

# The New Criterion

Poems October 1984

## Does a rake go to a brothel to sing?

by Peter Porter

(In memory of the creators of "The Rake's Progress")

We have been deceived by our idealists—  
Tom Rakewell acts the audible  
and not the consequent: for something to be real  
it must be possible to sing it.

And we can sing the starting of the world,  
a balancing of love, the games of touching teeth,  
the desert dreams of conquerors,  
yet wake beside the innocentest teacher  
in real time, kept shadowless  
beneath the cuckoo clock's retard.

Dreams are the grandest operas,  
unruined by a Gounod or a Meyerbeer.  
They cannot be cured with meaning  
but must sing through the very tones of happening.  
O tell our father we are blood and soul for him,  
we are plainly set in place  
as blades of grass, and should we die for love  
it will be love of syntax. Who are these  
punk phantoms of Pontormo? Who sits fat  
in Heaven, looking lovable?

Judgement is all Creation sings.  
Here we go back to finding crimes  
to match the punishment. Our needs  
are music, water, persiflage,

a set of values like a colour card.  
No wonder then our rulers subsidise  
this art you are expected to dress up for.

To dress for dreams is dressing up forever.  
Mother Goose has loosed her stays  
and let her hair in delta flood  
a veteran champaign. It is too late always  
if you're lucky. A Major sounds within the ranks.  
"Sweet dreams my Master. Dreams may lie,  
But dream. For when you wake you die."

---

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 3 Number 2 , on page 46

Copyright © 2024 The New Criterion | [www.newcriterion.com](http://www.newcriterion.com)

<https://newcriterion.com/issues/1984/10/does-a-rake-go-to-a-brothel-to-sing>