

TEXTS FOR THE NEW AMERICAN ART SONG

QUIET LIVES: SONGS BY RICKY IAN GORDON

Bus Stop

Lights are burning  
In quiet rooms  
Where lives go on  
Resembling ours.

The quiet lives  
That follow us—  
These lives we lead  
But do not own—

Stand in the rain  
So quietly  
When we are gone,  
So quietly . . .  
And the last bus  
Comes letting dark  
Umbrellas out—  
Black flowers, black flowers.

And lives go on.  
And lives go on  
Like sudden lights  
At street corners

Or like the lights  
In quiet rooms  
Left on for hours,  
Burning, burning.

*Donald Justice*

## Three Floors

Mother was a crack of light

and a grey eye peeping.

I made believe by breathing hard

that I was sleeping.

Sister's doughboy on last leave

had robbed me of her hand.

Downstairs at intervals

she played "Warum" on the baby grand.

Under the roof a wardrobe trunk

whose lock a boy could pick

contained a red masonic hat

and a walking stick.

Bolt upright in my bed that night

I saw my father flying;

the wind was walking on my neck,

the windowpanes were crying.

*Stanley Kunitz*

The Crazy Woman

I shall not sing a May song.

A May song should be gay.

I'll wait until November

And sing a song of gray.

I'll wait until November

That is the time for me.

I'll go out in the frosty dark

And sing most terribly.

And all the little people

Will stare at me and say,

"That is the Crazy Woman

Who would not sing in May."

*Gwendolyn Brooks*

Virginia Woolf

I wish I had been at Rodmell

to parlay with Virginia Woolf

when she was about to take

that fatal walk:

"I know you're sick,

but you'll be well again:

trust me:

I've been there."

Would I have offered

to take her place,

for me to die

and she to live?

I think not.

Each has his "fiery particle"

to fan into flame

for his own sake.

So, no.

But still

I wish I'd been there,

before she filled her pockets with stones

and lay down in the River Ouse.

Angular Virginia Woolf,

for whom

words came streaming

like clouded yellows

over the downs.

*James Schuyler*

Interior

Her mind lives in a crowded room  
a narrow room and tall  
with pretty lamps to quench the gloom  
and mottos on the wall

There all the things are waxen neat  
and set in decorous lines  
and there are posies round and sweet  
and little straightened lines

Her mind lives tidily,  
apart from cold and noise and pain  
and bolts the door against her heart  
out wailing in the rain

Kid in the Park

Lonely little question mark  
On a bench in the park:

See the people passing by?  
See the airplanes in the sky?  
See the birds  
flying home  
before  
dark?

Home's just around  
the corner  
there—  
but not really  
anywhere.  
*Langston Hughes*

### Lullaby

Sleep, pretty lady, the night is enfolding you;  
Drift, and so lightly, on crystalline streams.  
Wrapped in its perfumes, the darkness is holding you;  
Starlight bespangles the way of your dreams.

Chorus the nightingales, wistfully amorous;  
Blessedly quiet, the blare of the day.  
All the sweet hours may your visions  
be glamorous-  
Sleep, pretty lady, as long as you may.

Sleep, pretty lady, the night shall be still for you;  
Silvered and silent, it watches you rest.  
Each little breeze, in its eagerness, will for you  
Murmur the melodies ancient and blest.

So in the midnight does happiness capture us;  
Morning is dim with another day's tears.  
Give yourself sweetly to images rapturous-  
Sleep, pretty lady, a couple of years.

Sleep, pretty lady, the world awaits day with you;  
Girlish and golden, the slender young moon.  
Grant the fond darkness its mystical way with you;  
Morning returns to us ever too soon.

Roses unfold, in their loveliness, all for you;  
Blossom the lilies for hope of your glance.  
When you're awake, all the men go and fall for you-  
Sleep, pretty lady, and give me a chance.

*Dorothy Parker*

## SONGS FROM THE UNDERGROUND

### MUSIC BY GLEN ROVEN

#### He Wishes For The Cloths of Heaven

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

*William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)*

#### Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert ... Near them,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
That hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is OZYMANDIAS, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

*Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 - 1822)*

#### The Expulsion from Eden

In either hand the hast'ning angel caught  
Our ling'ring parents, and to the eastern gate  
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast  
To the subjected plain: then disappeared.  
They looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate  
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms:  
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;

The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:  
They hand in hand with wand`ring steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.

*John Milton (1608 - 74)*

Like a Beacon  
In London every now and then  
I get this craving  
for my mother's food  
I leave art galleries  
in search of plantains  
saltfish/sweet potatoes  
I need this link  
I need this touch of home  
swinging in my bag  
like a beacon  
against the cold

*Grace Nichols (b. 1950)*

Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802

Earth has not anything to show me more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty:  
The City now doth like a garment wear  
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
Never did a sun more beautifully steep  
In his first splendour valley, rock or hill;  
Ne`er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still

*William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850)*

Teeth

English Teeth, English Teeth!  
Shining in the sun  
A part of British heritage  
Aye, each and every one.

English Teeth, Happy Teeth!  
Always having fun  
Champing down on bits of fish  
And sausages half done.

English Teeth, HEROES' Teeth!

Here them click! and clack!  
Let's sing a song of praise to them -  
Three Cheers for the Brown, Grey and Black.

*Spike Milligan (1918-2002)*

This Is Just to Say

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
and so very cold

*William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)*

What Am I After All

What am I after all but a child, pleas`d with the sound of my own name? repeating it over and over;  
I stand apart to hear - it never tires me.

To you your name also;  
Did you think there was nothing but two or three pronunciations  
in the sound of your name?

*Walt Whitman (1819 - 92)*

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,

My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

*W.H. Auden (1907-1969)*

London Airport

Last night in London Airport  
I saw a wooden bin  
labelled UNWANTED LITERATURE'S  
TO BE PLACED HEREIN.

So I wrote a poem  
and popped it in.

*Christopher Logue (1926)*

The Leader

I wanna be the leader  
I wanna be the leader  
Can I be the leader?

Can I? I can?

Promise? Promise?

Yippee I'm the leader  
I'm the leader

OK what shall we do?

*Roger McGough (1937)*

## Knightsbridge Ballade

I'm eighteen actually, although  
Most people take me for *much* more;  
I'm *not* a debutante, you know.  
I think it's *such* a bore to go  
To parties until three or four.  
My father was an aide-de-camp.  
We've got an aubergine front door.  
I'm *frightfully* keen on Terrence Stamp.

I *wish* I had a bigger bust,  
Though Mummy says it's frightfully smart  
And any more would beckon lust.  
She says I absolutely *must*  
Stop trying to be keen on art  
And dressing like a King's Road tramp.  
I simply don't know where to start.  
I'm *frightfully* keen on Terrence Stamp.

I'm starting on a course quite soon,  
It's sort of cookery and flowers.  
My latest colour's deep maroon.  
And sometimes in the afternoon  
I simply lie for hours and hours  
Beneath dear Mummy's sun-ray lamp  
And contemplate the Carlton Towers.  
I'm *frightfully* keen on Terrence Stamp.

*Candida Lycett Green (1942)*

Come to the Edge

Come to the edge.  
We might fall.

Come to the edge.  
It's too high!

Come to the edge.  
And they came,  
and we pushed,  
And they flew.

*Christopher Logue*

London Airport (reprise)

In My Craft Or Sullen Art

In my craft or sullen art  
Exercised in the still night  
When only the moon rages  
And the lovers lie abed  
With all their griefs in their arms  
I labour by singing light  
Not for ambition or bread  
Or the strut and trade of charms  
On the ivory stages  
But for the common wages  
Of their most secret heart.

Not for the proud man apart  
From the raging moon I write  
On these spindrift pages  
Nor for the towering dead  
With their nightingales and psalms  
But for the lovers, their arms  
Round the griefs of the ages,  
Who pay no praise or wages  
Nor heed my craft or art.  
*Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)*

NIGHT SONGS

Songs by Lowell Liebermann

Robert Graves

She Tells Her Love While Half Asleep

She tells her love while half asleep,  
    In the dark hours,  
        With half-words whispered low:  
As Earth stirs in her winter sleep  
    And puts out grass and flowers  
        Despite the snow,  
        Despite the falling snow.

A Variation on "To Say To Go To Sleep"

*Randall Jarrell (adapted from Rainer Maria Rilke)*

If I could, I would sing you to sleep.  
I would give you my hand to keep  
In yours till you fell asleep,  
And take it away then, slowly.  
I would sit by you and be.

In the world the dark would be deep.  
I would watch. And at last I would sleep.

But if rain should star the stream  
Of your sleep, I would whisper: "See  
You are asleep"; and slowly,  
Your breath would change in your dream  
Till, ages and ages deep  
In the dark, you would say to me:  
"I love you."  
I love you,  
But I am here always. Sleep now. Sleep.