Housework in Timbuktu

(For Alison)

My sister flies from Accra
to Tamale, then takes the north
road to Bolgatanga and further on
to muslim Ouagadougou, where two
young men on a mobilete attempt
to snatch her handbag.

In Burkina, feet swollen with
the heat she breaks her journey,
buying new medicine, worrying about
infection from mosquitos.

Two days later the rains fall
on the francophone west and she
decides to continue by train
to Bopo and then on to Mopti,
to catch a riverboat along the Niger.

All the way to Timbuktu.

On the outskirts of the town
there’s a painted sign and she has
her picture taken.
Standing at the lorry park next to
the market, she starts to think of all
the housework back in Stoke on Trent,

where her husband is turning over
a new divorce.
She may wait for him to visit
but he’ll never get to Timbuktu.

SIMON FIELD