other
Within the bounds of their brick and mortared mortality,
Staring all blank and unfocused
At grey-wash walls and faint-faded woodcuts
As mute as the naked hat-stand
Wasting away in the corner like a leper reminder
That sometimes there is no cure.

Every now and then the doctor decapitated this unhealthy Hydra
But it merely grew another head just as sullen as the former.

Tony Jolley

The Indispensables

Some of them walk the world unrecognised,
Barely known beneath the skin,
Dwelling far beyond the ken of myopic minds
And the pernicious prejudices
Of those disabled by dogma
And blinded by bigotry
(Yet suffering at their hands all the same) .

Some of them don't know how not to give:
Are attuned to the beats of others' hearts
And share their burdens
With never a thought of thanks.

Such are the world's 'Indispensables':
More often than not taken for granted,
Far too often forgotten
When life's 'laurels' are lavished upon the 'deserving'.
They are the unassuming, gentle giants
Upon whose broad shoulders we stand
To scale the walls of our worries
And see beyond the bleakness of our most difficult of days.

May they be blessed above all measure and means.

For Nassim.... April 06

Tony Jolley

The Isle of We

Sometimes,
Sprawled in bed,
When we've tumbled
Into a tired tangle of arms and legs,
We stumble
Upon an entwining par excellence
Devoid of the usual numbed nerves,
Cramped calves
And pins and needles,
In which neither dare move a muscle
For fear of perfection interruption,
But instead send out stealth signals
Up and down the highways and byways
Of our bodies:
Reconnaissance missions
To reconnoitre and report,
To seek and enjoy
The feeling of not being able to feel
Our respective frontiers:
No Checkpoint Charlies;
No 'Nothing to Declares';
No lines;
No signs
To demarcate,
To separate;
No border,
No boundary –
Not even a nomansland
Between you and me.

Sometiimes,
For whole minutes at Eternity's End
We lie like this:
I'm you
And you're me
Or there's no you and me at all:
Just we.

Then, inevitably,
Involuntarily,
There comes a twitch or stretch
To cut me off and cast me loose again
Upon a singular sea of me,
And I find myself Odysseus,
Seeking landfall on the Isle of We.

Tony Jolley

The Kindnesses of Other Worlds

I stared into his eyes:
Big eyes,
Old eyes
Eyes that had seen life
And seen Life turn its back on him.

Nothing left to him now
With which to draw a veil over the soul
And shield the self from prying eyes.

I saw him.
Thought I knew him
For the splittest of split seconds.
Neither energy nor inclination
For anger or recrimination
Resided anywhere in him.
He was past hope,
Past the point of disappointment,
Beyond desperation,
Beyond self-pity -
Though I doubt he ever wondered: "Why me? ".

He was acceptance in illustration:
The perfect incarnation
Of the purest resignation.

I don't think he really registered me -
Why should he?
How could he?
For I belonged to another world,
A greater world,
A world of being and having
A world denied him:
The world of the Living.

He blinked painfully slowly
And turned his pathetically heavy infant head
Away from me -
It was a kindness he showed me,
The kindest thing he could do for me,
For one not born into his world
One not meant to see.

Maybe he saw me as a ghost,
An angel,
An avatar,
An after-living-death form of life,
Citizen of some unimaginable heaven
With no reference point inside his solid shell of hell.

He gave me all he had to give
Without a single thought,

But will I learn and heed the lesson
The eyes of this dying child taught.

Written immediately upon seeing on the lunchtime news, for little more than a few seconds, an African child, woefully malnourished and hope-less, barely able to support the weight of his own head on his neck. He looked once directly into the camera lens then turned away as if he could hear the beats of hearts on the other side of the lens and knew the sound was one predominantly of a static and moribund pity rather than an active and breathing compassion. Even compassion, he seemed to know, would be too late, but he seemed also to thank those anyway who would do even if he must yet die.

Tony Jolley

The Last Next Time

As I write,
This 'Last Time'
Is still a 'Next Time':
A time yet to come.
Still on the calendar.
Still on the agenda.
But come it will
In its own good time:
Will be;
Will go;
Will have been;
Will be history.

These recent last times
Have been tough times:
Nooses around neck
Anchors to ankles;
Pains to the present.

Now, at least,
It's the last of the past
And I can finally fix both my feet
Firm upon the foundation of our future.

Tony Jolley

The Latest Acquisition in the Library of What Might Have Been

The puppy-cut had me fooled for a moment:
A blur of overly-lanky limbs
Rather than the usual shaggy Beardie-coat
To disguise the four pounding paws –
But there was no mistaking the lass on the end of the lead
Hurtling headlong toward her next 'target':
- The red car in 20 paces
- 'Beat the Bus' to the next stop
- Three lamp-posts in under 30 seconds:
Hannah.
My Hannah.

It all passed me by so quickly,
Seeming in slow-motion.
Do we really see it like that? ...
Or are such impressions
The singular province of those of a 'certain age'
For whom The Six Million Dollar Man
Resonates with an embarrassed (yet unadmitted) recognition?

Couldn't say for sure why I didn't shout:
- Worried 'Hurricane Jenny' would veer to my voice
And trail Hannah, helpless in her wake, into rush-hour harm's way.
- Wondering what in the world to say after: "Hey! Titchey! !"
- Hoping against hope she wouldn't just hear and hasten on home.
Don't think my thoughts really ran that far
Before all the potential present in the moment passed its peak
To languish for evermore in the Library of What Might Have Been.

I didn't see her face,
But she's running faster these days.

Tony Jolley

The Maker, The Made and The Maid

It doesn't matter who plucked it, who picked it:
The damage was already done.
It doesn't matter whether literal or allegorical:
Autumn had already come.
And as Adam and Eve's eyes were opened
To a knowledge they instantly regretted,
The Garden gate closed fast behind them
And to time were both now indebted.

But in that time before Time, before talking needed tenses,
God fashioned Man from the dust of the Earth,
Formed him body and soul, two-thirds of one whole,
Breathed His spirit and gave Man his birth.

Though in Eden they walked, the Maker and the Made:
The Lord and the lord of His creation,
God saw Man, like He, would crave company
And determined to make him a nation.

He could have called us into being, made us from a mould,
But He had known the joy of making life,
So he passed to Man this power in a single sleeping hour
And Adam woke to Woman: to wife.

Tony Jolley

The Man from Martinique

They say of John Wayne that he 'walked with a drawl',
But 'though he always seemed somewhat slow
And to be veering [even steering] more than slightly to one side
[Picture any picture you ever saw him in
And find yourself smiling in recognition],
You could never accuse him of being overly leisurely –
[He'd have shot you, had you!]
For he exuded a tightly drawn, kinetic intent
Which filled every frame
And carried him far faster than could his feet.

Well, the Man from Martinique
Walks a little like, yet still a little unlike, him.

Wayne shot from the hip
Whereas Mr Martinique walks from it
With all the unhurried grace
And languid, lilted pace
Of a man who measures his days
In value, and not what it pays.

What strikes one above all is the ease
Of movement from neck down to knees
Devoid of ungainly, angular motion
Or of anything at all to gainsay the notion
That here is a man completely at home
Whatever the road he chooses to roam.

Tony Jolley

The Mouth of Babes....

'I Will Survive...'

She sang,
With all the garnered gravitas
Of the fifteen carefree years behind her,
Emerging from the bathroom
Robed and wrapped in chenille
Topped off by a nonchalant towel-turban
Of the type every lass can throw on in a trice
And lads would have to plan and plot for ages
With set-square, protractor and calculator
Before even daring to drape.

'I Will Survive...'

'Survive what? ', I thought,
Laughing inwardly at an innocence and insouciance
That can sing words with audacity and sincerity
Devoid of the vaguest idea of their veracity.
Putting my pyjama seat to the freshly-laundered bed sheet,
It occurred to me,
Not for the first time,
That she might have been right...

Unemployment up 11% just in the slide into recession –
And god-knows what that'll turn into
If it becomes a full-blown depression.
How can we expect her to get interested in employment choice
When some careers may not even be here
By the time she arrives
At the end of the educational production line?
Production lines? -
They're already on half-time
At Peugeot and Renault,
And to save their automotive bacon
Amidst the current crisis
And its dramatically falling prices
Citroen announces a new luxury model:
Exactly what planet are they on?

Forgetting the Economy
For a moment,
[... If only ...],
There's the Environment:
Mother Nature;
Well, what's left of her
After we've plundered and squandered
So much of her riches.
Now she seems to be settling in
For a long siege around our beleaguered cities:
A siege she must win.
She has to protect herself
To protect us from ourselves

Or we will be the ultimate losers.
No snowcaps for Kilimanjaro or FujiYama.
Basic crops set to yield less
In the prairies of the Steppes and the US Midwest,
Prices soaring and a real breadline appearing
On tomorrow's downtown horizon
For those formerly economically well above it.
Water down the Yangtze and Hwang Ho
Reduced to a trickle, no longer a flow,
Whilst the Chinese millions continue to grow.
The same scenario being played out
From Pole to blue-water Pole.

'I will survive...'

She's got more than a point
Whether she yet knows or no.

Tony Jolley

The Naked Estate

You are all the ages you've ever been: all of them,
Right now as you lie beside me sleeping just a little restlessly.

Age has had a hell of a bad press - is massively misrepresented:
It's merely a matter of measurement:
Measuring how far you've come...
But it says
Sweet FA
About what you carry with you,
What you may (or may not) have done -
Even less about who you are.

To me, today, you see, it seems
You never were that girl of seventeen -
['were' like a Tantalus-Odysseus
Fated nevermore to find Time's landfall,
Lost to yourself, the world, to me and fading memory] -
Rather you are and will ever be forever she:
That beautifully unsure, unknowing beauty
Upon my teenage beach,
Yet at the selfsame time
Mother, lover,
Orchestrator, maestra
And hub of a home
Warmer with all its windows open to the wide world
Than a mansion with its hollow heart hidden
Behind layers of triple-glazed privacy.

You turn toward me as you sleep,
You and all your years in concert,
And we're singing harmonies to Ronstadt records
In my front room:
'Prisoner in Disguise'
[and wasn't John David Souther's pirouetting around
Linda's voice in the last verse and chorus just spell-binding?
...And why could I never quite pitch it right?].

Your outstretched leg grazes mine
And you're my co-conspirator
In the fine art of 'Community Cooking' -
[Don't ask: it's complicated recipe:
Ingredients: cooking, singing, dancing -
Garnished with lots of gratuitous kissing activity!]

Your arm wraps over my hip,
You snuggle into me, and suddenly
You're the shattered one some Sunday mornings
That my 'Coffee Fairy'
Loves to let lie and let caffeine
Slowly, intravenously.

A hand upon mine

And we're walking the dog down to Flaxlanden in 10 degrees of frost,
And it's Sandbanks, Kew Gardens
And fingers entwined
In every road crossing we've ever made together.

Let's say it plain:
There's no such thing as time –
There's just today
And every today you're you
And every today I'm me
And we're all we've ever been.

The more todays,
The more I believe we free ourselves
To become who we really are at the core
And the less we can countenance
Anything getting in the way of being me,
Being you
Being we.

The way I see it, we enter the world naked,
Spend the early part of our lives unaware
Letting the world weave its will around us
And the rest of our days working our way
Back to our natural, naked estate,
To live, 'til we leave, as we are.

We've always been naked to one another,
My Love;
Now we share a beautifully singular nakedness
Knowing no shame, no time, no fear, no death:
Knowing only Eden, only Love, only we and this breath.

Tony Jolley

The Naked I

What can you spy with your naked I?

My life's landscape: its topography? its geology?
The obvious landmarks and the hidden histories of my archaeology?

My spirits ache: the constant craving to be free to be me?
To find and to love that one who needs me just to be?
My need to give: to give beyond giving's measure, without caring to calculate the cost?
To share: naught held back with no shred of fear of loss?

My love: tell me you see my nakedness...
Tell me
Tell me.
Tell me you see and know my spirit and that it holds no fear for you
Tell me you feel free to walk in me
Tell me you know I am forever yours
Tell me I am lost, lost in you, welded, wedded tenderly to you.

Tell me there will be a time. Our time.
Tell me we write our future...that we see its history.

Tell me soft that you are mine.
For,
As God, Nature, Love and Beauty are my eternal witnesses: know,
Know
That I am thine.

Tony Jolley

The Old One

The Old One stood,
Stock still and staring,
Somewhere between
In-depth contemplation
Of life's deeper mysteries and meanings,
And intense concentration
Upon some feature or creature
Just a few metres or so from his feet.

His robes were as weather-worn,
Grey, faded and blanched
As the years that furrowed his brow
And had bent his upper back
Into a pronounced, round-shouldered stoop.

He was still there, hours later,
Having moved not a muscle
As if in training for eternity:
A shade only slightly more sombre
Than the shadows of evening,
Falling, more curtain than veil,
Upon the bleak winter landscape
And upon the gnarled, lopped tree
I later found my Old One to be.

Tony Jolley

The Old One Trilogy

Old One (01.07 Bruebach)

The Old One stood, stock still and staring,
Somewhere between
In-depth contemplation
Of life's deeper mysteries and meanings,
And intense concentration
Upon some feature or creature
Just a few metres or so from his feet.

His robes were as weather-worn,
Faded and blanched
As the years that furrowed his brow
And had bent his upper back
Into a pronounced, round-shouldered stoop.

He was still there, hours later,
Having moved not a muscle
As if in training for eternity:
A shade only slightly more sombre
Than the shadows of evening
Falling, more curtain than veil,
Upon the bleak winter landscape
And upon the gnarled, lopped tree
I later found my Old One to be.

-

The Old One Two. (13.09.07 Bruebach)

Haven't seen hide nor hair of his familiar stoop
For a good while.

Miss him.

Miss his comforting solidity,
The slant of his shoulders -
Even his cardinal's hat:
Its corners so riveted to his cranium
They had squared off his head
And become as much a part of him
As the gnarled hands permanently jammed inside his bark-jacket pockets.
There had been a time
I could catch an occasional glimpse of him from afar,
Ministering stillness and silence to the swaying flock thronging at his feet
Like a rock, so rooted with passion for its place in the world, it would never roll.
But that was well before he had become obscured
By tall walls of green youth
Reaching for the ripe skies of adulthood.

He'll be back though – he always is:
For his season's disciples will bow before the blade,

Or fade before the Fall: -
It's the way of it.

I'll be waiting.

Then will he preach to a broader church
Drawn from the soils beneath his soles
And souls on the road to wherever they are bound,
Who, like me,
May well wonder,
Might just see
The strange yet welcome spirit
That is he.

-

The Rags of the Raptured (a.k.a: The Old One Three) 16.10.07

He came back last week.
Seemed as if he'd changed his coat and his tune,
Having worn terribly,
And faded four or more shades the deeper
In tone and demeanour.

His silence had put on a few pounds
Since his acolyte audience
Had been raptured without him:
Translated at the metal angel's last trump
From brown, down-at-heel, stick-in-the-mud
To gleaming, yellow-golden glory
And housed in one of the many mansions,
Prepared as promised,
Where the weather of the world
Would wear and weigh no more.

He alone was left in the landscape.
A Jean Baptiste, confused and crying voiceless in his wilderness;
Wordless against the wind
Now sweeping away the rags of the raptured
To rob him of even the faintest echo of his faithful service,
Helpless against a Nature who would no more nurture him.
He was become the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
After the apple had been plucked:
A blameless metaphor for something once pure,
Now unimaginably wronged as much by Creator as created.
Condemned..... yes,
Yet never without consequence
In this world....
And maybe even the next.

[The Old One, is in fact a gnarled old tree-stump the size and (most disconcertingly) the very shape of a man, dressed in well-worn, priestly garb, standing in a field peering intently at something. He is a bit like a familiar 'friend', but he 'disappears' during the summer as he is surrounded by tall maize. This last week the maize was harvested and the Old One made a comeback to the left of the road between Bruebach and Zimmersheim, Alsace, France. He looked very much the worse for his summer 'wear' this time....]

Tony Jolley

The Old One Two

[Reader: you may find it helpful to read 'The Old One' first!]

Haven't seen hide nor hair of his familiar stoop
For a good while.

Miss him.

Miss his comforting solidity,
The slant of his shoulders -
Even his cardinal's hat:
Its corners so riveted to his cranium
They had squared off his head
And become as much a part of him
As the gnarled hands permanently jammed inside his bark-jacket pockets.
There had been a time
I could catch an occasional glimpse of him from afar,
Ministering stillness and silence to the swaying flock thronging at his feet
Like a rock, so rooted with passion for its place in the world, it would never roll.
But that was well before he had become obscured
By tall walls of green youth
Reaching for the ripe skies of adulthood.

He'll be back though - he always is:
For his season's disciples will bow before the blade,
Or fade before the Fall: -
It's the way of it.

I'll be waiting.

Then will he preach to a broader church
Drawn from the soils beneath his soles
And souls on the road to wherever they are bound,
Who, like me,
May well wonder,
Might just see
The strange yet welcome spirit
That is he.

[No, this isn't some relationship with a defrocked priest! Actually, if you read 'Old One', as suggested, before 'Old One Two', you will realise that 'he' is in fact a strange tree stump the size and shape (to me at least) of a man standing in a field, with body language that suggests intense concentration upon something close by. In spring, fast growing fodder Maize was sown around him and by June he had disappeared from view altogether, but the harvest is not far off and I await his reappearance like an old friend in the landscape to the left of a country road between Bruebach and Zimmersheim in Alsace, France.]

Tony Jolley

The Oracle of Delphi

Then,
They came in selflessness:
Sacrificing;
Sanctifying.

Now,
They come in coaches:
Crowding;
Consuming.

All in all, it's got me wondering
Whether The Oracle saw it coming;
And if she did, well, where she went,
And if she didn't, why she was bent.

Tony Jolley

The Picardy Poems

.....for the few soldier survivors from WW1.....

Not Silent but Screaming. (02.04.07 - Island View & Bruebach)

"The War to end all Wars"....

"Dulce et decorum est" ...

Stirring sentiments and epitaphs all:

Familiar footprints

In blood-black sands

Upon body-strewn beaches

Stretching the endless coastline

Of all human history

Half a heartbeat,

Barely a breath,

From bare bones

To bullets and bombs:

Here, all the way to the Hereafter.

The fear-stained fire-step:

One command to Nomansland

To do or die, [more likely: do and die].

Sheep:

Dumb, yet not silent, before their shearers:

Screaming their last gasp of life

From lead-riddled lungs,

To their holy mothers on Earth

Or not-so-holy Father in Heaven

Who could let this happen:

Whoever would have them.

Whoever might save them....

...If only they had that long to frame the thought....

Easy for me to say:

I wasn't there [thanks be to them].

Haven't seen war.

Haven't felt fear leak hot down my leg.

Haven't heard a man plead to be put out of someone else's misery.

Haven't smelled the red-acrid stench of the charnel-house

And known it would never leave my nostrils.

Never had to clean a man's guts from my blade

After rattling it around his ribcage

To find and cut the last cord holding his body and soul together

Like some sort of sick midwife to the afterlife.

Never had to pray:

O God, please God, forgive me,

Though I know exactly what I do.

O God, Dear God, forgive me,

For those souls I've sent to you.

I've never had to live with death for the duration:
So what the hell do I know.....?

I know those who knew the fields of France
Are all but fallen now:
Are barely, but a handful;
Ten old men with tales to tell.

I know those who knew the fields of France
Are all but fallen now.....
But their lives are living legacies
That can keep us from that hell.

Off the Hook. (02.04.07 Island View & Bruebach)

In Picardy I saw the wraiths arise
From every hallowed foot of greenfield peace,
Unscrewing themselves slowly,
Solider by soldier,
Spirit by sprit,
From the coffins death never afforded them,
To spiral in their misty millions
Before the sun of my generation.

No ranks.
No dog-tags.
No uniforms.

No sides:
No 'Us';
No 'Them'.

Under the earth truth taught them
What they already knew full well
But were forced to deny for nations' pride:
That they were all the same:
The same under the uniform;
The same under the skin.

They're quietly impatient now:
Marking time at the end of their time;
Waiting for the last of their legion
To close the final few gaps in the ranks
Before marching towards what we owe them.

I wonder.....

When they're gone:

All gone;
When the last of the very last has left
And the direct line to the living
Finally rings off the hook forever,
I wonder.....

Will we really be any the wiser about war?

Tony Jolley

The Pink Black Golden

Got a Golden non-Retriever:
Goes and gets it
But can't be bothered to bring it back.

Noticed her nose turning pink from black,
Then that there seemed to be a series of stitch marks
Attaching it to her muzzle.

"Our dog's got a sewn-on nose! ", I said...
Then the realisation dawned:
The nose is fine
We've got a sewn-on dog!

Tony Jolley

The Promises of Small Gods and Great Men

The softness of the colours struck him
Barely a moment before the arrow.....

His last thoughts were not of home;
Not of glory,
Not of family,
Not of she:
She who had stitched leather,
Layer on layer,
In love,
In hope,
In hope against hope against harm
Across his breast and brow;
No, not even she;
But the colours,
The colours,
Colours living a double-pebble life:
Breathing – exhaling;
Darkening – lightening.
Colours wet:
Stark and striking,
Shifting with each gentle swish
Of the waves at the shore.
Colours dry:
Paling into pastel shades,
Settling still as the waters retreated
Before the feet of their landward foe.

Today men would meet on this margin,
Would mirror the war of these worlds,
Might against main:
Sea – land;
Zeus – Poseidon;
Death – life;
Persian – Athenian.

No god could claim complete victory
And vanquish one brother or another,
Could ever cut eternity's cord
And consign a sibling rival
To time, to history, to memory;
For they were, ARE, all
Forever shackled to a present tense
Whose chains not even the immortal may loose.

Gods who may never win
Must only ever lose,
And,
Bored to a death that won't take them,
Be condemned to play out
Their vacuous and thinly-veiled self-delusions
Of a glory that for them can never be,

Upon a mortal stage,
Whispering their whims,
Their puppeteer prompts and prophecies,
Into the vain ears of human hearts and dreams.

He had come,
Riding high on this hope
And a rising tide of Persian expectation
With security in his deities' invincibility.
Fair wind and weather had found and filled their sails,
Driven and drawn them inexorably
To their destiny,
Their destination:
Marathon.

There would lie victory:
Ripe fruit for the plucking;
There lay their glory:
Nothing more than easy picking.

He couldn't wait.
Wouldn't wait;
[For glory is seldom shared and diminished divided],
Set his foot, flexed to spring, to the prow
As it sank its snarl, keel-deep, into the flesh of Greece,
And sprang,
Unleashing all his coiled fear and fury like Fire
Into the third of the Four Elements.

Then, in that slowest of split seconds,
The colours cut through his war-hardened carapace
Like jewels,
Like the spoils
He would never now see
About her neck,
Adorn her breast,
As the arrowpoint
Stole his sight
And sliced him
Soul from spirit.

Riven of its kernel,
The husk of him sailed on
In the winnowing breeze of battle,
Then beached itself,
As heavy and empty as the hollow promises
Of small gods and great men.

And the colours turned and ran
Crimson,
[As would three thousand Persians]
Over what was once him.

On Marathon beach
My eye was taken too...

... For every other colour,
There are crimson pebbles: two.

Tony Jolley

The Rags of the Raptured (a.k.a: The Old One Three)

He came back last week.
Seemed as if he'd changed his coat and his tune,
Having worn terribly,
And faded four or more shades the deeper
In tone and demeanour.

His silence had put on a few pounds
Since his acolyte audience
Had been raptured without him:
Translated at the metal angel's last trump
From brown, down-at-heel, stick-in-the-mud
To gleaming, yellow-golden glory
And housed in one of the many mansions,
Prepared as promised,
Where the weather of the world
Would wear and weigh no more.

He alone was left in the landscape.
A Jean Baptiste, confused and crying voiceless in his wilderness;
Wordless against the wind
Now sweeping away the rags of the raptured
To rob him of even the faintest echo of his faithful service,
Helpless against a Nature who would no more nurture him.
He was become the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
After the apple had been plucked:
A blameless metaphor for something once pure,
Now unimaginably wronged as much by Creator as created.
Condemned..... yes,
Yet never without consequence
In this world...
And maybe even the next.

[The third in a series of 'Old One' poems. Prior reading of 'Old One' and 'Old One Two' may help with the bigger picture. The Old One, is in fact a gnarled old tree-stump the size and (most disconcertingly) the very shape of a man, dressed in well-worn, priestly garb, standing in a field peering intently at something. He is a bit like a constant 'friend', but he 'disappears' during the summer as he is surrounded by tall maize. This last week the maize was harvested and the Old One made a comeback to the left of the road between Bruebach and Zimmersheim, Alsace, France. He looked very much the worse for his summer 'wear' this time....]

Tony Jolley

The Sandalbinder

She took me entirely by surprise.

I was pretty much prepared for the great and the grand
But the remote possibility of such infinite delicacy
Amongst the rows and ranks of ancient statuary
Had, quite frankly, escaped me.
But there she was
In all her headless glory: the Nike,
Now pinned and pinioned:
A plaque upon a wall
Like a pin-stuck specimen in a butterfly collector's drawer:
All neatly categorised, catalogued and duly refined
To too precious few lines
Of meticulously incomprehensible Museums' Service script.

I stood,
As transfixed as the subject of my rapt attention –
Nothing short of spellbound.
Bound, not merely by her beauty,
But by the way her features were not directly presented,
But merely suggested;
Suggested by the fall and flow of her gossamer gown
As she gracefully inclined to bind
The straps of her sandal around calf and ankle.
With this shift she was goddess insouciant, incarnate;
Without it, her beauty was simply sublime:
An uncatchable, invisible summer zephyr.

Cold, angular, Athenian marble made the sheerest of silks
To caress and cling to her warm curves,
Revealing, rather than concealing, her nakedness,
Introducing the hint of a hope of wantonness.

Athena, owl-eyed as Homer had her,
Surely hated this Nike on sight.
She was, after all, every bit her antithesis,
Her very potential, eternal nemesis:
Athena: severe; statuesque; brutally untouchable;
Revered; feared; inaccessible; unlovable.
Nike: instantly knowable; eternally desirable;
To lust for; to live for; to hope for; to die for.

I fear Athena lost her head
So poor Nike had to lose hers.
Nevertheless, she's still head and shoulders
Ahead of Athena
In any red-blooded male's affections.

Tony Jolley

The Secret Lives of Shirts

Folded my shirt for the shelf, and wondered.....

In some machine-shop somewhere: India, Malaysia - probably China,
Some poor sod at the sharp end of the piece-work penny
Must have sewed & stitched and collared and cuffed her way
Towards a barely living wage;
And I wondered if she wondered where her output would wind up.

Further down the production line
She was pinned to card in a manner sadistically calculated
To frustrate and cut the fingers of the purchaser,
Cellophaned and slotted in beside 49 other daughters of the 'grand design'
Then subjected to the unspoken fear
Which is universally known in Shirt-Speak as:
The Despair of the Long Dark,
As the box leaves were closed, one by one,
Blotting out light by quarters in seconds
Until the hard day's even harder night
Had been sealed inside the box with them like a living nightmare.

Frightened and fork-lifted, stocked and stacked,
They were unceremoniously consigned and crated, labelled and loaded
Then containered and carted off on their long haul to wherever
Nested within a box of boxes like a sorry set of Russian Dolls.
Seven rolling roads and seas and a sharp slit later
Light razored its violence down on them
Making them wince involuntarily at the shock and screw up their button eyes
And before they knew it they were counted and bar-coded,
Priced and prepared for profit
Then displayed under spotlights and lurid 'come-on' promotions
To sell themselves to passers-by like pavement whores touting their wares;
Potential 'clients' picking them up, manhandling them,
Fondling them under their plastic 'skirts' to get a good feel of the goods on offer
And haggling over the price relative to the quality of the 'services' promised.

Decision made.
Deal struck.
I paid the price to your high street pimp,
Walked you to my car,
Settled you into the seat beside me
And drove you home.

Pleased with my purchase, yet wanting to reaffirm my decision,
I slipped you out of all your see-through outer layers,
Draped you over a chair-back, compliant and yielding,
Spread you out,
Made you ready for me;
Stripped you slowly,
Enjoying you the more the more naked you became,
Until the moment you were made for arrived
And I slid into you
Feeling you open to accommodate and shape yourself to me.

I watched us writhe together in the mirror:
Watched myself move inside you;
Watched you shift your position to give me greatest pleasure.
You followed my lead:
Never did I sense you were losing my rhythm
Or scratching or chafing as others often do:
Rather you wrapped your warm arms and legs around me,
Held me, caressed me and kissed me
Like the courtesan you were meant to be.

I loved you.

But beware,
I have a harem of former conquests here
Calling upon them as I wish to cater for my needs and desires
When the occasion arises.
You will have to live shoulder to shoulder with them
And learn not be too jealous when I choose one of them over you
To be my consort and companion.

This, will I promise:
That I will love you and keep you
And should I outgrow you,
I promise never to throw you,
But to find a new love for you.

Tony Jolley

The Silica and the Sand

From beyond the multi-cultural throng
Weaving and waddling its ponderous way past
Like some monstrous, badly-dressed, be-sunglassed millipede,
Its middle hunched and bunched up,
Marking time:
Vanguard stopped;
Rearguard clattering clumsily into the main body of the beast
Like a bunch of squaddies on Basic Training.
From the other side of this wobbling wall
Of congealed and compressed humanity,
Came the shrill shriek of shattering glass,
Closely followed by the ritual restaurant ribaldries:
"That's coming out of his pay! "
And "Butterfingers! ",
Accompanied, to be sure by the necks of countless kids
Craning to follow the fuss and find some distraction
From the inevitable, interminable wait for waiters
And their coke, chips and chocolate ice-cream.
All this in a torrent of tongues familiar and foreign.
Yet one singularly silent voice cut clear to my ear:
The last gasp of the departing spirit of glass
Making its death-bin confession
To one who might listen
Before heading to whatever kind of hell or heaven
Is reserved for him and his kin.

According to the ancient Lead Crystal Lore
Forged in The First Furnace
In The Time Before the Breaking,
Each must recount his last encounter
Over the Sacred Rim
Before taking his leave.

I am honoured to have been his chosen confessor
And to faithfully record hereunder
The last testament of his brittle glass life.

He'd been be-lipsticked,
Smears and smudged with a soft-sheen shade of 'Richer Rouge'.
She had lifted him gently,
Rolled his stem slowly between thumb and forefinger,
Bedding him down, feather-light, his rim to her lower lip,
Sinking him softly into her warm, wet colour contours,
Marking him,
Imprinting herself upon his soul's surface.
He felt himself raised and tenderly decanted,
Felt his white wine waters course and cascade
Over his ultimate extremity
And into her dark, oval lusciousness.

Emptied in waves faithfully obeying her desires,
She lowered him,

Seeking to prize him from her,
Her lip sticking ever-so-slightly to his sheen,
They parted in the languorous dance
Known only to lovers in the afterglow.

Perfect his foot, flush to the flat,
Yet the table seemed as solid as a sea swell
As she set him down,
The memory of her so vital
It refused point-blank to leave his present tense.

She toyed with him casually, absent-mindedly,
Running her fingertip around his rim,
Drawing from him a thrummed response
That no-one could hear below the dining din
And she alone could feel
In the slow and steady vibration
Against the most sensitive ridges and valleys
Of her fingerprints:
The sound of a glass heart breaking.

She poured herself another,
Taking care not to bring the bottle,
Glass to glass,
And shatter his spell...
[and for this he loved her all the more].
He felt himself stiffen at the swift temperature change,
The cold Muscat connecting with his innards
And settling, unsettlingly to await her pleasure.

Caught between the cool libation
And the heat of her lips
He never saw it coming;
Never knew what hit him.

Better that way.

He never knew what careless gesture
Caused his demise
And sent him shocked to slivers and shards
Into the after-existence.

Better that way.

No slow descent into the ignominy
Of scratches and scrapes,
Or the cancer of the abrasive, daily, dish-washer chemistry
In which crystal turns
Milky-white as a cataract eye.

His transparent heritage hung in the air
Like her perfumed fragrance: following everywhere.

It behoves me to leave you with his parting salutation: -
'To the Silica & the Sand and the Creator's Guiding Hand".

Tony Jolley

The Story of a Life Lost in the Telling

Reflection

It didn't look good, that barely recognisable reflection –
Didn't look at all like it should.
I could barely make me out –
Appeared foreign to myself:
A stranger to all I considered and hoped I might be, might become.

I had caught me like this before
Out of the corner of my eye when I wasn't looking
Yet always refused to pause
And enter into any painful dialogue with myself.
But not this time.
Not this time.
This time our eyes met: me and me.

The stranger looked, well... weary:
Care-worn and stooped under years of excess baggage
Which hung heavy along the length of both shoulders
Making knuckles white at the weight
And brow too beaten to get its back off the canvas for one last round.

I could just about have taken that:
...Just...
But not the eyes.
Not the eyes.
The eyes were strangely silent, eerily so,
Speaking volumes sans volume.
There Hurt and Hope waged their wordless war of attrition:
Hurt marshaling a fifth column of hopelessness
With which to infiltrate his enemy's meagre last lines of defence.

"Put the bags down... For God's sake, put the bags down."
I heard a voice plead;
My voice;
"Talk to me."
Slowly, seemingly unused or perhaps afraid of letting go
He unslung the rucksacks and shoulder-bags
And set them down at his feet.
Most were well-worn with many uncomfortable miles on the clock.
All seemed to bear the prominent tag:

Trying but failing.

Realization.

Released from the relentless pressure
He grew in stature before my eyes –
Seemed to straighten somewhat: became taller.
The distressed camouflage jacket
Hung so far off his bones

It appeared to have been sized for another soul –
Any other in fact:
Any, other than such as he
Who would only be found, be seen, be known:
Be anything but hidden.

An exercise in pointlessness in the face of dawning consciousness,
He sloughed the tired fatigues to the floor.
Shorn of this ragged layer, he was more recognisably himself,
Yet still adrift amidst an ugly sea of bags and tatters from which he recoiled:
Suddenly he saw they weren't his, didn't belong and stared in disbelief at the fact
That they might ever have claimed him as their own,
Amazed and appalled that he must have swallowed their shallow charms
And chosen to take them upon himself in some self-less, mis-guided orgy of doing.

It is one thing to be set free of something, even everything....
Quite another to be freed unto something else.
Absence of pain is just that: absence;
And absence may bring relief, but never, ever joy.
At that thought a momentary panic sought to grip his spirit
And strangle at birth this newborn of freedom:
What if there is nothing left?
What if this scattered, joyless ruin is me –
The life I have squandered myself to make?
What if there is nothing left....
Nothing of value...
Nothing of me?

Into the void inside he threw himself
Silently, desperately in search of the truth:
Not a knee-jerk, sticking-plaster, convenient-crutch of an answer,
But the truth unadulterated;
Which he would accept, though it slay him then and there.

Stripped, naked to the self,
In that place, that holy of holies
Where only the truth may dwell,
He saw;
Saw but one thing:
The jigsaw of his life:
All outer edges and no middle.
Patterns and designs were evident
But they made no sense as they converged upon an empty space
Where seeming thousands of pieces were conspicuous by their absence:
The story of a life somehow lost in the telling.

Hidden under the jigsaw board
He reached from memory for his old treasure chest
Wherein his heart had laid down,
Those things immemorial, eternal:
Those things indivisible from himself:
His mother and father;

His children;
The child he had wished for (and yet strangely had and had not) :
His youth:
They fitted themselves to the jigsaw effortlessly
Yet still the overall picture remained unclear, impenetrable,
As it cascaded into the sense-less emptiness at the core.

One further piece remained in the chest,
Wrapped protectively, lovingly, securely in pristine black and white paper
Reminiscent of all the style and seductive elegance
Of Hartnoll's dressing of Hepburn's 'Eliza'
And of the timelessness of an Ansel Adams print.
Slowly, with reverence, he unfurled the paper,
Admiring the precision creases and folds and smiling at the memory.
Peeling away that seventh veil
Her glory surrounded him.
For a moment he felt it would overwhelm him,
Yet she knew,
She had always known,
Read him like the book she loved,
And as her gentle waves washed over him,
He let go and abandoned himself to her.

Taken by the hand to the jigsaw board
He saw it, saw it whole, for the first time.
He was there
She was there:
In everything.

She completed the picture.
Gave it meaning.
Finished it.
Made it.
She:

Elle.

Research

The emotions played fast and loose with him:

Shock.
Shock that she was indeed the answer incarnate
Or shock that he had always known yet failed to admit it to himself, to her?

Confusion.
Confused that he had found her, that she was his answer,
Yet was lost to him in all but memory.

Love.
Loved her.

Knew it better than his own reflection.
Recognised it more readily than his own name.
But could she love him?
Would she love him?

Fear.
Fear of not finding her.
Fear of finding her and finding what he feared most.

The decision was alive in that first moment of truth:
Had no need of the making, the taking,
Had already begun working itself out from the core.

I would find you.
The years and miles would not stand in my way.

I would speak.

You would answer.

The chips would fall where they may.

Tony Jolley

The Sun, the Sea, the Oyster-Catchers and Me.

For all his indisputable majesty,
King Sol's royal arrival was accompanied
Merely by the muted, grey obeisance of the occasional, low-lying cloud
And the discordant, yet somehow strangely mournful anthem
Of a lonely, wheeling Herring Gull who had obviously set his alarm all too early.

Even the sea seemed mildly disinterested,
Indifferent to the first subtle reflections and refractions
Graciously gifted by the sovereign's slow ascendance,
And washed and lapped rather than waved and crashed
An altogether bare acknowledgement, well short of a welcome.

It appeared that only the Oyster-Catchers were gathered in greeting,
Their seek-in-the-sand, strict-tempo formation
Elevated to an energetic splash-dance of quickstep and stab
Sixteen to the dozen in all directions
As if frantic to find pearls to present to their coming king.

Then there was me.
I saw his gilded state-coach crest the faint horizon
And burn a bright hole clear through Old Harry
To cast a chalk eye at his slumbering, coastal kingdom
And upon one subject who couldn't meet his glowing gaze
And bowed before his glory.
A 'Moses moment', I mused, looking vainly
For a cleft in the concrete sea wall - a cleft that wasn't there.

They don't make rock like they used to.

Tony Jolley

The Teflon Kid

How long, O Lord,
How long?

How long before
Teflon loses its slick on our non-stick kid?

How long, O Lord,
How long?

How long before
The message finally sinks in:
He realises that keys are to be kept safe and secure,
That wallets aren't for waving about any more,
That coats shouldn't be just shucked off and chucked,
Neatly folded, ironed clothing is for putting away
Not for sitting on, creasing, screwing up
And dumping back in the laundry basket the self-same day.

How long, O Lord,
How long?

How long before
Plates are cleared without stares and glares;
Before feet don't stomp routinely up and down the stairs,
The dishwasher is emptied just occasionally,
The realisation dawns that other people's property
[and yes, parents do qualify in that hallowed category!]
Is not to be 'borrowed', purloined or otherwise 'acquired',
The torch has 'live' batteries in it when desired
And not dead duds cunningly covering the lack
When mine are become the integral power-pack
In your X-Box-ed, PlayStation-ed entertainment rack!

Leaving a lick of milk or a dropp of orange juice
Or a bit of bread & butter for someone else's breakfast use
Might just be nice in the kitchen tomorrow morning
Other people live here, lad ... is the idea dawning?

Tony Jolley

The Tigress and the Teacher

The Tigress roused herself:
Her firstborn cub had been rounded upon
By 'One Who Should Have Known Better',
So she swiped him,
Paw and claw,
That he should mind
The madness in his method
And not mistake
The method in her madness.

Tony Jolley

The Time Being

It hit me the moment you said it:

"...For the time being..."

It was so much more than just 'for now'.
It spoke of life:
Life in the being.

The Be-ing.
Gettit?

Being.
Not doing.

No-one ever says:
"For the time doing"

Being.

In the end,
Time is all we have.

Time is for being.
Our whole lives are simply

The
 Time
 Being

Tony Jolley

The Timetabler

Strange perfection.
Unexpected.
Tenderly playing in the corner of your mouth.

A single ivory gleam glinting between lightly-lipsticked lips
Slightly pursed in pixel-point concentration;
A hint of a smile dawning upon
Darker matters in hand:
A double tasking,
A parallel processing,
Veneering what you'd rather be and be doing
Over the bland screen-scapes of spreadsheets and cells
That you had no choice but to fill.

I caught it nevertheless,
Even running at right-angles to me:
A flat-out, full-length, outstretched arc sort of a catch:
The type that leaves you sprawled, winded yet triumphant, in a pall of dust,
The ball clasped tightly between your fingers,
A gratified grin from ear to ear,
A tear in the sleeve,
And a friction-red scrape in the skin as a memory medal
That won't be felt or even found 'til morning.

You can throw me that kind of smile anytime.

Tony Jolley

The Trooping of the Colour and the Changing of the Guard

Evening greeted night with a butterfly kiss
So soft it'd make the angels jealous.

Colour gave way
Gradually,
Reluctantly,
Yet as gracefully as
The final, fingertip leaving-longings
Of parting lovers,
Where the fading traces of together
Still tingle and teeter
Upon an intangible high-wire
Strung insubstantially
Between two and one,
Between there and gone.

Shifting twilight tones of shade and shadow
Insinuating themselves silently
Into each and every corner
Colour had so carefully colonised
Since its morning victory over dark's nocturnal hegemony: -

An eternal, natural, changing of the guard -
Not so much Buckingham as Bonoty.

NB. Bonoty = Mas la Bonoty, a lovely little 8 x bedroom converted farmhouse hotel in the Vaucluse, south of France. Sat there on the verandah one evening being served a lovely dinner and watching the light fade slowly from the sky and candlelight take over.

Tony Jolley

The Wicked Wisdom Tooth

Would have sat there by the chair and cringed for you if you'd really wanted.
[Thank god you didn't ask!]
Better yet would have taken your place if I could...
But I'm short on wisdom as you know.

All today's modern, mouth-sized drilling rigs
Ranged, ready to torture, in their racks and ranks,
Their high-tech, high-velocity, diamond-cut, cutting heads
Desperately champing at the bit to turn up their turbines
And bore and bite into that troublesome tooth.
Micro-thin hypodermic needles
Dying to deliver a dose of Novacaine
To ease the pain,
To lull your brain into believing
Where there's no sense there's no feeling.
Try telling that to your tongue when it discovers the truth:
A gaping hole more crater than cavity
Where an ivory-enamel peak used to be
And the odd clot of blood
That cuts loose and breaks free
From a wound that's all too plain to see.

A final word of advice.... A film you should ban:
Don't ever watch Hoffman in Marathon Man.

Tony Jolley

The Wilder Mile

She ran right over me
Across the motorway footbridge
At a perfectly carefree tangent to the traffic,
Her long, brown hair streaming behind her
Glowing gloriously in the lengthening light
Of the late afternoon sun.
She was all freedom and free spirit
And breathlessly bound for the beckoning Surrey greenery,
Whilst we,
Confined to our air-conned, black-topping tin cans,
Stop-started in our serried ranks
To the sick tune of Kafka, Huxley and Orwell's
Dark distopian machines
Of still darker demons and imaginings,
As they conducted, instructed
Admonished and punished
Our every minute and mile
Almost ad infinitum
[Well at least all the way to our destination].

May time and tide daily divert me
From the course of the rank and the file
And take me to that tender tangent
To walk the wilder mile.

Tony Jolley

The Wishing Line

Hung his hopes out on the wishing line,
Daring to believe that his daughter might shine,
Pegged them neatly, side-by-each,
Like a parasol parade on a summer beach,
Wetted finger to the air
In search of whatever breath be there.

But Wind's a capricious and fair-weather friend
She alone wills how the story may end.

Tony Jolley

These Small Fingers

What eternities have these small fingers fashioned
From the realms of the spirit
And made the living folio of a life:
Love watermarking all your learning -
A haven to those whose souls are searching.

The gentle gravity of a wisdom,
Clothed in such pure simplicity
Only its wearer cannot see,
Singing its sacred song
To sailors of those oceans uncharted,
Beyond the bounds of the temporal
And the means of the mortal heart.

Satellites (not acolytes) are we become,
Fired in the crucible of your morning sun
Reflecting first your practised light
'Til our own small incandescence ignite.

Where once reigned but lack and naught,
Eternities have these small fingers wrought.

Tony Jolley

Things I'll Never Be

Pregnant.
Young again.
Thin.
Rich.
Unhappy.
Cat-lover.
Cheeze-eater.
City-dweller.
Harangued.
Alone.
Decent piano player.
Drunk.
Unloved.
Short of kids.
Totally impulsive.
Dog-less.
Entirely English.
Entirely French.
Muté en Alsace.
Published (... probably...) .

Tony Jolley

Thought Not

Just how far would you go?

Fly a thousand kilometres for a friend
To have to drive home the selfsame day?

No.

Thought not – no way.

Sit naked against the slanting rain
As a sheltering warmth
About a cold-shouldered soul?

No.

Didn't think so.

Content to sip vin ordinaire
In a world awash with appellation contrôlée?

Hardly.

Be taken for granted
Yet grant it no mis-taking?

'You kidding?

Be married in spirit:
Short of sixteen,
But focused on forever?

No. No chance.

Never.

Say: "Come with a guitar
And the clothes on your back
And we'll make it" ... and mean it.
Forget it!

.... But then your name's not Ellen, is it?

Tony Jolley

Thousand Ships

Felt this feeling once before,
Wine and low-lit lights of yore.
Yours it was, conjoined with mine
Overture to our love's own time
Launched like Helen's thousand ships
With hopeful hearts, down tender slips,
Tuned to the wavelength of 70s youth
Exploring only naked truth
Sailing seas in search of life
Lass her husband ... Lad his wife.

Tony Jolley

Timeshare Trousers

Caught myself thinking I'd been 'hard done by', today...
And, in a fiscal, Einsteinian, Relativistic sort of way
I guess I had been, I could well say:
More 'F=TJ shafted' than E=MC squared,
As one client had 'forgotten' to pay me for months,
And two others had lopped 20% off my gross
For Social Security, Retirement and National Insurance
When, as a sole-trader, I've already paid these in advance!
Short on the mortgage, it's a fairly big deal –
The idea of 'disposable income' now completely unreal.

Then I read it:
An article about a present-day Chinese village
In the backwoods beyond the back-of-beyond,
Where, 'corporately',
[literally],
The destitute community
Owns but a single pair of town-going trousers,
Timeshared, in turn,
By whoever the Elders mandate to visit:
The best man for the job
[provided the pants fit].

Puts it into perspective, doesn't it?

Looking up the 'food chain' from me,
I can see the 'Corporate Carnivores',
The Killer Whales and the Crocodiles
Decimating their workforces in precarious times
To massage the proverbial, all-important 'bottom lines'
Screwing untold billions in subsidies from state silos
Which the small-fry fill
And these Great Whites filch
So they can drive away into the wide blue yonder
With obscene stock option milch.

Gold Bullion Handshakes
Going grasping hand-in-hand
With Silk and Silver parachutes
Straight into the next Non-Executive Director seat:
Half a day a month, if available,
For half a million passed under the table.

From down below the bread-and-waterline, I guess,
I must look not unlike this:
A Pike in a pond
Resting and basking
Until the need to feed
Forces a frenzy of activity:
A blitzkrieg war,
A snap of jaws.
Prey paid a pittance

That keeps them in the penury
To which they have had no choice but to become accustomed.
Tressells' Ragged Trousered Philanthropists,
So it would seem,
Are with us still - alive and (not so) well
Out of sight if not of mind
At the sharp end of the capitalist production line,
Ground down daily like the grain they grind,
Donkeys, born nose to the grindstone,
Condemned all their days
To the millstone's tune,
Fed on fallen husks, but never the bread,
While my mid-chain miller counts his profit instead.

This current Crisis teaches the cruel, but obvious, reality
That we rich are rich but not without impugntity.
We can't call upon the Third World to 'bootstrap' itself
Without shouldering some responsibility ourselves
And changing a system in which the deck is 'stacked'
In favour of one player whilst the others get wracked.

Tony Jolley

To Bend But Not to Bow

If he were here, I'd tell him that I've loved you from the start.
If he were here, I'd tell him that to each we gave our heart.
If he were here, I'd tell him of the fool who thought to part.
If he were here, I'd tell him we will no more be apart.

If he were here, I'd tell him of the forgiveness that we shared.
If he were here, I'd tell him in our absence, how we fared.
If he were here, I'd tell him of our souls and spirits bared.
If he were here, I'd tell him how for each, we've always cared.

If he were here, I'd tell him both came looking just for 'we'.
If he were here, I'd tell him that your eye-fire burns for me.
If he were here, I'd tell him to touch our love and see.
If he were here, I'd tell him how we learned, at last, to be.

If he were here, I'd tell him I will love and honour you.
If he were here, I'd tell him of our Neruda goblet too.
If he were here, I'd tell him of my delight in all you do.
If he were here, I'd tell him by my life, my love is true.

If he were here, he'd tell us what matters is the 'now'.
If he were here, he'd tell us to love while time allows.
If he were here, he'd tell us to let our spirit show us how.
If he were here, he'd tell us to bend but not to bow.

Tony Jolley

To Boldly Bogart

'Of all the gin-joints....'

Sounds 'big'.
Sounds Bogart.
Sounds improbable,
Unbelievable.
But what of you and me –
Is it really that impossible...?

Hominids, latterly humans,
So the anthropologists say,
Arrived on the scene
Some 70,000 years before today:
A whole continuum of space and time
To have missed each other in
By kilometres and minutes,
Yards and years,
Countries and centuries.
Any miss is as good as
A million miles or lifetimes.

But we didn't miss, did we?
Our trajectories intersected
The cross-hairs of probability
And our love leaped out of mere theory
And into daily reality:
A history inconsequential to History,
Maybe,
But indispensable to you and me.

Is it too preposterous or pretentious
To purpose
That somehow the world didn't
Want to do without us?

Probably;
But then we'll never know, will we?

Does the ripple know the pebble?
Does the shadow know the light?
Does the winter know the summer?
Does the left hand know the right?

Can beginning know its ending?
Can tomorrow know today?
Can morning know the evening?
Only Love may know its way.

Tony Jolley

To Hell with Hamelyn

Arras.
Ypres.
Somme.
Verdun and
Vimy Ridge:
Roadsigns to yesteryear and the former frontlines
Echoing a deeply and deathly-familiar refrain
From the fading pages of a history
Scarcely spoken by its own dramatis personae.
Names to conjure grainy images in black and white,
Of mud-caked men and machine-stoked might
Jerking and flickering awkwardly across
The cathode-tubed Nomansland of time
Like marionettes whose strings are strung
To some mad fool's sick and arthritic fingers,
Evoking pride and pity,
Reverence and repulsion,
Gung-Ho and going to a Hell
Even Danté at his darkest couldn't have conceived –
Entire empires of Hamelyns pied-piping
Their youngest, ripest, strongest and brightest
Like Lemmings to the slaughter:
Enticed over the cliffs of imperial vainglory
By 'Duty to country', 'Defence of the family',
'Home before Christmas! ', (or so lied the story) ,
To be murdered in their untold, un-graved millions,
Not by Maxim guns and mass-produced machinery,
But by the all too casual machinations and chicanery
Of the powers behind The Powers that Be
(Powers that should have long been and gone)
Playing 'Political Poker'
In the dim-lit, after-dinner Smoking Rooms of our stately homes:
Men's lives just a convenient, expendable 'stake' in their gruesome game:
"See your Company and raise you a Division"
The full-house sending the short-straight to hell.
Read them and let someone else weep.
Can't you hear?
They're weeping still.

Tony Jolley

Today I Fell

Aujhourd'hui Je Suis Tombé

Today I fell.
I fell a lot further,
I fell a lot faster.
Further than distance;
Faster than speed;
Way beyond want
And far beyond need

Tomorrow I'll fall.
I'll fall even further,
I'll fall even faster.
Further than possible;
Faster than light;
Way beyond day
And far beyond night.

Way beyond wrong,
Yet far beyond right;
Faster than thought
And further than sight.
Faster than life;
Further than time;
Far beyond forever,
And purer than prime

Do you feel the falling?
Are you falling too?
I know you'll catch me
As my love catches you.

Tony Jolley

Unknowning

Unknowning:

I have shaken Agammemnon's dust from my shoe;
Breathed of Napoleon's last breath;
Seen the light from stars long dead;
Drunk water that once fell as a snowflake
Upon the summit of Everest
Before it knew its name or the footsteps
Of Edmund Hilary and Tensing Norgay
(Or possibly even of George Mallory –
But that's another story) .

Unknowning:

I have drawn on the blackboard just this morning
With the chalk remains of the largest Ichthyosaur that ever lived;
Written on paper produced from the very tree
Your granddad climbed and fell out of when he was a lad;
Paddled, aged 3 ³/₄, bucket and spade in hand
In precisely the same spot where King Canute
Set up his throne to 'rebuke the waters';
Killed a spider in the shower
Whose direct-line Scottish progenitor
Inspired Robert Bruce with his resilience.

Unknowning:

I may have met an angel disguised as a tramp
Begging in the rain for the price of a coffee;
Walked past you in the street last Wednesday week;
Dug a hole to plant a shrub
And stopped a single, solitary spade-full short
Of a treasure trove to rival the crown jewels;
Switched off the light and gave up the midnight search
For melody and harmony
Just before 'Yesterday'
Gave up on me and gifted itself to Mc Cartney.

Unknowning:

My favourite shirt was made by a 9 year old Indian girl
Sold into slave labour
And chained to her machine 17 hours a day;
I've eaten entrecôte
From a cow named 'Clementine' by a farmer's daughter
Who, as chance may have it,
May meet and marry your son in three years time.

Unknowning:

I taught a girl to teach,
Who, in her turn, will teach someone's son or daughter
Something that alters the course of his or her life
And of mine, yours and history;
I said something unintentionally
Which someone took the wrong way
And ate them up all the days of their life to an early grave;

Built sandcastles with my daughters on the beach
From the grain remains
Of the very rock of ages past
Upon which life first hauled itself out of the sea to conquer the land.

Unknowing:
I am the 593rd person in all time
To call this plot of land 'mine';
I once thought of life, God, the Garden of Eden, Evolution and Darwin
And actually got the answer right....
But, of course, I don't know which thought that was.

Unknowing:
I needed someone once....
...not knowing it was you.

Tony Jolley

Unknowning (prose version)

Unknowning: I have shaken Agammemnon's dust from my shoe; breathed of Napoleon's last breath; seen the light from stars long dead; drunk water that once fell as a snowflake upon the summit of Everest before it knew its name or the footsteps of Edmund Hilary and Tensing Norgay (or possibly even of George Mallory – but that's another story) .

Unknowning: I have drawn on the blackboard just this morning with the chalk remains of the largest Ichthyosaur that ever lived; written on paper produced from the very tree your granddad climbed and fell out of when he was a lad; paddled, aged 3 ³/₄, bucket and spade in hand in precisely the same spot where King Canute set up his throne to 'rebuke the waters'; killed a spider in the shower whose direct-line Scottish progenitor inspired Robert Bruce with his resilience.

Unknowning: I may have met an angel disguised as a tramp begging in the rain for the price of a coffee; walked past you in the street last Wednesday week; dug a hole to plant a shrub and stopped a single, solitary spade-full short of a treasure trove to rival the crown jewels; switched off the light and gave up the midnight search for melody and harmony just before 'Yesterday' gave up on me and gifted itself to Mc Cartney.

Unknowning: my favourite shirt was made by a 9 year old Indian girl sold into slave labour and chained to her machine 17 hours a day; I've eaten entrecôte from a cow named 'Clementine' by a farmer's daughter who, as chance may have it, will meet and marry your son in three years time.

Unknowning: I once taught a girl to teach, who, in her turn, will teach someone's son or daughter something that alters the course of his or her life and of mine, yours and history; I said something unintentionally which someone took the wrong way and ate them up all the days of their life to an early grave; built sandcastles with my daughters on the beach from the grain remains of the very rock of ages past upon which life first hauled itself out of the sea to conquer the land.

Unknowning: I am the 593rd person in all time to call this plot of land 'mine'; I once thought of life, God, the Garden of Eden, Evolution and Darwin and actually got the answer right.... but, of course, I don't know which thought that was.

Unknowning: I needed someone once.....not knowing it was you.

Tony Jolley

Vanishing Point

White lines,
Bright lights,
Converging parallels
Aligning my perspective with infinity;
Arrows aiming me at an insubstantial eternity,
Hanging,
Disconcertingly inevitable,
Barely a heartbeat,
Hardly a hairsbreadth,
The other side of the vanishing point.

Then; well, then it would be
The other end of Alice's hole;
The me in the mirror;
The meeting the Maker:
The me or
Not me.

It was all too easy to imagine the imagery:
The what should bes,
The what just might bes;
It was all beginning to fall into place on paper:
But then the runway fell away,
The vanishing point I could no longer see
And I was,
Well,
Still me.

(Written on take off at Luton....)

Tony Jolley

Velocité d'Amour

My life changed again today –
Took a quantum leap of such unique proportions
That it defied Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principle',
For I know the time, the place and the velocity:

The time: right now
The place: right here
The velocity: Love.

The time is now.
We are ready for each other and our life.
We choose and are chosen.
We choose: "we",
Choosing complete: fini.

The place is here
I fell in love with your town, your country,
Your life's location and hinterland
The way I fell for you on our teenage summer beach:
Instantly, freely..... totally.
I have been walking around saying "âllo"
To the new, yet somehow through you, familiar,
Feeling welcome and wanted.
The sad goodbyes of leaving and uncertainty are over.
'Walking the Talk' of 'Just Come' is already begun.

La velocité d'amour: c'est toi; c'est moi
C'est cette alchemie parfaite
Qu'on ne peut pas expliquer;
Mais on voit, on sent,
On connaît sans raison
Mais sans aucun doute.
'Just Come'..... 'Just Come'...
'Just Come' has already begun.

Tony Jolley

Walk This Way

Think of all the ungainly gaits you've ever seen:

Mr Hobson in his polio callipers
Clomping his exo-skeletal, leg ironwork
Down the wooden school stairs
Drumming our approaching doom
Like tumbril to Madame Guillotine
Before he arrived on the scene.

John Cleese's, Monty Python
'Ministry of Silly Walks' walk:
100% gold-plated, bowler-hatted, pin-striped,
Umbrella'd, be-briefcased, British non-sense of humour
Parading its lanky angularity and ultimate ambulatory insanity
Down the pavements of 70s Whitehall
And into comedy history.

The former East-German Army's ceremonial Stechschritt:
That straight-legged, one-party-state showcase
On its short march to ideological extinction and failure's museum.
Their Greek guard comrades-in-choreography
Sporting their flouncing translucent skirts
And pumps with absurd pom-poms
Waving like the bobble on my granddad's winter-night bobble-hat,
Their legs extending and down-setting
Like a Crane fishing and desperately trying
Not to disturb anything.

The first research-lab robots
Labouring jerkily under terrabytes of programme code
To do what an adventurous sperm and awaiting egg
Plus a bit of nature and nurture
Can do without computation or calculation
No matter what the terrain or conditions.

Astronauts with their super-heavyweight boots
And movement-constricting survival suits
Dealing man-in-the-Moon-fully with 1/6th Earth gravity,
Trying not to make a fool of themselves on a billion TVs.

Drunks reeling and careering,
Unhinged and unbalanced in mind and body,
Their brains soused in Scotch
Or pickled in pints
Until thought and deed
Become estranged or deranged
For the duration of their alcoholisation.

Take all of the above.
Then, like God,
Or Dr Frankenstein, combine
Catalyse and electrolyse....

.....And there you have it, improbably:
Me in my ski-boots last Saturday.

Tony Jolley

Walked Far Woman

Bruebach to Brunstatt to Didenheim
Every day, without fail, rain or shine.
Stick-thin – and a thin stick at that –
No 'old stick' though:
Young, but with far too many miles on her clock;
Calves the size of your wrist,
Arms thin as a doll's,
Waist of one teetering on the short side of teenage,
Ploughing her lonely furrow
Hard as the miles and Macadam underfoot,
Her flint face dead-set against the god of Distance
That dared deny her:
A rock in a very hard place -
A singular human in her solitary race.

Wager she never felt a following wind:
She'd have turned and faced it down
Rather than have it lighten her load
Or goad her glory.
Not for her the easy victory –
She wore the curse of her indomitability
As a brand seared stark into her soul
Still smouldering on the surface:
A moving volcano spewing and strewing around her
The sulphur and silica of some secret suffering
Like a billowing cloak of nuée ardente
Flaying flesh from bone.

But no longer.
No more.
Snuffed out like a candleflame
By unbridled horsepower
And unyielding steel
With just a mere kid at the wheel.

1. 'Walks Far Woman' was a Raquel Welch film about a Balckfoot Indian woman whose family were gunned down in cold blood by some cowboys. She learned to shoot, treked and tracked them down then clinically finished them off.

2. This poem was about a middle-aged, local woman who was always seen too-briskly walking far too far for her own good along country lanes with no verges. We often thought she might meet her end that way. A lantern and shrine on a country bend in the road this week tells us she did.....

Tony Jolley

What is 'Green'?

..... 'Green' is the very incarnation of infinite variety
Running tranquil riot beneath a Tuscan summer sky.....

Tony Jolley

What Makes a Man...?

What propels a man to climb out,
At night,
At 200 mph,
And 20,000 ft
Along a the burning wing of a bomber
Over enemy territory
Amidst flak and fighter fire
Holding nothing but a small extinguisher,
With neither harness nor hope of return?

Only 905192 Sergeant Norman Cyril Jackson knows.

What makes a man
Spend a day and a night in Nomansland
Reportedly as close at 25 yards from enemy defences
Raining fire at all but point blank range,
Repeatedly to-ing and fro-ing
Carrying the wounded to safety
And a future they'd given up all hope of having
Whilst caring nothing for his own wounds?
For most mortals that would have been more than enough...

But then they weren't with Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse later at Paaschendaele
To see him do it all over again.

From whence comes the courage
Of a child with Leukaemia
Knowing he will never see next week
Investing his last reserves of life in comforting the living?

Perhaps even parents don't know.

What makes a man...?
....God alone knows.

Tony Jolley

What She Sees

[...for Minty....]

Wonder what she knows:
Whether she hears what we hear,
Sees what we see,
[Though I was once told
She sees whatever she sees
Only in monochrome tones].

If so,
Pity God couldn't have spent
A bit more time and effort
On the Best Friend known to Man:
His Name's all too easy, three-letter anagram.

Still maybe she smells in colour instead:
A spectrum of fragrance filling her head.
Whatever it is, we'll never know
So I'll just think it is just so.

Tony Jolley

Wideasleep Dancing

In those last, lingering moments
Just this side
Of the pillowed timelessness
That lies
Beyond the bounds of the wideawake world,
As the vanguard of the forces of unconsciousness
Reports to relieve
His daylight 'brother-in-arms'
From his sentry duty
In the service of the sentient....

....I summon all my senses,
Send them you-ward
To ward you,
To soothe you,
To settle upon you
And sink softly through
The silken skin of your soul
So our spirits can dance à deux,
Barefoot beloveds in our sleep,
'Til the morning when we'll smile:
Dancing shoes still upon our feet.

Tony Jolley

X-Station-Box Generation

A not-yet-out-of-nine year-old
Gleefully decapitating countless passers-by
In a frenzied orgy of Samurai sword slashing
Just to revel in how the dark lifeblood
Pumps, spatters and spurts
And to leer and laugh at the deadweight drop
Of headless torsos and torso-less heads
Decanting their precious Ichors
To slowly pool and congeal in the gutter.
Doing it all over again
For the craic
And a crowd called to witness
The murder and slaughter of innocent medics
Whose only 'crime' was to exist as
Avatars in exactly the wrong virtual place
At precisely the wrong digital time.
Loading up a double-barreled shotgun
(As if one wouldn't be enough)
Bought with hard kill-count currency,
Prowling the ghetto
For easy meat and soft targets
To 'blow away',
'Take out'
And otherwise 'terminate' with a degree of gratuitousness
Alien to both sanity and humanity
Just to steal a ride for a couple of blocks
Until the next 'hit' opportunity walks into harm's way
To shrug off a fatal few seconds boredom,
Satisfying the all-too-itchy urge
To squeeze the trigger and watch 'em fall
Like sitting ducks against a fairground wall.

Parachuted into a war-world
Where progression and promotion
Demands an even higher body-count
Borne of bomb and blade,
Gun and grenade
In scenes of such utter carnage
The real-life victor's laurels can be nothing less
Than a lifetime's subscription to Post-Traumatic Stress.

Sold disingenuously as 'games' of skill, craft and strategy
Such insidious software has infiltrated and invaded leisure time
And imprisoned and poisoned the minds of our most impressionable
Whilst we battle-weary parents are overwhelmed and in retreat
Before rampaging hordes of DVDs and downloads we can't screen or quarantine.

How did we get from brick-in-the-wall, Pac-Man, Space Invaders and Tetris
To today's high-definition, 360-degree, death-driven, heavy-calibre insanity
Lurking under the camouflage of the family console or PC?

What's next, now blood and gore and the race to sell it clearly knows no limits:

Celebrity concentration camp?
Columbine: one more time?
My little ethnic cleansing kit (kindergarten edition) ?
The innocent's guide to genocide?

These grotesque dystopias are sick stimuli
To evoke even sicker Pavlovian responses
On the part of children barely able
To hold a conversation –
Much less a weapon.
And when not locked into these online nightmares,
Blacked-out and blinded against light literal and moral,
What is left for them to do
But to corral all other conversation
Inside the barbed-wired and guarded limits of these 'games',
Confined to discussing 'shortcuts' and 'cheats'
To get them ever deeper and quicker
Into internet enabled death-debt?

'Games'?
Games these are not;
But rather 5th Column Programmes:
Calculating;
Mind-warping;
De-sensitising;
Anaesthetising
Weapons of mass de-construction and manipulation
Detonating daily upon screens before our children's eyes...
And inside their minds with the megaton message:

THIS IS WHAT ADULTS DO

'Programmes' is the right word –
Not programming the what, so much as the who:

Who, then.....?

.....Yours?

.....You?

Tony Jolley

X-Station-Box Generation 2: Sewing the Wind

[Reader: if you have not done so, please read 'X-Station-Box Generation' first.
Thanks.]

Every slug of lead bulldozing its girth through soft tissue,
Every pressure-pad mine erupting to separate sole from soul,
Every bomb-blast concussion wave
Crashing its super-power through internal organs,
Every laser-guided, precision excision,
'Taking out' its target.....

... in their world they all add up to a competitive gore-score:

Points making prizes as if in a sick version
Of a seventies, Saturday-night game-show
Hosted by some faded, sometime almost-star:
"184 dead,376 maimed and injured:

Lance-Corporal Jones, your score entitles you to.....

[Pause for effect and Foley Artist-faked, audience-excitement noises]: -

- A medal,
- The personal use of no less than two 'comfort girls' for a week's R&R,
- A promotion to sergeant
- 24 hour air support for your next-level mission

[Pause for applause]

• Of course, never forgetting this show's fabulous helmet-mounted webcam so
you can stream every second and shot of your next battle direct to your beloved at
home in 10 megapixel, full-colour, digital surround-sound quality: It'll be....
[altogether audience...!]

The Next Best Thing to Being on the Battlefield!

In my world there is a worried wife who hasn't seen you for months on end,
Who can't pick up the phone or answer the door for fear;
Who can't sleep without the nightmare of your nightmare gnawing at her soul;
Whose love and lips can tremble but can't touch, comfort or be comforted;
Who has to be strong when there is no strength to be had,
Who hopes to recognise your heart when you come home
From a world that might never quite release you to be the you she knew.

In my world there's a wife with no news,
Crushed hopes and dreams,
No body to bury,
No grave to weep over
And no words for her young son and daughter.

Children who will remember their childhood only with pain
[If their poor battered minds (closed to protect them) permit them ever to remember
anything]
Children with stolen youth and no parental hand in loving guidance,
Nothing normal,
Nothing safe,
Little or nothing human, like compassion, to enfold them,
No-one to say: "It's alright", and just hold them.

Then there's 'collateral damage' -
Kids killed or maimed by the long-left mines of political and military expediency
Consigned to a future of impossibility and impoverished opportunity.
The months in agony, the years spent scratching painful itches in limbs long-lost.
Sightless sockets never to be reconstructed,
Groping blindly in a loud and dangerous darkness for some sort of hold on life.
Children inches shorter than the guns thrust upon them
Forced to fire upon friends and family to prove a misplaced gun-gang-loyalty,
Scared, scarred to the soul and dead to the domain of feeling.

Women and girls escaping machete and bullet
Only to be subjected to repeated rape as a human weapon in an ethnic, inhuman war:
Condemned to carry a child, conceived not in shared love and longing,
But in hate and despite of all that is sacred to life.
How does she feel about such a child brought to term -
Can she ever see him and come to love him
In such a way to cancel out his innocent living representation
Of the result of her own private hell and violation?
Some do,
Though God alone knows from whence comes the unaccountable grace so to do.
Some don't I guess,
And I don't pretend I can even begin write their agony or story.

Our kids don't see any of this on the other side of their trigger-happy, war-game play.
I'm sure the manufacturers and retailers would claim they are 'far too young'.
Not too young to kill at will, to murder and slaughter at distance, mind:
Just too damn young to have to see or understand the consequences of their actions
And feel the blood on their hands and heads.
After all, that might spoil their fun, mightn't it?
And we can't have that, now can we?

First saw the wind.....

Tony Jolley

You Are Not. Are You Not?

Can't control my basic being –
It's all gotten away from me
As I went away from she
And both went away from we.
Seems I keep forgetting to breathe
Till something stirs and stretches
And yawns me away
From History's ever-open jaw
And never-sated stomach.

Sometimes I sense it first
As a lump in my throat:
A living lump
With its legs wrapped around my memory
And arms up to the elbows in my emotions,
Not an Everest (too high / too sharp) ,
More a rounded how, a high, hemispherical hill
That extracts its heavy toll
For every hard-swallowed, upward step.

At others it seems my 'Fill' is full,
Full of great guttering gobs,
Strong silent sobs
Born in my gut
Contr-actions of my spirit:
Actions-contra our two-from-six bereavement.
A crushing caress, yes,
Yet a caress nevertheless.

How dare I breathe without you?
Why should I breathe without you?
How can I breathe without you?
How can I not?

You are here,
Yet you are not....
Are you not?

Tony Jolley

Younger for the Latter Years

Area 51.
Unites State Secret.
UFO's
And who knows
What:
Ion-drives, anti-gravity propulsion
Ray guns and Martians in cryogenic suspension.

Age 51 in an hour from now –
Two if I count by GMT
And not where I happen to be,
Rather than by this Wehrmacht grey, teutonic timepiece,
Synchronised with clinical efficiency
To an atomic clock
That loses barely a millisecond in a million years...
Unless someone pulls the plug out, that is,
Like that Stateside hospital cleaner
Who couldn't find a socket,
So she unplugged intensive care machinery
[albeit temporarily]
Diligently hoovered
And dutifully re-plugged
Before leaving the room both
Spotless
And, sadly,
Lifeless.

Countdown academic.
Slipped away and fell asleep
Well before the 'witching hour' -
Woke to find myself 50 no more.

51's a strange age though:
At 35 you feel too young
To be half way through the three-score and ten.
51,
However,
Tells a different tale –
Over the 'hump' and heading
Slowly down the slow-but-sure slide.
Paradoxically I feel the younger for the latter years:
More alive to life and free of fears.

Tony Jolley

Your Call is Important to Us [Yeah, right!]

...Ah, no, not us, I'm afraid...

[Trans: for 'I'm afraid' read 'hallelujah! ',
What did Douglas Adams call it? –
An S.E.P.: Someone Else's Problem', thank god!]

Why don't you try this number – I'm sure they'll be able to help.

[Trans: they won't have any more of a clue than me,
But at least you'll be off my back
And I can log you as a 'problem solved' and a 'happy customer'
On my spreadsheet
And all under the 'three minutes a call' target too!]

I'm sorry, all our agents are busy at the moment –
We'll be with you as soon as we can.

[Trans: if we can keep talking long enough
The call queue will get fed up and ring off anyway,
Then we can nip off for an early lunch]

Welcome to our new 'CDS' Caller Direction Service...
If you have a star button on your phone – kindly press it now...
You have not pressed the star button on your phone... kindly press it now...
You have failed to press your 'star button'..
We are unable to direct your enquiry
And have placed your call in the general queuing system-
One of our operatives will be with you shortly.
Your waiting time is estimated at 3 minutes.
In the interests of security and for training purposes
You should be aware that this call may be being recorded.
This is a premium rate line charged at £1.08 per minute:
Please hold the line.....

[Trans: The call centre cost us too much (yes, even outsourced to India)
So we've put in this cheap and nasty barrier to annoy you while you wait.
You don't have a 'star button' or you are not pressing it –
Are you so thick you don't know where your 'star button' is,
Or such a cheapskate you haven't bought a new phone in the last 10 years?
Our operators are thinner on the ground now than ever
And haven't had a rise in ages
So don't expect too much: we pay peanuts – so you get monkeys:
That's the law of the global, economic jungle: just live with it, why don't you? .
Your 'waiting time estimation' is a figment of our creative imagination
Based upon what we feel you might like to think it will be
Rather than what will prove to be eventually...
...If, that is, you can be bothered to hang on that long (which we doubt) .
Your call is being recorded for use at the Christmas party
'Most Abusive Caller' competition –
By the time most callers actually get through they have had ample opportunity
To stoke their impatience and turn it into some pretty impressive invective!
The premium rate: yeah, well, where do you think the Chairman and MD's

Platinum Parachutes and Golden Handshakes came from?]

Your call is important to us.
Our agents know you are waiting and will be with you as soon as they can.

[Trans: your call isn't important to us: you know it and we know it.
If it were you'd have been directed to a bureau full of staff
And picked up within three rings,
But you just want to cost us time and money
And give us a problem we don't need -
So we'll be with you if and when we damn well feel like it.]

Your call is important to us
But, sadly, all our agents are still busy:
Kindly ring back later when convenient.
Have a nice day!

[Trans: Wake up!
Your call hasn't suddenly become anymore important to us than it was
When we first started trotting that line out 28 minutes and 19 seconds ago.
Our agents are ignoring you - but don't feel aggrieved:
They ignore all callers fairly in accordance with
The company's published 'equality policy' (see website for details) .
If you can be bothered to ring back after this ghastly experience,
Please do so when it is convenient to us...
ie when we are busy, you end up in a queue, and we don't have to speak to you.
We don't care what sort of a day you have
As long as you don't spend any more of it bothering us....

.... But thanks for the 28 minutes and 19 seconds at £1.08 per minute:
That's £20.87 you owe us.]

Tony Jolley

Your Cloudy Day

Do you know how much I want you on those cloudy days?
Want to be there?
Need to be there?

This is part of my being:
I am built to be like this,
Built for you,
To want to be there to be 'me' to your unspoken need,
For, miracle of miracles,
Being me seems to meet the need of the woman I love
As being her more than meets every need, want and desire in me
Before I am aware of any one of them.

I love you in your strength -
especially that strength that says:
'I do not fear to be me to him'.
That strength that says:
'I have no defences to him. I want no defence from him'.
The strength of character,
The strength born of love
To be you,
To be you without worrying what he may think or may or may not do.
To never have to censor yourself or second-guess.

Be strong:
Allow yourself to be weak when you feel so with me.
Be strong:
Be 'cloudy' whensoever you feel you are, feel you need to be, just have to be.
Be strong:
Be naked for me...

...And you will find that I will be your clothing for your weather
And if I have no clothes, then I will hold you in our nakedness and share it till the
clouds part...

Or the heavens break upon us both.

Tony Jolley

Your Left Hand

...For my daughter, upon watching her play piano and finding melodies of a beauty so far out of my reach...

Your left hand looked a lot like mine – but it wasn't.
Your left hand moved a little like mine – but with far greater grace
[well, it would, wouldn't it – you suit so well the name we gave you].

Fluency flowed liberally from your fingertips,
For all the world as if the keys were calling for your caress:
Attending upon your attention.
Michaelangelo sought the shape in the stone –
Do you likewise feel the form in your compositions unborn?
Do you hear the harmony sing to your soul
Before it finds its way, unchallenged, to your fingers?

I sat entranced, captivated, taken to another time,
Moved by the gentle motion
And the familiar sensation tickling my spine
From both sides of my skin
Making my shoulders hunch to nuzzle
That spot on the nape my neck I know they never will reach.
That's how I know.....that's how I know.

How do I tell you?
How do I make you understand?
You are special, yes, because you are mine
And I am proud of the woman you are walking towards,
But how do I get you to see
That what comes now to you so naturally,
Bearing all the hallmarks of the exceptional, the extraordinary, –
Is not great because you are my girl,
But is great because it is.
There are no means to measure what you can, or cannot do:
No rules to restrict or to regulate you,
For this is the world where you write as you wish
Where you are unfettered, free and fearless,
Where you answer to no-one,
Where the choice is all yours and infinite,
Where you transcend time and teaching
To become, in your own way, a teacher eternal.

You are still learning, My Little One.
You will always be so because you love and love to learn,
But here, as they say, is 'the thing':
All the skill and dexterity you command,
You use;
And you brook no barrier between
Your spirit and the sound you bring into being.
Oh how rare is this, do you not know how rare?

How rare you are, my love, how rare.

Tony Jolley