

Poetry Series

**Richard George**  
**- poems -**

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## Richard George(June 1,1965)

I was educated at Oxford University, reading Latin and Greek at The Queen's College. The college's outstanding poet is Ernest Dowson.

I was awarded a Doctorate on the Roman epigrammatist Martial in 1994.

The following year I had a breakdown and had to abandon the academic life. The year after that the Muses came. Nothing has been the same since.

I have been published in nearly 50 different British small press magazines and have two full-length collections of poetry. More than half the poems on this website are new and will belong to a third.

I am also working on verse translations of the Roman satirist Juvenal and Greek epigrams from the Palatine Anthology.

I live in s, near London, with my widowed mother. We enjoy feeding grey squirrels.

# 1982

My lowest ebb, that winter:  
Breathing, tasting minus centigrade  
I studied the sky's silent score.  
I scoured the barren quarter  
Under glittering Orion  
For the tiny constellations  
On the edge of the horizon,  
Caelum, Columba  
But in binoculars' grainy cast  
All I saw were other people's windows.

Numb and sad, one evening  
I caught through lacing sycamores  
A small pinkish disc:  
Elusive Mercury,  
Following the sun down.

Kinder Spring scrolled new text up:  
I scanned for the furthest northward grasp  
Of another hemisphere's Centaur  
In vain. But once, 3 A.M.,  
Sleepless, looking out by chance  
Antares, in Scorpio:  
Red beacon in a bracelet of stars  
And back I stared, back, back  
Five hundred years of light  
To the centre of our galaxy

Before I was born.

Richard George

# 366 Days Later

Piggy-wig? Peccary,  
if you don't mind.  
This is the New World. British Bongduras.  
I've got things to do -  
I've not been standing around waiting for you.

FIVE P? Do I look duncible?  
It's antique silver,  
not your mass-produced rubbish.  
Chuck me the folding, just for now -  
and I'm going to need a local anaesthetic.

That turkey - well, actually,  
he's a quetzal with a weight problem -  
he's got a nerve.  
Weddings and funerals?  
It's delusions of bureaucracy.  
He's not licensed, you know -  
it won't be valid  
in some of our northern provinces.

Don't get me wrong, love,  
but has it ever occurred to you  
you're marrying your breakfast?  
A mate of mine once lived with an armadillo.  
Didn't work out, though.

Richard George

## 7/7: Before And After

The dark young man  
with the curls of the Maghreb  
is in an altercation  
with the ghost  
that lives between his eyes.  
'He's harmless', our cadence falls.  
'He's harmless'.

But on the eighth of July  
he is grinning ear to ear,  
boasting to his djinn of jihad  
'I did it! ' Our  
intonation shoots to the top deck:  
'Harmless?  
Is anything harmless? '

Richard George

# A Country Of The Mind

In late October,  
after the sun has gone down,  
a range of blue-grey  
cloud has been seen in the west:  
the citadel of lost dreams

Richard George

# A Discord Of Yellow

October sun on honey-coloured stone.  
Shocked, a blonde fresher  
leans over a gargoyle  
with milk, and a cheese sandwich.  
Heart of gold.

All he can see is the dark between her breasts.

He baptises her with acid  
he swigs from his own cistern,  
dissolving an angel

Richard George

# A Lustrum At Druslyn Road

I woke into memory  
a little old man,  
not a child in that incline

garden with the brook  
where our Siamese Achilles wrestled next door's Hector  
and shortly after his only bath deserted.

At half past dawn he crept in fen-  
drained by a dog fox fang  
and we swaddled him and prayed. I played the doctor.

Behind the fence with its honeycomb  
of air at the edge of the known world  
a Scottie lurked, to uphill-hurtling me  
the size of a bullmastiff...

The ruined concrete foundation  
of boxer kennels was our Lords plinth.  
My bat was plastic, strawberry pink  
with a crystalline, ripe 'tunk' when I Bradmaned dolly-drops.

One frail and gilded morning Dad  
pobbled home from hospital  
and unveiled toes hued  
out of Stanley Gibbons, magenta, indigo...

old man and a child.

Richard George



# A Neophyte To Lilith

At copperplate madrasa  
I mastered the scalpel  
Shipman dipped in vermillion  
and suave  
italics of the Third Reich.

You were my salvation.  
Snaking your lithe,  
gelatinous slalom  
you looped back 'o'  
to its foregoing lambda.

I adopted your font.

Feminist and New Man,  
we liked each other far more  
than Eve did Adam.

Richard George

## A Pair Of Goldcrests

When you are this tiny, death  
is a nudge; he, she  
in the blink of an iris,  
violet to red petals of rain,  
the seven-octave of seeing.  
Slight as you were  
we miss you.  
Sad as we are  
we smile.  
We have glimpsed the soul of photons.

Richard George

## A Private View

From underneath I glimpsed her waiting heels  
(Third floor at five o'clock) . For seconds flat  
I was the ground where ants beheld a queen.

She calls me 'Mouse man' now that I've downsized.  
I skip and scurry through her carriage-spokes,  
Seek loopholes in her shield in which to hide.

But mice cannot confront the beast that prowls  
And barbecue it. They won't raise her roof.  
They're horribly susceptible to owls.

So to the womb of terror they retreat.  
They worship womandom to sleep alone  
And when they walk caress with creeping feet.

Richard George

# A Squirrel Sextet

## 1 Opportunists

What we throw away  
is their feast: a slice of bread,  
a packet of stale

cream pastries, and crisps  
they twitch-finger around, dab  
as a cross-stitcher.

Will one day they twig:  
dropped money, and bound into  
the chip shop, quids in?

## 2 Foreboding

It has been winter  
for years; no, it has happened  
before, and it will

happen again when  
I'm not. Consciousness and  
colour are draining

from what I see: black  
from a branch an eye states 'You  
have been here too long'.

## 3 First Day At School

The mother leads her  
kit onto dry land - their last  
day together. It

sees me and scurries  
behind the tree-trunk of my  
tan corduroy leg.

I spot it next week  
foraging confidently.  
Mum is forgotten.

#### 4 Attitudes Of Death

The blood from its snout  
is yet to jell. Stiff-stump-armed  
it looks scandalized

by some calumny -  
'Me? Tree-rat? ' A car swishes  
past, leaps it una-

ware: a second pan-  
cakes it. Abject, it lies on  
its front: 'I give up'.

#### 5 Landlord

Tortie's about. Birds  
alarm-hack: adenoids 'Kh-  
kh-kh' from on high

and head first, down it  
lopes, and circumnavigates  
me on the wet grass.

I infer from this  
'If you want to picnic here,  
you owe me pretzels'.

#### 6 Squirrel's Eye View

You're bizarre squirrels:  
you walk on your hinds, and your  
front legs catkin, limp.

Your bush is on your  
noddle: your eyes are too dull  
to catch dawn's chestnut.

You are two species,  
vicious and good. It is hard  
to tell you apart

Richard George

# A Walking Sadness

The Euston Road. April. Night.  
Of all these London numberless  
I love one:  
my old shoes pound her name,  
Lorna. Lorna.  
Poet's shoes.  
Now I SEE faces pass,  
projected on her photoplay  
for not being Lorna:  
I have never felt this living,  
thirty and a day  
in artificial light and rain  
and windscreen tear-blink.

Richard George

# Aardvarks On The Moon

As starving sacked their underground  
cathedrals, they were salvaged  
by a zoo Soyuz.

From his astronaut's porthole  
a cherub stares rapt  
at their tube-nozzles, Jodrell Bank  
dishes and vast woebegone

eyes, as in khaki  
camouflage they stoop,  
Michelangelos of soft earth,  
dreams beneath their claw-machetes.

Now that they are safe  
they are impotent.

Richard George



# Abergavenny To Blaenavon

The Coal Board has designs to sell  
This mutilated moonscape  
Where the great plateau of industry  
Crashes into Monmouthshire.  
They have taken all they want.

The B four-two-four-eight winds up  
To sixteen-ninety:  
We picnic-park, stretch our legs.  
Higher still, Cefn Coch,  
Beached carcass hacked with rain.

Two old men, caps and soot  
Discuss the universe:  
From the open-air museum  
Of their livelihood, they greet us.  
We owe them time of day.

Richard George

# After An Exam

Finished! So has she,  
With ages left to go:  
We sweep our desks, and chase each other

Out from ink and white  
Into soft grey afternoon.  
She asks me back for tea:

This stolen hour, our prize.  
I look around, my mind  
Still minutes, seconds quick:

Scruffy furniture,  
And crib-sheets everywhere.  
I turn my gaze on her:

The glasses, lips too full,  
That centre-parted hair.  
She smiles at me a smile

Down at heel and sweet,  
Modestly disowning  
A claim to be beautiful.

But now she smiles, she is,  
This hour we steal from Time:  
I see it, just this once,

The world come down to tea,  
A girl, and no exam.  
A picture, brief as light.

Richard George

# After The Fall

I was a cherry tree once:  
The flowers grow around me now,  
Loosestrife and celandine.

A hundred years, more or less  
My poor rings chronicle:  
One rainy night, that rainy June

Down I came, waterlogged  
And when you last expected it  
My branches clutched at the morning.

Richard George

# Aging Together

Worn gold, fear not fresh plastic.  
Each furrow reflects  
a superhighway of desire blazed  
into my landscape of neurons.  
You, with the deepest roots, are my tallest tree.

It was at your equator  
I began. My odyssey  
through forest and savannah  
has reached a plateau which,  
because it is you now, becomes beautiful.

In twenty more years  
I cross your snow line.

Richard George

# Alcohol Anonymous

I am a clever enemy.  
I am always one step up on you:  
when you say two, I am three, and four.  
I always have the right excuse,  
the watertight alibi;  
the disarming confession.  
There is always a more charitable conclusion.

I am the patron saint  
of actors, and confidence tricksters,  
of those you like who are not your friend.  
And I am not your friend.  
I shall slur the tongue of my nemesis,  
dim her eyes and dull her ears,  
I shall turn her wrath to contentment  
and her chiselled marble features  
into red and rustic.

I am a disease  
that feels like rude good health;  
a central nervous system depressant  
that makes you forget you are tired,  
a last resort that feels like Plan A.

I am a clever enemy,  
and one you will never defeat:  
the best that you can hope for  
is exile from my house of love  
and sad celibacy.

Richard George

# Alison

Four young men in summer term,  
we measured days by alcoholic tides  
and long liquid evenings  
deepening to night.

Cooler, hipper, or so we thought,  
we bestowed our tipsy accolades:  
'Weird', 'Bizarre', 'Avant garde'.  
God, we fancied ourselves.

And then there was Alison:  
she sat with us by default (we  
were a better class of rough trade) .  
And we just stared in wonder -  
with not a girlfriend between us -  
at her fine, greyhound features:  
'Do you like this music, Alison? '  
'Would you like a drink, Alison? '  
'Will you go out with me? '  
All she ever said, it seemed, was 'No':  
but now I close my eyes I  
can feel, touch almost  
her stillness, silence;  
a richer currency.

Richard George

# An Old English Master

Tenniel could have etched  
him into my mind: claw nose, half-  
crown spectacles and thin lips' dab  
turning the page. I hear the chock  
as he mined Greek Es from the coal face.  
Last lesson, in our first week at grammar school.

The end was in sight  
of the longest days of our lives so far  
and he told us about the railways  
in the British Raj, and was kind to us.  
The heatwave of '76  
had uniformed the playing fields for Deccan.

In that dust-mote gold September room  
he seemed to come from last century,  
reading us Hardy and Kipling  
in our new world, miles from home  
in the bigoted market town  
with no Jewish people. Bar one.

Richard George

# An Old Welsh Hill Farmer

Most days he sees nobody.  
Then you glint in his radar.  
In a flash his eye peregrine-stoops  
to the billionth billionth pixel.  
Your pilgrimage through contour-lines is on his land.

'Just asking.  
If they don't speak, you know  
there's something wrong with 'em, see?  
You're all right'.

A few words. All it takes.

Richard George



# Ashen Evening

Grey. I need hot vervain  
for this ague of Englishness;  
gasoline nectar  
in an amber womb I lift  
to the lamp, a Conquistador.

Lines Lorca, Lowry down  
to the mass grave of memory.  
The full-moon-nippled puta is on guard here.  
She slurs 'Burn me, trier,  
and burn the wreckage'.

I wake on a playa.

Richard George

# Astronomy In Autumn

For each faint, scattered  
star a brown dwarf spider spins  
at the room's hairline

Richard George

# At The Hayward Gallery

Gaudy abstracts do nothing for me.  
It's that backpack girl, head  
between her knees. She must be trying to duck  
a seizure, stem an earthquake  
in the rock of her beneath her feet.  
Vortex. She hunkers down,  
a copula of engorged muscle

no one else notices.

Richard George

# Augury

Gulls, I thought first; but they don't  
skein like the grey-shirt bully-boys,  
and these wings, ragged-edged  
as sails the morning after Trafalgar  
challenged Audubon. As though in Rome  
I grappled with ignorant  
geometries of flight-path  
for the words to describe the future,  
the innocence of a plague  
across steppe, snow and sea that kills its messenger.

The bird of death is a no-bird.

Richard George

# Avatar

She was dark, gamine, professional.  
First time we argued.  
The second she apologised  
'Was I awful? '

Awakening.  
At least ghosts report to memory.

What googol program  
pulsing in abyssal depths  
texted this stranger?

As waves lap our ankles  
we are the ocean

Richard George

# Baedeker: Balkhash

We smelt a copper road from Samarkand.  
Cloud-capped chimneys  
fire eagles to swoop on our lungs.  
Remember first term,  
when you cowered soldering?

And how are you going to get here, Marco Polo?  
We are bookended by sand and vulcanized clay.  
There is no main line, no airport  
and you failed your test. Twice.

I doubt Kubla Coleridge shared needles.  
And 'Absolut' - forget it.  
Bootleg crunches glass into your eyes.

That scimitar of fishpond -  
as every map-raker knows,  
half fresh, half NaCl -  
is wreathed with Silk Cut and sodden gossamer.  
They should twin us with Margate.

turquoise

crystal resignation

none will quarry

Richard George

# Bard And Exile

Swansea,1960.

My forbear enquires

'Are there any Welsh people here? '

She means 'Does anyone speak Welsh? '

but Kilvey Hill fumes.

A Welsh cold shoulder whips and stings sub-Arctic.

Snug in Kidwelly Press

are an Englishman working in Chepstow,

a Southern Cross of expats

and a Londoner

on away-days from Camden to Cardiff.

Anyone can be wasp

to bara brith. Here in England

Welshness keeps its head down:

there's nothing like delirious, malachite Patrick's.

The editor harangues me

on the phone. 'George slew our dragon!

Speak the language, do you? '

To be Welsh

is to be part of a disagreement.

Richard George

# Bereavement

It's not a virus.  
You'll never get over it.  
You'll grow around it.

Richard George



# Bible Dust

A Bible should not be in mint condition.  
Let it stoop in a dead cell  
surplice from fingers  
immemorial fumbling for comfort,  
maculate, creased as Methuselah's hands.

In an empty room, King James buckram frays.  
Month by month it coats  
wherever it lands wan damask.  
Hell is hypothermia  
if ashes are angels.

Richard George

# Breaking A Tooth

First glimpse of the pearl  
I cup in my clammy hand  
outside a mirror:  
chastened as crystal I sit,  
digesting mortality

Richard George

# Buncefield: The Memory Depot

The roof of dreams crashed on my head,  
up-puppeting me to an ash dawn  
as my window-frames danced.  
By breakfast it was World News  
as sidelong the raven plume  
smeared like the mane of a scarlet Astarte...  
the Marseillaise who lured me,  
a virgin, Magellan-bearded,  
from her stall of Henry Miller in s market.  
For two nights, smoke-nimbus cast  
rust and grisaille  
like the pupil of an eye across a waning moon.

Richard George

# C

English Lit, she taught us;  
Thin lips grey like rainy clouds,  
Tar-black hair cut straight across the shoulder.  
Beautiful she wasn't:  
But something in me hurt.

And then one break, by accident  
I opened the wrong door...  
I wonder, still, if they saw me.

I am her age now,  
And all I have is one report's  
Tall, italic script:  
'He shows little interest'  
(Initialled) C.  
I dream. She's reading a book,  
Bare feet in the water:  
'Richard', she fends me off  
And I have no reply.

Richard George

# Caligula At The Comedy Store

It was banter, knockabout -  
'I've had your wife', to senators  
who wished I'd died of that fever.  
I think I was quite restrained.

If students remember nothing else,  
it's the seashells. But \*I\* wasn't mad.  
An army - afraid of water?  
'If you want work for sissies', I said,  
'you can have it. Make yourselves necklaces'.

I went too far though. First to admit.  
The night I beat that singer to death  
I was so out of it - hash in the wine.  
Looking back, I shudder.

That, I suppose, was the problem.  
You can't be Peter Cook as Clive  
and have infinite power.  
Vespasian - now there was an emperor.  
Face like shitting marble.  
Funny, then,  
that what killed him was diarrhoea.

Richard George

# Callimachus For Our Times

Dew of grain spirit  
not bloated barrels' dead rats,  
old socks, apple-dregs

Richard George

# Callimachus's Contrast

The muddy, raging torrent,  
the droplet of pure water -  
Anne, do you remember?  
Here, on Brighton beach,  
the top layer of pebbles  
is ugly and lumpen:  
but sweep your hand, and underneath  
are quartz-eggs sucked  
small by the sea  
in pink, white, lilac,  
exquisite as Faberge.  
I shall make you a necklace...  
and throw it in the cupboard  
with my other whimsies.

Richard George

# Capability Janes

They water blossom-tresses; pare them back  
on branch of bone. Big amorous boys' eyes  
come bumble-droning, pollen-bags on thighs.

But every strand, each rooted follicle  
is an antenna. Stung, they turn and glare,  
of scrutiny behind their necks aware.

Men lack this swivel-circumflex of sight.  
Staunch Agamemnon, staring straight ahead  
as Clytemnestra crept, would soon lie dead.

Richard George



# Caravanserai

Before we were men and women  
we drank morning milk in a chalk mine.  
It smelt, and we raced from kissing.  
In the playground, I gazed up  
at a white ledge on summer-blue:  
'minaret', in a key unknown  
to cosy hymns our blunt recorders  
bottle-topped to. I hushed,  
my feet so little calloused  
I could feel the grit our knees bloodied -  
a camel's kick - smooth into sand  
and the brush of a pale robe.  
It is from here we set out to become  
strangers, the lambs we were  
invisible as our bones

Richard George

# Chiroptera

The summer evening ages  
To silhouettes, and pin-head stars  
And vespertine, the first  
To serotine, the last,  
Bats unfold strange names,  
Flitting twilight, out of reach:  
Bechstein.  
Natterer.  
Daubenton.  
The men who loved them.

Their lives were a prayer  
To God the naturalist:  
Natterer elbowed his desk,  
Bony fingers stretching wings apart  
While Daubenton fished as the dusk fell,  
In his beard a glint of teeth  
As his bat hawked, low over water.

And the rarest? Bechstein?  
Could this be him, I wonder,  
Wrapped in his leather, upside down  
Twittering hello?  
Here is my net. I cast it out  
To christen him.

Richard George

# Coming To Terms With Karadjic

Forget his Neronian Muse.  
What troubles me  
is this man was a psychiatrist.  
He had analysed the loam  
under his every step, excavated  
mines from the subconscious  
and unraveled  
the noose of schizophrenia.

But if hatred is your core  
genocide is geology,  
pragmatic as a frontal lobotomy.  
In a dialogue of snipers  
the calmest, most rational aim prevails;  
a Socrates  
at an Adriatic chessboard,  
the sanest of wolves

Richard George

# Counter-Evolution

To homo ferus, speech mattered  
less than pulling fangs of frost-  
Rusalky. Instead, he grew a pelage.

On two legs, he presented a target  
for authorities to flatten. On four  
he huddled tight to wet concrete, his bed and rock.

His beard forgot cut-throat.  
It tuned into enemy signals keen as a cat's whisker.

The scaly tail was gratuitous.

Richard George

# Deleted Scenes From The Cinema Of Dreams Post 7/7

1

Oxford spires list  
uprooted my escape to  
Port Meadow is locked  
by security gargoyles  
and a callow George Dubya

2

War is Lazarus  
a cluster bomb second moon  
maypoles around us  
on featherbed clouds we plod  
mantis jets accelerate

3

A woman shopper  
falls in slow motion puking  
puddles multiply  
I Demosthenes my mouth  
with her chlorine emeralds

Richard George

# Digital Compression

Lap top. Revision.

As she gapes, shovels lettuce  
her MP3s crunch

Richard George

# Diuturnity's Bite

On Thameslink home from Brighton  
where I'd spent the day waiting  
for the roar of grey to turn to gold  
and silence, like an alchemist,  
I glimpsed you at a station;

girl who rhymed and swam when I  
was paddling - with a pushchair,  
sucking the socket of nicotine.  
Even through the grease  
and scratched graffiti I could see

you were unhappy. We're a pair,  
if that's any consolation:  
drink is my elixir of death,  
my eyes are fraying floaters  
and I've lost a tooth, for ever.

Ten years on. Infinity  
has blinked: 'Never again'.  
Our low tides gleaming far out in the dawn  
are concreted over now,  
old as ammonites.

But cheerily, like Falstaff,  
I am fasting-forward  
my remaining spool of life.  
I'll buy you cider at sunset  
in the bar at the end of the line.

Richard George

# Dr. Schweinsteiger's Heartache Remedy

Such a long face!  
You have broken up with your Helen?  
I am sorry - truly.  
Let me bring to bear the arsenic cure  
of cold philosophy.

Your innamorata's visage -  
is there any part you don't like?  
There is always one, believe me. Re-  
align around the fault -  
a caricature.

Now extend this to her whole physiognomy -  
too big at (a) , too small at (b) ?  
Is she pear-shaped,  
spindle-shanked, flat-footed?  
Doubtful odours?

Schnell, before you relent -  
defects of personality.  
Couple each with a physical flaw:  
a bulbous end of nose, for instance,  
with superciliousness.

This, I guarantee you,  
works. I haven't been in love  
since 1963.  
Girt with these weapons,  
Menelaus would have laughed.

Richard George



# Drinking At The Mitre

Misery was meek  
thirteen on a lead round Cambridge,  
Prodigy City he  
would never frolic in, summer-gold;

sad old man  
with a pint of acid cider  
half empty, stealing snake-eyes  
at the girls who will run the world.

Richard George

# Eavesdropping Kashmir (Led Zeppelin, August 1979)

On Friday I unfrocked Fourth  
from its alb and tracked the comet  
of stylus over glittering tar,  
rapt at the tangerine flame of label.

On Saturday, in the hope  
of stray muezzin on the wind  
we embarked into gathering owl-light for Knebworth.  
The glade of our lay-by  
alchemised bombardment  
into subtle thunder.  
Hours, they made us wonder.

We picked the words from trees  
echo-floodlit, racked the zenith  
for riffing clouds, solo-constellations.  
In my boy-king's box, blithe  
to copyright or their trespasses  
I ape-guitared.

On our way home every winding lane was a chord change.

On DVD, they blind me  
in the beam of their juggernaut.  
But buried in the Araby mane of night  
Stevenage became Srinagar  
and Hertfordshire fledged  
as a sub-continent

Richard George

# Eclipse: A Haiku Sequence

Imperceptible  
at first, sunlight changing; then  
dusky, or faded,

filter on the lens  
encroaching, sky blue into  
grey, then grey-lilac,

colours blur, textures,  
shadows cast paler, out of  
focus, sudden cold

strikes us uneasy,  
half moon sun on leaves jangles  
crescent reflections,

dragonflies hawk the  
gloom, birds on their way homewards,  
green murk of low cloud

BLINKS OUT: OUR DARK STAR,  
OBSIDIAN RADIANCE,  
CUT CARBON DIAMOND

and back, like a switch,  
heavens as dawn six o'clock,  
luminous, bleary -

to morning of mornings  
and washed-lucid consciousness  
reborn we awake

Richard George

# Eminences Blanches (Rwanda: New Orleans)

They crawled to Lake Kivu  
where their only water biered corpses  
runnelled by the border's knife,  
leaching cholera.

No car, and you're nobody,  
up to your neck in sewage.  
The gas-guzzlers have left town.  
Race, in a Wal-Mart trolley.

The tribal chief sits back  
behind the face-mask of a TV screen.  
His conscience is being immunized,  
not a pin-prick.

Ten years on, and camera-vultures  
flap, flap with mobile phones.  
The hard drive of death records  
a whisper: 'Plus ca change'.

Richard George

# Emmeline At Westminster

You look a bit sad these days,  
a side-show: 'Oh, stick her up  
round there, that's her sorted out'.  
Few of the girls even know  
who you are: 'When? ' Hard to believe -  
and so we forget.  
And women are still locked away  
when an old prof loses his keys  
and the pigeon cocks circle and puff  
at your feet, and the hens ignore them  
like those banners on the pavement opposite,  
threadbare angels stating what ought to be obvious;  
silenced by 'Of course'.

Richard George

# First Blossom

It wasn't to be. You  
knew, wiser at eighteen  
than my ten years of beard-weed.

But you told me the way plants  
moved was one of the wonders of science;  
a gift from you, ever since,  
light as the down  
on your new petals.

Richard George

# First Harbingers

a sharp smuggled  
into C major

flecks of blood  
that checkmate explanation

black and white postcard  
glimmer-clouds

when your knees marionette  
and your mouth feels the wrong shape

Richard George

# Foolsday Sunset

Spring has menarched.  
The lads next door share a four-pack.

'Did you get off with her?  
Give her a score out of ten'.

I want to clamour

'Did you gaze upon the ovarian?  
Handle her memory  
like bombs or blossoms! '

A fence divides us;

and an anorexic new moon  
stained vermillion

Richard George



# Freud's Nightmare

the plane burst in  
at an angle but its Sodom  
was a massive phallus

ejaculates of fire  
a long trail of dirty smoke

then  
the lift shaft buckled  
the womb of manhood hurtled through itself  
velocity  
voluptuously hanging

Death breathed out a wall  
the sticky musk it left  
contained the unseeds of people

its odour  
could never be washed out

Richard George

# From Experience

Bonaparte (hand cupped  
to chest) , I bet, had a dis-  
locating shoulder

Richard George

# Ghost Girls

The overweight student hears  
'Mike's new squeeze is gorgeous! '  
Lump in throat, he plods home,  
imagination riddled.

For the rest of his life, he wonders.

But his friend was misinformed.  
The woman, as described,  
did not exist.

Glimpsed in ads, magazines,  
on TV, the web, spun count-  
less ways by men's Venus-Muse -  
girls who do not exist  
are everywhere.

We have reached saturation point.

Pursued  
round a corner, a demoiselle,  
vanilla or Sobranie, disappears...

For a breath, she owns you.

Richard George

# Giving Away My Books

I hereby leave to Martin P.  
My sellotaped-together Oxford texts.  
Your admiration touched me:  
Read them as I did.

Poetry: when those who print  
Could still afford hard covers,  
64 golden pages,  
Willowy and strong.  
For Jane.

And all those doorstep novels;  
Serendipity-stripped  
By the plausibility police.  
Joe, you deserve better,  
If gravity still earths you.

Mike, for whom words failed me  
When I had the power... a library  
On UFOs and Ouija boards  
And unidentified wallaby slashers,  
Must Collect.  
Nothing amazes me, these days.

And last of all,  
Jill, dear Jill,  
My OS maps...  
The eye of God, or an eagle.  
I loved our hills, that April  
In the Radnorshire monsoons,  
Otter meeting otter.  
But now I can't walk fifty yards  
Without angina.

Richard George

## Grafham, 1983

Shelduck, drake  
to a discord of warblers.  
Far bank dissolved in  
myopia, memory:  
a double watercolour

Richard George

# Gynaecomorphic Oxford

She has honey-coloured hair,  
A friendly, freckly face  
And an elegant figure.  
She is everybody's ex.

She works hard, parties hard,  
Her I.Q.'s off the scale:  
But she plays the whole thing down  
With a joke, and a smile.

She is welcoming and sweet,  
Modestly flirtatious:  
But behind people's backs  
Her wit can be vicious.

She gives of herself  
Without stinting: so why  
Is this beautiful woman  
Ingratitude's bride?

Richard George

# Halcyon And After

It was May or June, I met you:

Business, something or other.  
Your study, when you showed me in  
Was full of the sun, drenched with gold:  
From work strewn across tables, chairs  
You turned to me and smiled -  
And I was dazzled.  
You made me tea with bergamot  
And we talked and talked, all the things  
Our loved ones dare not hear.

At last, when I stood up to go  
I saw your eyes diving back,  
Sad and wise, into shafts of light  
And I thought: 'She is the one.  
I can tell her anything'.

But humid grey clouded the sun  
That day your skirt revealed your legs:  
I stared too long.  
Your smile became a laugh  
And you sheathed your tongue.  
From then on, we were colleagues.

The night I saw you last  
I walked you home half way:  
We practised conversation,  
Venturing nothing.  
Suddenly, you slipped from my side:  
I watched you walk to your future  
Through summer dark and street lights,  
May and June, another year.

Richard George

# Hand I Shall Not Lay

Glamis. An inheritance  
of sadness unearths her eyes,  
a burden of hurt generations of women  
she carries well.  
She has lost a skin, and gained a shell.

I gaze at her, and see beauty beyond desire.  
She looks at me, and recalls  
another's stubby fingers  
and goatee on gaudy night  
when timely Bacchus drowned designed delight.

We are in a cave, before history.  
She weeps. I want to comfort her.  
One touch, and she will scream.  
I am monstrous, and male.  
Small travail.

Richard George



# Heron

Grey pterodactyl,  
you are too slow for our time:  
your dangling legs and wing-span  
set an ample target  
for the murder of hoodies.

Faster, faster  
every year you watch them fly:  
you land, turn trigger statue  
and catch and eat your only friend,  
the primordial fish.

Richard George

# Hilaire Belloc's Mice

His son died in the war:  
his beard grew unkempt  
like the High Chamberlain's  
(‘The kindest and the best of men’)  
in Cautionary Tales he wrote for children.

And as he combed the past  
there surfaced, from some ocean's depths  
the fear of poverty:  
he slumped from company,  
bread for an emergency stowed away

in his pockets. But the house mice  
scuttled up his legs in joy  
‘That Providence should deign to find  
Them food of this delicious kind’:  
he didn't notice, or he didn't mind.

Richard George

# His Last Trip To London

1

Winter sunshine dazzled the old man  
with graffiti in his eyes as on  
the window of the train,  
scribbling the connection through  
the cell debris. An urchin stared -  
a writer! - and on impulse  
he handed it his pen, and  
away it ran delighted down  
the bucking aisle. He felt  
he'd rejoined the human race.

But when he stepped Underground  
the chilly light convinced him:  
another stroke, and shoving crowds  
would watch him die.

2

He visited one more time  
the library of poets,  
jostling periodicals  
and felt weary.

On Thameslink, northbound  
a passenger gripped him  
with the rivet stare of Serbs.  
From Cricklewood to Edgware  
he studied the long strata of the sunset:  
apricot, liquid green  
and purplish grey. One of the best.  
And he rallied, and was glad  
that he'd made the expedition  
and would soon be home.  
The next day  
his head hurt.



# Hogg And Hanlon And Me

Three mature students  
in decrepit Barbour jackets;  
Judes obscure, each with an  
implausible route to Oxford.  
Hogg was twenty tragic stone,  
Oscar Wilde meets Falstaff:  
he taxied us in a Simca  
he could fit inside with difficulty  
and offered Sloanes 'A lift, my dear? '  
I laugh his laugh to this day.

Hanlon was Anglo-Irish,  
spare as a civil servant,  
out of his gentle element  
at his college of trendy horridans.  
He read all Freud in fourteen days  
and collected Sixties music long  
before it came back into fashion,  
positioning stylus on shellac  
with laboratory precision.  
I loved to listen.

All was potential, those three years:  
Hogg would be huge on television,  
Charles strike gold on Harley Street  
and I - of course - would write.  
Somehow, though, I think we knew  
nothing would ever come of us.

A decade gone, and still I smile:  
'Hogg would find that funny... God!  
Hanlon would like this record'.  
But did I like them more  
than they liked me? What is it stops me  
phoning, writing, E-mailing - and if  
I ran and caught them  
would they turn, insouciant, and ask  
'Did you deserve us? '



# Horse Mushroom

Earth to earth fruit  
in the grave-grass, my  
Siren to gather.

Cheek to its cheek  
in my garden I nuzzle  
to cool,  
mammary muskones;  
tempt-apprehensive

as when my first Naiad  
rose on the bed, smiling  
'Ride you'.

Richard George

# Horus

As a crow saunters  
up that roof-scarp tile by tile  
I picture Giza

Richard George



# Howard Linton

Eleven, and hyperactive:  
The classroom rang with his voice,  
His great round head split with smiles.  
He never remembered his books, his pen:  
He couldn't sit still for thirty seconds.  
But the school treated his problem  
'As a disciplinary matter'  
And they didn't like West Indians.  
So they disciplined Howard Linton  
And disciplined him again:  
And little by little  
He lost his smile  
And muttered of heavyweight boxers  
And wrote one-syllable graffiti.  
Howard Linton, the last I heard,  
Was detained at Her Majesty's pleasure,  
The eighteen-year-old look-out  
In an armed robbery.  
His classroom is a cell,  
His teachers prison guards.

Richard George

# Ice Age

A thousand steps above the valley  
April is winter:  
But Offa's gale harangues me on,  
Deafens misgiving.

Leaves of snow gather,  
Shroud tracks with silence.  
Retreating from safety,  
I pad like Scott or Shackleton  
And look back; lost.  
In fog's winding-sheet, I stagger  
But something guides me down along  
Its blind man's stick; a hedgerow.

Here, the land remembers  
Glaciers, dog-tooth rocks  
Gouging geology.  
Brambling birds busy me home  
To Anno Domini.

Richard George

# In Concert

As Tom wauls, Jerry  
muezzins in miniature.  
Neither get their girl.

Richard George

# In The Churchyard Of St. Peter

Plateau of summer.  
I sit by Victorian  
graves with my luggage.

The elderly pass  
me, alive with excitement:  
their train's arriving

Richard George

# Inheriting

My father lives in my dreams now:  
In death he is half a stranger,  
Professional, like my doctor.  
He has left me behind, moved on.

So I retire, as he did,  
To hobbies and memorabilia.  
I cultivate his short fuse,  
His humour, his generosity:  
I drink as much as he smoked  
And smuggle the bottles home  
In his number-coded briefcase.  
I shall die like him, before sixty:  
I fear it no longer.  
It is part of the family.

Richard George

# Innominata

We have been in this dumb show now for ten years.  
I have witnessed you mature  
blossom-lush to magisterial.  
Still you tremor me.

Your attitude  
to my blind importunate stare  
has grown from furious through pity  
to a queen's pride, assuming  
adoration as your birthright.  
I caught you once looking at me  
with what I liked to believe  
was the briefest scintilla  
of affection.

We must never speak, never.  
How high is our tightrope?

Underneath what surges?

What poetry have - will I guess  
consumed by the unknown  
universe of your name?

Richard George

# Invocation To Sleep

Meldorine,  
maiden with  
sable mane  
and sweet,  
mocking smile;

rapture me,  
spread your limbs  
lissom-lithe,  
drape me  
with your dreams;

love me or  
love me not,  
dark princess,  
know that  
I love you.

Richard George

# Iris Murdoch And The Inanimate

'Thrown away'. I sense  
one degree of your kindness  
encompassing all

in those two sad words.  
But what would a bottle feel?  
It's just a waiter -

it dies with its tip,  
and the last pang of pleasure  
on a summer tongue.

Chairs, on the other  
hand; chairs are made for longer  
association.

No one to support;  
no creativity to  
underpin, no warm

clamp-to of buttock.  
One leg of four breaks, and this  
racehorse is useless.

Chairs mourn, I'm sure,  
in the charnel of junk; lie  
catatonic.

Richard George



# Jacqueminot In Negative

The most beautiful woman I ever met  
showered me with confidences,  
scarlet, jade, sapphire  
chatoyance in funeral tears.  
I wove her a biopsy.

But there

on the other side of the road

are her Concorde-  
aerodynamic curves  
evaginated monochrome.  
Under a shock blanched to pearl  
her glare is strychnine.

Her ghost?

Her or a stranger?

Does she recognise me?

If she does, does she hate me  
as a dolphin its carver,

hybrid rose, half her organ donor?

Richard George

## Jane: A Living Picture

I'm resisting the temptation  
(now you work at Tate Modern)  
to visit you like one of the exhibits:  
but I wonder how a century  
of painters might have seen you.  
Picasso flattens you  
to an ironic eyebrow's hypotenuse:  
Modigliani strings you out  
like an inscrutable almond.  
Chagall depicts you flying with a goat,  
which is not how I envisage you:  
Bacon's plastic surgery  
leaves you simian, resentful.  
(Wyndham Lewis sketched you,  
but never completed the project  
since you refused to sleep with him) .  
De Kooning made you hideous,  
a matriarchal monster  
from a schizophrenic's nightmare:  
Warhol silk-screened you in boredom.  
It took Lucien Freud  
to do you justice; nose  
to a flower, dark eyes  
depthless, Hebraic.

Richard George

# Jelly Fungus

It was sunset in winter.  
Oyster skies gleamed  
beyond the sycamores in the north-west.  
I found it in the no-lane  
between our shed and the fence next door  
and it flabbergasted me,  
glair and colloid  
to my clammy palm, taste  
unimaginable. This thing  
was alive, a man o' war.

I had my first wet dream  
seven months later.

Richard George

# Juxon Street

As oil wells roared 'Kuwait! '  
I elbowed through Oxford's  
en passant logomachy  
to my friend in Jericho.  
His American housemate  
cowered behind the letterbox,  
whimpering her mind was blown.  
I retreated.

Josh stirred explanation  
into a warm mug of apology.  
'The weed... the fear...  
you were wearing your black jacket -  
you know, the Marks & Spencer one -  
and you looked angry.  
Demonic vibes, or something'.

Sulphur in a struck match,  
a flicker of the infernal.

Richard George

# Last Moments

I feel sorry for bumblebees.  
They don't make honey.  
They're the fat churls,  
the patronized teddy bears.  
We could do without them.

One's grounded. I want to help  
it up. But it's fading.  
It lifts a leg as though to say  
'Leave me alone'.  
Peering concerned

I can see its eye:  
it's frightened, I can see fear  
in the black eye of a bumblebee.  
It is telling me 'Let me go.

My time has come'.

In crystal evening silence  
I respect its wishes.  
And please

when I am dying,  
half way to the ocean where we were before we were,

do not drag me back.

Richard George

# Leap Day

On the coldest morn  
of the year, Collared Doves mate  
on a branch: ice dis-  
lodges, scatters profuse as  
your loving's ejaculate

Richard George

# Lifter

Swoop  
to the biscuits; in/  
out the swing-door.  
Mixed race. Actress.

She's rangy seconds well away.  
Do I tell the college authorities?

Would I want her to hang, for some cookies?

A dare among girlfriends?  
A protest at pornography  
on the top shelf ('I'm not paying pigs') ?  
Or had her loan expired?

I feel for eagles held up  
by churlish farmers, limp.

A sequel, when I have wings.

Richard George

# Light Years Of Sunset

solstice eve  
Capella  
twin font of Zeus  
brims on the horizon

through a lambent triad

blue

pearl

bistre

1961

bathes  
in our quotidian star

Richard George



# Listen To Me

I died on 9/11.  
I was outside - a miracle! -  
floating, not flying,  
in the plume of smoke you could see from space  
with the molecules of my body.  
I watched the world watch the news.

We exist in more dimensions than you.  
You're like the Internet -  
we can pop in, and drop out of you.  
We're lightning-quick! Your thoughts  
are clear as water as we hang  
at your conch-lobes like hummingbirds.

But we can't get through to you.  
I saw you grieve. It was terrible.  
I clung to you, to reassure  
and you didn't feel me.  
I watched you try and cut your wrists  
and couldn't make the blood clot.

You are all like fish in an ocean  
we can scuba in - I can only look.  
My sad, beautiful grouper.  
I'm deaf-mute, a Milky Way  
scattered across the universe.  
I know all, can do nothing.

It's the ultimate apartheid.  
Your Death denies us;  
an underclass, gazing down on you,  
little regarded as oxygen.  
We are the twice bereaved.

Comfort me.

Richard George

# Lost Child

It's an air raid siren,  
red alert. Face slapped  
Jabberwock, all maw, she howls.  
My heart jumps to. I catch  
a woman's eye: glances of strangers twine  
into a safety net. 'Where's your Mum? '  
A finger-stub j'accuses.

They hug, Furies reconciled,  
a confluence of molten.  
Left hand in right  
they set off down the road to guilt, and pardon.

Richard George

# Louis Wain: Catavaggio

1

He first sketched the kitten  
to comfort his young wife  
in her last months: and when she died,  
the cats took over.  
Everything they did they un-  
Midas-touched with mayhem,  
decades before Eliot.

2

But royalties played possum,  
and bankruptcy's bullmastiff tailed him down:  
he saw his two tortoiseshell  
sisters hit by cars -  
and his mind strayed.  
In Napsbury's magic manse,  
behind high walls, he rediscovered fun:  
the Thirties were a sugar mouse.

At sixteen, he had a stroke  
and woke the final time to hear  
'War is coming'.  
Whatever war was, it was  
the end for cats.

3

I was watching TRIGGER HAPPY  
with my vodka genie.  
Enter left, three mischief-men  
in cat suits; grab the milk crates  
and waddle off to Elton John.  
A presence snuggled to me:  
I must be going mad, but

I heard you laugh.



# Love's Viva

'But her eyes? Can you  
define, exactly, her eyes? '  
'Blackening agate'.

Richard George

# Making Progress

When did you last spot  
one of Noah's jalopies -  
the frog-pout Anglia,  
the snail-shell Allegro  
or an Imp pug-squashed to a concertina?

Where are the Eurovision flops,  
Daf, Yugo, Simca,  
or that Quasimodo Renault  
ramped up on stilts,  
an all fours steatopygous hooper?

Gulag, what Gulag  
crushed Moskvitch babushkas  
or the thin-lipped Skoda,  
a coffin on ice-skates,  
brogue like a motorboat?

How were we chicaned by badge-engineering,  
the Wolseley (né Austin) ,  
third eye glinting in its grille,  
and the Vandenplas, the office martinet's panzer?  
Rust shall come to ye all, saith the Lord.

And who can forgive  
a Princess built like Henry Cooper?

But tyre-tracks wallpaper  
our bedrooms of memory.  
We rode through cars to school, university, marriage.  
That first kiss -  
was it in a Morris Marina?

Richard George

# Marie Celeste

Now I may never see you again  
I can think of no one else:  
I wait on platforms, hair in the wind  
But trains all leave the past  
Like you, with not a word  
And when at last I climb on board  
My carriage is deserted.

I sit at Charing Cross  
And read the news obituaries  
To check that you're alive:  
You are, but where on earth...?  
The cooling April sky  
Is cloudless to the jet-stream -  
And I fear to know.

Passenger tide washes me home:  
Saffron evening light  
Shines through towers of glass.  
Night will come to us both,  
Food and drink and sleep:  
I shall signal to you, if I can,  
Over the ocean of dreams.

Richard George

# Matin Tanka

Dawn-mist in laurel:  
a hen blackbird tilts her head  
dowsing for earthworms  
while indoors my PaperMate  
poises over a crossword

Richard George



# Memory

Then, I never loved you  
But Memory does now;  
A Muse, you see, creative  
And I long for you too late  
In shafts of golden light.

Nostalgia, in her Greek,  
That aching to go back:  
I need to laugh. Forget.  
I rifle my lexicon:  
'Lethargy'? 'Oblivion'?

But still your little cursor  
Is blinking on my screen:  
Memory has programmed you  
Into me without delete,  
As you were, obsolete.

And so like big black books  
You load me down, leave me here  
To toil for fifty years  
Before I die, and it closes,  
The distance between us.

Richard George

# Misattribution

When Satan emerged in 1830 Benbecula  
doves of stones proclaimed the peace of God.  
Only when the corpse  
washed up did He reveal the truth:  
a minikin, willowly mature,  
pearl as the underwings  
of birds that shear white horses.  
Around her form, spawned by guilt  
the myth barnacled: mermaid.

Last September, Western Cape.  
A white woman with wrack for hair  
is glimpsed in a river at midnight.  
Her eyes blossom red  
in a Babel of torches  
and her soul-skewering howl -  
'Kaaiman! ' - invokes a naiad-kelpie.  
In awe they leave the young wife  
to commit suicide.

There are no mermaids.  
There are women in water who drown.

Richard George

# And Chucky

The Jewish single Mom in Arizona  
told Joan, her daughter,  
to watch for javelinas  
(the piggy things with teeth)  
and take good care of Bobby.  
Bobby brought their pets along,  
in one hand the squirrel,  
on the other :  
they played an afternoon  
under desert skies of cosmic immensity.  
The next day  
Bobby discovered chess.

He left the pets to Joan.  
'You can't play chess with a SQUIRREL! '

had other ideas.

When their sun went down  
they atomized in-  
side his Bishops and his Knights;  
wheeling around enemy Kings  
paralysed as rabbits  
or swooping from the second rank  
to deal the death-blow.  
In 1972,  
Bobby discovered - silence:  
they were packed away.

Back they went to flesh and bone -  
what else could they do? -  
and four hard eyes  
in a Russian fir scanned the board  
for gifted children.

Richard George

## Music And Context

Del Amitri, blunt  
from a neighbour's house, shotguns  
coy church bells. 'I do'.

That tar thrush impet-  
uously reeling notes from  
our roof: late Coltrane.

Rain on holiday:  
'Rhiannon' (Fleetwood Mac) taps  
triste picnic windscreens.

At an Oxford ball  
a jazz-rat's Gauloises feather  
the chord of midnight

Richard George

# My Lover Out Of Time

When I was sixteen  
you were twenty-five. I sighed  
'This will never be'.

Now to the mundane  
and motherly beauty blurs  
that drew my manhood.

Richard George

# My Room Above At College

Roused, 3 A.M.  
by a muffled fiesta,  
bedsprings' creak  
and a duet of asthma -

feverish tenor,  
a burst of soprano  
like porkers jugulated -  
I shudder. 'Oh no'.

In refectory next morning  
they both seem unscathed;  
but wistful, sheepish,  
a little dazed.

Richard George

# Nelson Ngombe, Fail

In winter '63,  
snowed in, my father kept the house  
warm by marking GCEs  
from the golden coast of Ghana.  
The academic High Priest  
and Prempe these boys supplicated,  
terror-eyed, was twenty-eight  
with a young family.

There were no Desmond Tutus here.  
Paper after paper barely  
one side, scratch-and-scrawled.  
He imagined a lad going back to  
his village, and his mother asking  
'Did you do your best, son? '  
'Yes, I did my best'.  
And they had. That was the tragedy.

He gave nobody zero.  
(Not all were so kind) . They got  
2%, for writing their name.  
Patronizing? Perhaps.  
But he couldn't bear to tell them  
'You are worth nothing'.  
The saddest script was simply  
'Please, sir.  
I have read the paper.  
I feel ill'.  
A causal link - or malaria?  
Either way, hope smashed  
on the rich loam, soaking in.

Richard George

# Oblivion

Medea, wracked with pain,  
would have blessed our word with a deep sigh  
from her stabbing womb - docked as it is -  
anaesthetic.

Staph sickens ours to be,  
a bunch of grapes, its hieroglyph  
illuminated gold on the slide.  
People die, not languages.

Richard George



# On A Dead Cat In A Skip In Luton

Not a cream saucer  
to top to the tightrope-  
brim or a bowl for Supameat.

Not a name collar  
as a bib, or a medal  
for ten years on the night watch.

Not a ball rolled  
from silver Silk Cut paper for paws' pounce,  
not a tinker bell.

Not a last blanket,  
nor even a rag for tears,  
not a closed door or a head lowered.

Let what we love be our grave goods.

Richard George

# Once In Two Lifetimes

Who will die first,  
the Macaulay Culkin  
of the Schools or his mother?  
Eyes meet, furtive  
in this pane of silence.

A heat-wave at midnight.  
From the garden she widow-nurtures  
the vapour-fleece  
of a departed plane fans  
across

Vega

Regulus

Zubenelgenubi

statues by a street-lamp's  
mute sentinel

in awe they would die together

Richard George

# One Up On The Joneses

The hills that circle Swansea  
look higher than they are, as by  
the Dead and Galilee:  
gas-blue dusk grimes the air  
as pre-teen silhouettes  
war-dance round a blackened car...  
a Citroen GS.  
We had one of the first in Wales;  
low-slung and feline,  
a slinky Gauloise sex-bomb  
that had eyes in Sketty  
coming out on stalks.  
The test drive she gave you  
on those up and down roads  
under ocean skies nuanced grey  
you would never forget.  
We had four good years  
before she rusted, grugged to start  
and made me late for school.  
Now her sister smoulders  
on the streets where father and young child could walk  
through friendly yellow night-light, safe as blithe  
in 1971.

Richard George

# Ossonhe

I was a dwarf, cast out.  
The Amazon sobbed to me her secrets.

She drew me to peccaries,  
the despised, mere hides and meat.  
With fruits I knelt to gather  
I disarmed murderous blood.  
Where seeds fell in their dung there grew new trees.

When hunters struck I gave them vent for tears.  
In return they protected me  
with dagger-fangs, and the siren of their sulphur.

When I died they ate me.  
I was glad.

In spirit I emerged  
through the bravest boar's back like a noxious mushroom.  
Fireflies of ether spored from my fingers.

The tusks we face are chainsaws.  
Astride my snarling mount  
I conduct our rank cavalry into battle.

When you see my sparks, be afraid.

Richard George

# Oxford Thumbnails

## 1 Porter

The 'Sir' says it all.  
'You are my superior.  
Is that correct, sir? '

Deference sharpens  
the scalpel of irony.  
'Are these your drugs, sir? '

And you tug fore-lock:  
in this feast, the servants rule.  
'I'll tell the Dean, sir'.

## 2 Augean

Donegal jacket  
in shreds; trousers food-stippled;  
whiff of Glenfiddich.

Police pounce. They charge him -  
thunderstruck - with vagrancy.  
Down at es

they blanch; blush; blurt 'Please  
accept our apologies,  
Professor Woodgate'.

## 3 Head Of Buttery

A slur shadows him,  
his student patrons' unkind  
whisper: 'He's simple'.

But power devolves.  
Diners nearest him (losers  
in the race for seats)

endure a stream-of-  
consciousness jeremiad  
on his terms of work.

#### 4 Tristan

In ashen silence  
he mans the till at Turl Street's  
Classical Bookshop.

A car hit his girl  
on the bridge: she died at the  
scene, wearing his ring.

He nurses her candle;  
sentinel of manuscripts'  
sweet, musky echo

Richard George

# Painted Delilah

Nobody knows her age, or dares to ask.  
A L'Oréal helmet;  
contours of a sylph.  
She sells greetings cards.

Enter, and she winches  
you from Time's River Jordan.  
Your life is here, neatly arranged:  
BIRTH. EXAMS. GET WELL SOON.

When you offer CONDOLENCES  
she cups her hand.

Richard George

# Parenthesis: Leicestershire

(the between

great fields in eight-lane slipstream  
under gunmetal nimbostratus  
from lay-bys' brief settlements  
we gaze  
to a changeling horizon

our lives

are a sinew-thread  
beside panting juggernauts  
leaden dawn to camp-fire  
we chase out our niche  
the hard shoulder

in dreams

we shed Vulcan's chrysalis  
gasp in a gale of wings  
Pegasus-pedal  
to a col in thunderclouds  
bivouac)

Richard George



# Penetralia

For those who couldn't rock-climb  
Roman rents, the museum retained  
a bungalow by the almshouses  
where Hannah dwelt. Sephardic  
in the cloak of baptism,  
she dazzled to astronomy  
with her cowl of hair, starling-black,  
guarding her persimmon  
in the deliciousness of just enough  
security for the right Adam.  
Even in the city's light  
pollution she shone like Sirius:  
but my interest withered  
in the desert glare of her Holy Land.  
'Boring', the young bloods called her.  
I went back last week  
after sixteen years, and slipped through  
knocked down palings to windows riot-  
shattered and trash in the garden pond.  
We live in an age of hoydens wolfing  
flesh the Tartars cooked in their saddles  
and throwing remains to the rat's  
'carpe diem'. Now tanks probe the night  
I fear for Hannah, and hope her Babylon  
holds out.

Richard George

# Physical Education

First Aphrodites have a raw deal.

The Angevin blonde in my village Sired  
every yeoman with a pitchfork: lush and lithe seventeen,  
she knew her dominion.

I, two years younger, peeped through our net  
curtains: she saw me and grinned  
mirthlessly. First Eros hurt.

So I pushed her under the bed  
and then threw her in the rubbish with old school work.  
Her breath went bad

from the will o' wisp of midnight  
Vauxhall dashboards in lay-bys that went nowhere.  
She was a woman too soon,

clowned with lipstick by greasers with a handbrake  
where emotions should be.  
The last time I glimpsed her I felt pity.

A blonde, on a production line.  
I grinned, less than mourning  
what she would not become

Richard George

# Playing Wars

I liked being dead:  
falling, your last moment,  
letting go, lying there  
in cool soft grass.  
No one bothering you.

Hard to believe we played together.  
Adolescence came,  
and with it awareness of class:  
working class, middle class,  
bottom of the / top of the class.  
Toys corroding with jealousy.  
If any record exists  
of the games we had, destroy it.  
I should not have been there.

They may have children now,  
doing what we did.  
I have just seen on the news  
a little girl, in Israel,  
shot in the head.

I'm going upstairs, to lie down.

Richard George

## Pure Dolour

I commend to your attention  
the immeasurable sadness  
of that huge brown teddy bear  
slumped in the window  
of its institution;  
the wistfulness of rushes  
as summer sun cools at five;  
the tragedy of casserole  
wasted in the pan.  
I only mention this because  
you have a kind expression.

Richard George

## Raining Kettles And Walking Sticks (Bryntitli, Above Llangurig, April 1992)

England's rivers throng this sky.  
Dogged by skua westerlies  
clouds disgorge pans  
as men left them, slate seams  
veined with native iron.

Tussock moor: my track dissolves.  
A croft, abandoned, huddles  
in a lee of pines at habitation's limit:  
still, into a pool of spume  
its spring somersaults, gleeful, whisky rust.

Nimbostratus poises.  
I splash-face, taste the ore,  
a curlew whimpers:  
Welsh water emigrates  
to Severn plains, and the sea.

Richard George

# Rat To Human

I am more afraid of you  
than you of me:  
what time I have, I steal.

But kill me, if you must.  
Another me will take my place:  
for you, and you, every one

one of me is watching.  
Your home, your food, your medicine  
are my academy.

And when you go the way you came  
I shall walk on two legs  
and trim my whiskers.

Richard George

# Ratty And Mink

Water vole, if you don't mind,  
although rats scull strongly.  
Everything was ship-shape then,  
boating with a book  
and a hamper, and company.

But these days I'm boarded up.  
Stoats are bad enough,  
but their transatlantic cousins  
think I'm a Big Mac on legs.  
In this neck of the woods, it's getting rough.

Richard George

# Ratty And Mole On London Underground

It's her first time on the Tube:  
Her mother says,  
'We're in a tunnel under the ground,  
Like Ratty and Mole! '  
A man gives up his seat:  
'Now, what do we say?  
Say Thank You to the man!  
Sorry about her manners...'

But all our smiles converge  
As totally absorbed  
She stares, too young to fear  
Through the looking glass of her first book  
At Badger with a beard,  
Toad puffed up in a business suit,  
Rat with luggage, practical  
And Mole? Why, Mole, of course,  
Who offered her his place.

And we just long to protect her  
From the Wild Wood above us;  
Unlike ourselves, this instant  
As Ratty and Mole.  
It will not be us she remembers.

Richard George



# Realities

There was no church that windy night the bell tolled.  
And what sheep crowd the road  
in a roseate mist of solstice vesper?

Was Death tramp Abdullah's  
tap-stick and homburg  
down the telegraph poles to Chiltern Green?

A Tristar? Transparent.  
A plastic bag? No waft  
in the breeze. Unidentified.

The sceptic, with her fine canine  
face, aims her crossbow. Four times  
she lets fly, accurate as Cupid.

There is no church.

Richard George

## Reference Section

In this cubbyhole hive, poets  
Canute the bore - they don't read, or touch-type.  
Squacco quills poise  
for fin and flash in the ripple-mirror.

They are silent and still  
as grandmasters computing enigma variations  
where the black squares are words they score 'tacet'.

No skyscrapers of textbooks threaten to topple.

The angler-bird is stalked by an Argus centipede.  
In the lighthouse, a longer lens  
swivels. And poets wait.

Richard George

# Reliving The Calendar

It was our last summer in the village  
and flycatchers nested  
in the eaves of our garden shed.  
I was mad that year:  
I could have been William Cowper  
(bar the scansion) . I wrote diaries.  
I seemed at one with light,  
transparent, still as Buddha,  
feeling the ripeness  
of June, July's intensity  
in ways as inexpressible  
as mirrors to the blind.  
I could smell the oily sepia  
of the shed's lumberjack timbers,  
and listen to the creosote behind  
the bower they flashed out  
and back from, placating Void.  
'There are no years in Nature,  
only seasons, and summers'  
I wrote, and crunched it up. Rubbish.  
Spotted Flycatcher...  
They will be building in Tikrit,  
and Mosul, and Baghdad.  
They will hear all the notes  
in the octave of spices,  
and the heat will bloom honey-thick,  
coagulating. Bombs  
will fire them into the dust,  
their hearts will crack, and Void  
will open its beak, and swallow them.  
And Cowper's hares will run, and run, and run  
from Sanity with weapons.

Richard George

# Reporter

She isn't / she is  
beautiful: all faces are  
beautiful concerned

Richard George

# Rhodes Scholar

Lawrence Hammond thinks he is in love  
With a girl half Guinevere,  
Half Mary Queen of Scots:  
Desperate, in his final term  
He has dredged the courage painfully up  
To ask her out. Today,  
On a muggy late May evening,  
He feels not dwarfed but gross,  
Hitting his head on doll's house ceilings;  
A lounge bar panelled in mahogany,  
Jokey dons, and students  
Alien as angels.  
It is nine o'clock already

And she hasn't come.  
Dusk: a chill, an open door,  
An antique mirror opposite  
Where through a steeping screen of beer  
A face looks back, a keen young man  
Round-spectacled, in college tie  
And Marks & Spencer jacket.  
But something, some innocence  
Has died tonight: he burns  
Less in anger than in shame.  
Oxford won't remember him:  
He goes back home a stranger  
To ponder the banality of sadness.

Richard George

# Scopolamine: A Sequence

Hieronymus Bosch  
knew this region at the far  
edge of consciousness:

Pressure in my skull,  
summer twilight, ominous,  
I pass the threshold:

Vomiting laughter,  
throat contracting, grinding teeth,  
rabies, or lupus:

Faces, hideous,  
are peering back from the cave-  
depths of screwed-tight eyes:

Pterodactyls, horse-  
headed, chasing me over  
dysentery mangroves:

Wet darkness wading,  
dehydration, cholera,  
drowned grotesque at dawn

Richard George

## Second Kittenhood

'Who DID Prince Charles marry? '  
Dolly asked me in Tesco.  
It was 1996.  
I trumped with my heart card  
'He ought to have chosen the person he loved'.  
'I love my cat.  
Your cat knows what it likes'.

Charles married Camilla.  
Puss's last breath  
was a year and a day before 9/11.  
And I wondered  
if Dot's cat died  
who she would recognise.

Richard George

# Shadow-Tails

They come with dawn, silent, quick,  
Colonize our parks, our trees  
And watch our every move beneath

With jute-black eyes. Bound on bound  
Their tails brushstroke the air:  
They scan our hallowed lawns

For sites to bury, scabble soil  
Above our dead, and perch  
On their head-stones, cherubs with claws,

Clutch chicken bones we chuck in bins  
With tiny, praying fingers -  
And charm us utterly.

When Easter comes, the males in droves  
Chase her scent through fresh new leaves  
And fall by, suddenly old:

At the bottom of ladies' gardens  
They clown for nuts, caper their last  
As shadows lengthen to evening.

Richard George



# She Talked Too Loud

She came from a background  
Of distances, oceans;  
Atlantic, Antigua.  
So when she started cleaning  
In the Square Mile, in London,  
She talked too loud  
In the halls and corridors.  
Her bosses overheard  
As she punctured their pretensions  
And that great forgiving laugh  
Erupted from her belly.  
They had words with her. She was sorry.

So she whispered, but still  
They could pick her up across the floor:  
Even her silence resounded.  
She had to go. They all agreed.  
So now she does nothing  
In a white room, in white clothes:  
The blinds of her eyelids  
Are pulled down tight.  
And they have peace and quiet.

Richard George

## Small Solace

Despair not. In loss,  
after a warm door closes,  
a chill one opens

Richard George

# State Of The Art Squirrel

I'm a ticking over engine,  
a silent pneumatic drill.  
My jaws at twenty times your broadband.

I'm a micro threshing machine,  
a sample-gatherer scooting the surface of Mars.  
Up to a point, I'm environmentally friendly.

I can plant and excavate mines.  
I'm a crampon-kart, CCTV  
camouflaged.

Pray  
I am never in your control.

Richard George

# Summer Doves

Hush hour. Saffron light.  
Once, twice  
their beaks epée:

she bobs her head  
once, twice,  
in a flurry of wings he mounts her

and at the end, 'Peace' she says,  
he says 'Peace':

the only word they know.

Richard George

# Sunset's Ghost

Lilac clouds, a wash of green  
At daylight's end:  
When west is dark, to northward  
A heat-haze aurora  
Silhouettes our roof-slopes.  
Beautiful, but it chills me:  
We have made her burn with fever,  
The sky, our mother.

Richard George

# Sylvia Plath's Cats

Their breath was clean, or harsh and sour  
according to her moods:  
and when they sensed a coming storm  
they crept into corners.  
Today she is a remote eminence,  
tall and cold as Alaska:  
but the cats understood her  
as something young and brittle  
like bamboo  
that cuts you when it breaks.  
When she died, apart from them  
they felt her passing over  
as a seismic change of frequency:  
they never quite forgot her  
and when something reminded them  
they purred, nervously.

No one writes their biography.

Richard George

# Taid

Awake hours before Mum and Dad,  
I'd tip-toe down to see him:  
Early riser, old man.  
I sat in his snug, watching his hands,  
Sculpture-veined, roll Rizlas  
And make me tea I winced to drink,  
Rusty with tannin.  
He would talk. I would nod.

I am like him now; Puck in the eyes,  
Strands of specialist knowledge  
At my fingers, hook and claw  
And the booze - the booze, dark gold,  
Hot in our veins, all right with the world.  
But Taid died at eighty,  
With not an enemy, anywhere:  
This will be the difference.

Richard George

# Tate Gaia

That spider knows nothing  
of the geometry, Euclid-  
intricate, it gossamers.  
Spectrum-dewdrops wink goodbye,  
colour-blind.

The tide breathes its mantra.  
It has never heard it.

Pebbles sleep in bliss  
to their sculpture by my thumb-whorl,  
Henry Moore, before a hand existed.  
On into neolithic evening  
I comb the sea.

Richard George



# Testaments Apart

1

Pudsey, cleared for suicide cummerbunds,  
works a Purim miracle.

Three fortysomething schoolgirls  
paw me towards a beehive:  
cookies from Elsa's Kitchen.

Apple, raisin, cinnamon,  
an alchemy-amalgam of spice and sweetness.  
An ink-lash snags in my eye:  
'Pastry bites'. A scrumper in a kibbutz,  
I swallow the evidence.

On the carton, hooped bathers from 'Death In Venice'  
stand guard over Elsa.

2

Once children waved  
and mothers, fathers alighted  
at that Roman fort where no lines led back.  
Now Bible faces hurtle in glass  
through the constellations of night, Hendon and Cricklewood.

Across the aisle from me is a young executive.  
I don't know her from Eve, or Lilith  
but respond to a nuance  
in her cheek and quiet calibre  
I recognise from the picture.

She grimaces. My kind glance is a search warrant.

'Come on, the water's fine! ' 'Schnell!  
the shower is getting cold'.  
In her white void of Jacuzzi, which will she hear?

Richard George

# The Amniotic Briny

Glaucous eye of Homer  
inscrutable, then turquoise shoaled  
violet, wink of the wisp,  
down the man-mountain she draws  
me, slow of step, rapt in her procession.

Her breath is on my face  
as I barefoot hard shingle.  
Returning, all are returning who gaze  
into milky luminescence and the grey  
lanes between continents, where the meagre glides.  
I long to be inside her.

But you can't swim. Remember?  
You sank, a fist of resolution.  
When her white thighs closed round your head  
your ears screamed 'Death! '  
and you clutched horizons.

When I see her again, she spits ice-  
pure in my beard of belated.  
She is incubating winter:

chaos  
of women not yet born

Richard George

# The Ark Of Foregone Conclusions

What if I told you  
the Great Auk only died out  
in 1929 on Jan Mayen?  
Would you beam? Shrug? Shed a few less tears?

By steeple-aiguilles  
on the front line, Chadians  
unearth a still warm sabre.  
Loggers in Tasmania  
spot a tiger: they track it down  
and saw off its head to flog on eBay.

Yangtse River Dolphin reports  
will persist for half a century.

And Steller's child, safe, we prayed, beyond Thule...  
In 1977  
a fisherman stroked one.

That was the last one.

Richard George

# The Ballad Of Owl Man Danny

Danny didn't have a home,  
but had two dear companions;  
a mutt called Charlie, and an owl  
that perched upon his raglan.

Nice families that normally  
would shy from folk like Danny  
took children out to touch its wings  
and give him pounds and pennies.

It didn't pay his rent, of course,  
it didn't keep him warm:  
it simply made him want to live,  
protecting them from harm.

s is an open place.  
It feels for people's pain,  
and sees in '-less', or 'handicaps',  
a corresponding gain.

It welcomes misfits, odd ones out,  
eccentrics, characters,  
but sometimes takes, unknowingly,  
less pleasant visitors.

s has more pubs per head  
than even sites of worship.  
The psychopath was rolling home  
when suddenly he - tripped,

colliding with the greyhound. 'Oi! '  
He landed kicks on Charlie,  
who howled. One more could break his leg.  
Danny had to hurry.

He grabbed the fiend: they grapple-fought,  
and in the all-in wrestling  
Danny dislocated the man's  
shoulder. Homeless. Sling.

Danny knew enough about  
legal preconceptions  
to think that HE'd be punished. And:  
he might lose his companions.

Danny drank to ease the pain,  
and one day turned to meths.  
That midnight, in a dream of rucks,  
he drew his final breath.

Obituaries on lamp-posts mourned  
'The much-loved Owl Man Danny'  
from good people who'd taken on  
one oddball too many.

Richard George

# The Boar's Head Gaudy

The college only owns one  
Aristotle, pre the Caxtonet,  
and you've left it behind in lieu in a bawdy house.  
Shades of the pillory close, and your neck prickles.

In an ague of desperation  
you dream your trail dies deep in the Nemean monster.  
There are no lions. But wild boar...  
All night you rehearse the bosk where you strayed

lost in thought; its charge; your knock-down  
'This is Greek! '; its choke  
transfixed by the first zoologist,  
and the paragraph of his work you were rudely torn from.

The Provost is spellbound.  
He decrees a feast to celebrate,  
as a model for students, your fortitude and intelligence.  
From this moment you're on guard, on guard, on guard.

Richard George

# The Cruellest April

My favourite photo of Wales:  
shepherd leading dog  
on the drovers' path above Glascwm,  
the man's face a life-mask  
of dirt and devotion.  
Behind them Gwauncestre looms:  
trees give out, then fields  
to the bald slope, bare hints  
of blue in the grass's green.  
Last month foot and mouth  
invaded Painscastle:  
what are the portraits now?  
The woman stoic;  
men head in hands at the hearth;  
the girl of eleven  
taken to neighbours, screaming.  
Tears freeze, come down as snow:  
how many seasons burn  
in newsreel minutes?

Richard George



# The Dark-Eyed Rival

Groomed for George Chapman's  
Parnassus on Hitchin Hill,  
she smiled over my 'Please, sir! ' shoulder.  
Puberty flicked  
her pages of score unstained  
by my flailings to Led Zeppelin.

Google was made for dark-eyed rivals.  
In belated laurels I wondered.  
I plod past her eyrie  
to the South Bank. She cradles  
varnished rosewood, and thrums her bow.  
'Better than you'.

Richard George

# The Etymology Cat

A glimpse in the glen  
and you could still be a houri  
in Baghdad taffeta  
or queen of Caledon.  
But your jizz is Wild West,  
Saddam tabby.  
You stalk like a gunfighter,  
walrus-whiskered,  
rattlesnake gorged in your tail.  
You earned those stripes in the Stone Age  
among bears and mammoths.

For a Camcorder stooge  
you rear on tiptoe to a hunk,  
farouche as a wolf.

You'd mangle Macavity.

Richard George

# The Eye Of Faith

Bidston Hill, in Birkenhead:  
sandstone broken by conifers  
like the balding scalp of a geographer  
gazing north and west.  
Its views were renowned.  
After a pint of Guinness,  
my Taid would tell the pub he'd seen  
Snowdonia from Bidston,  
and he had, since I had too.  
Then, over a second, he'd vow  
he'd seen the Lake District:  
and he could have done, in exceptional  
atmospheric conditions.  
But then, with G & Ts, he'd add  
the Isle of Man to his conquests;  
and finally, after a whiskey or two,  
the mountains of Wicklow  
over the sea to Ireland.  
I laughed at him, of course,  
with the obtuseness of affection;  
affection still, but realizing  
how his soul grew warm,  
expanding with alcohol  
out beyond the Mersey  
and mud-flats of the Dee,  
the Celts in a great sweep  
from Scotland down to Brittany...  
a diaspora returning.

Richard George

# The First Place I Remember

Is a Gower seaside suburb,  
Little streets up from the bay  
To Clyne Common, built on now,  
Hand in hand with my mother  
On afternoons before school.  
And off Glen Road, a track  
Past a monkey-puzzle tree,  
Open fields, and through a gate  
The churchyard, Gothic angels  
With mute swans' wing-spans:  
BORN, MARRIED,  
REST IN THE LORD.  
Out we walked; and down  
Along a driveway through woodland  
Tangled with the sun  
And suddenly - the bustle.  
Town, country folded together:  
I knew no other.

Brighton, and the Downs  
On an empty afternoon; and  
I think about the day  
My mother dies, and I shall walk  
Up from the sea, little streets  
To the edge of nothingness.

Richard George

# The Food Chain

My mother hung out seeds  
for the endangered sparrow...  
and whatever eats its chickballs.  
Pluckings, in a semi-circle.  
Twenty minutes  
the musket hawk gripped her  
in her kitchen hide, dainty  
as Apicius with a dormouse,  
unabashed at intestines.  
She feasted on his minutiae,  
his tail's broad banner-stripes,  
five pale spots  
on the grey of his uniform,  
his hot blush of vermillion.  
She waited for her sparrowhawk  
to return, but he never did.  
Mine was near Llangollen  
in the sunset, by that long  
diagonal of foothill-rear  
blazing with sienna... her  
tail fuller, round at the base.  
Pigeon's heart, her delectable...  
the tall schoolgirl who pounced  
on a delicate older boy,  
her epicure.

Richard George

# The Funding Lottery

'Great news! ' they told me.  
'You've won the tie-break.

It was you or a women's refuge.  
It's closing'.

I pop-corked fizz  
to celebrate, sailed to dreams

and shuddered to a girl's face  
bruised, not even angry.

Richard George

# The Gargoyle Kiosk

I scrunch my first travesty on the reflex:  
a block of four Tartar basilisks.

Take Two: merely Bulgarian Secret Service.  
I cut my losses.

But my eyes are aquamarine, not mud-brown.  
I am not in need, as far as I know, of a liver transplant.  
I have even been told I have a delightful smile.

I reclaim myself  
in a paparazzo CD, tousle-  
blurred, pushing a boat  
in the bath of sorrows, but me.

Richard George

# The Ghost Of Frank Zappa

He is on the Northern Line  
between Edgware and Euston.  
Just him and me, in the carriage.  
His stare irradiates me.  
Guilty.

I wasn't there for Liam.  
Now there was a fan of yours.  
He took all that trouble  
to make me lunch, and I stood him up.  
I'm sorry.

He doesn't pass sentence.  
He gets off at Chalk Farm  
with the faintest smile  
in his obsidian eyes:  
'You still need a ticket'.

Richard George



# The Heads Of The Valleys Road

is a Southern Ocean  
blasted summits whale through  
like stray flashbacks  
from the worried odysseys of a dream.  
No archipelago threads this cutting room floor.

Straddling the flock arête dread /  
security, a sheep flinches  
'Not our warder'.  
Albatrosses have relocated  
to Xanadu, or wherever wages are cheaper.

On the One Inch windsock I  
origami-wrestle  
fastidious open cast  
scrapes from its bone china  
vermicelli contours

in a double mastectomy landscape.

Richard George

# The Intervening

My father died ten years ago today.  
How faint the feeling is, a veil of grey.

What happens to our grief? It sinks below  
and turns into the us that we don't know,

the sodium chloride of the tears we weep,  
the DNA, the blood, the dreamless sleep

cushioned by three thousand diary slips.

Richard George

# The Kazakh In University City

His doctorate is on deserts:  
a poorly regarded subject.  
He waits, ignored, in an alcove  
of the cosmopolitan Common Room  
and thinks:

'In deserts travellers smile  
when they meet, just pleased to see  
another human being.  
But here, now, for the first time  
I understand loneliness'.

So he rolls his maps, his photographs,  
retreats to his bed-sit bolt-hole.  
Six-foot women dizzy him on the street:  
he notes, he charts stray faces, words.  
Passers-by he will never know.

Summer dusk: he gazes up  
at honey-coloured spires,  
fantastic crenellations  
and feels shut out - of Xanadu.  
He peers inside an Oddbins...

So two, three bottles a night  
he drains to Western rock:  
hangovers he welcomes  
like a far horizon.  
But he fears going back.

Richard George

# The Last Of May

Acid green new growth:  
dazzle-glimmer dying sun  
ripens into gold.

The garden hushes.  
I cuddle to the cool back  
of the grass goddess.

Grey remains of cloud  
straggle home to roost along  
the blond horizon.

Richard George

# The Lodestone

English; well spoken;  
an auburn bob.  
By a King's Cross kiosk  
she asks if I want  
'Services'.

No man ungay is immune.  
I duck my head, lips pursed  
spirit level straight  
as an orifice itches: curiosity.

Urban fox  
from pedigree. Addiction?  
College fees?

For your sake, be a clipper.  
Run for it.

Your name is an unexploded mine.

Richard George

# The Marilyn Monroe Doctrine

The Iraqi boy was twelve  
when he lost his hug. Napalmed  
by testosterone, straitjacketed, he smouldered.

In an Oxford college bar  
Thalidomide lamented  
'That American girl...' Nobody  
airlifted him from his mirage.

Eight limbs propel  
Liberation's spider.

Richard George

# The Mating Season

Where have I seen her before?  
In a crowd, you fool, or nowhere.  
She makes you think of somebody  
who once in turn reminded you  
of some one else.  
Daisy-chains, strangers all.

But very familiar,  
the way she pulls her lips  
back behind her teeth to smile,  
dark blonde,  
that side-tug of the hair.  
It's amorous weather:

the first 70 plus of the year,  
gentle Zephyrs.  
She sidles up to me -  
to bin her picnic.  
For once in the calendar  
I can entertain the notion

she has left me her telephone number.  
In the little brown bag with two handles:  
a serviette.  
A banana skin.  
The Cupids have stolen my wits.  
Who cares.

'No' this April day is a kiss on the wind.

Richard George

# The Meagre

goose  
to siren nightingale

anorexic mermaid

submarine ark  
launched by our discord

sheep  
croak  
bubbler

herring hog

sargasso minotaur  
grey atlantic reaches  
wanderer

golem in formaldehyde

meagre  
all and none  
yours is a crypt we fathom

afloat on cradles

Richard George



# The Meditatrice

Fawn hair part-curtained  
her English girl's guileless face  
as down she drifted  
on parachutes of Sanskrit  
and when she came back she said

'Dancing with angels'.

Richard George

# The Mermaids Of Brobdingnag

It was every zoologist's dream.  
In this fjord-Iceland  
the other side of the New World,  
Sirenians, sea cows  
but narwhal-dwarfing, mountainous -  
and here he was, Georg Steller,  
administering baptism.  
Through chilly April sunsets  
where only the sky's yellow-ochre  
spoke of Spring, he watched them mate,  
feeling for the one hither-  
thithered by his lover's  
double-ballet, catch me, catch me not.  
They even slept on their back. He thought:  
'How little divides us'.

But what do you eat, in Kamchatka?  
How do you keep warm?

He went with the hunters.  
The details tore his heart out:  
the massive hook, the ropes,  
the beating, and the desperate  
devotion of the male  
'even when she was dead'  
as he told the clean white page  
(the fat burned without smoke) .

In Europe, he petitioned.  
Siberia's longitude  
intervened. He fell  
twenty years before his mermaid:  
an Arctic mercy.

In 1962,  
off Cape Navarin, far to the north,  
a pod of black giants perplexed  
a whaling ship. Science  
helter-skeltered from Moscow.

You can't fast-net an echo.

Richard George

# The Meteorology Of Loss

I.M. Katrin Cartlidge 1961-2002

On the train to Birkenhead  
for her father's autopsy,  
my mother saw the rainbow  
of rainbows, a double.  
I woke with a spark today:  
the sunlight in September  
is the loveliest, pure  
as a woman's touch.  
I turned to the obituaries  
and Katrin had died;  
who snake-charmed devotion.  
I didn't know her,  
but it felt like I did.  
And yesterday was a deluge,  
hours of it, and stinging eyes.  
I wonder if the dead live  
up there, in the sky.  
I wonder if we breathe them.

Richard George

# The Nevada Mission

He didn't get it.  
I pushed the allegory:  
the seven little men around his truck,  
the scow, not spaceship.  
I called myself Aura Rhanes:  
spirit rules, the aura rains -  
and down I come like a butterfly.  
I was ravishing in part,  
Captain Brunette in a beret.  
And then he asked me  
'What planet are you from? '

I had a cover story.  
'Clarion. Behind your moon'.  
He seemed to swallow that.

'Clarion' is right, in a way:  
a world that you see through, like glass.  
Communication is rare, and brief.  
I, as an actress, was  
to warn mankind about atom bombs -  
which I did. He was selected  
for his John Doe insignificance.

It gets better. You'd have thought  
he'd make a play for me, and I could put  
him down. He wouldn't touch me -  
he called me 'Queen of women! '  
He waved me goodbye in the dawn.

We monitored him.  
He told his friends. 'Awra Reins...  
what kind of a name is that? '  
He drew 'my' picture. 'Aaaah...' - nudge -  
quite a broad! Where's she from?  
Clarion? Where's that - L.A.? '  
His wife divorced him.

The sad thing was,

he expected me to come back.  
He'd fallen in love with a character,  
less real than Venus.

Richard George

# The Nightingale

Once, just once, I heard it;  
That warm night in April  
When it landed, on migration  
In oak woods across the fields  
From my garden: and I stood there  
As it soaked the air with music,  
Beseeching for a mate.  
A bird, the size of my hand:  
I wondered how it could sing so hard  
And live.  
An hour came down to rapture,

Second by second.

But twenty years have flown,  
And the birds that I remember  
For plumage, song, or something else  
Are dying out:  
The corncrake falls to the combine,  
Highwayman shrike hangs up his scythe  
And even the lark has gone to ground...  
We shall miss them, when they are gone.  
Spring will seem like autumn,  
The sky too still:

At least I heard the nightingale.

Richard George

# The Oddity Of Species

Affluent / homeless:  
poles apart, facing apart.  
Their dogs nose-to-tail.

Richard George



# The Old Northern Line

Strangers don't talk on the Tube.  
It breaks unwritten laws  
of a city millions craven.  
Adverts, and our wan  
reflections. Are we coring  
cholera dead? Down here, in this  
warm, sick dark, do plagues  
incubate, an AIDS  
that can kill virgins who breathe it  
in a hot September night's  
Calcutta crush? I must get out.  
Forty years layered  
in the station, and footsteps gone.

Footsteps gone.

A dart, on cinder track.  
It is dragging a MacDonalds burger  
carton, five times its size,  
to the under-platform dungeon  
where it will breed. All it knows.

I kneel. 'O Muse'.

Richard George

# The Perils Of Plant Science

'I doubt that's dog's mercury'  
said Heather, handing back my ode.  
'I'd stick with golden daffodils, if I were you'.  
First term at hothouse Kew  
and her boyfriend was 'cross-pollinating'.  
'I wouldn't treat you like that...'  
Conditional. She nodded.

I shared my pangs with a kind  
encyclopaedia, which whispered  
how the rabbits razed Kerguelen;  
hugged its bouquet  
across Darwin's bridge, and spilled triumphantly...  
'I know all this. By the way,  
you confused lichens with liverworts'.

Richard George

# The Philosopher's Blind Spot

People walked away,  
sometimes ran away, but the white goose  
shadowed him, and hissed off  
drunken poets enraged by Plato's Republic.  
As it studied him, head  
on one side, slow love  
cracked the shell of his heart:  
engraved on his tomb  
was that bumptious waddle,  
beak in the air, and strident honk  
faithfully echoed by  
the bird in pursuit of  
the bag of corn round his waist.

Richard George

# The Plagues Of Russia

We drove them out of Europe  
and this century: but on the edge  
where Soviet turns Anarch,  
cholera gallops from Balaklava  
to stagnant Caspian estuaries;  
typhoid snakes insidiously  
down the Volga to Astrakhan;  
amoebic and bacillary,  
the sisters, run the Silk Road  
and in Moscow and sbug  
the poor inhale diphtheria,  
cough tuberculosis  
and sell the traveller syphilis

Richard George

# The Polish Plasterers

An imp and a boy king,  
between them not a syllable  
of English. They rake our house  
with AK-47 Slavic staccato:  
not a derivation-crack  
to peep through for my Latin and Greek.

Falling cadences.  
Every sentence ends with them.  
Leather-suave, their interpreter:  
my bathroom is now a set  
from the film MOONLIGHTING, and right on cue  
it starts to snow - in Warsaw.

'Tea, coffee, orange? '  
I might as well be a good host.  
What they need is a ladder,  
and they hand me a crumpled hieroglyph;  
don't-know-wheres with a don't-know-who,  
trailing their skill and pride.

Crisis talks. Two more hours? ?  
(I slug some Smirnoff) . Half past eight  
and they want to Hoover my staircase...  
please, I am delighted,  
let me go! Laurels  
and they're still not happy. Thank the Lord for strangers.

Richard George

# The Portent Laboratory

A ear-lobe jockeys  
a mouse: its cat Caesar scowls  
crowned by a socket.

Augurs recoil.

Richard George

# The Revenge Of The Australian Postage Stamp

Unsung Dürers of the die  
poise over the deprotrix...

Brand

her callow, flibberti-  
gibbet, to be flogged  
to Dame Spiteful of Scutari  
meets grimalkin prostitute,  
then girl again, crone again.  
They deny her no refinement of travesty.

She is still in use in 1912.  
The frank-punch genuflects.

Richard George

# The Roman Museum Characters

Ripe as fish-gut sauce  
they regaled my baby face;  
Charles, with his Hogarth  
balloon of bulge and half  
double-barrel he'd aborted there,  
Nick the beer-goblin.  
'Get a proper job! ' they joked.  
But now they're derelict;  
Nick in the testudo  
for Scotch at Asda, lowering  
his patina of shame  
and hepatitis, Charles leaner  
in his heart's Sebastopol.  
They trusted in the past  
to look after them, curators  
of their own anni mirabiles,  
destined for a Goth girl  
in 3027,  
shaving bare their skulls  
in a tented field. Males. A date.  
Museums set things on thrones  
and make serfs of people.

Richard George



# The Rusalky

They are Russian girls who drowned.  
Their forms are slight as children.  
Their dark hair is a mane and long.  
They are combing it for ever.

In June, they run to the cornfields.  
They slip through the stalks like willow.  
Their hair and sweat glisten the grain.  
Where they have danced, it grows taller.

No brown is deeper than their eyes.  
Their bottom lips are weighty.  
They stare, down their brows, at a young man.  
They hook his soul, reeling him in.

They ask him riddles on pain of death.  
They ream his pockets for wormwood.  
If none is there, they bundle him off.  
With snake's tongue kisses they kill him.

A few young men get away.  
For as long as they live, they are mad.  
They gibber of hair, snakes in the corn.  
Mother Russia enfolds them.

Richard George

# The Toddler At The Festival Hall

He paddles in the spotlight-sun  
of first memory:

tables are his friends  
and the decking floor.

All he does in this charmed time  
opens as a petal

when past, present and future  
are three of his aunts smiling

and waves of jazz roll  
across the beach of the Foyer Bar:

the Heaven Armstrong and Ellington glimpsed  
at the end of their lives

Richard George

# The Unknown Sabine

Slipped from A Levels' leash  
I stalked the solstice dawn with a pocket camera.  
In the skein of graffiti  
on a railway bridge I read  
'I was raped here.  
It was the worst thing that ever happened to me'.

The fiend understood geometry.  
Pinned in an attenuated  
rectangle, bisected  
by the line to Luton and Bedford  
she was die-cast,  
piston in a furnace.

Alone  
with this anguish where epigram began,  
I bowed my matchbox lens, but it captured nothing.

Three months later, cradling  
tripod, macro and zoom  
(and straight Grade As)  
I returned on a mission.  
The bridge was repainted  
magnolia.

Gouge to repair.  
A paradox not mine.

Richard George

# The Vernal Gallery

Tangles of verdure  
under Scandinavian  
teal-blue chill of sky:  
virginal, viridian,  
nourished by February rain

Essences of spring  
budding into blossom white  
on a cold north wind:  
this is the tenderest time,  
on the cusp of hope and fear

By the end of March  
coumarins waft new-mown hay's  
unreasoning joy:  
Eros electric is shi-  
mmering through lovers' auras

Richard George

# The Visitors

Which bird brings us summer?  
The swallow does, from deepest Mauritania:  
we are its far Thule.  
It screeches solstice evenings  
for insects on the wing:  
September cools its fire, and melts its heat.

And which bird brings us winter?  
The redwing from Siberia:  
we are its Riviera.  
It feasts on our red poison  
to greet the holy season:  
April sparks the ice beneath its feet.

Richard George

# The Way Back From Therapy

Six o'clock, each Tuesday  
he brushed through the forest  
to his freezing fen of Thameslink.  
Down the grey escalade  
she'd march five minutes later:  
a Nicola in a business suit.

His fresh heart went out to her.

His medication made him ooze  
salt and lard: 'Swinish! '  
stung her mustard Selfridges bag,  
her sneer of meat to his calf's eyes.  
When she stepped off at Mill Hill, his gaze  
stretched to her silhouette's  
'I know your kind'.

Richard George

# The Wordscape Of Hertfordshire

Conrad laid anchor  
on the calm plateau sea  
near the shipwreck of Someries Castle  
where future Luton Airport planes  
would screech in low to land:

GBS, young eighty-five,  
leprechauned the emerald  
leys round Ayot nce  
or boot-scrunched the stony track  
to Codicote, and the Mimram.

Bunyan went from crypt  
to crypt on the Chiltern fields -  
Temple End, Witnesses Wood -  
to save the inhabitants  
of Cockernhoe and Bendish...

and Charles Lamb bought Button Snap  
on the lane to the dead villages;  
nettle-traps at Westmill Green,  
the bulge of buried Wakeley  
that informed him: matricide.

Richard George

# Therapist

At the end of her last session  
she incubates a judgement  
you will never read.  
But you contain a deeper  
enigma - the moments  
when she could not see herself.

When she was your heart. You were her eyes.

Now you diverge.  
However far you travel  
your angle will be the same.  
Overhead between you a contrail ripples -  
a duet of silence

Richard George



# Those Dreams I Was Telling You About

I am running away, to start with  
From a plane crash, or a plague,  
Faster, faster, just  
To stay aloft; then wheeling,  
Immelmann turns, always alone  
In landscapes more familiar  
Than any I have seen,  
Technicolour sadness,  
Pleasurable terror,  
Racing along roads once,  
Never again travelled in life,  
Electrics by railway lines,  
Flat-blocks where I loved  
In another dream boarded up  
And not a soul to hold me.  
This world is more real:  
I fall awake, woozy  
And it pulls me back from shadows  
And one of these mornings  
I shall not come down.

Richard George

# Threnody For Claris Macintosh

My confidante is dying,  
my memory of ten years:  
she has only a week to live  
and her software is obsolete  
as 78 to MiniDisc.

Dusk. All this long,  
ashen summer solstice I've been  
pulling my whole corpus  
from her chill conflagration,  
thanking the Lord for papyrus:

print-out. Relief  
is a gall-and-honey torture,  
averted calamity.  
I carry  
her bier up to the attic.

My fine Scottish secretary,  
cursor failing.  
What would I have done.  
Prayers well in my eyes  
for indispensable women.

Richard George

# Time And The Drinking Man

An hour can seem a minute  
with the cognac clock, or a minute an hour,  
the gallows of tomorrow next  
year, the can't wait treat sweet dreams.  
But when you wake hung  
over, and your job's at nine  
you clutch at every second -  
or last night's teat. Suzy Grave  
has wheeled you down the aisle  
and you're full sail in her willowy wine-bottle figure.  
Every day you drink you grow  
more like her: your hair, while others  
bald, is blooming, luxuriant,  
her pert little breasts brush yours  
and in response, your liver swells.  
Once a month you stop, afraid;  
tasting blood.

Richard George

# To A Crossword Compiler

Thank you  
for only deconstructing Martial  
to ANIMALS ON A DRUG.  
I was there  
when you carved up that hippopotamus.

Richard George

# To A Woman I Have Never Met

We were two of the six degrees apart  
at our colleges tête-bêche down a Bridge of Sighs.  
The roulette wheel of my dream spun you a face  
in a tendresse of aftermath.

In the rose-dawn of next sunset  
I padded upstairs to your corridor  
and cell and read your autograph  
and a kiss in cipher crossing not my name.

You were a stranger.

In this field of alien rape there was no bridleway.  
I was spying for regimes not recognised:  
my retina was a thief,  
my memory of the non-existent its accomplice.

I wandered home past November lit shop  
windows, gazing in,  
a moth sprung from its chrysalis

alone as awake

Richard George

# To An Inept Suitor

A girl is not your prize  
for a new record  
in sisterhood downhill slalom.

George V, goatee,  
imperial, Lincoln  
rotate the plunge-brush.

At Paradiso, where bantams  
bop, concussion  
will crown you ostrich.

Love is no substitute  
for a butterfly net.

Richard George

## To An Unrequiter (After Belloc)

I do not take your fancy in the least.  
    Against your barbs, my hide turns dense  
    And shoulders squat in dour defence:  
Rhinoceros, I am an ugly beast.

Your chosen, Circe, is the unicorn.  
    You need his quiet eminence,  
    His undemanding elegance;  
His defter hip, his longer, finer horn.

Richard George

## To Letters Page Jeremiah

Oh, I agree with you.  
In the old days libraries were cathedrals.  
Now they're Big Brother Houses  
where shelf-stackers smirk at drunks'  
drivel-soliloquies.  
So torch your courtesy.  
Strangle every 'Thank you' in your throat.  
Vulcan a new  
concentration from fury,  
the calm of assassins

Richard George



# Tumbelarum

Step-trip - 'Molly! ' -  
but she's not a scathe, swaddled  
in her parachute of lovat  
Danimac. Restored  
to the mantelpiece of grandam  
she frail-smiles, snug  
in the cribbage-notch of gravity,  
her world still spinning.  
When she dies, she will stumble but  
sideways - no bolt of shock -  
where Time is a coat she hangs up,  
unlike before as chrysalis to a butterfly.  
Women slip lissomer  
than soldier oaks on tarmacadam,  
drips of blood thin  
on their Donegal sleeves, alone and clutching

Richard George

# Two Naked Commuters

A biker boy's attentions:  
black leather, her tan briefcase  
she clicks open, swivelnecks  
and melodramatically yawns.

I see this mime reflected  
inches from my face  
in negatives of plate glass,  
invisible, what joy.

Richard George

# Two Women: A Photographic Study

Election blossom is out.  
Jo is being interviewed  
by an LSE Britannia  
whose clothes are beautiful:  
a long grey skirt creased  
at the wheel of her crimson Volvo,  
a jet-black cummerbund  
and round her broad shoulders  
a wrap, magenta, giving place  
to hair of Vandyke brown  
in a Victorian half-bun.  
She looks like a suffragette doll.  
Jo, who is beautiful -  
jade wool to her waist -  
spreads her fingers in answer,  
but the other stares beyond her,  
tensed like a warrior princess:  
there is bigger game to track down.  
She picks up her valise  
and says 'See you'.

Richard George

# Ultima Thule

South, down the spine  
of the Atlantic is the pilgrimage  
to Bouvetoya,  
the island three continents banished.  
Some bergs have more substance  
than this Scottish Ben in the purdah  
of ice-cliffs foothold-less as glass...  
when they docked, Norwegians shuddered,  
torn from the bosom  
of Antarctica

Richard George

# Understorm

A giant, I could almost  
touch this dye-through-  
ribboning in the cauldron-smur.  
Scrag-ends of cloud wave from the mountain.  
Most of this is us waiting  
for fat drops two parts  
hydrogen to plop like minnows  
seconds before squall  
picks up, and all along a bronze-electric horizon  
drown Himalayas of water

Richard George

# Unidexter

My yanked-out shoulder needs this sling  
For a minimum of three weeks:  
And patience never has been my big thing.

Right-handed, right hand gone,  
What two hands did without a thought  
I must learn again with one;

Prising plug from wall enlist  
The service of auxiliaries,  
A foot, a wrist.

I empty bladder seated,  
Inch my socks on, toe by toe,  
By one task only, shoe-laces, defeated.

But I'm in good spirits:  
A challenge without choice like this  
Inspires you to it,

I'm not in pain, I'm strapped in,  
I've codeine for the long small hours  
And at last I understand the one hand clapping.

Richard George

# Unrequited

Limp petal slimes slug.  
Salt I avalanche.

To goose-turd gristle it  
shrinking writhes, twined around  
flower head. Dead.

Guilt tugs me now:  
as it clung on, did ugly love  
what is beautiful?

Richard George

# Unsung

Threading his Great Wall  
to its pinnacle, Llanfair,  
Offa overlooked Stow Hill,  
a tall man higher.  
Base camp is the church  
where the dead of its hamlet dream:  
tarmac turns to boot-scrunch,  
switch-backs past a cliff of ferns  
as at my feet, mossy green  
hurls to the valley.  
On the first plateau,  
the oval pool slakes the herd:  
it is grey, and cold, and nobody knows  
how deep it is. Over it  
Holloway Rocks stand guard,  
a Jacob's ladder funnelling  
the buzzard's fohn, fog-fraught:  
four feet from the summit  
I lean to breathe, whipping  
like a scarecrow in my Peter Storm  
and left to right, above me  
the cattle are making their journey  
as how many times, how many times.  
Last push, to meet -  
a muddy field, as flat  
as a football pitch in Foulness  
and on unsung Stow Hill  
the wind is still.

Richard George



# Walking Into The Woods

It's a tangent from the end of the road.  
You park the car.

You tie laces that hoisted your feet  
to the bleakest, most beautiful moorland,  
a wind farm now.  
In the thickening twilight  
you can almost see the atoms in the air, grain-fuzz  
you drove into after that Zeppelin  
with no thought but 'Daddy, let's ride! ' of your children.  
That was summer.

To a pew of fallen Dutch elm  
you tinder-eggshell. Clumsy cherub's  
shaking parents' hands  
unstop your last present.

You will never sleep.

Richard George

# Wyndham Lewis In America

Something black touched the Tarr  
who'd blasted Cab Calloway  
and dallied with Adolf.

This warmth and wisdom  
gave his seventh decade leaven.  
His composite Cosmic Man  
came to him. A Tiger Woods.

But who was it brushed  
this modernist Napoleon  
in exile specks of comfort?

We'll never know.  
But wonder.

Richard George

# Youth Hostelling

Glory, emerging  
from a pupal cagoule  
sister to my calloused Adam:

Man could not conceive  
this butterfly-flourish of hair. At The Swan  
our smiles intertwine and soar, a mating helix.

Alone in respective  
dormitories, we feel each other  
tick, two bees in a honeycomb.

Richard George