

On the Brightness of Water: Seven Songs for Baritone and Piano

I. Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths (W.B. Yeats)

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.

II. When my soul touches yours (Rainier Maria Rilke)

When my soul touches yours a great chord sings!
How shall I tune it then to other things?
O! That some spot in darkness could be found
That does not vibrate when'er your depths sound.
But everything that touches you and me
Welds us as played strings sound one melody.
Where is the instrument whence the sounds flow?
And whose the master-hand that holds the bow?
O! Sweet song—

III. You came down from your throne (Rabindranath Tagore)

You came down from your throne
and stood at my cottage door.
I was singing all alone in a corner,
and the melody caught your ear.
You came down and stood at my cottage door.

Masters are many in your hall,
and songs are sung there at all hours.
But the simple carol of this novice struck at your love.
One plaintive little strain
mingled with the great music of the world,
and with a flower for a prize
you came down and stopped at my cottage door.

IV. Go, lovely rose (Edmund Waller)

Go, lovely rose!
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that's young,
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That hadst thou sprung
In deserts, where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die! that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee;
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!

V. Look not in my eyes (A.E. Housman)

Look not in my eyes, for fear
They mirror true the sight I see,
And there you find your face too clear
And love it and be lost like me.
One the long nights through must lie
Spent in star-defeated sighs,
But why should you as well as I
Perish? gaze not in my eyes.

A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain,

Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.
There, when the turf in springtime flowers,
With downward eye and gazes sad,
Stands amid the glancing showers
A jonquil, not a Grecian lad.

VI. The day is no more (Rabindranath Tagore)

The day is no more,
the shadow is upon the earth.
It is time that I go to the stream to fill my pitcher.
The evening air is eager with the sad music of the water.
Ah, it calls me out into the dusk.

In the lonely lane there is no passer-by,
the wind is up, the ripples are rampant in the river.
I know not if I shall come back home.
I know not whom I shall chance to meet.

There at the fording in the little boat
the unknown man plays upon his lute.
The water is dark,
but the light of your eyes is still upon it.

VII. Look now at the silver scales (Wojtyła)

Look now at the silver scales in the water
where the depth trembles
like the retina of an eye recording an image.

With the broad leaves' reflection
touching your face
water washes tiredness round your eyes.

Still far from the spring.

Tired eyes are the sign
that the night's dark waters
flow through words into prayer.

(Consider how arid, how arid our souls.)

The light from the well pulsates with tears:
a gust of dreams,
passers-by think, brought them down.

The well sparkles with leaves that leap
to your eyes. Reflected green
glints round your face
in the shimmering depth.
How far to the spring?

Multitudes tremble in you, transfixed
by the light of your words
as eyes by the brightness of water.

You know them in weariness.
You know them in light.