

Poetry Series

**Stug Jordan**  
**- poems -**

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**Stug Jordan(18-8-81)**

## \*bad Bird

'Was told it wasn't he but was,  
but promised it was she, was not;  
they struggled to be we, and just forgot.'

Bad birds, struck the skies of English parks  
like shuttlecocks or two clock hands,  
kicking chestnuts, unlocking four fingers.  
And now the bell thunders in his head,  
'Nero, is dead.'

And when he lands with the grass beneath his feet,  
it's for the first time, but his heart of wings  
is up there still, oblivious to the earth.  
This bad bird will never fly again,  
the weight of two guilts a harder gravity,  
his tears torn from him like a page in history  
and the details of a long lost song  
to the mad emperor of love, repeating it was him  
and him and him all along.

Stug Jordan

# A Song For The Innocent Loner

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Admiring Death From Afar

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Alpha Male

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# And Adam Said

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# And They Called Her Ophelia

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

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

Stug Jordan



# Apple

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Appointment

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# As We Slept

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# At Loose

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# August Night

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Back Of The Hunched Black House

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

## Beauty In A Dark Glass

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

Stug Jordan

# Beds

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

Stug Jordan



# Bird Fraught

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Blossom

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Body Parts

Older body parts are the accessories for littler lives:

Older arms are the slings to be carried in;

Older legs are the stilts to stalk the earth with;

Sometimes an older hip is a convenient seat;

Older knees are to be energetic on, with the help

Of older heels and older toes, found on older feet.

An older back is to be heavy on, and is used

Like a ferry to go where crouching is necessary;

Older ears are the handles with which to guide us there.

Older belly buttons exist to be explored in by

Little mining fingers, provoking old eruptions;

Older hairs are the grasses that get played in,

To grow and change colour in little sunshines;

Older hands are the rails to practice caution on;

Older hearts are clocks to count out curiosities.

An older body is something to grow into,

And that needfulness is the necessity of older lives.

Stug Jordan

# Bug Poem

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Conquistador

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

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

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

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

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

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

and spit them back into the sea.

Stug Jordan

# Country Poem With Boy

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

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

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

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

irreverent Magna Carta.

Stug Jordan

# Doctrine

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Elegy In Silence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Stug Jordan

# Eye

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

Stug Jordan

# Gotti And Letti

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

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

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

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

Now Gotti is Letti.

Stug Jordan

# Hospital Song

(Sestina for catatonic patient in Ward\_\_\_)

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

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

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

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

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

But every one of them, each old animal, cares  
about their own unwritten brand of death,

as one by one they surely do disappear  
into that night beyond their dirty halls;  
the inbred object of their own disgust –  
wrapped up overnight, their stiff indignant shapes.

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

Stug Jordan

# I Am Not A Poet

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

looking back on those who are,  
I think: If they were then as I am now,  
why can't I....?  
But I don't, because  
I am not one of those.

Stug Jordan

# Lately

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

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

Stug Jordan



# Lineage

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

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

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

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

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

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

And then it's the onset of post-war efficiency;  
a razorish hum of depressed engines  
and accurate furrows –

a forsaken half slice of bread and awkward  
butter unskilfully spread, assuming  
a place on the table with tins of milk  
while the noise fractures the earth,

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

one delicate string to lace the two together.

Stug Jordan

# Man Danced

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

Stug Jordan

# Mornun' Mawther

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

## Mr. & Mrs.

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Old Man

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Prelude

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

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

Stug Jordan



# Revival

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Slumbers

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# Sweep Spring

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# The Beginning

1.

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

2.

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

3.

Days pass him lengthways, like hours  
Of continual traffic, as he huddles his thin  
Sides whilst walking; vomiting in roadside flowers.

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

4.

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

5.

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

Of bruised carrots; mandarins to put colour  
Back into the day; an autumn portent of duller  
Daybreaks, shorter evenings clouding the motorway.

6.

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

Stug Jordan

# The King's Physician

The king's physician  
knew his patient well,

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

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

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

Poor George inflated  
by decay,  
wasting day by day.

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

which hovered and spat  
above the prone  
little emperor.

'God save the king'  
he said as he pushed  
in the needle,

and watched the king pop  
and fly around the room.

Stug Jordan

# The Old Ploughman

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan



# The Old Scarecrow

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# The Path Knew Before The Footstep

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# The Snow And The Coal

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stug Jordan

# The White-Armed Statuette

The white-armed statuette  
is transfixed by the night,

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

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

though only a slender finger.  
Not enough to prevent her

from conducting the night.

Stug Jordan

# Three

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

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

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

Stug Jordan