

GERARDJAN RIJNDERS

ANSWER ME

TRANSLATION

PAUL EVANS

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GERARDJAN RIJNDERS

ANSWER ME

DE NIEUWE
TONEELBIBLIOTHEEK

*This text is intended to be performed by three men
and two women*

I

Who are you, D

Detainee

What's your name

What's your age

Where do you come from

Are you a journalist

Are you a German

Dutch

Turkish

Portuguese

Do you even know where that is, Portugal

What lingo they speak there

What lingo do you speak by the way

Can you even speak

Cat got your tongue

Why are you here

What were you up to in Pakistan

What were you up to in Utrecht

What were you up to in Riga

Are you married and if yes, why

Are you actually telling us there was a woman who
wanted to marry you

A man maybe

You fucking pervert

You don't seriously think

Do you seriously think

Like you've got anything to think

Like any of you've got anything to think

Like we didn't already know

We've known the whole time

So why don't you just spill it

Why don't you just come clean

That's much easier, right
So why make it any harder on yourself
Why don't you just answer
Yes, why don't you just answer
Were you there
Of course you were, so why
You can feed us that much, can't you
It isn't that hard, is it
You just say
Yes, sure I was there
And, sure, when I was there I
Easy peasy, right
Or maybe you think we
You can't seriously think we
You don't need to think at all
We'll do that for you
We'll do the thinking
You just need to give us the answers

To a few simple questions
Questions like
Were you there
What were you doing there
What's your favourite colour
Do you like broccoli
Where do you stand on
Yes, where do you stand on where do you stand
Do you stand for anything
Would you stand on a mine or a roadside bomb
Or some maimed genitalia
Because that's the way you are, right
Go on, you can tell us
That's the way your tribe are, right
And the whole bunch of you reek like skunks
Have you ever been on a tour boat
And what was it called
That's not so very hard, right

None of this is so very hard
So why don't you just give us the answers
You can't seriously think
We're not really
Who the hell do you think we
Who the hell do you think you
You don't need to think that any more
That we do know
Yes, that we do know
Or did you think we didn't
Of course we know
You just need to answer
The questions aren't that tough, eh
Or are you really that dumb
Are you really as dumb as Tommy Cooper
What?
Tommy Cooper
What do you mean 'Tommy Cooper'

Is he that dumb then
That isn't what we asked you
Maybe you are Tommy
So why don't you tell us
Juzz like that
The tour boat
What?
That's what it was called
Oh, are we going to be a smart arse
Are we going to be a funny-bones
Well, we don't think it's the least bit funny
We don't think you're funny at all
You know what we think of you
You know what we think you are
We think you
No, no, we don't think nothink
We're just asking a few questions here
And those he's got to

Those you've got to

Answer

Get it

You understand

Sure he understands

So tell us Tommy

Yes, tell us, what were you doing

What good reason did you have to be there

You didn't have any reason to be there at all, did you

Where are you from

What're you after here

What're you up to

What have you done

Name

Age

Profession

When did you get off the banana boat

You think

Do you really think

You can't seriously think we

Did you really think

That we wouldn't know

Where you thought we'd think

You thought you'd be

Did you really think that, D

Dickhead

Twat

Fuckwit

Whore

That's what you thought

But you won't think that any more

There's no reason for everybody in this country to
read or write. Two letters suffice. The two letters in
the word 'Mamma'

Fifteen days without sleep

Fifteen days without light, without sound

Fifteen days in a black site

No books, no papers, no phone, no TV, no radio, no
visits

Keep your head up

You're a terrorist

We've got you

And we're going to give it to you good

Motherfucker

Have you ever seen a man

Yes, a man

Kneel down in the street and take a look at a broken
vase

And if yes

What did it mean

And who was the man

Were you that man

Does it make any difference

Of course not

But you're no good

Do you believe in miracles

Let's hope not

Miracles don't exist

Do you exist

What do you think

Do you think anything

You think it makes any difference

That you think anything at all

Do you think you're better than others

Do you feel superior

Do you hate irreligious Muslims

Do you hate the Portuguese because they're not
religious

Or do you hate the Portuguese because they're such
fundamentalist Catholics

Or claim to be

Jack the Ripper was a Freemason, did you know that

Do you know what a Freemason is

Do you know what we do with Freemasons?

Do you know who Nana A Tamakloe is

Who doesn't know who Nana A Tamakloe is

Don't you know who Nana A Tamakloe is

What's penetrative power of the blunderbuss

The bendy bus

What is a blunderbuss

And who made it world famous

Tommy Cooper's weapon of choice
Was the blunderbuss more famous than Nana A
Tamakloe

Have you ever met a man on the feet

On the street

A man you didn't know

Who you greeted with the words 'Hi brow'

Do you know the word 'khyfer'

Or the words 'roro-boat'

Ever heard of the 'Hook Water Firm'

Or 'Avogadro's number'

Have you ever worn blue shoes

Ever seen kiddies films

Faster, faster

Drink your water

Ever had a toothache

Do you love your mother

Do you love your father

Did Tommy Cooper buy your ticket

Tommy Cooper's dead

Is Tommy Cooper really dead?

Ever had a pet

A dog, a cat, a marmoset

Maybe a nigger

Ever handled Semtex

Do you think Osama Bin Laden's good

Do you love your brother

Do you have a brother

Do you love Osama

Do you love Obama

Are you scared

What are you scared of

Scared of us

Of what we're going to do to you

What we might do

Do you have any idea what we might do to you

What we're sanctioned to do with your kind

I bet you've heard of this and that

I bet they've told you this and that, right

And whether it's true or it isn't

Or whether it's all a pack of lies

Or it isn't

How would you know

How could you ever know

But you never know though

You can never know

Where there's smoke, there's fire

And where there's fire, there's something burning

And where there's something burning, it reeks

Scorches your lungs and your cheeks

Isn't the ant always scared of the boot that's coming

to snuff it out

An ant's life is no life
Always scared of the boot
Of the heel
Of the step
Maybe not always conscious of it
Of course it is
You can tell that by the way it walks
The way they walk
The way they walk?
They never do anything but take to their heels
Is that what that means
To take to your heels
Always afraid of the crushing boot
And what about all those other fears
The fungi, the eczemas, the boils, the pustules, the
rash, the anal fistulas
Are they flourishing now, those fistulas
Or do they rather crawl into their shell

Shell?

Like you tried in vain

His arse, more like

All in vain, as you saw yourself

Aren't you the anal fistula

No more, probably less

A right pain in the ass

Would your old daddy be proud of you now

If you've even got a dad

But even if you haven't got a dad any more

Anyway no dad you've ever known as dad

Would he be proud of you now

If he could see you here

If he knew how you

Or would he just sink into a sewer of shame

Like you've always wallowed in shame

He thinks

You think

Or do you think, do you hope

If hope means anything any more

'Be absolute for death: either death or life shall
thereby sweeter be'

Shakespeare, you know Shakespeare, D

Do you think, do you hope, for what never happened
on the football field

Never happened in the swimming pool

Never happened with the whole social touchy-feely
shit

Weren't you always the dickwad

The runt with the limp wrist

Shit in his pants

Covered in snot, slime and piss

Skulking in the meter cupboard

Brooding on revenge

Out for payback

Dreaming under the couch
Or up in the top bunk
Dreaming of that one act that'd stupefy all the rest
The inconceivable
An act like a thunderclap from the clear blue sky
The act that'd wipe out
All those fiascos
All those humiliations
All those failures
Turn everything ass over tit
Turn the ant into the boot
Black into white
Snot into God
Like painting the theme stood on its head like St.
Peter, and then slavishly obeying its commands,
colouring in the background and stretching the
canvas tight
Is that what you thought

Don't think so

Or is it another one of those things that just sort of
happened to you

Like that shit in your pants

The blood on your dick when you again reaped no
respect

No respect, not even any pity

Just blood on your dick

Dick

Like that old wild boar hunter

Who refused to bow down on the final whim of the
local authorities

And wear a screaming orange smock on the swine
hunt

And was so transformed into the boar itself, and into
death

But if you're scared

Scared of us

Who are you scared of then

Who are you scared for

Not us surely

Or were you just trying to keep one step ahead of
your mortal terror

Was that the reasoning of a brain that isn't so
particularly agile

That isn't so very seasoned

In reason

You'd rather be a dead boar than live any more

Death is no sort of life

A corpse is an un-thing

But rather that than listen to the silting of the
bloodstream

The deceleration of cellular fission

Or the festering of cellular fission more like

The synapses starting to sputter

Short-circuits upstairs
Misfires down below
And suddenly a retina floating in your soup
You aren't so old that your fear
That fear you have paralyses your will
Already turns life into death
Or is it like this, you
You, in the middle of your life, are moved by the
death of others
You can't bear those deaths
Their deaths signal your own
Inconceivable, an insult
'Injustice' whispering from the meter cupboard
And wherever there's injustice there must be
offenders
Forget short circuits, insight
A flash of clarity
An epiphany

For wherever there's injustice there must be
offenders

A hero is born

Not on the football field, not in the swimming pool

Not even skulking in the meter cupboard

But on the world stage no less

A hero and redeemer on the world stage, you

At least that's what you dreamt

And who are the guilty

And what of

You don't even need to answer that one

Everyone knows that, right

Except them

Those simpletons

Clinging to their claims of innocence

Washing their hands in blood

Do you believe that yourself

You must do

Not knowing any better

What other reason could there be for your existence

The martyr's reason

The ultimate right to silence

Or are you silent now because you've nothing to say

Never had a thing to say

Always despaired of having to belong

Have you never managed, desired, dared

To cry out a passionate 'yes'

A passionate 'no'

You saw a truth in everything, a rightness

'Yes, that's grand, but on the other hand'

'No, not so much, what you'd call "grand", but then again'

And so you stumbled on

Left, right, yes, no, tisn't, tis

On you stumbled

Always slower, always more laboured

Left, right, yes, no, tisn't, tis

The considerations and deliberations always more
feverish

The progress always more squelching and viscid

Until you got bogged down in your considerations

Ground to a standstill amongst all the nuances

Everyone was way ahead of you

Whichever direction you looked

At least everyone had taken some direction

While you were sunk throat-deep in quicksand

As good as drowning in your sense of justice

I've got to get out of here, I've got to get away

And that's why you're sitting here now

That's the way it went, right

That's how you were converted to the act

Because you finally wanted to belong someplace

You finally wanted to have something to cling on to

Clown, runt

Those you thought were your saviours
Liberators from the quagmire of eternal doubt
They dumped you here and now they're laughing in
your face

And they don't even know your name

Don't want to know

Because someone with a name exists

And someone who exists troubles the conscience

A conscience is just a millstone when justice is at
issue

So they slung you straight from the quagmire onto
the chopping block

And do you really believe that if you close your eyes
now so as not to see the axe, it'll just go away

What's your name by the way

You do have a name don't you

Tommy

You're not seriously called Tommy are you
What did they used to call you
Didn't anyone ever speak to you full of tenderness
Full of emotion, even if it was only meant so as not
to discourage you
Not to discourage you even back then
While you were struggling just to stand up on your
own two feet
Dare to reach out and stroke a dog
Burbles your first few words
What did they call you back then
What did they say so you were sure they must mean
you
Do you remember any of those faces
From amongst all the faces that hovered over you
Hovered over you all those years
And did those faces scare you
Did those faces scare you to death

Or did those faces tickle you under your chin

Coo coo ca choo

Did the faces make you feel it was fine to be alive in
this world

Which you'd never asked to be born into

But how could you

You still couldn't do a goddamned thing

You couldn't even stand up on your own two feet,
could you

'The woman is hemmed in and kept firmly in place

by accumulating layers of strict and lashing

brushwork – black and blue and grey surrounding the
red glow'

What's that

Did someone say that

And what did he say

Did he say it to me

And who am I

And what about all those faces you hovered over
yourself

What did you see in those faces

What could you read in those faces

Was it indignity most of all

Is that what you were scanning for, indignity

Or were you really out for submission

Their willingness to abandon themselves to you

Weren't you always hungrily searching for
submission

The submission of others to you, you who were
never able to submit yourself

While really it's so very easy

Ridiculously, astonishingly easy

You just need to answer a couple of ridiculously easy
questions

Would you say that the lameduck regime is locked
into a course of inevitable change

What were you doing at the men's boarding house on
the date in question

When would you say the developments began to
acquire an irresistible momentum of their own

What's the difference between Greek and Egyptian
feet

How would you describe your own feet

Look, an answer

Unintended maybe

Unconscious probably

But still

An uncontrollable reflex

Reflexes are always uncontrollable

So, by means of an apparently uncontrollable reflex

Your feet have given us an unexpected and most
helpful answer

Greek or Egyptian

I like to think of them as sweaty or flat

Crude or in flight

Foot flees from ant

Shouldn't you have known better

Couldn't you just confirm this

Without having to speak a word

By simply and very carefully

Very subtly

Inclining your head

As though overcome by sleep for just a fraction of a
second

Sure I should have known better but now it's too
late, you must be thinking

But does it make any difference what you think

We'll decide if what you think you think

Makes any difference

But for now we just want the answers to our
questions

Clearly articulated answers or answers via

An apparently uncontrollable reflex, spasm or twitch
Which form of cynicism fits the concept of the
'useful idiot' and why
And what was the reasoning and what the
perspective
To put it more simply: when did you first bunk off,
and why
And why didn't you do it more often
Or maybe you never bunked off
And why not
Would you state for the record how you contrived to
lose contact with all your friends
And why you refuse to admit that maybe we're the
only ones you can call your friends now
Or have you never needed any kind of friendship
Then how do you explain how you ended up here
In this less than enviable position
There's got to be something in this for you

There must have been something in it for you
Or are you going to get your compensation
Everything is a transaction after all
That's all I'm trying to say
Are you going to get your compensation in some
dimension still unknown to us, which we can only
joke about now in our ignorance
But which you still insist on taking so seriously in
that mulish way of yours
Why don't you just be honest for once, there must be
something
You still take seriously
And what's that
And why
And why's your name in the visitors' book at the
kiddies farm
What personal reason could you have had to be there

Were you trying to grasp the paedo-sexual straw in
your desperation

Or were you really just hoping for a helping hand
from that unlikely scene

Or a reach around maybe

Again an answer

Again an apparently uncontrollable reflex

But it's still a little unclear as to what your answer
reveals

Next question then: What could they have meant by
'en petit comité'

Were the methods put under the microscope and
carefully examined

Didn't it ever dawn on you that even our infinite
patience might prove to have its limits

That isn't so much a question as the half-concealed
expression of our suspicion that behind this oh so
quasi-interesting façade of arrogance and supercilious

silence there lurks a miserable little mouse-hole of
helplessness, impotence and treachery

Pathetic

Barely worth stamping to death

I bet you're the sort who wouldn't dare to ask the
way

Would never ask the way out of misplaced pride

After all, you can figure it out for yourself, can't you

You think

You don't need any help

Don't you need any help

I think you need help

What about now

Look where you've ended up

You aren't the kind for dialogue though, right

That you decided long ago

Dialogue's nothing but a distraction

Cuts you off

From whatever target you've set
The resolution resolved upon
Once, you did let yourself be seduced by dialogue
In the age of compromise
Of back to square one
Always back to square one
And so you resolved it was going to end
No compromise, no more standing still
No more back to square one, but right at em
That's what you resolved upon
From then on you'd be the monologue-man
The man who'd rather say nada than hear that
chatter
If needs be, blind, if needs be, deaf, if needs be forever
silent
So you made yourself invulnerable, or so you
thought
You armour-plated yourself, or so you think

But take a look at yourself now
A prisoner of your own intentions
A fortification, invulnerable even to himself
And any moment of doubt feels like a dagger thrust
into your guts
Like hacking off a hand
Hacking off anything
Any other thought than 'I'm right, Goddammit'
threatens to rob you of a certainty based on nothing,
those air-bubbles of certainty from that 'I'm right,
Goddammit'
Admit it openly
In an hour of the night when all the others are asleep
Or slowly getting drunk
Shoes getting kicked off
Clothes being unbuttoned and hung over the chair
The dogs licking their balls

All dissensions having concluded in perfect three-
part harmony

Just admit it for once how you long for an offered
hand

A hand on your shoulder, your arm, your thigh

A touch

So that for a moment you're someplace else than the
tower of the fort you've built yourself

Maybe you waltz through the dreams of others

Run hand in hand down a flowery hillside

Fling yourself from a diving board and belly flop onto
the surface of the water

Tumble fart-arsed out of a tree or off a balcony or a
scaffold and shatter your spine

But the others will always be there to minister to
you

Raise you up again, or else let you lie there

motionless and then very carefully

Almost timidly

Solicitously, let's say

Touch you

Do you know what that means: 'touch'

Shall I show you: 'touch'

Look, another answer, another apparently
uncontrollable reflex

Has anyone ever told you that 'I love you'

Or do you still think any second we might say:

'Stand up and walk away and forgive us, for we know
not what we do'

Or do you think maybe any second you might stand
up

And say 'I forgive you all, for you know not what you
do'

And casually walk away

Hand in hand with that unshakable certainty of
yours

You arrogant piece of shit, arsehole, anal fistula

We'll get there by and by

You can only keep this up by denying who we are

And by denying who we are you're only denying who
you are

We are who we are

And we'll stay who we are

And who you are, who you were, who you'll be, we'll
decide that for you

We'll decide who you are, if you are

Has anyone ever told you that 'I love you'

And what did you say back

Or is that too painful a memory

Does the expression still mean a thing to you,
'painful memory'

Of course you cast out shame a long time ago

Or does it still get under your skin when you're all
naked in the shower and they finger you and laugh

Or are you above all that

Like you'd like to think you're above us too

You can't do anything

You've got to

Answer, please

Do you hear that: 'please'

Didn't expect that, did you

'Please'

Pretty please

Now things are going to get a little scary

Now things are going to get a little nasty and slimy

And if I ask 'May I'

Do you know what I'll be getting at

Think I'll be able to picture

You and me

Us together

Or will you just crawl deep down into yourself,
hoping to sniff out a little poison
But you won't be able to do that any more
Because you'll be totally lame
Not numb, but lame
Does that make any difference
Of course it does
You won't be able to waltz off any more
Like you promised you would
Promised so firm
The next time someone says 'I love you' you're just
going to walk away
And look at you now
Still here and silent as a stone
You think
But to us you're an open book, with very big letters
Which we're going to run our fingers over like Braille

Did you think we didn't know how you tortured the
rabbit when the lights went out, and your mammy
and daddy only had eyes for each other, and you had
to go out scrounging for candle stumps

I can still see you walking with that mangy dog
slinking behind you

How the dog refused to walk and so you turned it
into a sled

And us just laughing, and you just howling

Didn't really have much luck, did you

And that's why you're sat here now

Just come clean for once

You don't need to do anything

Just make out like you're nodding off, just like you're
nodding

Know what a jamrag is

Know what a faghag is

Sorry, we've got to try something

We could just kick you to death right now

There's not a dickybird would blow the whistle

Whistle

Sing

You know that, right

Do you know 'algebra' means the setting of broken
bones

Scared we might have to use a little algebra on you

Classic cars, preparation of foie gras, life on Mars,

the art of origami, Richard Branson's dyslexia, the

importance of informed optimism, the quest for dark

matter, a health service for Rwanda, the birth of the

computer, the deception of anti-depressants, the

conquest of gravity by geckos, fighting poverty with

mobile phones, the Nigerian film industry, saving

the earth with fungi and toadstools, what does that

remind you of

Do you know Ted

Anil you do know of course

Or are you saying absolutely nothing because you've
absolutely nothing to say

You can talk

Shop till you drop

Hello, a hamburger, a pack of Camels, double vodka
on the rocks

What is it with you and vodka

You can even say the name Tommy Cooper

But did it occur to you one hood day

Hood

Good I meant to say

We'll get to the hood later

Let's scratch that

You should never scratch anything

And let's scratch that too

You should never scratch anything, because that'd be
falsifying the record. And that's what it's all about

What, this

Did you think back then: I've really got nothing to
say

Because I am nothing

Never been anything else

Never had anything to say

Of course it's too painful even to admit you
thought...

With my eyes on you

My smile

The gel in my hair

My bulging crotch

I'd never even noticed

Take a peek

A big fat gob like that

And he's got nothing to say

Never had anything to say

Yes, they're all motherfuckers and cunts

Yes, so Amy dumped her clothes

But who's Amy

Have you never had anything to say

No seems like

And so you decided you really ought to have
something to say

In this day and age

Before you die

And so you went shopping around for what you
thought you ought to have to say. That's the way I
see it anyway.

Or do I see it wrong

And the price you pay because you suddenly thought
you ought to have something to say is that you no
longer have anything to say at all.

Or do we see that wrong

Of course you ought to answer, but you've decided
you've got nothing to say any more

Because you decided you never had anything to say
and because you thought that's a bit lame, so you
went shopping around for what you might have to
say

You signed up for this or that

Ideology

Gibberish. Fuck

And that led you to this and that and that and this
and that

With the end result that you no longer say anything
at all

Except 'Tommy Cooper'

So now we're finally talking to each other

I love you

Why do you say that

An apparently uncontrollable reflex

Is that important to the investigation

An apparently uncontrollable reflex, that's what I
said, didn't I

It's all about you wanting to be wrong, needing to be
wrong

Otherwise nobody'd even notice you any more

Just admit it

My voice

What do you think of my voice

Most people don't think much of my voice but what
do you think of my voice

A calcified washer dryer

A Polish angle grinder

A juiced-up Vespa Ciao

An overheated vibrator

Do you think my voice hysterical

Or do you think I should just breathe deep and gaze
out the window more

Or in my, what do you call that, actually?

Or are you more interested in fuel oil

Leaving aside the question of what deodorant you
use

Sorry, used

Not that you reek

You do reek

But I don't mind

Do you have trouble with rolling batteries

Sorry, rolling arteries

And is that why you don't dare test yourself for
cancer

Which is bound to be eating away inside you now

Because they can't do the blood tests

Because of the rolling arteries

Of course we're talking about all those attacks

Not about you

The ones against us

That's what we're talking about
And don't act dumb
Do you have to down a bottle of vodka before you
even dare say anything
Before you dared say anything
Sorry, have you ever dared say anything
Did you ever dare say anything
Ever said anything in your whole life
Ever dared to
Of course, we don't mean
What we mean
Did you even really exist
Do you exist right now
Sure, you exist
But so what

And that's why you're sitting here now

You've got to sell us some total bullshit, otherwise
nobody'll even notice you any more

He isn't saying anything

No, he is

He's sitting here now

And he's keeping his fat trap shut

Do you know what the word 'empathy' means

The word 'autism'

'Asperger'

How did you learn maths

With long division

Or realistically

Should we teach you how to do realistic maths

Or do you prefer the word flat tax

As if it makes any difference to us what you'd prefer

Are you a masochist

What happened to me today all told

How was I when I woke

What was the first thing I said today

And to who

And if the first thing I said today were the words
good night

Would you think me lonely

And if you think me lonely

Do you think me unhappy too

And if you think me unhappy

Do you think: 'Well that's what you deserve'

And if you think: 'Well that's what you deserve'

Would you say that's an example of realistic maths

And if you're such a wizz at realistic maths

How would you rate your own chances of happiness

How many flowers do you know by name, by the
way

How many symmetries

They can also be ordinary trees or motorbikes or
dodos

Do you know the one about the dildodo

Or the two rabbits in the wood

She kept on crying 'I'm coming, I'm coming' but she
never came

That wasn't the rabbit though

No, that was the naked woman

And where was the other rabbit

It was off gathering firewood

But she did come of course

But the rabbit didn't know that, no sirree

It was just pressing her little button

Maybe the rabbit got all wet

Or the firewood

No, that was the other rabbit

Doesn't all this make you dead tired too

What do I mean 'too'

It strikes me as dead tiring not to say anything
As if that's even possible
Forgetting about all those apparently uncontrollable
Well, anyway
Where was that button
Why don't you just come clean
Let's start again
Did you have a chorus of chants in your head
That three-part harmony we discussed
Did you have a stiffy
When the decision got taken
Not any more, of course
Never again, of course
Do you secretly hope for one though
Is that why
A permanent erection
A grief erection more like

UN ask government Beijing when you have
elections. Chairman Mao say have elections every
morning

How many virgins was it again

Tell us

Realistic maths

You were standing in an open-top car

Could already see yourself in an open-top car

Mercedes Benz

People flinging themselves on to the asphalt

National anthem playing

Which national anthem by the way

You had a stiffy

Dogs were running through the alleys, up the hills

Garlands in their mouths

Girls bawling 'We are the champions'

Boys

Boys

Girls keeping a low profile
Anil'd take care of the explosives, of course
Benji the condoms
You had the detonator
We know all the details
Down to the second
You were standing in a bloody open-top Mercedes
Benz
Café Sodom, that's where you liked to go, right
Up that back alley
Do you know people hate you
What do you know about the secret service
It's secret
It's a service as well
You know that people hate you
What do you think you might do about that
Or was that actually the whole point

Do you count on our sympathy just because you
tossed everybody else's sympathy away
Are you the sort of dick whose going to sit down on
the sidewalk
With a plastic cup in front of him
And a piece of cardboard with the words
'Help me. I'm a dick'
'And I'm so homeless'
'And with no income'
And you've got a handicapped son
Looks like a monkey
A gimp with two clubbed feet
And a hair lip
A cleft palette
And spina bifida
An anal fistula dangling out of his arse
Aren't you the ant, the grub, the worm
Who'd like to scream up at the boot

But he can't scream

Born mute

We're not in paradise here

Not yet

And he thinks he's making a statement

Just by cussedly lying there

Cussedly keeping shtum

I'm going to keep lying here all cussed and quiet

Then they'll have a problem

Then they'll feel guilty

Did you really think that

If you really don't want to say anything, then just say
that

Makes more sense than Tommy Cooper

You could ask something

Do you love me

Are you asking that

He could ask that

Why

A plant must have to work really hard and draw
upon important natural resources to achieve the
balance and beauty of the orchid or the sunflower

The wondrous world of symmetries

Ever realised that nature is a huge supermarket with
the most glittering ads

One louder than the next

This way birds, this way bees, lick me, eat me

Of course, you're against all that, against the very
idea of supermarkets

Well, there must be a whole bunch of things you're
against

If you even have to be against nature

If it's true that nature is a huge supermarket

Full of screaming sales

Or are you just against everything for convenience
sake

Even against nature

Even against yourself

Tell us a little about Café Sodom

What's the most beautiful thing anyone's ever said to
you

What's the most beautiful thing you've ever said to
anyone else

Or do you break out in a cold sweat the moment you
walk into a café

If you have to shake someone's hand

Who says you have to anyway

Would you dare take my hand

Shall I give it to you

Again an apparently uncontrollable reflex

But quite sweet, quite...

Vulnerable

See you can do it

Would you like us to call you 'Tommy', Tommy

'Feel me, hear me, touch me'

We'll just skip the Cooper then

He suddenly dropped dead, remember

People thought it was a joke

Applause

Do you want that too

Is that what you're secretly hoping for

Applause

Have you been sitting there this whole time waiting

quietly, patiently

For that applause

They applaud

Silence

And we don't even get any thanks for it

You can't believe it

What do you believe then

You can tell us that, can't you
That's what religion's all about, isn't it
To spray it around, spread the good news
Metastasise it, spurt it over everyone
Barf it out
Spatter everybody with it
Like a field with cow-shit
Must be a delightful prospect for you to be getting
the chance now
Why don't you go and spank the monkey
Don't you think we're pretty
We're drop dead gorgeous, aren't we
Must be one of us you think's drop dead gorgeous
Dressed to kill
Maybe one of us thinks you're drop dead gorgeous
too
Or else imagine how we beat ourselves up
Lovingly mortify each other's flesh

Or lovelessly penetrate each other's every hole
Here, all fantasies are fair game
There's not a single limit to your fantasies
Would you like to hear what kind of fantasies we
bring to the table
I imagine I could take you very softly by the...
Or else more firmly by your...
And then I could maybe...
While from behind he might...
Or else they could take you and...
While me and her could...
Does that turn you off
Why don't you come right out and say so then
You can also say something totally off the wall
There must be more to say than 'Tommy Cooper' for
Christ's sake
You could maybe say how tough it is to memorize a
random series of numbers, like maybe

99375105820974944592, but how on the other hand
it's pretty simple to memorize the series

12345543211234554321

A run-down of all your one night stands

Maybe then you'll be done real quick

Or do you always come real quick

Or are you talking about other things

What were you favourite kiddies books

What was the name of the dog you turned into a sled

What did your daddy used to say to your mamma

when she set the soup down on the table

Or did she never set soup down on the table

You did have a daddy, didn't you

Or did he never say a word either

Is it a family affliction

What did you want to be when you grew up

Fireman, pilot, spy, surgeon, barber, supermodel

The fuck-up you ended up becoming

Is that what you wanted to be
The fuck-up you ended up becoming
Are we supposed to applaud that
No problem

They applaud

Silence

Will you work for us, if we send you back to Portugal
Or Denmark
Failed Hamlet
You'll move in interesting circles
Harley bikers' circles
You could really help us

Won't you tell us something interesting
Something sensitive

We can arrange a nice place for you to spend the
night

Soft and warm, with a mattress

And a blanket

A shower

If you play ball, we'll let you sleep in peace

For as long as you like

Really

I know your God gives you power

You've been living in these tiny cages so long

No man could keep that up

You pray and your God comforts you

Or else you'd go insane

If I had to live in a cage like that, I swear I'd be dead
in three days flat

And if we suddenly say no more now

A terribly long silence

II

What do you think you're playing at

What do you think you're mooning at, lobotomy-
case

What do you think you're thinking

What do you think you're up to playing the
wallflower and hoping you're invisible

What do you think you're up to

What do you think you're playing at thinking O god,
O god, how terrible, how awful

Or aren't you thinking O god, O god, how terrible,
how awful at all

What do you think you're thinking then

Or aren't you thinking anything

Or are you only thinking when can I get out of here

When can I finally go home

To your dull and dreary, but oh so proper apartment
To your feller with his fat gut and his foul breath
With his thick lisp and his bandy, rheumatic legs
To your pots and pans, your cauliflower and your
braised lamb

Are you just standing there pining for your antiseptic
dish-brush

Or are you dreaming of the rabbit your son'll slap on
the table at Christmas

Or haven't you got a son

Haven't you got a feller with rheumatism, foul
breath and a belly as bulbous as a beetroot

Do you even have dreams

Ever had them

Never had them

Did you come into the world a spare part

And is that how you're planning to crawl into your
grave

A spare part
Never used
Never once screwed
Poor little wallflower
Always left gathering dust on the shelf
Or did you once decide: none of this is true
What I see I don't
What I hear I don't
Sure what I see I see
And sure what I hear I hear too
But none of it's true
The words I hear just aren't real words
They're, they're, they're... things
The screenplay of a nightmare of someone I don't
even know
Or maybe I do
Maybe the neighbour I say a friendly hi-there to
whenever I see him at the superstore

But who I don't have anything more to do with
Even if he'd maybe like me to
Do you think so
Do you think about the neighbour
Who you always say a friendly hi-there to whenever
you see him at the superstore
And who you'd really like to get to know better
Wow, what a thought
Like to get to know better
But a thought like that's a dead end
Like to get to know better
That's the way to say it, cunt
You'd like to get to know
Not the neighbour, no way
But little old me of course
None other
Every morning when you leave your dull and dreary,
but oh so proper apartment

You fantasise only about me

Every morning after you've left your dull and dreary,

but oh so proper apartment you feel a moist itch

spreading through your panties

Didn't you know I knew

It must have dawned on you by now there aren't any

flies on me

Tough one, eh double D

It must have dawned on you by now there aren't any

flies on me

Never will be

Do you feel sorry for me

Mostly because you feel sorry for yourself

Maybe you're cooking up a way to comfort me

Because nobody's ever comforted you

Because nobody's ever noticed you

Not even the neighbour

Don't count on him

You give him a fine hi-there every time you see him
at the superstore

But he can never quite put the finger on who you are
The lady across the hall?

I don't know any lady across the hall

Yes, that apartment really stinks

Of cauliflower and braised lamb and antiseptic dish-
brushes

Her too probably

But I've never set eyes on her

Is she the screwed-up poodle who says hi-there every
time I see her at the superstore?

Good God, most people would be better off not being
born

Once, you used to walk around the place with two
pigtails

Have you tried to make all the good habits your very
own mantra

Because it's important you make all the good habits
your very own mantra

Make all the good habits your very own mantra

Another flashback from the neighbour's nightmare

You knew that

But the good habits themselves

The why inside the habits

What the habits truly mean

And why that is

You even thought those pigtails were a chore

And the turning of the washing machine

And the turning of the microwave

Everything's turning, all things considered

The earth around the sun

The sun around...

Life's turning well, all things considered

Take public transport for instance

Dizzying

Makes your head spin

With everything

Life itself

But here at least everything stands still for a little
while

Here at least life stands still for a little while

Is that what you're thinking while you're standing
there, poor little lobotomized wallflower

Standing there blank, blank and vacant

Or is even that giving you too much credit

Aren't you thinking anything at all

That can't be right, right

Of course sometimes you think: what might be in
those undies

What do the nipples look like hard

What does she wear on the weekend

I reckon he's got a huge fleshy cock

And I suspect she's got cellulitis

What do you suspect us of

Not just me

Us

Them I can deal with

Part of the game

But you

Such a nondescript pad

I don't know

You read all sorts in the papers of course

III

No more war. Peace forever. Everywhere. No hunger. No poverty. And throw in no more disease either. So nobody actually dies any more. But should babies still be born? Or calves, lambs, ponies? Because it'll fill up pretty damn quick. And when it's really full, full to bursting, you can forget about peace. And about nobody going hungry any more. And about there being no poverty. Ideals always trip over each other's feet. Or so it seems. That's the problem with ideals.

Progress. Is there any sign of progress? If you're talking about 'civilisation', for instance? Has the world become more civilised through the course of time? In a technical sense, yes, of course. A life without an alphabet, without a fridge, a life without

a telephone, a life without a computer or Internet, can we even still imagine it? Okay, maybe we can still imagine it, but as a sort of nightmare. On the other hand: haven't all these technological innovations led to ever larger-scale slaughters, even more efficient forms of genocide? Yes, as a matter of fact they have. And yet we still call that 'progress'. Most people call that 'progress' and I really don't long for the Middle Ages.

The way everyone feels they've got to have an opinion about everything. Not that I'm against it as such. I do indeed think everyone should to have an opinion about everything. But I also think it's inconceivably presumptuous, arrogant and dumb. Because we aren't able to have an opinion about a lot of things, for the simple reason that we know too little about them, can only know too little about them. Because we simply don't know all the facts.

The formulas applied, the secret deals that have been done. For an awful lot of things, we are simply too dumb.

We should be able to admit that, shouldn't we? We are kept dumb about a lot of things. Yes, sure I'm against that. But I don't know what those things are. And that's true of all people: we don't know what we don't know. In that respect a seal is better off: it doesn't even know that it doesn't know. We people don't know what we don't know. And so we say, for instance, 'I'm against the clubbing of seals.'

I say that as well, because I am against the clubbing of seals.

And I say other things too and I know what I'm saying but that doesn't necessarily mean I really know what I'm saying. Maybe a seal is absolutely ecstatic that it doesn't have to go on being a stupid seal anymore that doesn't know that it doesn't

know. Or do you need to know to be happy? Well, I don't believe that. I think I'm able to see if a seal is happy or not. But with flowers or trees, on the contrary, I don't. I've never seen a sad tulip or a cheery willow. I have occasionally thought: 'God, that tulip seems to be standing in an awful draught, or that willow must be chilled to the bone.' But I was thinking more of myself than of the tulip or the willow.

So I identify myself with the tulip, the willow, the seal. I identify myself with everything. That sounds beautiful, that sounds 'full of empathy' but it also testifies to a great degree of egotism. I project my ego on to everything and everyone. I spread out my own experiences, my own desires, like an enormous network, an enormous grid, covering the whole world, covering everything and everyone, seals, tulips and willows, and then I colour in the spaces in

between. But don't I then create the world in my own image? I play God. And I don't want to be that sort of person. They aren't idealists, that sort of person? They are fanatics, fundamentalists, Nazis. But do I then truly have no ideals? Sure I have ideals. You can't live without ideals is what I wanted to say, but I don't believe that's true. Very many people can live pretty well without ideals. They live with a dream, for instance. Winning the first prize in the lottery maybe, or an Olympic medal. But all those people with all those sorts of dreams will always insist that along with those dreams they do have ideals too, they strive for a 'better world' and they think about the way it should look and say they're even prepared to make the necessary sacrifices to achieve it. You will never hear someone say: 'I haven't got any ideals, I think things are fine the way they are, as long as I win the first prize.' The

possession of ideals is apparently a condition for 'belonging'.

Is it my ideal then, or at least my dream, to dare to say for once: 'Sorry folks, I don't have any ideals, I think things are fine the way they are and even if I didn't think they're fine the way they are, there's nothing we can do about it, leave it, everything you try to do will only make things worse?' No. First of all I don't think things are 'fine the way they are' at all and second: I definitely think there's something we can do. I just don't actually know what and how. So, is my ideal to portray that very precisely for once, that 'what and how needed to create a better world?' And do I believe in that ideal? No. I'll never be able to. I'm too dumb. We're all too dumb. After all, we don't even know what we don't know. Some people think they do know. They're dangerous. You shouldn't trust them. But the fact that almost

everyone is busy with this is, at the same time, a comfort. 'Save the seals, don't leave the willow out in the cold, keep the tulip wrapped up safe from draughts.' Beautiful, but just as many shoots of war too. Sadly.

Or have I now really implied that 'every person needs ideals in order to survive, as they need air and food too in order to survive, but they will ultimately die?' Maybe so. But that's why I can also ask this question, can't I: 'And was that life meaningless then?'

Answer me premiered at Alkantara Festival
in Lissabon on the 7th of June 2010
Dutch premiere: 12th of September 2010,
Internationale Keuze van de Rotterdamse
Schouwburg

Answer me is a play by Gilles Biesheuvel, Luz de
Camara, Julian Maiwald, Gerardjan Rijnders, René
Rood, Manja Topper en Conçalo Waddington

www.doodpaard.nl

Gerardjan Rijnders (1949) wrote his first play *Dollie of avocado's bij de lunch* (Dollie or Avacodos with Lunch) when, unable to obtain funding for a staging of Thomas Bernard's *The Hunting Party*, he felt bound to write something himself for the group of five actors.

Thereafter, he continued to write.

Rijnders is a director and playwright.

Plays by Rijnders have been translated into various languages.

www.gerardjanrijnders.nl