

Poetry Series

John Rickell
- poems -

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John Rickell(november 1945)

I am a countryman by my retriever I am in the country most days. Living in a small market town in Shropshire UK

I have been writing free verse since 1970 I am a singer of plainsong and Gregorian chant, which has significantly influenced my poetry.

I have published a book of poems 'A stirring in the Air' with photographs by Tom Scot, a grandson, it is being sold on Ebay by SHINE, the charity which cares for those with spinabifida.

..Nineteenth December....

The view across the wood
so different from the spring,
cold and down to minus six.
Ferns have dropped their fronds
birches naked in the wind,
shortest day next Monday.
New Year starting soon
perhaps in snow, that would be nice,
but not too much!
From Long-Mynd top the sheep are down
cows milking in the dairy,
sheepdogs curl beside the hearth
a treat for them, better than the barn.
Days growing longer, minutes added daily
early mornings once again, whistles all day long.
February cold to come, fighting springtime sun
daffodils in Jessop's copse, catkins in the alder,
pregnant does and badgers rest,
Reynard howling through the night,
down to eating worms and berries,
dreaming rabbits suckling cubs.

John Rickell

A Stirring In The Air

What is this that stirs the air
no storm clouds shroud the sky
yet the sun does not shine
and the morning breeze is still.
I hear no birds, the storm-cock
silent from the roof, no mice
disturb the leaves, hedgehogs sleep
yet a stirring in the air....
stage whispers, confidences shared
actors hid I know not where.
Perhaps the sun will shine
storms invade and lightning strike.
I shall wait the storm-cock's cry,
His yellow beak to welcome or to warn.

John Rickell

An Interlude

My love is of the wild wood
the wild, wild wood and free
gossamer green her robe
resting on her shoulders
tumbling at her feet
dancing on the mossy logs
riding them like centaurs.
Ivory thighs for those in favour.
hidden behind an apple tree,
divest my coarse work clothes
boldly step from out its shade
to the elfin form and soft green moss;
she does not stir but waits,
takes me on her thigh
holds me tight to make us one.
In pity, so it seems;
holds my head in supple hands,
becoming harlot to my wishes.

John Rickell

August Rain In Madiera (Edited February 2014)

The concrete seemed so short
The turn so steep.....
We and the plane were down.
A fortnight lay before
The sky porcelain and blue
mountains pencil sharp and dark
With ribbon streams
And dangerous challenge,
No clouds, they were to come.

A fortnight's Eden lay before,
Before.... we knew not what.
The bed was flat, we used it well
Slept the whole night through
Woke once to taste the air
A holiday from home,
Locked and safe and waiting.
Innocence no crime.

There was no need for hope
We did not know
Why hope when skies are blue?
Clouds were left behind,
Thousands walked us by,
without a word.
We only spoke for wine, a meal
A simple meal, not too much
No sweet.

Turn north the streets are steep
Forty-five, you trod them well
I did not know, nor you
We bought some fruit
I ate it all, sucked it on the quay,
Waiting for the bus
As the ships went by.

In years the rain
Had never come in August,

Surprised them all
So strange to see shiny streets,
Jewelled leaves and gurgling gutters
It came by night, ashamed,
gone by eight, misty low,
not bold as home.
It needed practice, not like ours.
Which turns out every day

They learned the art of weather-talk,
Cafe conversations just like home.
We shrugged away the rain
Went a gentle walk
To watch the plants and lizards
Why it had rained we did not know
No, we did not know
So much we did not know,

John Rickell

Awake My Love

Awake my love the world is sleeping
the fox is in his lair and owls dream on
the mouse, with us, will rest in quiet,
assured the humid night is safe,
midsummer day, but memory.
Pan with his pipes, plays to keep the world at peace,
darkness tonight our friend so wake my love, we are 'lone
no chill moon, or baleful eye, friendly dark to clothe,
no need of spiders' gossamer veils sleeping with the world.
Wake my love dream, dreams do not count as sleep,
there is another world, or so I'm told,
Come with me, I cannot go alone.

John Rickell

Barmaid

Step down into the parlour
deep window sill and flowers
early afternoon, most are drunk
just as it should on Sunday.
She smiles bold, direct
holds her own each day
'Guinness please', she pulls,
her arms suntanned and strong
she knows her worth,
draws the shamrock, smiles
and melts our hearts
her heavy blouse says all.
Barmaid here for many years
her maidenhood long since gone
and many times, the easy life
of take it as it comes
along the Marches counties
a long tradition, in her genes
we too know the rules....
since on our mothers' knees,
her hips are broad, so her mind
her beauty shames the hills
this is woman at her best
two kids, a dog, and a husband
proud and jealous, vigilant
sitting at the bar.

John Rickell

Before The Bedroom Window

Pigeons two and blackbirds three
crab tree red and ripe
sweetness for all to see
before the bedroom window.
Spring miles away waits
towering cloud and western wind
A wild rose out of season
shivers in the border
came out for Christmas,
pink and tiny, flowering
friendly defiance
shaming me in woollen hat,
January not my favourite.
Refilled feeders and fat-ball snacks
finches fighting sparrows
and yes, the robin's there
holly berries long since gone,
ivy berries too,
stolen by the blackbird
who clammers in the rose
laying claim within the thorny tangle
safe from cats and courting cocks.
Twenty years this scene repeats
tunes the same, colours never fade
master-pieces hung about,
primrose, daffodil, an acropetal
succession none compete, conjoined
until Michaelmas daisies fade
and Christmas comes again.

John Rickell

Before The Clouds Disperse

De profundis, the departed
favourite for so many
drawn in awe and fear.
Why no more for joy
bestowed by nature
found in primrose verges
cast so carelessly we hardly notice
there to chose and free?
Life is not for ever
we knew as we were born,
see moths trapped in the window,
nipples dry, milk a passing fancy.
Throw off those gowns,
Black is not for us
bring on drums, intoxicants,
spin, sing, jazz, girate.
There is little time
of what there is
share the rainbow
before the clouds disperse.

John Rickell

Betwys Y Coed

The day had started wet
Telford's road glistening in the rain
passed Llangollen's busy streets
and tumbling Dee.
It was ten, the day before us,
Jack asleep waiting for his walk,
three friends, but a single thought
Will the sun shine as last week,
who cares in such good company?
Called A5 today, made for coach and horses
stone walled smoothing Welsh hills,
cars appreciate the gentle ride
the easy curves and misty views.
Carrog passed... the steam train too,
Corwen soon, villages with funny names
few vowels, stone and slate;
green fields, flecked white
Lime- washed farms and rusting tractors
late lambs suckling in their innocence
Bala on the road sign(that's another day)
stop at Pentrefoelas, chocolate shop,
beside the infant Conwy and one arch bridge
The road now weaves its way,
the river on this and now on that
Dropping to Betwys y Coed
'prayer house in the wood'
drizzle now so there's hope of sun.
In the Fairy Glen, relief for Jack
he's travelled well and barks delight,
leaves us in his hurry
comes to heel at every car
(well nearly every car)
The railway rumbles to our left
on its way to Blaenau',
the Llugwy tumbles right,
And frolics with the Conwy
its valley steep and woody
on its way to the five arch bridge,
Merging architect with nature,

water-falls and childish cries.

School next week, long drive home
Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham
so we watch and share the fun,
take coffee, Royal Oak cake and cream.
Eden for a day no matter what the weather.
The chain bridge swings across the river
Four trains a day, golf,
shops ice cream and candles
Five arch bridge and water falls
kids and barking dogs,
grandmas and wheel chairs
prayer house in a wood
Afon Llwygy,
tumbling surf and laughter

John Rickell

Blackbird

How does he do it?
His brain no more than finger nail
Singing a scale of notes I cannot sing
Nor can does he say? It seems he knows
But what? Is there some communication...
A radiating beam that strikes the tiles
The message always clearer
When he sings upon the roof?
Black as night, she brown discrete, a job to do
Keep warm and safe. Silence is the key
Eight is late, to bed, one last egg to hatch.

If he could write would he write it down..
All those notes without a scale, more than twelve,
An alphabet of sounds, as random as the sea
Would he even try? each note is sent its way,
The thought.. if thought there be lost above the roof.

There is no past for him no future, all is now.
No thinking in the melody but joy and being well
Yesterday? What is that? Never heard of yesterday
Of today doesn't even care.
How long will it be? What is long? Is it a worm?
A brain no more than fingernail only room for hope.

Maybe I'm wrong....
Is there a message in your song
Save joy?
Do I leave a space to listen, to you kind soul?
Your life so short...'though long enough
Just long enough, no more.
When song is gone so will you be gone.
Its all you want to do

John Rickell

Books In Dusty Solitude

I don't know what to make of it
do not understand; when there's time
I'll sit and think, seek pages
on library shelves made years ago,
answers hid somewhere, cramped
deep in dusty solitude, out of reach.
There's wood in the garden shed
enough to make a ladder,
To reach the high most shelf,
its sound, no worms, no mold;
it'll take some time.....there is enough
On the way I'll learn a lot
what tools to use and care to take
hand down a book, then if I find.....
what shall I make of it?

John Rickell

Brambles Showing Green

Sun beams slanting through the wood
steel sharp cold and cruel
March fighting off the Spring
to lose again as yester-year
but still he tries
his memory worse than mine!

Jack and I keep in the lea
tramp leaves and twigs
remnants of last year
green leaves once and branches.
Around trees lean and creak,
a hundred years from now
shall see the same
that's if I'm here
that's if it could be so.

Brambles showing green,
nettles threaten in the shade,
pine and birch and alder
wave their fists, defy the storm
ferns, brown, dry and waiting,
slumber in the shade.
I lose my hat and whistle Jack
who negotiates a biscuit
runs around the thicket
proudly finds the hat drops it at my feet
on the muddy path!
Who cares says Jack,
you never gave me a hat.

Watched at every move,
tits and finches cease to whistle,
we're not here long, peace will soon return
the wood will struggle with the wind
hold back its leaves and blue bells
the clock goes back,
tomorrow will be late
but not in my wood,

time infinite as ever.

John Rickell

Breathe Deep The Midnight Air

Breathe deep the midnight air
It is late and time, well spent,
proceeds its way to night
star-lit sky no moon to
chill with cruel shadows,
vicious shapes of topiary
yews clipped and sinister,
nudes, their arms outstretched
bolder now than in the sun,
no longer to excite the eye,
only the sound of dusty moths
clashing with a lonely lamp
and fountain in the oval pool
peppering the water's golden hordes.
Frogs and toads serenade the stars,
gentle on the ear calming
those who listen.....
Breath deep the midnight air,
sink in sleep the angels sing.

John Rickell

Building Site Walsall Uk

Hoardings shouting at the street,
those in buses reading as they pass
of perfume, razor blades and Guinness,
selling space and advertising
keeping secret from the public
the future of their city,
JCBs moving piles of earth
to mold a future better than the past,
where once workers toiled,
houses cheek-by-jowl, back allies,
terrace rows and corner shop,
midst laughter, spinning tops and shawls
smutted wash lines wall to wall.
Evening pubs with glittering mirrors
nicotine ceiling and sawdust floors,
counters lined with glasses,
as hooters sound the end of day,
on the way to home, to crowded streets,
seagulls on the cliffs at Flambro'
(how did they know which nest?) .
wife and kids around the table,
scrubbed, white, no cloth hiding knots,
armchair for Dad, stools for the kids,
chair, beside the sink, for Mam.
Pigeons to feed and whippets,
shoes to sole and wood to chop,
fishing canals for roach and pike,
barges low with coal and pots from Stoke.
Smells of tanning, thumping hammers,
freight trains through the night,
flashing furnace fires, bed
by ten and up at six.
Blake's 'Jerusalem' on a school piano.

John Rickell

Burns Night

Burns-Night long ago
fateful night for both
haggis, turnip supper,
whisky by the yard.
We had not met before,
rumour all we had,
both alone and free.
as we liked we did,
danced the whole night through
then home upon my knee
a friend at the wheel
I too drunk to drive.
Boldness was my friend that night,
sponsored by the malt.
Said I thought her lovely,
dark eyes, dancing feet,
hair black and to her waist
Three days.....
we shared a meal, and more
beneath the railway bridge
until the rising sun.
Never once looked back
never once 'til now.

John Rickell

Butterfly Trapped In A Norfolk Church

□

Where were you last Christmas
hiding in the dust behind the altar
underneath an oaken pew
patched in darker brown, not oak
like the patch on a poor man's coat
Proudly wrought?
The peace of God around you
trapped in loving kindness,
fading altar flowers no food for you
anxious glances to the door,
the mesh obstructed door to keep out birds,
which kept you in, had I not come.
You let me take you from the sill
filled my hand with joy
bride-like walked with me along the aisle.
I threw you to the sun and wind
saw flowers tremble in delight
shake their anthers, petals open wide
'Feed off me' they cried.
Who needed who the most?
A winter fast complete....
cold sweet charity stayed your appetite
'til one fine day in May stirred your wings,
warmed your heart and set your tummy gurgling.
so glad I called.....
I would not have prayed that day.
there were no candles in the church
but then I had no matches.
You were my pray.....
I wished you well and all your brood,
but never asked your name.

John Rickell

Can You Hear The Rumbles?

Can you hear the rumbles
daffodils and cowslips
stirring in the grass?
worms and beetles feel the heat
The bird bath sheds its ice
Euphorbias with pale green furls
impatient to be first.
Time to prune the roses,
lavender's greying whiskers
untrimmed in the fall,
better late than never.
The frost has nipped a few,
the pineapple tree unconcerned
silver leaves beneath the cedar,
its sweet unEnglish scent
overwhelms summer evenings
mixing with the Merlot and
neighbours' drunken laughter.
Winter short as ever, never stays long
like us does not like the cold!
Fought the snow since Christmas,
but let us have our sledge and grumbles
knows we'll soon forget.

John Rickell

Candles

The place brighter for my going
and bright upon my leaving
pagan lights upon the vaulting
lofting to the oak beamed roof
uncensored prayers, vague
untutored hurried thoughts
float ethereal until time
no more and earth stood still.
To the crowded street again
another year to pass until
prompted by the self same urge
I return with the same intent
a ninth November day, the place
brighter for my going
more bright upon my leaving.

John Rickell

Chaffinch In The Gorse

Last night's snow melted from the roads
dawdled in the wood hiding from the sun
losing every minute despite the cold.
rabbits scamper through brittle ferns
leap across our path, a full six feet
the only sign of life today,
that is a lie, hazel buds are smiling
cheeky grins as scales fall,
pale leaves peep out, to join the hazels.
Soon March and hope returns.
Ferns will lace the woodland floor,
Rooks, survived the shot-guns
will build again their scruffy nests,
badgers dig a little deeper
chaffinch in the gorse.

John Rickell

Chanting In The Wood

Quiet stand the trees no breeze today,
filtered sun-light grey clouds motionless.
Plain-song chanting,
Sunday worship from the birds,
unified and unison.
no harmonies disturb the melody,
one song to rival all your symphonies,
gentle petals on the mill-race stream
random laid, careless and carefree.
Josquin, never wrote like this,
all self-taught; practice through the day
with friends from branch to branch,
joining when space is found.
I have no pen, if I had
I could no more recite these runes
but, 'til memory fails shall take,
each day I call
those songs so random laid,
careless and carefree.

John Rickell

Charity's Lost Content

Many times ago, it was so many,
so many that I fail to count,
each date, each happening
on the way, my memory
rushes passed years so full and free
(I keep no diary, no calendar on the wall,
Blueberry have I none.)
compete and jumble in joyful tumult,
echoes in the room
paintings seek my attention,
ghostly children in a class,
coloured pencils brighten
mundane recollections,
photographs and things
like that, in albums lost
beneath cases in the loft,
envelopes swearing eternal love,
newspapers proclaiming peace,
mans' eternal dream.....
charity's lost content.

John Rickell

Children Playing In The Wood

I saw them in the wood playing hide-and-seek
old fashioned clothes hoods and leggings
as in the photographs.

What a game they played!

hid behind the trees hands about their faces,
count to ten, 'I'm coming' but I could hear no voices,
the woodland colder now could not hear their mother
no bird song in the air

Went a little further, the path known so well
cracking twigs and cones, Jack barking at the wind.

I wore no hat or gloves not so cold today I thought,
but a mist enclosed me in fog, or so it seemed
yet it was only noon and the sun shone bright.

Jack to my side pressed against my leg
stayed close, unusual for him,
wished I had my hat and gloves, another mile to go.

Children playing hide-and-seek,
dressed in white all three their bonnets and their boots

I asked them where their mummy was
as silent now as then.....

turning looked at me and melted in the sun.

John Rickell

Chuckle Of Content

You would not think I could forget
the touch of you, light as silk I recall
then of velvet, satin, finest linen
each the aura that is you.

Would I could steal the cloth, take
it home to my bed wrapped round to
dream of you uterine beside me.

To dream of skin, fine hairs to
glisten in the morning sun, musk laden
with your scents to rival those of lily
which I confirm each time I kiss the
sacred place for which there is no name
save ours, so secret none shall know.

There is but little time to wait, each one too far
now my memory is revived, I had not forgotten
how could I forget? like the lemon bowl
before the dinner plate this lapse will
cleanse my tongue to taste again
the sweet I know so well,
cries and silent moments
waiting the chuckle of content.

John Rickell

Clun



Clun Shropshire

The Sun at Clun church,
crooked bridge and castle.
Offa's dyke a village shop
and silence.....
Shropshire's dreaming best,
Housman's 'quietest place on earth'.
Been there, drank in the Sun,
they never said a word,
this is Shropshire,
that's what it's like!
Leave them alone
and they'll stay home,
waving goodbye as you go.
Far from the world we know
artics on the forty nine,
traffic lights, roundabouts
and super-market trolleys
I don't go back as oft I did
the hair-pin to the bridge
up and on to Knighton,
a world I can no longer grasp
I am of another far away,
traffic-lights and roundabouts,
dreaming of the Sun at Clun
crooked bridge and castle.

John Rickell

Coming Home

We were so proud of the tree
Stood in the street the last of many
Planted in the twenties
But then it died, elm disease they said
The first I'd heard of elm.
Mam blamed the milkman's horse.
So without a tree we lived, mourning the passing,
The garden gate, green and sprung
Clashing closed when bringing in my bike.
The street was lined with privet long before Leylandii
Trimmed at different heights and widths
Half the footpath left to walk,
Cut every month by Dad to the height of the concrete posts.
Lawns to right and left flower beds in symmetry
Doctor Van Fleet round the windows
Fed by horse muck from the milkman's horse,
The front door green as the garden gate
Round steel handle, brass thirteen, letter-box in black.
Struggling round the side passed the London Pride
Brick edged path to the back and trellis arch
Vegetables, apple trees, rabbits and crowing cock
Lean the bike, close and lock the door.
Wipe the shoes and hang the clothes,
Smell washing in the copper, belching steam
From the flue beside the porch;
Then to the table, brisket, cabbage, potato mashed in butter
Glass of water, never wine; sheets airing in the hearth.
A kitchen range, black and shiny, bones stewing in the oven,
Windows drenched in condensation
Home for twenty years. rented from the council.

John Rickell

Community

Goldfinches feed again
counted two today, said hello,
ninja seed their favourite,
thistles from America,
have their feeder all alone
tiny holes keep out the sparrow
who rarely calls today.
Crabs glow pink and white
wild, yet stay
no stake no tie and free to go,
There is no garden gate
all call, dandelion, primrose,
even oxlip shy and rare
paler than the cowslip
seeding everywhere
soon to hide beneath the grass
I do not cut 'til autumn,
sharing with the birds and mice.
And yes, I have a rat.

The garage roof long disappeared
beneath ivy clamber, homes to let
blackbird, tenant 2008, here again
to sing its faithful vigil.
God's-Little-Acre in the corner
have not been for years,
nature left alone, in peace
funny noises, silent, secret
grunting hedgehogs making love,
hear them through the window,
vicarious pleasure on sleepless nights.....
knowing I've got it right.
So night over takes day,
no owl to hoot, no fox to bark
all will sleep this night,
tomorrow is another day.

Who will call?
And will they stay?

John Rickell

Country Clothes

Who was this
in country clothes
suitable for most occasions?
green jacket, check shirt.
We spoke and laughed,
admired the dogs and guns
walked side by side,
leaned the bar, drank our ale,
mud upon the brick and mat.
At the door went our ways
pulled down our caps
heel Jack, Nero heel.
Who he was I failed to ask
he didn't ask me either;
next time I shall ask,
walking down the lane,
in our country clothes.
suitable for most occasions.

John Rickell

Crab Trees

The crabs are red today
tempting the blackbird
lashed by sudden rain;
they have no names,
bought from a super-market
smothered in a plastic bag
Saturday, late half price
and almost dead.
love kept them live,
through winter they glow
paying back their debt,
breakfast for the blackbird.

John Rickell

Crimson Petal

Six hours to dark and humid night
reach for the rose, soft and nectar laden
kiss her petals hear whispered promises
suck sweet, slow and buried deep, unfold
and dream of evening's silken robes.
Reluctant day retreats, evening breezes cool
the sweating brow, confirmed in the crystal pool.
evening and the moon is high.
Raise the glass and stay
close my love skin more soft than silk
Skin in love none more sweet
Let me taste and see
Oils of Arabi, Arcadian spices
opals waiting, pearls about your neck.
Night is young and so are we.
There is time..... time enough,
skin more soft than silk,
Your nectar shames the lily.

Is this a dream? If so I have no wish to wake,
the cushion of your thighs rests my brow,
breasts to quench, your hands to hold.
The crimson petal of the lake no match.
Take this night beneath the smiling moon
share this earthly gift
more worth than Heaven's Gate.
I am your Hercules this night
Soon, too soon... but
there is time to wait.
Lie still, the tide is rising,
float upon the foaming waves,
hold your breath and me, we shall not drown
But tossed on the shore shall sleep,
Salt drying on skin more soft than silk.

John Rickell

Curlew Calls

The curlew no more
stalks the estuary
winter is gone.
I hear but one cuckoo
and summer is here,
when I hear him no more
summer will fade again
autumn slipping silent by,
the blackbird heralding
the shortening day as
crows assembling in pines
sing a raucous roundelay
to rutting stags and
waiting doe as the fox
seeks rabbits in
the honeysuckle hedge
bright with berries and
black with bramble beneath
the crab and thorny sloe.
Yellow tinges in the leaves
as ash and aspen moult,
while the oak stands green
until November gales discard
the orange leaves and red,
acorns fall and squirrels
stock their larders
As the curlew calls

John Rickell

Cyclamen

The wild Cyclamen
Nestling in the grass
Their marbled leaves
Will stay for summer
Soon to fade and seed.
Not bold like daffodils
Or the Iris in the border
Which eyes me every day.
Casting seeds in June
spreading across the meadow
under shrubs and trees
to delight in Spring.
One must bend down low
To find them,
Pull back their grassy hide.
Plant them as you will,
they'll decide to stay,
if you give them peace.

John Rickell

Day In The Sun

Llanrwst on a sunny day,
beside the Conwy river, diamond fresh,
pebble strewn and bubbling,
a dog's delight chasing swans,
swim and drink your fill.
Shirt sleeve weather
muddy paths from Monday's rain,
walking shoes not sandals.
The drive across the hills to me was new,
hawthorns late, with pale green leaves
the 'bread- and-cheese' of child-hood,
eaten on the way to school.
Woolly sheep in hundreds, not a cow in sight,
do not mention mint, that would be unkind,
mustard if you must!

I drove for miles, long secret lanes,
hamlets passed me by, names all consonants
Double 'Ls'..... few vowels!
Where I was, I knew not,
but was not lost,
did not know where I was going!
Nor care.....
I'd left behind a friend to study for her work,
Had five hours to spend on myself,
climbed the nearest hill turning
my back on caravans, sandy shore and sea.
Llanrwst again, (let's not forget) .
Found the church, oak door not locked.....
Just push.

Gentle streets behind, silence in the nave.
a quiet day, a holy day.
the only one to sit in the dark oak pews,
smell of bees-wax candles,
organ keys smiling black and white.
Major, minor, melodies and vaulted roof.
Beneath the tower pretty pulls hang limp,
the bells heavy, silent waiting call to prayer,

Twenty, so I'm told, on Sunday.

A lady came to talk to me, Desiderata on the shelf,
Made a copy for me, wished me 'Nice day'.....
Went to shop in town, left me silent once again.
Whispers from the past, echoes drift round the beams,
Jacobean black and lime-wash white.
Chancel arch from fifteen hundred.
Beckoned.. 'Climb the steps' but I stayed to think.
Wished I could believe.....
Listened to the ponderous tock, of the tower clock,
Tick out its pendulous measure.
'Oh, Lord support us all the
day- long of this troublous life'
Rose like incense smoke, as I took rest.

I had to go, an hour left, just enough,
Must not be late, took a shorter route
Along a white lined road, rushing east,
between two statue limits.
Order now, no sheep or soaring kestrel.
primrose, daffodil and hawthorn nowhere to be seen,
Caravans and sand, police and traffic lights.

We met 'How did it go? '
Shared pleasure and the day's frustrations
coffee, chat, a walk to stretch class-room limbs
and blow away the cobwebs.
Gave her the keys, switched on the music
To drown the traffic noise...
no birds to sooth the brow.
No smell of bees-wax candles
.
.

John Rickell

Digitalis Purpurea

Statuesque handsome in the shade
of the tree wild with crabs
tempting as of ages passed
legends steeped in belief
faith for those who choose.

Do I resist your charms
embrace, kiss those purple lips
enter the goblet, its freckles
innocent in that pouting mouth
bathe in the dangerous air.

Un-heed maternal warnings
drink deep sweet intoxicants
to calm my racing heart
and indulge myself 'til death
succumb as thousand others.

I must away from this seductress
to hawthorn buds, spotless white
who in quiet beauty promise less
lasting wealth and silent comfort,
the bread and cheese of childhood.

John Rickell

Do Not Pick The Flower

Do not pick the flower
let it fade and
when the petals fall,
fold in the book, soft tissues
capture the waning essence
of your memory, past bliss
once to delight when youth.
Then safe in dark recess
let them sleep daylight hours
wake with you through nights
once crowded with the flower.
Hold the pillow as once your love
perfume fading, surely as it will.

John Rickell

Drawing The Alphabet

'What did you do at school?'

I asked.

'Drew the alphabet'

she said.

Watched her draw her name

with greatest care

in her drawing book.

You must understand her style,

feels the world as once we did,

discards sophistication,

before she even knew it.

'R' the wrong way round

'K' laid on its back,

yet all made sense, watching,

saw the world as she did;

drawings on the table

signed in felt strokes

reds and blues and why not!

John Rickell

Dreamer

Never a noisy place,
seems to sleep all day,
does it dream, the trees,
their fantastic forms,
all illusion, how do
I enter such a place?
Many shapes to challenge
my imagination, too
must dream, enter the mind
nature wrought, which
began this never-land
I can understand only
in the fog of make believe.
Believe I must, yet
truth can be hard to bare,
to dream each day
in such a place is all I ask,
why I call each day
in thorn-proof green,
breathless, silent disbelief.

John Rickell

Druids

The long day closes,
safe with moth and fox,
silent owl and timid badger.
I wait the sun, paths tripped
with roots as the soil shrinks,
leaching in the drought.
The wood a secret place.

If you believe in pixies do not go at night
to tread those toad-stool circles
that are of the Druids, ancient, long ago, ,
unknowable, a past on which we build deep
foundations, secure, an order we follow,
did we but know the truth

No message left, Romans saw to that
long before the Glastonbury legend.
Stone circles stand proud today
architecture tuned to nature,
not cold as Cathedrals' Gothic pride,
honest stone wrought from earth
not carved with maul and chisel.

□

John Rickell

Earthly Bond

Its been a long time sweetheart,
longer as days drag passed
I miss your voice and laughter
the gentle intercourse we share
that knows no bounds and free.
The right that grows each day
to take our fill of each, to rest
secure, content when passions
die, to resurrect and renew
the cup still full, the nectar
and the mystic oils to mix, a
secret more worth than gold.
Close the curtains one more time
none but me to see your form
none to hold you close, to press
my jealous body against your
eager thighs in pure delight;
to enter, nervous as a virgin lover,
the bower hid between those
lips, smiling welcome to my love
eyes meet one brief time, a blush,
on your cheeks, a kiss;
the moment now demanding
trust to share a sacred gift,
flushed in joy souls fulfilled
joined in common earthly bond.

John Rickell

Ellesmere Canal Festival

We had no plans except to meet,
a long time since the last,
caught up the news before we left
then fifteen miles and pretty flags
beside the canal in Ellesmere.

A festival of boats and brass
plant pots, garish paint and dogs
upon the prow, dodging folding chairs
ropes and rings on tow path gravel.
stalls, organic jams and cakes
smells and thumping diesels;
shapely blouses, rainbows in the sun,
floppy hats, men, white legs,
plastic wind mills, candy floss;
perhaps the last of summer cotton.

Cross the bridge, horse shoe scratches,
a retriever caked in mud
its lead about my legs, owner in despair,
none fell in that day but it was close!
and if we had few would care
its only four feet deep.

Through the meadow by the cut
to find a quiet lane
memories of childhood springs
the glistening mere beyond the hill
white steam launch from a railway brochure,
seagulls, ducks incontinent geese!
Coffee, cream and Bakewell tart.
The rebuilt cafe, closed two anxious years,
no cosy drapes no feathers on the walls
no scratches on the table, the salt and pepper match

John Rickell

Epiphany

Had I not known
forgotten how blue the sea
when daylight fades to night?
many dawns, noon-day chimes
pass in silent queue,
waking buds unattended,
scales scatter, work done
litter the ground waiting
the breeze sweep gutters
washing to the sea each year
digesting in swirling waves
as winter spring-cleans.
Another advent waiting
Candlemas, hungry gap,
March soon passed,
Lenten abstinence.
Another year, resurrection,
reassures, revives, recalling
other times, Whitsun hope,
Advent welcome,
holly wreath and baubles,
reminding how blue the sea,
night fading at Epiphany.

John Rickell

Eve

I leaned the morning mist
fast fading in the sun,
had climbed the hill,
was tired.
So soft this veil and strong
no fear of falling,
I thrust my hand into the mist
found her standing,
sleep still in her eyes,
hair unkempt to warm her breasts
but not to hide her beauty,
her mystery was as the mist
I reached for her, she did not move.
Was she flesh or did I dream?
the air cold as was the mist
but my hands not chilled
as I stroked away her hair;
she smiled consent drew me close,
arms about my shoulders
as mists subside
my passion for her to see.
Dew warming in the sun
moist moss for a bed
my mouth dry, she bade me drink
I found the source, but dare not,
her smile confirmed I drink;
this another world
warmer than the fading mists
my thirst soon gone hunger quenched
nectar of the gods was mine
mists dispersed and noonday sun,
birds ceased to call
the moss sprung back, her form
but now a memory,
can dreams remember such as this?
this not dreaming, this is real,
and so it must. Dream again
when mists invade share
the glory that is Eve

John Rickell

Fading Whispers

We spoke each and far away
ether-wards our conversation
drifting in the breeze
guided by more than random thoughts
met by chance, perchance to stay
friends in need are we in deed,
who has the most of need?
I do not ask myself
this task not mine to say,
I am half of two I hear an echo
echo answers echo, echo, echo
must answer which and how?
I whispered to the hills,
echo answers echo
asked for help, vain repetition
half afraid, apologetic,
there was no need beside Emmaus road
I lay not mortal as I thought.
Promise believed, a promise kept
echo answering echo echo echo
fading whispers to the hills.

John Rickell

Felix

Old Felix came and went
His business combs and buttons
Ones for nits, the others brass and cotton
To be squashed by wooden roll.
How big his feet in sagging shoes
How bowed his coat, herring bone and worn
A heavy coat, a winter coat....
In blazing June.
A poor man, a good man,
With eyes so blue and frank, .
He was a tramp.

He pushed a childless pram, without a hood
Left it in the street;
Card-board case opened at the door
With things to sell to Mam,
And sometimes Dad was there.
Had a little book of poems
One was on a card,
Was it his? He said it was
No need to disbelieve
Those eyes so blue and frank,
His coat... so long and worn,

Slept outside, he said,
The sweating coat in June!
Oh! ...Yes! ...the little book.
Was it blue?
Or....did those eyes?
Yes, what did they do?
Did he smell?
Stood without the porch, could not tell,
Did not want to know.
It was those eyes
So blue so frank
Above that coat so worn.

The war was on, buttons scarce as gold
Felix got his from a Walmgate store,

A corner store beside 's Church
We passed it every week,
But always bought from Felix.
Lent me the book.
Or was it given me?
I gave it back, I wished I'd not
He wanted me to have it.
Dead now Felix and your book
Lost beneath a tree,
But not the memory of those eyes
So blue so frank
That heavy coat in June
And hands that asked for friendship,
With a book.

What was in that book,
The blue book with grubby back?
Poems beyond my years,
A little boy from Sunday School.
The card began.....
Yes, I remember now
'My mother taught me,
Mathew, Mark and Luke and John'
The rest is gone, something under a tree,
Had he sat beneath a tree to write?
But on the card the lines were print,
Not licked and leaden pencil.
Kept for years, the card now gone,
The book, I gave it back.
Worried months in-case you did not come
Gave it back....a great mistake,
To those reluctant hands
With saddened eyes
So blue and frank
And older coat,
Its back more bent.

Away he walked
In shuffle-shoe, and stooping coat
Card-board case in tatters
The sleeves seemed longer
Fancy frills.....

The herring bone had worn
To show the lining,
No leather edge like mine.
Buttons there were none, but
Stooped and arched
The open cloth became a porch
Against the snow and rain
And sweating summer sun.
I never looked to see the pram
As empty as before?
Soundless turned the wall,
Proud along the path
Its London Pride and bricks.

Who were you, ?
Your hair was long uncombed,
You came down Constantine
Like Jesus Christ at Sunday school
Christ in Constantine I thought
(I was that age)

Had trod those pavements I despised
Gentle Jesus, meek and mild
Looked upon a little child
Turned.....
And walked away.

I wonder where he went?
He must be there by now,
Left behind the pram,
Thrown away the case
The book and pencil and the card,
Left behind the memories
Of a man who left no mark.
Sufficient was the day....
He had no morrow...
Just today.....
And that old coat.

John Rickell

Fields Free Of Snow

The fields free of snow
these thirteen days.
the garden half dark
and a blackbird sings;
ten to five my clock,
curtains tight shut,
music on the radio
waiting for the news
Bach to take me back,
Halcyon's baroque splendour
competing the blackbird
distant and soon to sleep
he will rise early
to stir me from my bed,
she chasing foolhardy
worms seduced by a
warming breeze, gentle
rain on friendly trees.
All dark save for street
lights' yellow glow,
artificial shadows on
the garage roof where
now no bird sings;
here beside the fire
the music changes
Liszt, takes me into
the evening hours
and sleep....
gentle sleep..
gentle as the rain
on friendly trees.

John Rickell

First Love

In the hollow by the course
She, with me and Joff
late one Saturday evening,
The day had been a success
I had won again and the prize
Was in the bag, beside my togs.
The laurel wreath, around my neck,
Was twisted, not in greens
But soft pink of woman's arms
and the scents of skin in love.
Victor Laudourum
On the field and track,
Another conquest lay before,
Hazel adoration.....
Better than the crowd.
The August moon in cooling beams
smiled his same old grin.....
we used his light
as he had used the sun
kissed.....
and, cheating watched
the other cheat,
between long dark lashes
each nineteen.....
and scared of love.

John Rickell

Flag Fen Peterborough

This the land of squires and spires
stone and brick, slate, deep eaves and thatch
stubble fields with open gates and welcome.
Quarries yielding ore and stone, soon for
recreation, boats and fish on Sundays
Quiet lanes and motor ways, turbines
spinning in the wind, sixteen times a minute
beside the silver power station
chimneys of the Fletton brick works
clay old as man black smoke flowing east.
Silent witness to our past.

Wooden causeway, toil and timber
three thousand years buried deep
waiting to be found, Flag Fen, iris
floating on the lake, moor hens nesting
deep and safe in reeds for thatching roofs.
Confronted thus in awe at mans' invention
there to see the oak and thatch, Soay-sheep,
shedding wool obedient to the weavers' trade
around the smoking fire and curing ham.

The air was still, but the turbines
kept on turning, sixteen times a minute,
electric light where once was tallow's
sickly smell, which swamped the stink of sweat
Were they happy? Yes I'm sure, childrens' cries
barking dogs and herbs to harvest in the summer,
hedges for the winter, wood for the fire,
shawls to weave and boots to cobble.
Three thousand years! and here we stand,
stand in awe time and again to slip away
enhumbled that we with all we have and more
own part of them who shivered long ago
our genes as theirs, their hopes as ours.

John Rickell

Floating On Ferns

Floating half hidden from myself
buoyed on ferns and things like that
sheltered from the wind and rain
trees, shade from the sun and glare.
Only badger sentinels to guard,
black and white....and brown.
Where is this place, Calm and Peace?
in dream I came, woke upon the ground
a green and pleasant ground, dry soft.
shall stay a while until I sleep,
then dream to home and daffodils.
I do not wish to wake until I'm home
then, should I dream once more
to return again to this green space,
float half hidden from myself,
buoyed on ferns and things like that.

John Rickell

Foxglove

Statuesque, handsome, flowering
in the shade beneath wild crab
tempting as of ages, past
legends steeped in belief,
faith for those who chose.
Do I resist your charms
embrace and kiss those purple lips
seek the nectar as the bee
Digitalis is your name
my finger deep within your folds
enter the goblet, its purple freckles
innocent in that pouting mouth
bathe in the dangerous air,
unheed paternal warnings
drink deep sweet intoxicants
to calm my racing heart,
indulge myself 'til death
succumb as thousand others?

Turn away from this seductress
to hawthorn buds, spotless white
who, in quiet beauty promise less;
lasting wealth and quiet comfort
the bread and cheese of childhood

John Rickell

Friday Afternoon

Not the sort of day for fun
but we found enough of gentle sport
dodging puddles in the park
childish nonsense, for its own sake
never noticed the rain had stopped.
It kept fine from there on,
pearls on Rhododendron blooms
glistened in the evening sun
while late snowdrop and Crocus
sheltered beneath the hazel hedge.
Friday afternoon in March,
a weekend stretched before....
Summertime next week.

John Rickell

Friday Night

Friday night, the town is quiet
pretty girls with ivory thighs
precarious on their heels,
tread their way to 'Whispers'
in pairs they go by laughing
passed the emptying pub its drunken
boys who, encouraged by the lager
slowly leave in twos and threes,
shout at the girls; jousting knights
banners high and bright.
Soon the street is dead, to remain
until early Sat'day morning
when all will stagger home,
stopping for a random joy
in the darkened lanes.
Each night the same
it was ever so, each generation
lives a rage, a rage to live
to talk in years to come of
watching pretty girls go by.

John Rickell

Frost

The garden etched in white
diamonds in the wood, cold
beauty shining in the sun,
Christmas decorations
will they last 'til then
a fortnight yet to go?
sledges meant as presents
unwrapped early, indulgent
children out of school
charge the hill and tumble,
or shop with mum struggling
side walks' lethal challenge;
home to snap the icicles
from the thawing gutter
shake the tree laugh as
haw falls like snow
on the scurrying cat.

John Rickell

Gentle Waves

Calm and still,
no turmoil in the air
the same as last we met,
I hear the gentle waves
join in your delight
buoyant at your side,
as we swim the summer lake
flesh combined.....
shared and discrete
not to wake the pigeon
cooing love as we.
Across the waves
hear summer thunder
retreating from the morning sun,
glory in the yellow light
solos joined in bliss
duet now and unison;
hold the moment close
relax, thoughts entwine
wallow once again, in
the balm of mind and soul
drink of the crystal lake
quenched and satisfied.

John Rickell

Go Home

Do not wake the lily
dawn not yet begun,
she lies sleeping
in her bed of green,
petals tightly closed.
Wait young gardener, wait
listen for the blackbird
rising with the dawn,
singing in the willow,
dipping in the lake.
She hears the silver song
the gold fin at her side.
Watch young friend and dream,
do not stretch your hand
Listen to the blackbird
See the petals stir.
She is not 'wake but dreaming
eyes dazzled by the dawn.

Go home young man, go home
this bloom not for you
the flower will open many times,
one day you'll find her gone

Go home young man, go home
your time will come, then
fall again in love young man
and when you do, you'll
soon forget the lily
half sleeping in the lake.

John Rickell

Go Slow Sweet Moon

Go slow sweet moon my love lies sleeping
her breath drifting on the evening air
ghostly scents of recent joy;
soft lips smile enigma to my dreaming;
no need to more than whisper on the breeze
the Halcyon on the muddy shore
sleeps and we are safe;
no need to speak, our hands entwined
hearts combine pulses beat in unison;
conjoined, blessed by nature's law
let no man put asunder promises
sworn beneath the Aspen tree.
Owl and linnet and croaking frog
witness our communion, bread and wine
shared with elves and pixies,
as half-sleep bluebells chime
and echoes, through the branches,
drift like petals newly born...
two lovers sleeping, hands entwined
beneath an Aspen tree.

John Rickell

Gold Finch Feeding In The Rain

Crystals on the window panes
shining pavements and gurgling gutters
mirror pools and scurrying clouds
gaudy umbrellas, pink boots and plastic macs.
Today the grass looks greener, standing tall,
wild flowers kaleidoscopic more than Jacob's coat
gold finch on the feeder, eager sun-flower seeds
seems not to mind rain dripping from her tail.
Somewhere dry her brood, three perhaps. Who knows?
Birds dashing to their nests, never look to find them,
ethnic congregations, narrow chattering streets
of dripping leaves, dark alleys, ivy on the wall
happy in the rain or sun, (not so much in winter)
each day the same no matter what the weather.
(My tea that bit warmer, no milk today,
bought too much on Thursday
spoilt the first cup of the day,
curdled as I poured it, will I never learn?)
Jack's curled on the rug one eye on me
the other on a walk.....
he knows it's raining 'course he does
takes his lesson from the gold finch
feeding in the rain.

John Rickell

Heat

The air is heavy on my lungs,
white heat frightens, platinum not gold,
where was warmth, a cruel shaft.
The bird bath beside the wilting rose
tide-marks and whitening crystals.
I walk slow to ease my limbs seek shelter,
throw off my clothes,
an afternoon of sweat and drink
my hair limp, not a muscle 'wake
sagging in the chair, unpleasant, its plastic-wet.
birds panting in the ivy.

John Rickell

Helicopters

Frost melting in the sun as diamonds fall from trees
to sparkle on the carpet of leaves that fell last year.
The wood is cold, sun yet to strike the heart.
Helicopters ponder overhead blades crack like whips
lashing the air as I cross the field, waking sleepy molehills
shimmering the pond on their way to the airfield.
Here, in peace, they train for war was ever so and ever more.
January has a little time to go, wild clematis defies the cold
clinging to a larch, pale leaves innocent, or defying, I cannot say.
Jack nowhere to be seen the last I saw his tail
he'll come back when I call, knowing there's a biscuit.
I wave to the ponderous `copter on its way for home
close the wicket gate as peace returns once more.

John Rickell

Henry Matisse Walsall Art Gallery 2010

The hall filled with cut-outs
birds and beasts and flowers
spread in cheering profusion
on walls of purest white.
Best of all the ladies
articulate limbs, lithe and blue
understated beauties
cast in scissor strokes
framed in plainest wood and glass,
silent on the wall
speaking for themselves.
Four friends with leather heels
crept between the frames,
shared delight of the silent forms,
while I agreed on the hard wood bench.
I had not been for many weeks,
too much trivia had concerned my days.
I drove in sun and cloud,
half an hour of lunchtime traffic,
relax with carrot cake and coffee
pay homage to the silhouettes
strolled the other halls,
then refreshed and new again
to the turmoil of the street
lost in the tangle of the car.
□

John Rickell

I Dreamed The Cooling Eve

I dreamed the cooling eve
lay on the grass from noon 'til now
light grey clouds discrete hid me from the sun
naked found rose deep red petals
lying close, so close; I did not ask
good fortune like this comes but once
no thorns prevent my way.
I did not pluck this flower
she (for that I did presume)
lay in the grass.
We moved close, or was it I?
yes I think it was,
but she did not move away.
I held her as a crystal goblet
took her to my mouth and drank,
petals limp in the cooling light
darkening in the moonlight
drew me close, emboldened
I felt a shiver, petals strewn about my shoulder
full awake suffocating in the blossom.
Who was this rose? I did not ask
sinking in the grass
to dream the cooling eve.

John Rickell

I Must Go Back

Do roses bloom as once they did?
did snow fall on the cypress tree
just in time for Christmas
and holly berries red at Michaelmas?
and was the ivy on the wall
sparrows' noisy chatter deep
in the rampant leaves
and was the garden shed still leaning
the padlock never locked

I must go back to see the roses
and stroke the cypress tree,
perhaps this year at Christmas;
make a wreath of holly berries
listen to sparrows' noisy chatter
from the ivy on the wall and
find the garden shed still leaning
and turn the padlock key.

John Rickell

I Shall Not Take

I shall not take that I do not own
but wait in hope the gift I seek
you have not spoken, but
the promise there to see,
why, in the black of night. my promise
made, so glib, not to take but wait
made in haste, not to take that
I do not own and cannot buy,
nor gold nor silver can contain?
There is no sense beyond I write,
thoughts more mixed than this
a dictionary, more ordered than
my babel mind a turmoil
disturbing sleep which dreams
beyond the blue horizon,
a gift to seek, but not to take
until there is sense in this I write.

John Rickell

Icicles

Morning, breaking icicles decorate the crabs
crystal chandeliers snapping in the sun
tinsel on the lawn to melt and merge.
Leafless January crisp and clear awaiting snow,
as adventurous aconites peep and say ' Hello'
A scarf about my throat,
memories of Christmas, flaming pudding, silly hats
waiting February's bitter cold
looking to March and daffodils.

John Rickell

In Awe Of Nature

I am in awe of nature love her as she me,
We are never far apart
woods and down the lane styles to lean,
gates tied with twine, hinges rusting, mossy green.
while Red Kites soar and pheasants hide.
Clouds shut out the sun until zephyr winds
sweep and skies are clear.
A whisper quite enough, if we would but listen.
Ask before you take the flower, do not crush the daisy
or the humble plantain, once the emblem of a king.
Rejoice with the dandelion then blow away the clock
cast away your watch time is nothing..
less when time stands still.
In the city park see how nature enters,
fills this man made space mixing with the gaudy pansy
daisies and humble plantain, reminding of creaking gates.
Swans now, in the lake; Red Kite waiting my return,
returning to my love, clouds and zephyr winds

John Rickell

In Praise Of The Dandelion

Put down your hoe and knife
Take up the lute and sing
Taraxacum the Golden !
Penny-round, shining everywhere
Loyal despite our scorn.

I walk the lanes and city streets,
See golden flowers everywhere,
Long stems in country lanes,
No taller than the grass
Waving in the breeze
Short in tarmac pavement.

Changeless flower
None to spoil the golden head
No orange lips, as with the daffodil
No silly names like 'Chorus Girl'
On plastic packets in the shop
Wild-child of nature,
Taraxacum for ever.

Composite and penny -round
Perfect in the rain
Golden now and ever.
Sportsmen with their clubs and bats,
Studded boots and stinking vests
Blame you for the errant ball
And blackened eye.

As children home from school
We blew away our time,
Destroyed that perfect symmetry,
Scorned to take it home to Mum
For fear you wet the bed.

Cut the stem, it makes a whistle,
Take a root and you have coffee,
Suck the honey from the flower
Rosette leaves in salad

Antidote for port.

Today it shines for us,
(At least for those who look)
Yellow gold and willing,
Friendly with the daisy,
Close as salt and pepper.

John Rickell

Intruder The

The Intruder

The day had long since gone
A glow to the west fading fast and sure
Foot fall insecure, twigs snapping,
moths and money spiders' silks impede.
A gothic gloom weighs down
from trees once green and berry-laden
now in shades of black and grey.
Honeysuckle at the woodland edge,
memories of daylight hours recede.
This is a world I do not know
of badgers, voles; a secret place
which I intrude and stumble.
I am unwanted, no one lights my way
here another side of life
In which I hold no shares
do not understand as once I thought.
Each day I call, enjoying songs and colours
to rival Jacob's coat, and plainsong monk,
but never once before this night
and never more again shall I intrude
this dark, dank, secret place.

John Rickell

Is There No Rose?

Is there no rose of pure delight
no lily white or blue bird wing
rival to your charms and opal skin.
Do I wake or am I sleeping,
honey-bees in sleepy drone
liquid sweetness from the
lotus bloom and honeysuckle arch
Such pure delight no rose can tell,
is there such and do I dream?
Leave me lie, the moss is green
dew dispersed and night-moon's
silver light fading with the sun.
Blushing lily's trumpet petals
orange stamens strew to fertilise
with dusty grace the swelling seed.
There is no rose of pure delight
no lily white or blue bird wing
to compare with honey-sweet
and opal charms.

John Rickell

Jessop

The horse looked so strong
as we put him to the cart
from the shires he came
heavy muscles, no pedigree.
From whence we did not know, or care
There was a lot to do,
fences to repair poles to carry
and wire to the ten-acre by the wood.
Sheep got out last night
into Wainwright's wheat
there's more no doubt,
when we have time to count.

'Chuck on some more
he'll take it in his stride'.
Its muddy down by the wood,
we had a flood on Tuesday,
but he has the strength
big hooves and spirit
we feed him well and the stable's dry.
Looks a little tired today,
but tomorrow's Sunday.

Here's Jack, looks none too happy
why isn't he with Jessop
unlike him to leave the horse
'What's wrong Jack'?
'Its Jessop boss, he's dead...
put on another sack,
just fell.....
he's dead'

John Rickell

Jigsaw

The Long Mynd heather laden high above the Shropshire plain
awesome in its beauty; fearsome solitude when winds blow;
walkers with two sticks, packs upon their backs
climb green hills to gain the top.

Where once itinerants tramped the lanes
for work and mugs of tea, dinner in the barn,
they do for fun and healthy hearts.

Look down the vale white washed farms and wood smoke,
farmer's calls echoing in the valley
a whistle and a curse, the working dogs obey.
A jigsaw that is countryside, each piece held firm, secure.
Horizons long and wide, summer sheep and winter snow,
cockrels crow the day long, hens lay wild
as children, home from school, search for new laid eggs
bound for Ludlow Farmers' Market, Thursday once a month.
Time stands still, there isn't even history!

Down Pontsford way they still believe in witches,
and magic hawthorn, Shropshire Prune,
elder flowers in a bucket, wine for Christmas day.
The old railway out of steam the bridge leaping in vain
across the twisted track, shelter now for lovers,
Sunday drivers scratch the walls, sometimes each other!

I know the place by heart love its loneliness;
the land is poor, polluted since the Romans
who took the lead and silver, Victorians too,
Laburnum hedges, planted by farm workers
stolen from the lords estate in lieu of poor wages.
The friendly locals serve good beer and ham,
they'll talk with you, let you in with muddy boots
But when you've gone will lock the door
count the evening's takings, forget you ever came,
preserve the land for yesterday keep away tomorrow.

John Rickell

Joan

I danced her rhythms, long black hair
restless feet dark eyes and pouting lips,
to my shoulders stood and kissed my cheeks
promised more, if I would only wait,
to the floor her gown, swirling in the dance
heeding not the other couples and their knowing smiles.
No doubts, our searches over, no more need to roam.
Burns; this was his night, but we stole the hour,
desecration of a poet's birth, this time was ours.
Thoughtless through the night we danced
gypsy beauty tall and sleek, sultry eyes and willing
breasts pressed close in scarlet, black and gold,
supple hips with promises a plenty,
mistress mine and no more roaming.

John Rickell

Judas

What did you do dear Judas? Why did you dear Judas?
Were you not the brightest of the twelve
Could you not see the plan that would have taken you with me
To those dreamed heights? Could you not wait?
Why could you not dear unhappy Judas?

The books you kept so well, of the cash we held,
Were of the same importance as the rest we'd done.
The way to heaven is not paid with cash,
But we were on the earth and needed you,
My dear unhappy Judas

We shared the road and joked together,
You knew me better than the others
And saw the God beneath the man...as could the Sanhedrin,
But God on earth was not for them, but it was for you,
Dear dead Judas.

John will call you thief say you cared not for the poor,
Part of my ministry was yours, now they'll divide it up.
It was a friendly supper, we dipped together,
I chose you.....
You will take much blame Simon's son,
Man of Kerioth should I have chosen you?
Was I right, you of Judea not Gallilee?
John was kind, loved him best, was I wise Judas?
He will be bitter 'it was dark outside'
Dramatic yes and bitter,
Oh! Judas.....Judas.... Judas dear dead Judas.

Those soldiers Judas were they really necessary- -
Or the staves? But you were hurt.
I trusted you: you had no choice.
'He that eateth with me
Hath lifted up his heel against me'

A piece of bread to bait you
A piece of bread
Bread!
Oh! My dear unhappy Judas

You should not have given back the silver
But kept it for the others, they'll need it now,
Not you or me.
Your neck is bruise your lovely name is sullied
No sweet child will pride the name of Judas
Which is a shame,
Jesus will live and be addressed to other men,
Dear dead Judas.

Oh! Judas the pain! the pain if this is triumph I'd hate to lose!
But I've nearly had enough
You are gone before but soon we shall meet, dear friend.....
Before the others,
So be consoled, your dream will wake
Fulfilled with me in Heaven,
Where we can talk unleavened talk,
My dear dead unhappy Ju.....
1970

John Rickell

Kids In A War

We took the table leg
set it on a stand, a nail at either end
and another in the middle
found a wheel from a pedal car
a solid disc and red
put the wheel on the middle nail,
we had our Lewis gun.
Stood vigil after school
shot everything in sight
but never in the night,
or mornings of a Sunday.
The Derwent Light Railway
ran at the back,
ammunition sheep and cattle
wobbled on its way to Dunnington
on spaghetti rails and grass,
stood on the wash-post to watch it pass.
Chase butterflies off Dad's spring cabbage
while he was at work,
then back to our gun beside the shed
its extra concrete roof and thickened walls
in case a bomb fell close.....
safe against the blast
to be crushed beneath the concrete
(so Dad had said to Mum)
He was an Air-Raid -Warden,
had a ladder and a bucket
SP on the door to say we had a pump.
They bombed the other end,
one went off and killed a dog
burnt the house right down
we were beneath the 'Morrison'
in the living room, bullets on the wall
the Lewis gun stood silent.
The playing field across the bridge
its swings and rusting roundabouts.
One afternoon, on Saturday
we found a railway detonator
hit it with a brick

shattering November's war time silence,
scattered to our homes and gardens
waiting for the Bobby....no one came
the guilt remains but Oh what fun!
The walk to uncle Harry's
was through the gas works snicket
tall gas filled towers grey with threat
smoking retorts, cross railway tracks
no gates, look right then left,
all posh today, Mercedes at the doors.
One Sunday afternoon
they hit the tallest holder
they knew it was there
they'd built it in the twenties;
turned round went home for tea,
but a Polish chap got them,
before the siren went
somewhere near the coast.
Our Lewis gun was silent,
watched it in our Sunday clothes.
Potatoes in the flower beds
tape on window panes
black curtain screens to stop the glass.
But when the sun shone
we chased the butterflies,
ran to see the train to Dunnington.
Marbles on the way to school
soccer games between the grates
there was a war..heard it on the wireless
but we were kids and found it fun.

John Rickell

Kingfisher

Do you remember our love
in those far seeming times
When the Halcyon
Flew across the sea
Calming the waves
On which our love
Was borne?
Did we not give him food
Is that why he went?
The labourer is worthy
Of his hire,
But we cast no morsel
To his care,
And we had much to spare
In those far seeming times

John Rickell

Kissing Gate

We left the dreaming wood
and its shaded contemplation,
took to the oat-field
stubble under foot snapping,
wild flowers struggling back
mustard from years ago a daisy
here and there, thistles blue
and handsome docks beside
the nettle patch, to cool the sting.
Mole hills beside the woodland edge
where rotting autumn leaves bring
out the worms when rains return.

How hot the October sun today,
how cold the eastern wind
reminding me of winter afternoons
when I shall no longer tramp
these sods to seek the pimpernel.

Across the stubble, green tracks
stand out where once the combine
cast the straw, grassy rows
Jack grazing for his stomach's sake.
He knows what's best, I do not wait
he'll come when he is done,
black, articulate, tail streaming
then, still to sense the air,
soon, asking for a biscuit.

The wind is getting up again
time to go back through the wood,
the kissing gate, where once we leaned
Goodbye crow and flapping pigeon
goodbye see you in the morning.

John Rickell

Lament

Why should I not love thee
font of all my hopes?
My dreams of thee conspire
to keep me wake,
I hear the owl and fox
art thou wary too?
I hear them in the wood
heed not my love, heed not
their love is false
to die before the sun
is risen from its bed;
you must not share.
They are of the earth
my love, that they love
I do not doubt,
but not a love like mine.
Should I not love thee
my dreams of thee
shall shattered fall
upon this bed I lie
my pen a worthless tool,
no more to write or sing
of butterflies and bees
which long ago bore thee
t'ward heaven to glimpse
Elysian woods and meadows.

John Rickell

Laughter On The Terrace

Summer soon, the dandelion
yellow as the sun shines
in the hedgerow shade,
daffodils, vigil over fade,
no more clarion calls
to wake the sleepy mouse.
Bees and flies again
sultry honeysuckles
in the pergola shade.
Lavender walk and roses
cotton dress and sandals
laughter on the terrace.

John Rickell

Lichfield In December

The Cathedral church
was almost empty.
No Christmas lights,
peaceful, quiet,
no more than eight,
but room for thousands.
It was warm inside.....
we'd left the cold outside.
and stayed awhile,
how long we did not count
leaving candles and a pray.
In the streets old buildings
back a thousand years.
Doctor Johnson on a plinth
Remember him
a dictionary in his hand?
The streets were busy
citizens smartly dressed
and shops well filled,
Jewels in some,
discounted suits and toys
Christmas trees in plastic bags
yours for five and twenty quid.
The Earl of Lichfield fed us well
enough to walk the town
every alley nook and cranny
stone flagged pavement
coffee and a chat
Soon dark we had to home,
left behind Mammon lights
beneath the darkening sky
Three-wise-men-blue
its southern star
and near full moon.

John Rickell

Lichfield On A Monday

The old streets confirm its age, a thousand years or so,
mixed in wild abandon, plaster walls and white wash
sagging to the street, narrow windows low arched doors
once home for weavers, cobblers, blacksmiths, candle makers
to those in smart tall houses built of brick, not wattle,
snobbish Georgian noses in the air, `kerchiefs at their wrist
lean back in haughty stance above the street, balustraded roof,
hand-rails painted white, sash and steps, lanterns black and glazed
brass plates beside the bell-pull each side of the blue front door.

We strolled the Monday streets noon-time in the sun
down a step, and mind the door, into an arthritic Tudor cafe,
beams complaining of tiles long since replacing golden thatch,
light meal and gentle conversation above terracotta tiles;
then to the lake, greedy ducks, children and their bread crumbs,
passed cafes, shops and restaurants cheek by yowl and busy.
Looking at the Cathedral, stained in soot from miners passed.

Inside the air clean, marble statues smooth and bright
flagged nave its chairs in silent witness, looking east,
a stillness in the air compressed beneath the vaulted roof
pressing down our souls to impress, somewhere, here is God.
A bible locked in a climate all its own and dimly lit;
see the print and ancient paper; read it if you can.
Another stroll along familiar streets clicking shutters
the sun shining no sign of rain no clouds to spoil,
home again our several ways,
a worth-while day, a day well spent.

John Rickell

Little Bird

Dedicated, little bird
and unashamed to dream
years, few and fleeting
flit before me as I stroll.
You guide or guard; I free to roam
in this, I call my wood
where I retreat to dream as you.
You are loyal each time I call
call me when I wander
gently keep me to the path;
the dark heart of the wood is yours
to share it with your friends.
I hear them through this morning's fog,
rooks, black silhouettes and still
high in the pines and larches
threat us both and make me shiver.
When spring comes take care, keep 'wake,
wait the shoots and leaves,
choose with care, as always,
weave your nest and line with fur.
I shall call when summer shines
guard as you do me.....
seek your children and your mate
and fright away those rooks.

John Rickell

London Pride

Does the rose beside the green front door
bloom as when I was youth.

Does the gate clash against the post
the spring that gave us rides
sitting on the bar, six-gun at the ready;
waiting for the sheriff and the call to dinner

Is the London Pride beside the path,
the zigzag line of bricks, still there?
the fluff from rugs shaken every week
clinging to the terracotta edging.

I would go back, but know the answer.

The place was home, apple trees and chickens
copper in the scullery, Yorkist Range
in the kitchen, clip-rug in the hearth,
bones stewing in the oven every day,
washing on the clothes-horse, waiting
for the rain to stop, steaming up the windows.
Nostalgia isn't what it was, memories fade, distort
The rose beside the green front door....

London Pride and dreams.

London Pride

Does the rose beside the green front door
bloom as when I was youth.

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The rose beside the green front door....
London Pride and dreams.

John Rickell

London Pride(Edited January 2014)

Does the rose beside the green front door
bloom as when I was youth.
Does the gate clash against the post
the spring that gave us rides
sitting on the bar, six-gun at the ready;
waiting for the sheriff and the call to dinner
(dinner time was twelve, supper time at six)
Is the London Pride beside the path,
the zigzag line of bricks, still there?
the fluff from rugs shaken every week
clinging to the terracotta edging.
I would go back, but know the answer.
The place was home, apple trees and chickens
copper in the scullery, Yorkist Range
in the kitchen, clip-rug in the hearth,
bones stewing in the oven every day,
washing on the clothes-horse, waiting
for the rain to stop, steaming up the windows.
Nostalgia isn't what it is, memories fade, distort
The rose beside the green front door....
London Pride and dreams.

John Rickell

Love

They came to sit beside me
A mother and her son
He was sixty if a day
Looked ill, dark sockets, half awake.
Concerned eyes staring at his mother,
Her walking frame and stick
Leaning on the table.

He asked a simple question
Her reply I did not catch
Her face said all she had to say,
Bland, smooth-skin and vacant eyes.
This was for them, a day in town
To shop and make a change
Before returning home
Where-ever and what-ever.

We did not speak or smile
I was outside their world,
They'd brought it with them
Couldn't shake it off.

As they left he rose first
Took the stick,
Set up the walking frame,
Not a word between them.
I tried to draw his eye....
Cast down, tired and grey.

Out through the door he led her
And they were gone.....
Their world gone with them,
Like a tortoise in its shell
Not a lot to carry.....
Far too much to lose.

John Rickell

Meeting

It was one of those times,
We met at close of day
soft grey sky mix of
many colours that make a day
often forgotten, but not this
the weather forgettable
as I remember it.
It was a walk for Jack
just a walk in a field
beyond the hedge
a hundred yards or so
no more, every day the same.
She was there with her dog,
(who she is I shall not know
until we meet again
and that we shall)
black as Jack and twelve years old
She was tall and handsome
said hello, complimented Jack
they were of equal height and got on well
as she and I.
(Yet who she is I shall not know
and we shall meet again)
The path was muddy kept to the grass
remembering the white carpet
and my daughter's pride!
Just retired from the RAF
At Wittering down the road,
I knew the place in cold-war days
when gentle fields and forget-me-nots
quivered in Valiant roar
and children quaked in bed
five minutes to eternity.
She spoke with ease
we got on well
her smile a lonely smile her
(laughter lines radiating friendship)
colleagues left behind
Her home now in Wansford

by the Great North Road.
Drums in the car
brought from Nantwich she said,
her life now itinerant
two boys, her mother in the village
We spoke little of our lives
enough to wish time was longer
I never asked her name
nor she mine,
we were on a journey
through shops and streets
jostles in crowds, waiting for a bus
woodlands and flooded streams,
chance to meet, chance to stay
another time, when next we walk the dogs
buy our daily bread.....
share the world we breathe.
We shall meet again, the earth is round
we only need to wait
and if, by chance we do not,
shall remember days, grey skies
many days of no great value
save they join other times
when colours, no longer subdued,
break into all their glory,
delphinium blue and poppy-red.

□

John Rickell

Mely Y Wig

The road winding round corners
left and right, up and down
through pines and birch
each bend somehow different
no breeze to speak of
winds practicing for winter
and cold at that!
Here's another corner
just like the last,
someone's had a crash
tyre tracks in the verge
weren't there last week.
The trees are tall and close
pines guard rowans, silver birch
home for birds and fox
they'll be there next week
when we come again.
Lovely day again came last week
on a Monday a week ago
Nothing much has changed
nothing much to change,
brought Jack this time
loves it, wants to come again
I can tell...his tail is high.
Another corner round the bend
watch out cars and lorries!
I see a tree's come down
across the brook we crossed last week.
Must come again sometime
don't you agree? Thought you would.
Let's see what's round the other bends,
more I suppose, predictable
why we come a change from home
somehow different, not the same
just different.
Changes as good as rest.
There's such a lot to tell
Trees, grass and autumn berries
calm reflections in the pond,

will be the same next week.
It may rain...this IS Wales!
Jack won't care and I don't mind
a change will do no harm,
we've had the sun today.
Time for coffee soon.
Been thinking sitting here
the log green with moss
(now my pants are wet)
there's nothing else to do.
Not much time back home
Yes! .. that's why we come;
always the same, that's
what makes the countryside.
Always the same,
yet somehow different.

John Rickell

Memories Of Robert Frost

The path bent its way through the wood
I'd had a choice some yards back,
The fork, (was it the same?)
Left and right
Just like the hay-fork I carried.
I'd found it further back.
The thick and solid handle
Of the early path, now two
One brown with mud
The other flat and green
Strolled before.
It was winter.

Who had thrown away the fork?
It had been there a long time
The handle black with mould.
February now,
Had it been discarded last fall?
(A strange tool to find
In two thousand five
With its mechanisations.
A break-down perhaps?)
Chuckling bales on a cart hard work
I could have thrown it away,
But I hate waste.

The sky was blue and steely
Could see it through
The silhouette branches
It was three.....
The sun shone through the trunks
Darkness some time away
So I took the muddy path.....
Something wrong with the green
What did the others know?
Only an inch of rain this month
There'd been five the last.

The hollow path, still damp,

Slipped its way between
The shallow banks
Which promised spring and yellow.
Above, the khaki green
Of nervous buds,
Telling of an early spring
Could just be seen.....
Winter afternoons so silent.

I was alone. Or was I?
I knew from the 'prints
Someone, or ones, walked before,
And there was time for those behind.
Ofcourse the trees could give support
I could always lean....
At least awhile.

Looking up, redundant mistletoes
evergreen, viable only once a year.
The path on the woodland edge
The centre too dense to walk,
birds sang joy, defiant,
Safe from hawks and me.

'Follow me home
I have tables aload with food
Boxes dry and square
Better than those ragged nests
You exhaust yourselves for days
And stick with mud
(But of course they are
Square and painted green
And not in a wood)
I love your wood, but do not envy
My home is warm....
The shops a yard away'

I began this walk a time back
There's been no rush
even so it's been too quick
Four weeks and spring will come
(The corn shows green)

In the fall I shall return
To feel the autumn sun,
See gold and ginger leaves
Rowan-red and chestnut brown
Un-zip my coat, left home the gloves
This winter wood too cold.

John Rickell

Midnight Yet To Strike

Eight, the night is still
the wind-flower folded
closed against the dew;
nowhere is the blackbird heard
robin long since gone.
Soon dark; waiting for the moon
the warm day cooling
beneath the cloudless sky
too warm for frost
but let us drink inside.
Leave the candles
to gutter through the night.
Close the door and window
I shall follow soon
draw back the curtains
let in the moon and moth
take the glass, drink deep;
there is time enough for sleep
midnight yet to strike.....
Sunday in the morning.

John Rickell

Morning Glory

I woke, my hands dreaming on her thighs
the sun in the window, Morning Glory,
a robin in the holly.
Seems an age since last we kissed
memory's yesterday lingered
fresh as new mown hay.
She was sleeping so I thought,
does not stir as I raise my head
to touch her tempting breasts, but
she was woman and not asleep,
those breasts are proffered.
She looked at me and smiled
I drew my hand from dreaming
tried to move away, her thighs
closed round the welcome palm
so we lay as yester' eve.
I loved the soft silk gown,
thought I felt it now.
In the night my love slipped the dress.
Butterfly out of its chrysalis,
seeking the morning glory,
wings expanded wanting flight and me.
The sun rose high, no longer in the window
the robin too has gone his way.
Sunday bells rang out, their noisy cries ignored,
another day perhaps, perhaps another day.

John Rickell

Morning Mist

Today, born in mystery
I did not see its coming
mists surround, birds silent
feeders in the trees unattended,
the cat beside the hearth.
Pigeons brave the lawn
take the bread, alert
and ready for flight
waiting for the day
when the sun will shine.
Fields, spring green,
hedges once again along
the lane white with
blackthorn flowers
daffodils and crocus yellow.

Mists invade and cold presides,
all wait the rising sun
to reassure our doubts
wash-lines limp, wet
from the night's dank air.
Through the windowpanes
I see the silent yew
and sagging willows
in subdued regret,
buds fail to swell,
winter's cruel hold
another week, 'til
Friday's first spring day
and cherry blooms once more

Now see the sun
nature's promises fulfilled!
Distant hills again to see
We should not doubt
beauty beneath the veil
revealed as we knew it would.
Churches' steeples reach the sky
clouds and blue and pigeons.

John Rickell

Mountain Stream

The mountain stream
bubbling towards the sea,
silver in the evening light
crossing hills and far away.
I lay, my head close to the
dancing water its message clear,
all round chaos that is nature,
above, clouds drift white and soft,
towards the sea black clouds loom,
deer nervous as they graze.
Swans take flight across the lake,
wakes of dripping water from their feet
Otters on the shore and nature sleeps.
I cross the stream stoop to drink
hands cupped... intoxicated.
No thoughts no plans for tomorrow,
chaotic, a child-hood puzzle
myriad pieces, never still or silent,
peace beyond all understanding.

John Rickell

Mozart Symphony 39

Mozart, I anticipate or think I can.
You suggest, imply, leave the rest
to my imagination, I wait.....
A discord I know will overwhelm
build me up, surprise and please.
Making love so many times
has no surprises, that is the joy,
one discordant moment, a bliss
jarring the soul, exquisite pleasure
wakes and echoes still.....
passing to the library
shelves of memory.

Comments (8)

John Rickell

Nothing Much In Mind

I rose with nothing much in mind
Made no purchase for the day
Dressed in green, as yesterday
And slipped into the wood
Merged with birds and mosses
Noonday sun shining through the storm,
Chill and thrilling.
The March- wood floor winter- bracken- brown
Crisp- crackled 'neath Jack's feet
No signs of green, yet Easter-day yes Easter-day
So early.....
Pheasants in alarm flew low stirred by Jack,
Who had no care for sport leaping high and long
Stretching legs long rested
As I rose with nothing much in mind.
Still with nothing much in mind
And sometime later in the lazy day
I found a railway station; jostled with the crowd
Its cheerful children, choking smoke, whistle
Wooden carriage, churn, leather case and signal box
Station master's hat and porter's barrow
Tea and coffee cake.
A little after four the train midst hiss and billow
Pulled away excited children many more than sixty
And stillness fell upon the brick- paved platform.
So on we went, with nothing much in mind
Easter-day half gone, let the stormy wind dictate.....
West we went, took the easy way,
The English road had nothing much in mind
Its purpose no more than mine each hamlet much the same
As for me, it was all the same
At six, with less in mind I found a wood
Walked with Jack who chased between the trees
Left me some time, with very much in mind
Here were rabbits, pheasants, hunting smells and fun.
He did not know my mood perhaps thought me quiet.
Agnostic as he is took no thought of Easter,
Twenty third is all the same to him,
March? What's that? Two meals a day as always.

John Rickell

October Holiday

My pen is dry,
wrist cramped and cold,
must try a history.
I have seen such things
you would not believe
autumn leaves the least
no rain for fourteen days
except a little drizzle,
gentle winds and fluffy clouds
red kite watching asphalt roads
badgers in the gutter, stoats
stretching long across the lane,
white tails in alarm, hedges
maple trees orange red
waiting for the first frost.
Crows, bramble-black
waiting a careless mouse.
Beers with funny names,
bitter hops and friendly talk.
Home tomorrow leave behind
the harvest trailers, potato full
scratching in the dark
before the winter time.
Home to Jack I left behind
and wished I'd not,
country walks are not the same
when no one says 'come on'
there's a bone and biscuits
in the boot where he would sleep
a present from my holiday.....
Next time he'll come with me.

John Rickell

On The Way To Ely

Three hundred and sixty degree sky
cold winds from the continent
all roads leading nowhere,
so it seems this stormy afternoon,
standing on the roadside verge
leaning on the wind and bitter rain
jealous of my presence on my way to Ely.

A landscape of lettuce, sprouts and leeks
sinking below the road as water drains away
through 'Sixteen Foot' and 'Hundred Foot'
onward to the Wash and shrieking gulls.
The road high above the land; ditches on each side,
waiting for the careless at each bend,
sharp angles as though the road
taken by surprise swerved as now you do
to avoid a watery grave.

Flat, all is flat, October-grey above
brown rich earth, salads for the cities,
meagre living for the tenants
picking sprouts for market,
no matter what the weather.

John Rickell

Opera

Two glasses on the table
standing tall crystal clear,
strangers as we talked,
waiting, we sat in velvet chairs,
curved arms and sculptured legs
delicate feet stretching, languid
seducing as we spoke, choices,
conversation charged and anxious
thrilled in expectations.
We made our choice simple melon,
neither of us hungry.
This was prelude to an opera.
Called to the table, I held her chair
thank you she said and smiled..
The spoon to her lips sweet flesh
were I the spoon, were I the melon
the meal not yet begun!
I approved the wine, white, not too chilled;
the waiter poured and left the bottle
in the ice and water;
we raised our glasses, laughed a little
the overture, begun
her shoulders hidden by her hair
black as night blue hints in the lamp-light
her ring-less fingers gentle with the goblet.
Soon, time for coffee....
across the dessert table we talked into the night
until, in deference to the waiter,
we rose and made our way to the sinuous stairs,
taking my proffered arm she dreamed with me,
as we leaned to each climbing the coiling stairway.....
found a door named twenty two
the overture fading we entered the procenium arch.....
curtains sliding open, the opera now begun
The scene was set sheets drawn back inviting
The shower warm and intimate,
bathrobe slipping to the floor
She kneeled, as though to pray,
but she sought another heaven

Bade me kneel to humbly share the dream.

John Rickell

Opium Poppy (Edited January 2014)

There is a poppy in the garden
the first I've seen in years.
Ten years ago they left...
were they mourning for my love?
the purple and the red, black
stamens as her hair, tall and slim.
She loved them as her own,
demanding, intoxicant, as she,
One, just one is here,
beneath the Wellingtonia,
hanging blooms tight closed.
Will they be red or purple?
The stamens will be black
of that I'm sure....
as were her eyes and hair.
It called the other night
I did not see, seldom go that far
thought they never would return.
She lies close by the rose we bred.
Another love, roses and the poppy.
Not the reds of Flanders field,
memories here are purple,
narcotic dreams,
memories I cannot forget,
gathering round when alone.
causing me sleep and comfort.

John Rickell

Oyster Shells

See the Morning Glory
blooming with the dawn
resting content and still.
Hold the tender bloom
for you alone it grows.
I would have need
were you not here.
Let us share the dance
tunes in the air;
speaking ocean depths
frothing waves and high,
oyster shells upon the beach,
pearls about your neck.

John Rickell

Peels Arms Apple Pie And Cheese

The rail track once to carry
coal from Yorkshire fields
redundant; lorries now and diesel.
A country walk and straight.
The sun across the reservoir
coats, hanging on our arms,
this a place of romance,
cotton long gone to India,
stone cottages clinging to the hill.
Peels Arms, apple pie and cheese.

Across the valley white farmsteads
beside the Wood-Head Pass
heavy with lorries yellow, green,
Wispa blue and Kit-Kat red,
steep hills, grinding gears
as sheep quietly graze,
and cows munch cud.

The dog looks back 'This way'?
as we struggle with a stile,
hid in hawthorn hedge and fire-weed pink.
Nettles, tiny white blossoms
frustrated behind the stinging leaves,
never admired like the lily or the rose,
take time to look when next you pass.

Manchester to the north not far,
jets ply their trade to foreign lands
writing in the sky, 'Goodbye' and 'Hello.'
The footpath between the houses
leads us to this scene,
overgrown with seeding grass,
narrow as a tightrope.

The station now a dead-end
Glossop on to Manchester
offices, Costa, HSBC, Next,
so they come and welcome;

but can't help weeping for the cotton.
Old factories monumental dinosaurs,
luxury condominiums, knee-length boots
electric trams chased by BMWs.
Then back to cosy Padfield,
Peels Arms and apple pie.

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John Rickell

Perfume Fading

Do not pick the flower,
let it fade. . .
and when the petals fall,
fold in the book, soft tissues
to capture the waning essence
of a memory, past bliss
once to delight when youth.
Then safe in darkest recess
let memory sleep daylight hours
to wake with you through nights
once crowded with the flower.
Hold the pillow as once your love
perfume fading, surely as it will.

John Rickell

Pigeons

I shouldn't grumble I suppose
when the pigeons eat the crabs.
They've taken all the orange ones
Before the bedroom window
Wondered what all the fuss was
They've not been here for months
There's a red one by the drive
Always red at Christmas
But not this year I bet.
Blackbird, who watches over me
And has for many a year
Scratches in the lawn and shrubs
But doesn't sing upon the roof.
The storms are unopposed
The gable top quite empty.
I miss the other birds,
Tits and finch and Christmas robin.
The food's all theirs to see
Why don't they come?
No I won't grumble at the pigeon,
there's bread enough to spare.

John Rickell

Potatoes And Carrots

Spring dissolves winter's gloom
distilling opening buds drop
their scales now snow is gone,
chestnut leaves carried home
for Mothers-Day and grandma,
joining anemone and violet
in jars and vase and jam pot.
Church-bells, bonnets tricycle
white tailed rabbits skipping lambs
Easter eggs announce another year
Good Fridays pass un-noticed
Lent forgot and Passion Sunday
Palms and Easterday, (The list
does not rhyme, if ever once it did.
Regret not passing of the past
today shall become a yesterday.
Let rain beat on window-panes
see willow buds turn green
on veils of yellow branches
May flowering in the hedge
sparrow, chaffinches and tit
stoat and weasel, fox and hawk
Hear laughter and the fears
smile and cry with them, share
as does all nature, all and more,
it is there for you...
Take and pay for it....
Potatoes soon and carrots, ride
the roundabout, do not trip,
hold the rail and let it spin
round and round and roundelay.

John Rickell

Queen Anne's Lace

NB Sweethearts an alternative name for Cleavers; Queen Anne's Lace the flower heads of Wild Carrot.

Queen Anne's Lace silhouettes in the hedges
hawthorns bound in bindweed ties
white moons shining in the noonday,
trumpets proclaiming summer's afternoon.
Sweethearts cleaving to the branches
the gate ajar creaking as I enter
with poppy red and campion pink.
Mid-summer sun and panting robin
sleeping faun and nettles limp
no more to sting, fretwork ferns
patterns cut, scissors in the night,
nightjars guarding with the owl.
Bracken in the copse turning gold
before the ferns, brambles soon,
purple fingers, bleeding hands and pies
Foxgloves fading seed pods swelling
seedlings for next year around my feet,
Fire-weed soon to light the path.

John Rickell

Race Course Hollows

We lay in the hollow
by the race-course copse
waiting the harvest moon
as other lovers take their places
in grassy circles like our own.
She was pretty, brunette, tall
lovely legs and thighs
brown green eyes tempting breasts.
talked of music.....
we both sang, often as duet
read the same white pages,
books, Yorkshire churches
cycle rides and country-lanes;
but not here to talk.
Love was in the breeze
intoxicating evening air
the night warm,
murmurs in the dark
rose from other hollows,
late walkers with their dogs
sneaked away not to spoil our fun,
recalling youthful memories,
on their way to home.
We watched them climb the style
alone we used the moon
kissed, breathing scents of skin in love,
forgotten now the country-lanes
Cycle rides and Yorkshire churches
we knew the way by heart,
every turning now explored
been this way before.....
what was round the corner.
So lost ourselves for one brief hour...
all the things that lovers do.
A long reluctant walk to home
glowing in the dark.....
separate beds and houses.
parents sitting by the fire
sneak up the stairs.

shyly say good-night..
smiles beside the fire.

John Rickell

Rainbow

The promise arched across the sky
no rain, but predicted,
an apology before the deluge?
Colours of the faintest hue
more an echo than a rainbow.
Billowing clouds grey and fluffy
washed in gentle pink of morning sun
tumbled dry by the cold west wind.
Will it rain today? Showers, yes.
The spectrum band so faint,
had nature lost her nerve
unsure in this tumultuous world
that the promise read in Sunday school
could not be kept?
Was I the only one to see
the message in the sky?
There was no rain that I could see
the light split red to indigo.
Would they soon converge again
let the day continue as of yesterday
or had I best put on my coat
my hat and gloves, say farewell
to summer days until next year?
There is more than meets the eye,
not a simple tale of fairies in the wood.
An echo cannot of itself combust.
Why this message in the sky?
From the west it comes, always from the west.

John Rickell

Remember Not Tomorrow

Go slow into the darkening night.
Leave no ripples on the lake,
Touch light the air you breathe
Do not disturb the dusk,
The fading blues and white.
Calm the heart
Stay the flickering eyelids
Listen for the owl and fox
They must not hear your thoughts.
Blank your mind,
Neither think nor fear.
Laughter is another day.
Neither smile or weep
Do not mourn, nor please.....
Anger now unknown sickness gone awhile.
Smooth the wrinkled brow,
Relaxed the arm, lie down the limbs
Sleep, sleep, sleep and deep,
Sleep the sleep of childhood
With dreams of yesterday
And remember not tomorrow.

John Rickell

Rent

Today the wood was changed, time at a cross roads,
reluctant winter sulks, spring who has the runes
waits in silent buds as ferns sleep.

Birds songs incomplete, mates and loves play court
a few more weeks to dedicate a summer's life of nests
chicks and gaudy jay.

This field we play each day, soon to plough and furrow
barley, wheat and rye, when lambs begin to fatten

Jack on his lead to satisfy the shepherd no more to fly his tail.

I am but a sojourner...borrow every blade of grass
silver birch and bramble;

pay no rent, then no one asks should one ask, I have the price,

they will not ask too much I have had a money's worth;

invested every year in case they ask, they never have,

I doubt they ever will.

John Rickell

Ripon Uk 1944

Squat Cathedral at the city centre
looks half finished from the race course
the Ure at my back forded by
a concrete ramp, for tanks
there was a war, perhaps you know
there always was, there always is.
riding from York, thirty miles and tired.
weed clogged canal, factory on the left
final climb into the square
aching legs and sweat;
holiday begins today.
Ure-Bank-Top across the bridge
four if I remember.....
the station and the smoke,
army lorries pass the house
shake the terrace cottage,
four rooms; toilet in the yard.
Aunt Ada uncle Fred and Tom.
Lampreys in the river,
Laver and the Skell conjoined
bird nests in the woods;
never seemed to rain.
Shunting in the sidings.....
broken crocks and frightened cows.
rabbits in the cutting,
shot by uncle Fred
the airgun in the wardrobe,
Sten gun by the hearth,
ten bob made by blacksmiths,
khaki uniform and webbing belt,
out half the night.
I can't remember bombs,
Leeds a better target
the army camp above the hill
left in peace, hardly worth the trouble,
great to be so unimportant.
Nine each night, the Horn Blower
three blasts in the square
curled around his back,

(The curfew never late)
an honour so I'm told,
every night and all for nowt
and that a Yorkshireman!
Uncle drives for NER
a lorry not a train
picks up eggs and bacon
hides them in his snap.
Thinks at twelve
I have n't noticed,
scared police will call.
Holiday's so short....
back home again, bike in the shed
my war effort complete....
eggs in the saddle bag.
They got the gas works Sunday,
A Pole got them near Driffield!

John Rickell

River Conwy

Pentrefoelas, pronounce it as you will
beside the road to Holyhead
a single arch across the Conwy
on the way to Ysbyty Ifan,
pronounce that if you can.
Ten feet wide and shallow
beside the chocolatier.
We stop each time we pass
indulge in hand-made chocolates
Betwys y Coed six miles more
coffee, cakes and waterfalls.
A pretty railway halt
single track to Blaenau'
Another river, Llugwy
fresh from the Swallow Falls
conflued with the Conwy;
They fight below the railway bridge
bubbling energy at the bifercation;
The innocent river at Pentrefoelas
here in raging joy, seeking sea and sand
at Llansanffraid and Glan Conwy
say that if you can!
Ladies on the golf course,
macs and umbrellas.
The drive is long and beautiful
from Corwen on the Dee....
moorlands white with sheep,
crude cottages and hard-worked farmers,
handsome turbines their elegant necks
stretching white necks,
helping pay the rent.
We never tire of this
from Llangollen see the best of Wales
thank Telford every time we call
always on a Tuesday,
never on bank-holidays.

John Rickell

Sculptor The

If I could sculpt my love,
search for finest porphyry,
I would spend my life and carve
fit for Rome or Athens to rival
all that they display, then
weave a coat of finest silk
dyed in purple, rich and royal,
clinging close as skin
to hide you for myself.
Not for you the gaping crowds,
the need to hide your nature
you would sit as oft you do,
thighs relaxed and honest
smiling eyes and mouth,
thoughts, desires as my own.
The Opal and the rose unfurled,
petals soft a stigma at the heart
beckon, tempt my confessing passion
hid beneath the leather of my apron
dusty with the chisel strokes,
as I seek your form within the stone.
Then with all my might and memory
between those thighs so cold and pure
I would spend my days remembering,
know I could not simulate the joy you give,
each fold inscribed upon the stone
sincerely wrought yet cold not warm.
Then discard my conceit and blade
return the stone to whence it came,
to weather in the rain and sun
moulded by a skill more rare
but with a love not less.

John Rickell

Serenade

It comes again, yet again,
In the night again and yet again.
Do you hear? You must listen.
There again, please listen,
music never man wrote,
no scale competes nor pen recite.
Bamboos in the evening breeze?
Perhaps, even sky-lark whispers?
Wish I knew, would tell, too good to keep.
Surely you hear.. this is real
too real for imagination imagine.
An air pulls at heart-strings, come close and share.
What is this air de cour and its strophic repetition
that stirs me from my rest.
Do you hear it in the night?
Share this music never man wrote.
No scale competes nor pen recite

John Rickell

Shelve Wood

The woodland path, a
nave saintly as the church
I see in the valley below,
tripped with pine roots
its ceiling in the heavens
lit by the noon-tide sun
my soul aloft, listening
to the silent trees
no birds to sing.
Do I pray, kneel on moss
while time stands still?
The day has long to go
the world I leave behind
waits my return, let it be so.
This a bliss I seldom meet,
church was never this content
my selfish mood indulged.
Transcepts either side
tempt me to seek, for what?
The trees do not smile, or weep
of that they have no need,
content in every limb,
they wait the woodman's axe
to live transformed as beams
beneath clay tiles or thatch.
And fences for the sheep.

So on this hottest of days
upright to the sky in random lines
they hold me, walking in a dream.
I shall not go to church
its noisy bells unheeded;
perhaps I shall kneel,
a prayer not out of place
moss to bend the knee
I have not sinned today
There is no temptation here
Compline for another day.
Tomorrow is a Monday.

In this green space
my mind a blank,
tripping pine roots
on a woodland path.

John Rickell

Shropshire In January

The Shropshire lane makes its uncertain way
Passed the old school house at Pennerley
Untaught for many a year,
The children now with siblings of their own.
Passed the old mine shafts
Where lead and silver long since ceased.
Crumbled walls where once
A poor man kept alive, but just,
A family far too large for comfort,
Where a thousand dug the earth.
Nothing to be seen....pulled down
No more silver no more lead no house remains.
The old school, a wild-life centre
Where walkers read the walls,
Histories with blurred photos
Grey as life once led by children
Sorting stone from silver-ore.
When Romans came they found the ore
Made pipes to teach us plumbing,
Kept the silver for themselves.
The land polluted now with lead
Struggling birch, heather and ginger bracken
Black with autumn whinberry for pies and puddings
The slow road, climbs, uncertain,
Avoiding steeper slopes right hand bends and left...
Pot-hole hazard warns the car take care! .
Bleaker now the hedges broken only wire to keep the sheep,
Not much money in this land fit only for romantic rich,
Or farmer locked in poverty.
The day is cold, not a soul in sight.
Splashing higher up the hill
The road swings left and narrows,
Mind the tractor this road is his
Go back to town you townie!
The mountain range spikes the sky
The Devils Chair barely fifteen feet
(But once a mountain range older than Himalaya
Worn away by time a million years and more,
Or so I'm told)

East-ward, watch the clouds, woolly purple-grey
Feather-light upon Long Mynd hills
Green against the pale blue sky.
Quiet, no birds sing, no trees sway the breeze
Heather stiff and low, grudging shakes a little
Miles away Wales is west, in mists,
Housman's coloured-counties, south.
We are alone the dog and I, walkers long since gone,
An hour more it will be dark, frost is in the air.
Time for home and cocoa but Jack says no,
So I stay and watch him sniff the scents.
Mobile phone ashamed to ring in my jacket pocket.
So home an hour's drive down uncertain lanes
And think of arguments, the fights that bent its way
Two hundred years ago as hedges sprang, divisive.....
Centuries slipping by, houses, brick, not cob
Plastic windows and no thatch.
Forgotten now those children,
Scratching lessons on a slate,
Weighed down with lead.....and poverty,
Who took their skills elsewhere.

John Rickell

Simple Song

Come sweet be my mistress
let me be your lover
desires to share and share alike.
This secret moss-deep hollow
curled in bliss and dreams
where none have shared before;
ours and ours alone to believe
as lovers through the ages.
Heaven from skies blending earthly passion
(more substance than the clouds) .
Heed not those bird songs
they love all day
watching kestrel and the kite,
as we those prying eyes.
Would we could share, we have enough,
proud of that we have, ours, ours alone.
Tonight the faun will take this hollow.
Three hours to the midnight owl;
moon and stars to light us home,
take and let me give; give and let me take.
A simple tale beside the winter hearth
those who love and read my song
will understand, yes you'll understand.

John Rickell

Sleeper Bridge

The little bridge is simple, crude,
Old wooden sleepers from a railway track
Which carried thousands I've no doubt
On holidays to sea-side towns,
Or coal for kitchen fires, washing boilers,
Children drying on the hearth.,
Keeping out the snow.
Now rotting spans the ditch
Enough for dog and man.

You'll not find it on the map
Or Tom-Tom screen
Too small for their attention,
But every day we come this way
Anti clockwise walk the wood
Listening to the birds,
Shaded from the noonday sun
When last it shone!

This is a simple task.....
Walking in a wood across a bridge
Too small for cars and rotting as I speak.
Who cares for this?
Why do I tell you this?
Tomorrow may never come,
But if it does and the sleepers fall
None will care, but me.

I cannot jump the ditch,
Take away the bridge
Or never build it.....
We shall have to go right round,
Or shout across the gap
To tell the flowers and the ferns
We'll call back later...
Round the other way.

Just four bits of wood
Dropped across the gap

No rails to stop one falling
Greasy in the rain, hidden when it snows.
A bridle way, childhood magic,
Pooh sticks, splashing pebbles
Water-vole and rat.

This an ordinary wood
Few will know it's here
Fewer still to care
But here we talk with nature
Commune in simple words
In country terms.
The fading timber logs
Delicate and mortal,
Welcome muddy boots!
More conversations than in town
Despite its mobile phone and internet
The papers and the crowded jostle.

John Rickell

Sounds Of Earth

Nothing heard, the air still,
no breeze disturbs the willow
the lily sleeps, her petals fold,
moon-lit shadows in the wood
sombre, sleeping primroses,
all nature shivers as moonlight
fades and dark returns before
the sun begins his daily task
waking farmyard cock and snail.
Darkest hours of night
chimes unheeded, sleeping
one more hour to dawn.
Rise again from your bed
to sounds of earth and willow.

□

John Rickell

Stoop Narcissus

Silent aspen grove,
autumn light and pool,
drifting clouds
and glassy mirror,
flies skating safe,
and fish sleep deep
hid in lily pads,
petals limp and noonday heat.

The serpent waits
his innocent purpose,
his birth right
since crawling on his belly,
Frogs waiting to be kissed
Cinderella, Pinocchio too,
dreamers in a nightmare world
of make belief and making-do.

Stoop Narcissus, be not proud!
reflect the fading day,
beauty in the eye of conceit.
Fold your arms, kiss the lake
see your face smiling
in the rippling water,
watch the tide to turn,
see the water-boatman,
smooth a cross the lake
and serpent, eyes closed
waiting his birth-right
sliding on his belly.

John Rickell

The Art Gallery Walsall

I felt no breeze, the day so still
few foot falls in the sand
none save two, flying a kite,
low towards the land
their backs to me, unaware,
as they played in mild content.
An umbrella, stabbed into the beach
I left them to their game.

Walked the 'Harbur', the tide was out,
topsy-turvy boats on their sides
planks drying in the sun,
clouds gone, hot and bright.
I looked behind the kite flying high,
despite a slackening breeze,
a boy or girl(I couldn't see)
holding on the string
as we all have done
some time or another.

So the afternoon slipped by
scenes of many places
some I knew, the castle, by the sea
a woodland like my own,
exotic flowers, snowdrops,
cobble streets in Stockholm.
cubist fantasies,
faces I'd like to meet.
A tour within a space
no more than tennis court.
'Sunset over Mull',
(outside the rain)
Here they shared their views
no need to travel far.
I bought the 'Mull'
walked back,
passed the kite and child
the umbrella stabbed into the sand.

The Aspen Tree

She was Welsh as Snowdon's snowy peak
bright voice light as butterfly
never still, dancing through our conversation
turning the afternoon into a rush of delights
beside the mountain spring, sparkling diamonds;
crystal clear and sweet as honey dew,
its mossy bank a cushion 'neath the aspen tree
an opal hiding in the emerald green.
Time still as summer clouds fade in the sun.
So the day progressed, too few hours on the clock
now face down, time to look another day.
Distant wedding bells....we wished them well,
but we had no need, save to lie beneath the aspen tree.
Cares were for the morrow, the mountain spring
slaked our thirst into the night and sickle moon
sleeping on the mossy bank our communion complete,
no need for bread and wine or wedding rings
here beneath the aspen tree.

John Rickell

The Autumn Wood

Smells in the autumn wood
There are smells in the autumn wood
Jack can't resist, rabbits older, bolder
run across his path, ferns less dense
paths a mattress of leaves and twigs
scents odours, burrows new and deep.
I hear the birds, but hardly ever see,
counter-points to rival Bach,
a symmetry of notes wrought
times long ago, unchanged, secure.
We copy best we can, tune the flute
to entertain pixies in the wood
but dawn in summertime
when all awake and yet to eat,
more than worth the loss of sleep.
Hear the pigeon's noisy flight
"caw caw!" of rooks untidy nests,
come here every year, each time
to build another nest to blow away.
I come for entertainment, to think
important thoughts for which
there seems no time, until I find
it here among ferns and brambles
falling trees and autumn mushroom;
moods to contradict my whims, to
leave behind with mull and rain.
Then replete, again for home, another
day until I come again to share;
a little wiser, just a little,
I have much to learn, time flies so quick
and the bird is on the wing.

John Rickell

The Building Site (Walsall 2009)

Hoardings shouting at the street,
those in buses reading as they pass
of perfume, razor blades and Guinness,
selling space and advertising
keeping secret from the public
the future of their city,
where JCBs move piles of earth
to mould a future better than the past.

Where once workers toiled,
houses cheek-by-jowl
terrace rows and corner shop
midst laughter, spinning tops and shawls
smutted wash lines wall to wall.
Evening pubs with glittering mirrors
nicotine ceilings, sawdust floors,
counters lined with glasses,
as hooters sound the end of day
on the way to home, to crowded streets,
like seagulls on the cliffs at Flambro'
(how did they know which nest?) .
wife and kids around the table,
scrubbed and white no cloth to hide the knots,
armchair for Dad, stools for the kids,
chair beside the sink for Mam.
Pigeons to feed and whippets,
shoes to sole and wood to chop,
fishing canals for roach and pike
barges low with coal and pots from Stoke.
Smells of tanning, thumping hammers,
freight trains through the night,
flashing furnace fires, bed by ten and up at six
Blake's Jerusalem on a school piano.
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John Rickell

The Chapman

I leaned the gate
between the wood and pasture,
more to think than rest;
Slow clouds, heavy and grey
made their journey westward
a bad sign; cold tomorrow
you can bet your gloves on that,
four layers today, five tomorrow!
Every day, just me and Jack,
know each stick and rabbit hole;
miles from anywhere and mobiles.
love the pines searching the sky
vaults random laid in tumult,
pagan; raw; Druid-land.
there is a corner hid away
deep in yew and holly
stitched with old-man's beard,
a lady chapel with no candles,
dark-deep-secret, where I dare not.
I hear rumours from the starlings
rituals to tempt and thrill;
foolish to believe,
but the wise old owl rarely comes
and never says a word.....
and he's been here for years;
that's enough for me.
Whom to ask as I lean the gate
leaning by the wood and pasture?
I must into the chapel, subdue my fear
seek her face but once,
once will be enough, just once
I've heard her siren song
a tongue I do not know, ancient,
ancient from the by-ways, the lanes
where once the chapman and his horse
shared hay and rabbit and small beer
beneath the milky way bright and clear.
My fear subdued I shall know a truth
which will be her choice

There are many truths to learn,
should I accept her word, her wisdom
leave the yew and holly....
The sadness of the truth she tells?
I cannot leave the world I know.
(my purse too filled with gold)
to join the chapman and his horse
but sit on the leaning gate
my ears closed to siren calls.

John Rickell

The Crimson Petal

Six hours to dark and humid night
reach for the rose, soft and nectar laden
kiss her petals hear whispered promises
suck sweet, slow and buried deep, unfold
and dream of evening's silken robes.
Reluctant day retreats, evening breezes cool
the sweating brow, confirmed in the crystal pool.
evening and the moon is high.
Raise the glass and stay
close my love skin more soft than silk
Skin in love none more sweet
Let me taste and see
Oils of Arabi, Arcadian spices
opals waiting, pearls about your neck.
Night is young and so are we.
There is time..... time enough,
skin more soft than silk,
Your nectar shames the lily.

Is this a dream? If so I have no wish to wake,
the cushion of your thighs rests my brow,
breasts to quench, your hands to hold.
The crimson petal of the lake no match.
Take this night beneath the smiling moon
share this earthly gift
more worth than Heaven's Gate.
I am your Hercules this night
Soon, too soon... but
there is time to wait.
Lie still, the tide is rising,
float upon the foaming waves,
hold your breath and me, we shall not drown
But tossed on the shore shall sleep,
Salt drying on skin more soft than silk.

John Rickell

The Cuckoo

Remote and lonely baritone
the first in May,
clock-work, mechanical,
two notes not to be forgotten
haunting spring time solos
sung from oak and ash
awakening to a spring
confirmed at last.
Courting pigeons in the birch
green and silver bark,
chill east winds
threaten winter's return,
but the solos sing a sweeter song,
hope beneath the rainbow arch
haunts the evening light...
joining the skylarks' twitter,
pheasants in alarm as foxes roam.
I heard the first in spring
will tell my envious friends
and toast the lonely cuckoo.

John Rickell

The Cuckoo (Edited February 2914)

Remote and lonely baritone the first in May,
clock-work, mechanical, two notes not to be forgotten
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joining skylarks' twitter, pheasants in alarm as foxes roam,
I heard the first in spring will tell my envious friends
and toast the lonely cuckoo.

John Rickell

The Empty Cottage

Time long since I came
stone porch and church-pew seats
Chinese matting in the hall
broad planks to make the floor
black and white, alternate,
poppies papered on the wall
beside green-tread stairs,
banisters white and black.
Three bedrooms from the landing
Ghosts of time long gone
drifting in the silent noon.
Children in the bathroom
huge, Victorian, cast in iron,
gone.....plastic now
window low and wide
alone as never once before,
memories...do not stay long
a daughter, many times a mother
now grandma.....
gasped her first, crying to the night
her sister sleeping in the moonlight.
The room bare, cold undressed;
fragrance from the past,
scents of skin in love gave warmth,
warmth of remembered breasts
eager thighs and straining muscles
broke the magic spell,
I turned, fled the scene.
No more to seek or savour
this time so long since gone.

□

John Rickell

The End Of Dreaming

I listen to the
lonely cello, music
from the thigh,
the gentle bow,
mans' invention
and time's eternity,
or so it seems,
Oh that it were so.
Sempiternalis
time and space
eternal siblings
let none disturb;
here hope awaits.
and dreaming ends

John Rickell

The Faun

In the thistle bed
you play, dancing
rhythms all your own
no ballet pas de deux,
alone you skip and jump.
outside the copse,
humming in the evening breeze,
an orchestra of leaves and branches
accompany you, extempore;
from the heart, not the mind.
Listen hard, this comes but once
from whence I do not know
innocent as bramble juice
drink deep, autumn is so short,
just this one time
hear your parents' cries
goodbye, my gratitude, goodbye
your rhythms returned
to dance another day.

John Rickell

The Fen

The fen, black, below the road,
Dykes wide and straight,
sink of thirteen counties,
draining fields of leeks
and kale, harvested
in January frost,
the ground hard and
as harsh the wind, from Ely's
lofty tower, chills the bones.
Today the sun is hot
open skies beguile as children
pedal wide horizons
beneath a cloudless sky,
fecund earth in all its glory

John Rickell

The Fieldfare

Lonely on a crab tree top
speckled breast and grey-blue head,
against the melting snow.
Have you lost your way....?
You are welcome to round red fruits,
pears I threw from the bedroom window.
Where are your friends, out in the fields?
Why not tell them of your luck...
sultanas on the lawn at eight
just as the sun was rising,
yew and ivy through frosty nights,
a bath to bathe or drink.
When you return to northern lands
tell your mates and families
there's a welcome waiting here
no matter what the weather.

John Rickell

The Foxglove

Statuesque, handsome, flowering
in the shade beneath wild crab
tempting as of ages, past
legends steeped in belief,
faith for those who chose.
Do I resist your charms
embrace, kiss those purple lips
seek the nectar as the bee?
Digitalis is your name
my finger deep within your folds
enter the goblet, purple freckles
innocent in that pouting mouth,
bathe in the dangerous air,
unheed paternal warnings
drink deep sweet intoxicants
to calm my racing heart,
indulge myself 'til death
succumb as thousand others?

Turn away from this seductress
to hawthorn buds, spotless white
who, in quiet beauty promise less;
lasting wealth and quiet comfort,
the bread and cheese of childhood.

John Rickell

The Frog

I fell in love
when first I saw a rose
too young to see and
understand its beauty,
Why the bee sucks
and hovers round the bud.
The rose hip syrup
on the Christmas table
sweet and sour delights.
The water lily too
the gold-fin in the lake,
petals whiter than the rose,
stigma to invite, pink wings
resting in the fountain's shade,
a frog waiting to be kissed,
before the petals closed,
then I saw the rose,
then I understood.
I came here a youth,
to leave a man.

John Rickell

The Gate Latch

I had not known a day so quick
darkness soon upon us, the gate
sombre in its cloak of moss
tight shut, the latch wrought,
forged so many years ago
in flame and blacksmith sweat,
smote by hammer, made in smoke
alongside patient horses
ploughing-shear and hinges
and hammer-welded chains.
Rough hands gentle as the dove
twisting rods for garden gates
fire-side fender and the sickle;
as children at the open door,
bronze in the firelight glow
on their way from school
in the darkening eve
watch the latch, like magic,
its nativity before their eyes.
Curving handle, still today,
wrought with love and skill
by hands not made for love,
metamorphosed at evening light
I pressed the latch felt the hammer blows
Of yester-year, clang and clatter
children curled in feather quilts,
mum and dad not yet asleep.

John Rickell

The Hut 1

I heard the blackbird
Shiver in the wood
Gold beak tight closed,
Ginger bracken fronds tinder dry,
In the trees raucous crows
Were silent too,
Nests half done, no sound of work.

The clock said six
But the light had gone,
My footsteps cracked the twigs
Blown down in last week's storm,
Alone I walked..Took care,
Respectful of the woodland's mood.
The woodman's hut. metal-clad,
A chimney still intact,
Door frame and window space
No door no window pane.

Who was here and when
Chopping wood and felling trees?
Or burning charcoal
Trapped in smoke,
Damping down the flames....
Swollen cancerous nose....
And puffing on his pipe.
The rippling walls and roof
Corrugated sheets, rusting, silent.
I ran a stick along the walls
But the tune was not the half
Of childhood games on city rails
And there was no one here to wake,
No need to run away.

The chimney stack in brick
Propped up the gable end.
Inside, the hearth lay bare
The bricks were black
It had been used, but when?

The soot, as silent as the day,
Hung with insect wings.

What did this place say?
Oh yes it whispered,
But even in silent evening light
I was none the wiser.
The old man, if that is what he was
Had left no trace
Perhaps had nothing much to leave.
This shed was never even his....
Like me had silence to himself.

I found myself nostalgic,
The cold got to my bones
The light was low,
Birds more sense than me
Had long since gone to bed.
The rabbits too and squirrel.
Romantic dreams....a poor man
In his stable
Heavy coat for eiderdown
Candle-lamp for light.

It was time to go
I turned, left the hut
Half wanting to repair it,
But nostalgia is a dangerous mood
My home is warm
My coat's hung in the hall
Duvet on the bed and much, much more
Electric light.....I could go on.....
I can afford to dream....

John Rickell

The Hut 2

Again I walked the wood,
As almost every day
Absorbed its mood
Mildly changing with each day.
The sun at dawn, shafts of light
To send the owl to bed
Wake the trees, unfurl the ferns
Wipe away the morning dew,
My gloves safe in my pocket
Un-zip my jacket to the morning air.

The dog and I are not alone
He visits friends,
Comes back when I whistle
Must run miles
As back and forth he gallops
Chasing phantoms in the sun.

I stop before the hut
Step into the past,
Feel him in the corner
By the crumbling hearth
There is no 'hello' to greet me
He does not need me there
We are years apart
His life long since gone
The fire cold and black.

A shiver down my spine
I turn and call for Jack
He never comes inside
Never tells me why
I suppose to him it's just a hut
An old man by the hearth
No rug to chew a bone.

The sun is higher now
The chill gone from the air
Crows cawing loud and friendly

The robin by my side
Did I hear a squirrel?
Badgers gone to earth.
Across the bridge and ditch.
Its railway sleepers rotten
There's been no rain,
No water for Jack to drink
We have some in the car.

Time for home and breakfast
'Farewell old man, I'll come again
Maybe in the evening
But can we talk?
Tell me of the charcoal,
The hurdles that you made
Pheasant suppers, snares
And rabbit pies
The awful cold in winter
Gleaning kindling in the snow
Looking in the windows
On your way to home.'

John Rickell

The Hut 3

The wood was heavy, green,
The clock said seven
Thermometer, twice the same.
Wenlock edge in blue-green mist
Ten miles distant, seemed much more,
Dawn had been at five
The chorus, silent for a moment,
Silence like the sea shell
On the bed-room mantle-shelf.

We had not walked our wood
For ten long days.
When last we came
The ferns were shy, pale green, unsure,
Now bold they brushed against my legs
Soaked my shoes in dew,
My trousers too were wet,
The sky was blue, unhindered
Save for two white clouds
Fading in the morning sun.
Forecast..... sunny hot.

I did not pass the hut this time
Jack, impatient would not wait
Reluctant, went ahead.
I stepped inside.....
There is no door,
(I've told you that before)
What was a door is on the floor
A step to let me in.

The silence in the hut
Was not as in the wood,
(Its sea-shell gentle hiss
Breathing in the ear)
The tone was changed,
Somehow back in time.
Through the unglazed window
I saw dark clouds.

There was no wind that day
But the walls were shaken
I looked around the room
Everything in place.....
The fire-grate on the narrow wall,
Still there.... corner to the right.
Cobweb veils across the ceiling.
Felt cold, uneasy, did not belong.
My day was gone.....

It was then I saw them,
Heard them hold their breath.
An evening tryst.....
Turning quickly, said goodnight,
Back to the morning sun.
Who they were I did not know
But tried a guess.
Lovers, many years ago?
How had they met?
A village dance perhaps?
Across a bar and lousy war-time bitter?
Slipped out 'Won't be late 'she said.
Jean her name?perhaps
A ploughman's daughter?
Could have been.....
Eighteen, newly widowed,
Conscript William... older...
Dead and all their dreams.
'We regret' it said.
The telegram screwed up
On the kitchen floor.....
Him?A William too,
But Bill for short.
A gunner in an aircraft's tail
Far from home, America.
Both scared by the plight of war.

The broken door was then in place
They closed it shut and quiet
In the corner by the hearth
They leaned the steel clad wall,
They needed each and took..

And did what lovers always do
When wearing heavy coats.

I walked away along the path,
Jack in front as usual.
Bluebells, champions, nettles,
Said hello in babel voices
And so we went, as always.

That night we called again,
Did not stop this time
In case they'd call again
(I think I would...
And so would you!)

Whistled Jack into the car
Drove down the lane
Pulled in the car-park lot
Leaned the bar
The same.....
Said hello to William
Birthday-boy today.

Named after Dad he said
Killed in the war,
Mum never remarried.....
I looked at Jean
(she's often there)
Grey upright and handsome
How old?
We never ask, not polite.
Where had I been she asked
'In Jessop's wood, with Jack'
'Ah'
'You know the place?'
'Yes I know the place'
'The hut still there?'
'Yes I often look inside, '
'The cast-iron hearth still there? '
'Cracked, but the walls are firm and safe'
'I bet there are tales to tell'

She said no more.....

Looked me in the eye.
She knew I'd guessed.
I felt ashamed,
Until she smiled.....
Cast off the grey and wrinkles
Her golden youth returned
The heavy years of toil cast off
Her breasts now firm.
She was in his arms again,
Let me share the joy,
Let me share the secret
Only we could know.

John Rickell

The Intruder

The day had long since gone
A glow to the west fading fast and sure
Foot fall insecure, twigs snapping,
moths and money spiders' silks impede.
A gothic gloom weighs down
from trees once green and berry-laden
now in shades of black and grey.
Honeysuckle at the woodland edge,
memories of daylight hours recede.
This is a world I do not know
of badgers, voles; a secret place
which I intrude and stumble.
I am unwanted, no one lights my way
here another side of life
In which I hold no shares
do not understand as once I thought.
Each day I call, enjoying songs and colours
to rival Jacob's coat, and plainsong monk,
but never once before this night
and never more again shall I intrude
this dark, dank, secret place□

John Rickell

The Irish Boy

It was 1840 and the potatoes failed,
The English printed postage stamps
While bison roamed the prairies.
We couldn't afford the boat fare
Came here to build canals
And then they needed railways
So we lived in camps tin huts
tents and barking dogs.
The railways soon were finished
The canals were silted up,
We were no longer wanted
So they sent us all down here
Called it Hun-gate since the Vikings
Wet beside the Foss, but free,
Bin here since great grandad
Our women scorned, except at night.
I go to school, play in the streets
My overcoat across the bed
Head to tail we try to sleep.
Charley Jones has a pencil box
Laughs, the way I talk and says I smell
Why don't I go to Ireland and
Take the blight back with me
I will do one day, you see
We'll all go, you see!
But just for now, I'll try to sleep
Listening to Mam and Dad.

John Rickell

The Ivy On The Roof

You did not tell me blackbird
did you want to surprise me
knowing I would be pleased?
and that I am, so very much.
I have children of my own
and so have they, into
the future we all shall go
our genes and seed until
eternity shall end.
So many years.....
ivy now on the roof
black fruits to eat and shelter;
nest deep within the scramble.
The gable for your pulpit,
where you sing, but do not preach,
I hear you in the morning light
before the sun awakes
and the moon still shines.
There are apples on the lawn,
worms aplenty, now the rain has come.
Bring out your brood tomorrow
the dog will not disturb,
Sleep tonight in the ivy's mantle
heavy with ripening fruit,
and veils of spiders' webs

John Rickell

The Kissing Gate

Fading light on our shoulders
welcome night turning blue to black
the mossy bank dark and secret
The kissing gate ceased its creaking
walkers homeward bound, , smiling
as we inscribe a lovers knot,
ripening hay and clover flowers.
The slow day over, for this we came
our cycles in the hedge
our hopes upon each other.
Divest of clothes, honest 'neath the stars
we talked of days ahead
a house with curtain secrets
a door to lock, a bed....our own
not borrowed from the rabbits,
no thistles scratch at our toes
romantic as it is.
The evening cools, moonlight on guard,
shivers down our spines
heaven, heavy on our thighs
Venus and Eros entwined
in pubic congregation.
Ignore the owl, wisdom too late,
we can be wise tomorrow, in the sun
Demurely smiling as they pass
the kissing gate.
'Good day ' we'll say
'Good day '
Fading light upon our shoulders
welcome night turning blue to black
the mossy bank dark and secret
The kissing gate ceased its creaking
walkers homeward bound smiling
as we inscribe a lovers knot,
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shivers down our spines
heaven, heavy on our thighs
Venus and Eros entwined
in public congregation.
Ignore the owl wisdom too late,
we can be wise tomorrow, in the sun;
demurely smiling as they pass
the kissing gate.
'Good day ' we'll say
'Good day '
Fading light, cycles in the hedge.

John Rickell

The Lady And The Parasol 1

She sat beneath the parasol
white wine to her mouth.
How I envied the goblet
could feel the warmth of woman's lips
memory fresh as the Chardonnay
she sipped in exquisite calm;
my drink was red as my desire.
We smiled, raised glasses
I doffed my hat, she uncrossed her legs
and so we sat full half an hour.
She glanced at times, I too,
admired her light brown hair
to her shoulders above her breasts
heavy in her blouse, held secure
by one lone button, pearl as was her skin.
The afternoon droned on in the shade of Cypress;
she confident, called the waiter
for another glass, this time water; (it was hot.)
she gloried in my attentions
crossed her legs again revealing thighs
pearl as was her skin.
We played our game discrete as virgin lovers
not a word between us, smiled again.
I rose, raised my hat and said 'Hello'
turned towards the beach and left,
tomorrow was another day.

John Rickell

The Lady And The Parasol 2

I returned again in pious hope
to sit once more beneath the cypress shade
the table, parasol and empty chair,
the time of day about the same
my drink as red as yesterday;
my memory nagging at my mind.
Was it a dream my eyes dazzled
by the sun. Were those thighs as white
or were shadows from the cypress tree
playing with the light?
The wine more dark than yesterday
saw her first across the square
serene conscious of me, time
as of yesterday, I did not move
sipped my drink raised the glass
but did not smile, nor she
the day was hot but she was cool
Had she stepped from the temple
frieze to take the chair
same as yesterday? our contest
had begun, discrete and slow
the second act; an opera
whose end we could not know.

John Rickell

The Lady And The Parasol 3 (Cariatid)

The drowsy day and sleeping streets
processing jacarandas and futile shade
another glass to quench a thirst
which would not subside;
the sun was high beneath the pines
I sat and thought one thought
I think she knew.
I could not hide my praise
sun glasses laid aside,
to hide behind a darkened lens
and wine red glass was not polite.
I wanted her to know.

She drew her robe about her breasts
innocent gesture but not to conceal
she knew the worth of ivory flesh
saw my hands clasped tight.
So the day progressed
as yesterday when first we met,
if ten paces is a meeting.
Her graceful neck long and strong
she stood straight backed
robe to her feet, so out of place,
I did not notice, it looked so right
said goodbye (not au revoir?) .

There were sights to see
that were my intent.
So through the blazing streets I strolled,
to admire this thing of beauty.
Baskets on their heads they stood
but only three! ...In fear I turned
panic on my mind, for hours I ran,
so it seemed, terror at my soul
it could not be.... it cannot be!

The square was as before
the table too, cypress shade,
a parasol neat and folded

an empty glass, a lipstick stain,
the chair set back.....
an echo of sandaledfeet....
dancing on the pavement
and she was gone.....
Before I left for home I went again,
long shadows casting gloom,
of the four, which was she?
I could not tell.....
the sun in my eyes,
tears about my cheeks.

John Rickell

The Lane

It winds its drunken way
as all lanes since Chesterton,
Hedgerows, verges, centuries old
green shoots in the fields
pheasants in the copse, waiting for the guns,
distant hills to north and south
too short as mountains, but
high enough on Sunday afternoon.

Roman fort and Saxon tumuli
I am not the first to stumble here
battles have been fought
two thousand years and more,
Hotspur died in Shrewsbury
Charles 1st camped down the road.
All today is calm.

Mackerel sky and sparrow hawk
black asphalt glistens in the rain
puddles in the road for childish games,
rotting hay waiting for the plough.
Half dark..... birds loath to fly
stake their claim before the moon's
cold stare silhouettes the oak.

The old beet factory gone,
two years passed, the site now
fenced in wire to stop the caravans.
I shall miss its steam and smoke,
Irish accents, mud and smells of boiling beet,
heavy lorries in the campaign season
tractors and their trailers.

Fields next year, rape-yellow
some, the blue of linseed
prettier than the beet,
how I miss the steam and chimney
in frost and cloudless sun, with
a dog a stick and whistle.

John Rickell

The Lily

Daylight dawned
through gossamer mists
awe struck birds silent
at the orange glow.
The porphyry font
glowed in early light,
crimson petals still,
closed in calyx comfort
waiting the searching bee.
I sat to watch the shadows fade
leaned to touch, half afraid
to scare the water boatman
skimming in the lily pads
reached across the ferns
at the water's edge,
withdrew each time
ashamed to wake the flower.
Waiting for the sun,
lying on the grass
shivers down my spine,
I saw the petals open
the lily flower drifting
to the shallow beach,
let me kiss
its velvet crimson
stroked away my cares,
tasted of the nectar
sweet and honey scented
rare as oyster pearl,
woke the nymph within the bloom
who stepping out
cast away her mantle
and came to lie with me,
Offered more than I could hope
from the lily I had kissed.
the world turned up-side down
spun in dizzy circles,
all sense of time was lost.
The sun now on my back....

let fortune show the way.
How long we lay
until the spinning ceased,
I did not count.
Then she rose and slipped away,
floated to the lily pad
to wait the searching bee.

John Rickell

The Little People

There was a struggle in the air
retreating night and eager dawn
grey white mists at half passed four
muffling the friendly battle,
tonight the fight will be reversed
without the use of fog.

They do this every day I call
say not a word swirling in the mist.

We all come out to see, the elves
in pointed caps grab my hands
pull at my coat and make me dance,
steal my clothes until I am as them
uncumbered, naked as intended.

We dance about the wood
through bramble nettle-sting and thorn
unharmd by nature's barbs
until morning mists disperse
and I see me as I am.

Where is my coat? I must go home,
the keys are in my pocket,
there are no fig-leaves in this copse,
yet why must I go home?

Come with us I hear them say
live a life of berries, mosses for a pillow,
we will knit a coat for you
as warm as you shall need
shoes of silver birch.

I look back along the twisted path
unsure of what to do,
your choice, they say, you come here every day,
so why not stay, yes why should I not?

John Rickell

The Moon In Her Wisdom

It is late the moon
in her wisdom sinks
beneath the trees.
no need to compete,
rule the night, rest the day,
sleep with the owl and
leave the sun to hay and jay.

John Rickell

The Night Garden

I walked the night garden shadows of gentle grey,
lit by the sickle moon stood still and silent
the warmth of the summer's day rose to mist the air
bearing flowery fragrance to the sleepy leaves,
silent still, still and silent, gentle grey
the pool its water-lily, golden fin, and lily pads
beside the sickle moon, reflected in the glassy water
lay still, silent still glazed and grey and calm
quiet to burst the ears only a heart-beat pulse
to count the slow grey hours.

Colours of the sunny day take rest, leaves turgid now
after the heat of day, pinks of lilies, whites of daisies
dressed now in shades of grey, gentle... sleepy.... grey
slumber in the silver light of the moon
reflecting in the pool.

The owl and bat and moth softly go about their business,
whispering in the grey night air, walk the grey night air
calm the mind and soul, grey colours levelling all.

Pompous reds and purple, blues and yellow all the same.
Sufficient light to study shapes the round and cosy hedge
trellis arch, its black blooms where tomorrow, red will shine.
None compete, the bee asleep, butterfly with closed wing
Time for rest sleep, grey, on greys
before the sun burns the eastern sky,
destroys these gentle greys to proclaim the gaudy day.

John Rickell

The Nymph

The Nymph wakes from winter sleep
deep snow laden pastures greening
with the sun; blues about the sky
cheerful songs and foxes cry
Lambs laugh at mothers' warnings.
the copse is not a place for play
stay close with us; fear not the dog
the smiling fox is not your friend.

Innocent in her dawning
not heeding rumour
casts away her clothes
naked breasts and open thighs,
not a thought for April showers
fecund seed cast far and wide
to quench a thirst long waited.
Winter but thirty weeks
there is time enough,
but not to waste.

John Rickell

The Old Man

The Old Man

The old man before the fire
Slumped and comfortable
pale blue bright eyes
Staring to the past
Fine lines confirme a
wit of keenest edge,
and kindness sealed it all.
Tranquil, thoughtful
And ninety five
Tick tock tick tock tick tock
Went the clock
Lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub,
The heart replied.
Grandfather's and father's clock
Tall impassive measurer of time
Tapping out the pace of time
Recording not a moment.
Dictating, unchallenged
How long time seems to be.
He turned his thoughts
Upon the clock,
never known to be late, or stop..
Tick-tock -tick-tock-tick-tock
Lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub
each had shared the room
Playing a double fugue
Lub-tock, dub- tick, tock-lub, tic- lub,
Other hearts had joined
Young and old played minuets
Waltzed and polked across the rugs
And through the door.
Times have changed,
Beats a little quicker
But little else.
John had lived a useful life,
family had success through him,
Emily gone these last ten years
Richard had a grandchild

(He was sixty five)
Enigmatic June had gone a broad
Strange June.....
Strange like him.
'I miss June....had guts'
'She never writes'
'But then I don't'

"Ah, well time for bed"
Damp down the fire
Put out the cat and light
Close up the cupboard
Leave everything tidy.
'Ninety five's a grand old time'
The old knees not what they were.
but old habits keep them supple
'Our Father which art in Heaven'
Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock...
Lub-dub, lub.....
Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.

John Rickell

The Painting

Glow red you terracotta sky,
Deep blue you narrow sea
Beneath exotic skies
Above grey and drying sands,
Cool and still, grey on grey,
Still as three fishermen
Dressed in shades of grey,
Cool and still . . .
All still, still as grey can be.
Not a word btween them
Why does he stare, the one between
The two who look out west . . .
Is there invitation in that stare?

Glow red you terracotta sky
Deep blue you narrow sea
Beneath the exotic sky...
Have you nought to say?
Was it good today?
The sea far out, the beach
Stretching to its limit
Smooth and grey, still as grey can be,
Grey on grey, blue on blue
So long the day
Beneath the terracotta sky
The boat lies on its side
Pointing to the north,
Still, grey on grey, leaning on the beach
Dry, marooned and waiting for the tide.
Deep blue narrow sea
Glowing terracotta sky.
You do not answer,
Have you nothing yet to say?
Lean all day, grey smocked, black cap.
Does the red alarm you?
It was the artists whim.
Ask him why . . .
Terracotta glowing red
Above the deep blue sea.

John Rickell

The Postman

The postman called right early
the sun had hardly shone
precious thoughts to share
open secrets but dare to tell
words that shall be read
much more than once
wisdom, foolishness and truth
the jigsaw that is life.
Look no further than the mirror
its silver back, prevents the view
look behind, are you sure it's you?
Is there past or but a dream
prick yourself did you feel the pain?
See the healing scar, the crooked finger
the wrinkle on your brow, creased
long ago by happy childish laughter
sat on mothers knee proof that memory
not illusion, things did happen
as your mind remembers.
Forget-me-nots in garden vases,
how do they remember, how did they come
was it on the feathers of the sparrow
and will its memory help it return next year?
The book in my lap and thoughts dispersed
six thousand miles and wisdom to read
enter the mind and share the joy
that makes life the bittersweet
and ours to choose.

John Rickell

The Statue

Gold fins in the lake
water boatman rowing
to the lily pad; heavy air and still,
willows drooping to the bank.
no breeze to stir the leaves,
while in its shade
Jack dreams of mountain streams.
Nothing moves, July sleeps,
and day is done.
Watches cease their ticking,
urgent work unheeded.
Hens lie with the cat,
cockrels stop their crowing,
my book closed un-read.
I kiss the placid lake,
join the dreaming dog,
not mountain streams
far away and long ago
more distant as the hours pass,
more lovely than the gold fin.
Ebony arms naked to the moon
glowing in the silver light
cupped hands about my face
bid me drink once more....
water-boatman and the gold fin
willows drooping to the bank

John Rickell

The Water Mill

So calm the river
No rain since Mothers' Day,
Willow twigs in flower vases
Grand children and their daffodils.
Bread crumbs chased by ducklings,
Sophisticated swans and elegance
Float by and choose, un-coil their necks
Take the best, leaving crusts
To the rampant drakes,
Serene return to the middle pool.
Glide towards the mill
Its 'race smooth, glazed and dark,
The wheel un-turned for many years
Ferns and moss caught in its teeth
Slate tiles crashing to the cinder path
A warning sign, hid by brambles,
Never heeded, no longer needed
The steps long since gone.
Grace and dereliction combined,
Smooth white necks and angel wings
Rotting wood and rusty nails.

John Rickell

Thursday

The wind, boisterous today
jostled trees and me
barged and bungled, bullied
no concern for the wood.
A scarf, serpentine about my neck
clung close for warmth choking me.
Spring is here borne on March winds,
roaring lion, fearful lambs
A topsy-turvy April.
Ditches drying in the breeze
dry soil blows across roads,
late sown seeds not yet green
rooks stealing what the farmer sows.
I remember many springs
but none so late and cold.
Jack's had his run, time for home
We'll be back tomorrow,
I know when I'm not wanted.

John Rickell

Two Voices

It is the noon, I feel it on my face
yet all is dark, black on black.

'Fret not nor weep, open wide your eyes
open your eyes to see the sun'

My eyes are closed, yet I cannot sleep
I am wake to black, black on black
the night can be no more.

'The night is yet to come, open your eyes
open your eyes to see the sun,
separate these two do not let them merge
cousins both reverse of one another,
day succeeds to night as night to day'

My eyes stay closed, I have no will
is it the sun I feel upon my back.?

'It is the sun there is none other
your back is safe, cease to cry
let those tears dissolve your fear'

How do I stop this crying, tell me
I will try, oh! How I will try
but first tell me how to see the sun
evening soon, the sun is falling in the sky.
Am I too late all is black?
Black and black again and the light fades fast
black rolls in, black on black, dark so dark.

'It is eve, you have no time to hesitate
take Hope to prise your eye-lids open,
it may hurt (it will) , brave my friend
brave the pain,
there is joy behind those fears, and light'

I must trust you as I can no other.
Can I trust?

'You must decide, that is your complaint,
I can no more, soon, before the sun goes out,
soon before the sun falls from the sky'

John Rickell

Valentine's Day

No need to know the date
no calendar for them
but a warming sun.
balmy air and shelter
from the rain that
feeds the daffodil.
I am heartened by
their industry, the
cheer filled cries of
early morning breakfasts,
seeds and suet cake.

I feel the surge
that nature wrought,
February cold and bleak.
Soon spring will come
and we shall join the
birds and fox and crow,
divest our winter clothes,
sharing supplications
with fair Demeter's
fruitful earth.

John Rickell

Walking In The Night Garden

I walked the night garden shadows of gentle grey,
lit by the sickle moon stood still and silent
the warmth of the summer's day rose to mist the air
bearing flowery fragrance to the sleeping leaves,
silent still, still and silent, gentle grey,
the pool its water-lily, golden fin, and lily pads
beside the sickle moon, reflected in the glassy water
lay still, silent still glazed and grey and calm
quiet to burst the ears only a heart-beat pulse
to count the slow grey hours.

Colours of the sunny day take rest, leaves turgid now
after the heat of day, pinks of lilies, whites of daisies
dressed now in shades of grey, gentle... sleepy.... grey
slumber in the silver light of the sickle moon
reflecting in the pool.

The owl and bat and moth softly go about their business,
whispering in the grey night air, walk the grey night air
calm the mind and soul grey leveling all.

Pompous reds and purple, blues and yellow all the same.
Sufficient light to study shapes the round and cosy hedge
trellis arch, its black blooms where tomorrow, red will shine.
None compete, the bee asleep, butterfly with closed wing
only lavender scents the air cooling in the sickle light.

Time for rest sleep, grey, on greys
before the sun burns the eastern sky,
destroys these gentle greys to proclaim the gaudy day.

John Rickell

Walking In The Summer Garden

Tangles in the shrubbery,
roses soaring to the trees
babel colours held in spiders' webs,
queues of caterpillars in ragwort yellow
next year's moths and butterflies,
crab trees heavy in their fruit
holy berries green, robin
hiding in the glossy leaves.
A July noon heavy in the sun,
roses twice my height, sway in the breeze
dropping petals and hips begin to swell,
fruit for autumn mists and fruitfulness.
Here we wait, sense the fading greens
pluck an infant bloom in its sepal cradle
try to stay the flight of time.

John Rickell

Where Oxlips Meet

From the midnight wood
elfin beauty not of earth
moulded by another hand,
divine yet not of Heaven.
I am wake and cannot sleep
came to watch the stars
beside the pool reflecting
as daylight fades.
Did I sleep? I do not know.
She strode my body
naked innocence, not of earth
yet not of heaven.....
From the midnight wood
a world I scarce know,
I hear the badgers' gossip
their whispers tell me little,
enough to know there is a world
free of avarice and guilt
where oxlips meet in parliament
and bluebells chime the hours.
She stooped to kiss my brow
her breasts gave suckle to my lips
dark hairs beneath her arms
darker shades upon her thighs.
My will was gone, she bid me wait
guiltless took me to herself
such as this I never knew,
save in boyhood dreaming,
She took her fill of me
and rose.. one last glimpse,
dark hairs and innocence,
and was gone.....

John Rickell

Whispers In The Copse

What tongue recites
Is it the willow
Languid to the ground
Catkins and golden leaves
Swaying in the springtime breeze?
A message I can yet guess
Of love eternal, through summer days,
A lexicon learned from days
Walking with a dog called Jack,
Listening to humming
Bees and calling crow,
Tumult clouds and Wedgewood sky
Rising sun and golden eve,
Cadences and falling tones
Unfurling ferns and mushroom parliaments
Where the nymph and cheeky elf
Tempt surprise to naive man.
Mock him in his sombre scowl,
Weighed down with imagined gloom,
Insufficient days, ambition's greed,
Consuming avarice and jealous pride.
They do not spin, gossamer clothes suffice
Gleaned from spider webs and butterfly,
Stuck with dew and morning frost.

John Rickell

Windowpanes

There is a world I know
Far beyond the windowpanes
Where others live and love
And children die by ten,
Because there is a world
Back here with me
That stares beyond the windowpanes,
Thinks of other lives and loves
And children dead by ten.

John Rickell

Woodland Edge

I scratched my way
through the hawthorn thicket
A sunny day and dry
tall coarse grasses rushes moss,
waiting for the winter's flood
sure as Christmas Eve.
Jack was on ahead along the narrow tracks
worn by fearful rabbits, rats and mice.
The meadow unkempt and free
bent to the cold May breeze
which carried sweet hawthorn petals
to the city in the north.
We were quite alone.
A diesel whistled, miles away;
a silent Kite on the wind
a meal for chics who soon will find their own.
I thought I heard the heart beats
Stood still to watch the carnage.
Last night I heard the fox and pheasant
saw the silent owl, white tails in alarm;
this is a world I do not know,
took more care in the hawthorn thicket
ignoring scratches on my arm.

John Rickell

Worms

They wriggle and writhe
in the shade upon a bed of peat.
a humble mattress soft and warm
leaves for sheets, mosses for a pillow;
see them careless in their bliss
two tied in ecstasy
Daphnis and Chloe, dreamed as these
paled in their delight.....

No marble halls for these
Humility their daily task
Scorn their sole reward
in the bowels of deep earth
Omnipresent and omnificent.

John Rickell

Would I But Have Dreams

Would I but have dreams to spare
to wake this restless state
clouds that do not rain
nor suns which pale and fade
while moons glow red and
skylarks sing at night.
The daily round again
to spin its weary weft
tangling with the warp.

Could I but dream of such
wakened in this restlessness
feel rain clouds weep again
suns grown pale and fade
when moons again are grey,
their skulls to scowl, or
in youthful sickle, lie
on crescent backs to
watch the weaver with
his weft and warp weave
again a daily roundelay.

John Rickell

York

The Board Inn at the end of Pavement
scrubbed bar top and saw-dustfloor
Bass and only Bass, a real ale
handles on the glass....
Pulled down years ago,
as was the slum of Hungate by the Foss
Dank and dark shunned and rats
now Texan hats and foreign tongues
where once was poverty's ragged mantle.
St Saviours Church was never locked,
now closed, the organ gone.

The City middin for a thousand years;
tall houses in the fifties, barking dogs
leaking roof to floor, Dickensian,
like the work-house down the road
crammed with despair and loathing
a hundred years and more.
They felled it in the sixties
now it's called Stonebow,
the Board Inn gone.
Archaeologists digging in the mud
beside the river bank
finding Viking pots and pans
leather shoes and buckles
a pier and landing stage
cobble and the like.

They'll build a museum,
line walls with charts and pictures,
will they can the smells behind the Inn,
hear the bare foot children?
Where did they go, I do not recall their going,
remember this was in the fifties,
I was in my teens dare not enter Hungate
until they pulled it down.
Bars and crowded pavements now
The ancient town a bustle.

Coffee smells and city walls,
All Saints Pavement. lantern tower
once to guide those lost in Gaultres forest
The Minster bell at noon.

John Rickell