BENJAMIN BRITTEN
The Red Cockatoo
The Holy Sonnets of John Donne
and other songs
IAN BOSTRIDGE
GRAHAM JOHNSON
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BENJAMIN BRITTEN  (1913–1976)

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IAN BOSTRIDGE tenor  GRAHAM JOHNSON piano
Realizations from Harmonia Sacra

Although Britten had shown continued enthusiasm for the music of Henry Purcell since the early 1940s (the first of his many realizations of Purcell’s ‘Divine Hymns’ and secular songs date from this period), it was not until the very end of his life that he turned to other composers whose works were represented among the pages of Playford’s Harmonia Sacra. (Britten and Pears had been the fortunate recipients of early editions of both volumes of Harmonia Sacra, which had been given to them in 1945 by Imogen Holst, another Purcell devotee, as a direct result of her hearing an early play-through of Britten’s Holy Sonnets of John Donne.) The three realizations on the present recording—two by Pelham Humfrey (‘Hymn to God the Father’ and ‘Lord! I have sinned’), and one by William Croft (‘A Hymn on Divine Musick’) were made in 1975 for Peter Pears and the harpist Osian Ellis, with whom Pears had formed a recital partnership after Britten, disabled through illness, was no longer able to play the piano in public. Several composers wrote for the tenor and harp combination, not least of whom was Britten who contributed a new canticle, The Death of Saint Narcissus, Op 89, and a new song-cycle, A Birthday Hansel, Op 92, as well as realizations of seventeenth-century songs and additional folk-song arrangements. For Humfrey’s ‘Hymn to God the Father’, Britten offered the alternative of the piano as the accompanying instrument instead of the harp. This effective—and practical—alternative also works very happily for the other Humfrey’s setting as well as the Croft.

The Holy Sonnets of John Donne

The Holy Sonnets of John Donne were completed on 19 August 1945, a few weeks after Britten’s return from Germany where he and Yehudi Menuhin had toured at the end of July. On 27 July they visited Belsen to give a pair of concerts to the liberated survivors; it was a harrowing experience and one which undoubtedly coloured the sequence of nine settings of Donne’s profound religious meditations, all of which are concerned with the related themes of death and repentance. Although the cycle was composed in the emotional aftermath of the visit, Britten had been reading Donne’s poetry at least two years earlier: Pears had written to Elizabeth Mayer in February 1943, ‘What have you been reading lately? Ben and I have been re-reading Donne lately—those wonderful holy sonnets, and especially the Hymn to God the Father’. But even while still living in the United States, Britten had made an incomplete sketch for voice and piano of Donne’s ‘Stay, O Sweet, and do not rise’, which probably dates from 1941.

When he chose to set Donne in the wake of the enormous success of Peter Grimes in 1945, Britten was continuing the remarkable sequence of works which had commenced two years earlier with the Serenade, Op 31, in which the setting of his native language is made with an assurance that is derived from a complete understanding of the subtleties of Purcell’s attitude to prosody, an appreciation heightened by Britten’s practice of making realizations of Purcell’s vocal music for himself and Pears. While Purcell’s ‘Divine Hymns’ are undoubtedly the strongest influence on the Donne settings (Pears and Britten gave the first performance of the cycle in the context of a Purcell anniversary concert at the Wigmore Hall in November 1945), the close relationship between vocal line and accompaniment also suggests an understanding of Wolf’s fluent techniques, while Britten’s habit of hitting upon a binding ur-motif for a song is redolent of his beloved Schubert.

The opening pair of sonnets articulates a conflict between B minor and C minor which is explored through
the tonal scheme of the entire sequence of nine settings, five of which are centred on B (and its diatonic relatives) and four on C (and its relatives). Whereas Nos 6 (‘Since she whom I loved’) and 7 (‘At the round earth’s imagined corners’) emphasize the tension between these two tonal circuits at its most acute, in the final pair of sonnets Britten shows how such opposition can be integrated. Both ‘Oh my blacke Soule!’ (No 1) and ‘Batter my heart’ (No 2) respond to Donne’s striking verbal patterns with hammering rhythms in the accompaniment, a death knell in No 1 and a manic moto perpetuo in No 2. The basic semitonal relationship of the cycle is spelled out in the falling seconds which characterize No 3 (‘O might those sighes and teares’). No 4 (‘Oh, to vex me’) is another moto perpetuo, with an expressive chromatic melisma at ‘when I shake with feare’. ‘What if this present’ (No 5) has an affinity with the contrapuntal invention of the ‘Lyke-Wake Dirge’ from the Serenade, particularly in its incorporation of Baroque-inspired ornamentation. The lyrical warmth of ‘Since she whom I loved’ (No 6), notable for its consonant harmonies, is redolent of ‘Being Beauteous’ or ‘Départ’ from Les Illuminations, while the fanfare textures of the succeeding sonnet, ‘At the round earth’s imagined corners’, in a triumphant D major, recall the Purcellian / Handelian inspiration from which On this Island, Op 11, sets out. ‘Thou hast made me’ (No 8) is a restless, agitated setting (E flat minor), in complete contrast to the valedictory ‘Death, be not proud’. The latter (in B major) is constructed over a five-bar ground bass, a direct inspiration from Purcell, in which the piano, as in the last of the Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo of 1940, plays the dominant role. It is a song that strikes a finely judged balance between the simple and the complex.

In the years since Britten’s death in 1976, a number of unpublished and unperformed songs have come to light. Nearly all of these are connected with specific song-cycles (with piano, or orchestra) and were rejected by the composer in the final stages of composition. For example, although Britten’s Hardy cycle, Winter Words, Op 52, comprises eight masterly songs, he did in fact compose two further settings, subsequently rejected—‘The Children and Sir Nameless’ and ‘If it’s ever Spring again’—while annotations in Britten’s volume of Hardy’s verse suggest that at an earlier stage in the work’s genesis the composer had considered a large number of possible texts. This process of refinement is typical of, and crucial to, the working methods of Britten’s compositional maturity. The songs presented on the remainder of the present recording, however, are not derived from pre-existing cycles but are isolated examples of Britten’s song-writing, or, in two cases, songs from potential cycles that never achieved fulfilment, or examples from Britten’s substantial corpus of incidental music for the theatre.

Evening, Morning, Night
The trio of songs ‘Evening, Morning, Night’, for voice and harp or piano, is taken from incidental music for Ronald Duncan’s masque and anti-masque This Way to the Tomb, first performed on 11 October 1945 at the Mercury Theatre, London, by the Pilgrim Players directed by E Martin Browne. Britten’s score included solo songs, an a cappella chorus, and a boogie-woogie for voices, piano duet and percussion. The play’s subject was the Temptation of the St Antony, which was treated seriously in the masque and subsequently parodied in the anti-masque. Robert Speaight took the role of Father Antony, and Eric Shilling played one of three novicuates, the poet Julian, whose three songs appeared in the course of the masque.
Duncan had known Britten since the mid-1930s when they collaborated on a *Pacifist March* (1937) for the Peace Pledge Union. In 1944 he invited the composer to write the incidental music for his new play, provisionally entitled ‘The Tomb of St Antony’, of which only the masque was at that time finished. Although Britten was already fully immersed in the composition of *Peter Grimes*, he agreed to Duncan’s request, writing to the playwright on 7 April 1944 from The Old Mill, Snape:

> What a one you are! Here I am up to my eyes in opera and spiritual crises & you expect me to drop everything and write you two songs [‘Evening’ and ‘Morning’]. Still, maybe I’ll have a shot (but no promises), if you’d be so gracious as to let me know what kind of background, accompaniment, there’ll be—full orch.? barrel-organ?? What kind of voice, high, low?—it makes a difference, you know. But, seriously I wish you’d give me more notice—because I’ve been turning everything down for the last six months, BBC, Films (including Shaw’s Caesar & Cleopatra, which I admit gave me pleasure to do!)

By November that year Duncan had completed his anti-masque and Britten provided further incidental music, including Julian’s final song, ‘Night’. ‘Evening’ is another fine example of Britten’s haunting nocturnal music, a setting characterized by a major/minor mode ambivalence. ‘Morning’, in a bright G major, is a relatively straightforward song. ‘Night’, as befits a song composed in the same month as the celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of Purcell’s death, is cast over a four-bar ground bass in B minor which turns to the major on its fifth appearance at ‘Night is no more than my love who lies / She dreams of a dream lives, then dies’, except for the final minor chord (on ‘dies’).

**W H Auden settings**

Britten first encountered the poet Wystan Auden in July 1935 when both men were working for the GPO Film Unit, writing words and music for documentary films. *Coal Face* (1935), in which Britten set Auden’s lyric ‘O lurcher-loving collier, black as night’, was soon to be followed by the aborted *Negroes* (although it was later made in a revised format) and *Night Mail* (1936), the most celebrated of all the GPO documentaries from the 1930s. But it was not only in the film studio that these two prodigiously gifted youthful creators were to collaborate: they were to work together in the theatre (*The Ascent of F6*) and at the BBC (*Hadrian’s Wall*), and in the same year that *Night Mail* scored such a hit with cinema-goers, Auden compiled the text for Britten’s virtuoso orchestral song-cycle *Our Hunting Fathers*, Op 8.

A little over a month after the premiere of *Our Hunting Fathers* Britten purchased a copy of Auden’s new collection entitled—against the poet’s wishes—*Look, Stranger!* (for the American edition Auden changed the title to that which he preferred—*On this Island*). Britten noted in his diary entry for 3 November that the volume ‘has some splendid things in it. He has written two for me included in it. The poems Auden dedicated to Britten were *Night covers up the rigid land* and *Underneath the abject willow*, the latter of which Britten immediately set on 17/18 November as the second of his *Two Ballads* for two voices and piano. (The other ballad was ‘Mother Comfort’, to words by Montagu Slater, future librettist of *Peter Grimes*.) It was not until the following May, however, that Britten returned to *Look, Stranger!* when he set ‘Now the leaves are falling fast’ (27 May), while earlier that month he had composed his beautiful ‘Nocturne’, a setting of Auden’s ‘Now through night’s caressing grip’ from *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. Both these songs were destined for Britten’s cycle of five Auden settings, *On this*
Island, Op 11, first performed by Sophie Wyss (soprano) and the composer at a BBC contemporary music concert on 19 November 1937; the other songs from the cycle—‘Let the florid music praise’, ‘Seascape’, and the cabaret-like ‘As it is plenty’—were all composed in October. On this Island was published by Boosey & Hawkes (Winthrop Rodgers edition) in 1938 as ‘Vol 1’, an indication that it was Britten’s intention to follow these Auden songs with a second collection.

To this purpose there are three further Auden settings belonging to 1937, two of which are included in the present recording: the satirical To lie flat on the back with the knees flexed (26 October); and Night covers up the rigid land (27 October). While ‘Night covers up the rigid land’ only survives in draft form in Britten’s customary pencil (the manuscript was put to service as the wrapper for the draft of On this Island), the composer made a fair copy of ‘To lie flat on the back’ for Sophie Wyss and she may well have performed it. The first official performance of ‘To lie flat on the back’ was given by Neil Mackie (tenor) and John Blakely (piano) on 23 April 1985 as part of a BBC broadcast recital. ‘Night covers up the rigid land’, a beautiful nocturne, was first heard at the Wigmore Hall, London, on 22 November 1985, performed by Patricia Rozario and Graham Johnson.

A further Auden setting from Look, Stranger! dates from January 1938, when Britten composed Fish in the Unruffled Lakes while staying at Peasenhall in Suffolk. This song, unlike the others intended for the projected second volume of Auden settings, was approved for release by the composer and first published by Boosey & Hawkes in 1947. Although no information has emerged concerning its premiere, it was a song that Pears and Britten often included in their many recitals together.

The Red Cockatoo & other songs
Probably the earliest song from the collection published under the title The Red Cockatoo & other songs (Faber Music, 1994) is A Poison Tree, Britten’s first setting of a poem by William Blake, a poet to whom the composer was to return many times in future years (for example, ‘Elegy’ in the Serenade). It was composed in London on 2 March 1935, when Britten recorded in his diary, ‘Write a song (A Poison Tree of W Blake) in morning—but it’s not much good—more an exercise than anything. This occupies me all the morning—a short walk before lunch’. It is presumably because of Britten’s view of the song that it remained unpublished and unperformed in his lifetime; it received its first performance at the Wigmore Hall on 22 November 1986, by Henry Herford and Ian Brown. Blake’s ‘A Poison Tree’ was a poem to which Britten returned exactly thirteen years later when composing his final (and major) Blake settings, the Songs and Proverbs of William Blake, Op 74, for Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Like the later setting, the 1935 ‘Poison Tree’ was written for the baritone voice.

When you’re feeling like expressing your affection (1935/6) may be linked to a vague memory of the late Hedli Anderson’s, the singer for whom Britten and Auden composed their cabaret songs in 1937–1939. In an 1980 interview she recalled her first meeting with Britten: ‘… as far as I can remember, I think it was to do with a film, Auden, GPO, I think … and I was asked to sing a song that Benjamin had written for them and that’s how I met him … It was something very small I had to do and films … were very strange to me.’ No direct evidence can be found to link the recollection with the song, but it seems possible that this is the piece that Anderson remembered. Although Britten’s manuscript gives no indication of authorship and no manuscript in Auden’s hand exists, the Auden scholar Edward Mendelson
believes Auden to be a likely author of the song’s witty text. Moreover, the chronology of Anderson’s memory coincides with Auden’s six-months’ residency at John Grierson’s GPO Film Unit and Britten’s employment there (1935/6). The catchy character of the song, marked ‘Vivace’, in F, with harmony coloured by an unstable major/minor third, is not unlike the later specifically designated cabaret songs known to be from the Britten-Auden stable, even if ‘When you’re feeling’ is much less sophisticated or pungent than, say, ‘O tell me the truth about love’ or ‘Funeral Blues’. The song amusingly extols the virtues of the public telephone service and would probably have been intended for one of Grierson’s many publicity films. Indeed, Professor Mendelson is surely correct in suggesting that the song might have belonged to a sketch for a film ‘not unlike the brief GPO publicity film The Fairy of the Phone’. The latter, directed in 1936 by William Coldstream with music by Walter Leigh, included a dozen female telephone operators singing at their switchboards: ‘Just telephone, and we will put you through.’ The first performance of ‘When you’re feeling like expressing your affection’ was given by Lucy Shelton and Ian Brown on 15 June 1992, at Blythburgh Church, Suffolk, as part if the forty-fifth Aldeburgh Festival.

Britten’s setting of Peter Burra’s poem Not even summer yet, was composed on 9 October 1937 (on the same date Britten also set Auden’s ‘As it is plenty’) in response to a request from Julie Behrend; Britten lunched with her on 28 July that year, noting in his diary that she ‘has written me appealing & sentimental letters about setting a charming little poem of Peter Burra’s’. Britten had first met Burra (1909–1937)—who had been at Lancing College with Peter Pears—in Barcelona at the 1936 ISCM Festival, about which Burra wrote as a music critic for The Times. Burra was a most gifted and perceptive writer not only on music, but on art and literature also. While at Oxford he edited a quarterly undergraduate periodical, Farrago, in which ‘Not even summer yet’ appeared in December 1930 under the title ‘For a Song’ and with an attribution to ‘James Salkeld’, Burra’s middle names; and his essay ‘The Novels of E M Forster’ (1934) was widely admired, no less so than by Forster himself.

It was Burra’s tragic early death in an aeroplane accident in April 1937 that brought Britten and Pears into a closer relationship. Although Britten and Pears knew each other slightly at this period, it was only while sorting out Burra’s effects that their relationship blossomed. Britten wrote in his diary on the day of Burra’s death (27 April):

Go to bed feeling desperate as I’ve just heard that dear old Peter Burra has been killed in an Air smash near Reading—flying with one of his ‘tough’ friends. He was a darling of the 1st rank, & and in the short year & a bit that I’ve known him he has been very close & dear to me. A first rate brain, that was at the moment in great difficulties—tho’ this is far too terrible a solution for them. Nothing has leaked out yet how it happened. This is a bloody world, & nothing one can do can stop this fatal rot. There is Franco in Spain blowing thousands of innocent Basque & Castillians to bits. I’m glad Peter is out of all that—he felt it so terribly.

Burra’s twin sister, the singer Nell Moody, recalled the circumstances of the song’s composition:

After he was killed a mutual friend Julie Behrend (whose parents owned the cottage at Bucklebury where Pears was living with Peter at the time) suggested that Ben should write the song for me sing. I sang it first with Gordon Thorne accompanying at a
concert in memory of Peter. I was to do it again at a Wigmore Hall recital with Norman Franklin; in fact the concert was fixed just before Peter died. But I was too emotionally upset and cancelled.

‘Not even summer yet’ was revived by Neil Mackie and Iain Burnside at the Wigmore Hall on 22 November 1983. Britten and Lennox Berkeley, who had also been in Barcelona in 1936, jointly inscribed their orchestral suite Mont Juic, based on Catalan folk tunes heard by them while in Spain, ‘in memory of Peter Burra’.

The Red Cockatoo was first performed by Lucy Shelton and Ian Brown on 17 June 1991 at Snape Maltings Concert Hall, Suffolk, as part of the forty-fourth Aldeburgh Festival. It had been composed over forty years earlier, on 24 January 1938, while Britten was lodging with his sister Beth’s future parents-in-law at Peasenhall in Suffolk. He wrote in his diary: ‘Do a certain amount of work. Clearing up—writing a little music (Po-Chu-i).’ Although the setting appears to be unconnected to any larger scheme, this brief song demonstrates an early interest in Arthur Waley’s translations of Chinese poetry, perhaps influenced by Mahler’s settings of Bethge’s Die chinesische Flöte in Das Lied von der Erde, a work Britten much admired. Almost twenty years later, Waley’s translations were to provide Britten with the texts for his tenor and guitar cycle Songs from the Chinese, Op 58.

The pair of Beddoes songs, Wild with passion and If thou wilt ease (entitled by the poet ‘Song, on the water’ and ‘Dirge for Wolfram’ respectively), were composed in April 1942 (‘If thou wilt ease’ on the 4th) during Britten’s and Pears’s Atlantic crossing on the Swedish cargo ship, the MS Axel Johnson. During the journey Britten planned Peter Grimes, finished off the Hymn to St Cecilia, Op 27, and composed A Ceremony of Carols, Op 28, finding the texts for the carols in The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems, edited by Gerald Bullet, an anthology of poetry bought on 31 March in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the Axel Johnson made its last stop before attempting the dangerous Atlantic crossing in convoy. The same volume also included Beddoes’ poems as set by Britten, the texts of which are occasionally at variance with more authoritative editions. ‘If thou wilt ease thine heart’ must claim our attention as it contains early, tiny examples of simple heterophony in Britten’s music, a technique that Britten had first encountered through Balinese music (he had recorded two-piano transcriptions of Balinese music with the composer and ethnomusicologist Colin McPhee in 1941, the year prior to the song’s composition) and which he was more fully to embrace in the 1960s.

Although Britten appears never to have pursued the idea of a Beddoes cycle, it is interesting to note that Pears may have wished to encourage the composer in such a project: in March 1944 he gave Britten a handsome, scholarly edition of Beddoes’ complete verse, edited by H W Donner. (Annotations in the back flyleaf of this volume suggest that Britten was considering the possibility of including Beddoes’ poems in the Nocturne, Op 60, and the uncomposed ‘Sea Symphony’ (c1974/5).) Lucy Shelton and Ian Brown gave the first performance of the Beddoes songs on 15 June 1992, at Blythburgh Church, Suffolk, as part of the forty-fifth Aldeburgh Festival.

Britten left an unfinished attempt at a setting of Louis MacNeice’s Cradle Song for Eleanor in the United States when he left in 1942. On his return to England he resumed his friendship with MacNeice with whom he had collaborated on two Group Theatre productions in the 1930s. The association was further strengthened in 1942 by MacNeice’s marriage to Hedli Anderson, for whom Britten and Auden composed their cabaret songs. In a letter to an American friend in September of that year Britten remarked: ‘I’m doing separate vocal works with
Louis MacNeice, whom we see a great deal of.’ Britten’s completed setting of ‘Sleep, my darling, sleep’ probably dates from the autumn of 1942, when Britten and MacNeice also collaborated on a propaganda radio series entitled Britain to America. It may well have been intended for Hedli Anderson, who by no means restricted herself to cabaret repertoire; however, no information about performances by Anderson or anyone else has come to light. ‘Cradle Song’ was performed—presumably for the first time—by Lucy Shelton and Ian Brown on 15 June 1992, at Blythburgh Church, Suffolk, as part of the forty-fifth Aldeburgh Festival.

Little under a month after the premiere of This Way to the Tomb and during their collaboration on The Rape of Lucretia, Ronald Duncan provided the text for Britten’s Birthday Song for Erwin, a pièce d’occasion written to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of the Austrian-born musician Erwin Stein (1885–1958) on 7 November 1945. Stein, who had been a pupil of Schoenberg, had first encountered Britten in 1934 when the composer visited Vienna in the hopes of meeting Alban Berg; Berg, unfortunately, was away from the city at that time, and Britten met with Stein instead, then employed as an editor at Berg’s publishers (Universal Edition), to whom Britten showed a number of his recent compositions. After the Anschluss in 1938 Stein fled from his homeland and moved to London where he worked as an editor at Boosey & Hawkes (Britten’s publishers since 1935). He soon became one of Britten’s closest friends and advisers. The celebratory song was first performed by Pears and Britten at Stein’s birthday party, an occasion described by the young violinist Winifred Roberts in a letter to her teacher, Antonio Broa:

Mr Stein had his 61st [recte: 60th] birthday this week, & we had a jolly party with Ben, Peter & Ronnie Duncan. Ben & Peter sang, & Marion [Stein’s daughter] & I played a Schubert piano duet, & a Mozart violin & piano sonata, & Ben, Peter & I played Mozart’s Symphonia Concertante (Ben playing the viola). Ronnie Duncan wrote a greetings poem in honour of Mr Stein. Ben set it, & Peter sang it. I also heard one of Ben’s new settings of Donne’s Holy Sonnets.

The manuscript of the song was given to Stein in 1945. It remained unheard and unknown until discovered among Stein’s papers by his daughter Marion Thorpe in 1986, along with another important Britten manuscript, the rejected setting of Tennyson’s ‘Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white’, intended for the Serenade. The song’s Lydian-inflected A major (an echt Britten touch) was undoubtedly inspired by Duncan’s opening line, ‘See how the sun strikes the bronze gong of the earth’, and has an affinity with Britten’s Young Apollo (1939), in the same sun-drenched tonality, and his last opera Death in Venice (1973).

After 1945, ‘Birthday Song for Erwin’ was not heard again until 1988, when it received its first public performance on the seventy-fifth anniversary of Britten’s birth (22 November) performed by Christopher Hobkirk and Rosalind Jones at the Royal College of Music, London.

The final song, Goethe’s Um Mitternacht, was probably written in 1959/60. In 1958 Britten had composed his Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente, Op 61, which he dedicated to Prince Ludwig of Hesse and the Rhine on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday. Perhaps to encourage the composer in his setting of German, Prince Ludwig gave Britten an edition, printed in 1959, of Goethe’s complete poetry. Over twenty poems in the volume have been marked by the composer in pencil, including ‘Um Mitternacht’, and this evidence suggests that Britten may have
been considering a larger Goethe-based piece. ‘Um Mitternacht’, however, is the only survivor from the project. The song’s subject matter is reflected by the oscillating figure in the piano’s right hand and the twelve tolling bell-like chords in its lower register, each one rooted on a different pitch of the chromatic scale and divided equally among Goethe’s three stanzas. It is yet another fine example of Britten’s night music and very much in keeping with his sharply focused nocturnal preoccupations during the period around the composition of the orchestral song-cycle Nocturne and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The first performance of ‘Um Mitternacht’ was given by Lucy Shelton and Ian Brown on 15 June 1992, at Blythburgh Church, Suffolk, as part of the forty-fifth Aldeburgh Festival.

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Sources:


Ronald Duncan, This Way to the Tomb: A Masque and Anti-Masque (London: Faber and Faber, 1946)


1 Lord! I have sinned, and the black number swells to such a dismal Sum, that should my stony heart, and Eyes, and this whole sinful Trunk a Flood become, and run to Tears, their Drops could not suffice to count my score, much less to pay; but thou, my God, hast blood in store, and art the Patron of the Poor. Yet since Balsom of thy Blood, although it can, will do no good, unless the Wounds be cleans’d with Tears, before thou, in whose sweet, but pensive Face, Laughter could never steal a Place. Teach but my Heart and Eyes to melt away, and then one drop, one drop of Balsom will suffice.

DR JEREMIAH TAYLOR, set by Mr Pelham Humfrey

2 Hymn to God the Father
Wilt thou forgive that Sin, where I began, which was my Sin tho’ it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that Sin, through which I run, and do run still, tho’ still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done, for I have more.
Wilt thou forgive that Sin, by which I’ve won others to sin, and made my Sin their dore?
Wilt thou forgive that Sin, which I did shun a year or two, yet wallow’d in a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done, for I have more.
I have a Sin of Fear, that when I’ve spun my last Thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thyself that at my Death, thy Sun shall shine, as he shines now and heretofore,
And having done that, thou hast done. I fear no more.

JOHN DONNE (1572–1631), set by Mr Pelham Humfrey

3 A Hymn on Divine Musick
What art thou? From what causes dost thou spring? Oh! Musick thou Divine Mysterious thing? Let me, let me but know, and knowing give me Voice to sing? Art thou the warmth in Spring, that Zephire breathes? Painting the Meads, and whistling through the leaves. The happy, happy Season that all grief exiles, When God is Pleas’d and the Creation Smiles? Or art thou Love, that mind to mind imparts, the endless concord of agreeing hearts? Or art thou Friendship, yet a nobler Flame, that can a dearer way make Souls the same? Or art thou rather which do all transcend, the Centre which at last the Blest ascend, the seat where Hallelujahs never end; Corporeal Eyes won’t let us clearly see, but either thou art Heav’n, or Heav’n is thee.

Set by MR WILLIAM CROFTS

4 Evening
The red fox, the sun, tears the throat of the evening; makes the light of the day bleed into the ocean.
The laced grace of gulls lift up from the corn fields; fly across the sunset, scarlet their silhouette.
The old owl, the moon, drifts from its loose thatch of clouds, throws an ivory glance on an enamelled sea.
Eyes of mice, the stars, from the privacy of light peep into the darkness with the temerity of night.

RONALD DUNCAN (1914–1982)

5 Morning
Morning is only
A heron rising
With great wings
Lifting day into the sky.
Morning is only
The white plumes of smoke
As the velvet snake
Night leaves the green valley.
Morning is only
A scarlet stallion
Jumping the ocean,
Its mane aflame on the sea.
Morning is only
Women bent at the well
Lifting their pails full
Of their hearts, too heavy.

RONALD DUNCAN (1914–1982)

6 Night
Night is no more than a cat which creeps to the saucer of light, laps, then sleep.
Night in no more than the place waves reach with their hands of surf seeking the beach.
Night is no more than the hounds of fear with bloody jowl
and bark bullying the year.
Night is no more than my love who lies
She dreams of a dream lives, then dies.
RONALD DUNCAN (1914–1982)
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Night covers up the rigid land
And Ocean’s quaking moor,
And shadows with a tolerant hand
The ugly and the poor.
The wounded pride for which I weep
You cannot staunch, nor I
Control the moments of your sleep,
Nor hear the name you cry,
Whose life is lucky in your eyes,
And precious is the bed.
As to his utter fancy lies
The dark carressive head.
For each love to its aim is true,
And all kinds seek their own;
You love your life and I love you,
So I must lie alone.
O hurry to the fêted spot of your deliberate fall;
For now my dream of you cannot
Refer to you at all.
W H AUDEN (1907–1973)

Fish in the unruffled lakes
The swarming colours wear,
Swans in the winter air
A white perfection have,
And the great lion walks
Through his innocent grove;
Lion, fish, and swan
Act, and are gone
Upon Time’s toppling wave.
We, till shadowed days are done,
We must weep and sing
Duty’s conscious wrong,
The Devil in the clock,
The Goodness carefully worn
For atonement or for luck;
We must lose our loves,
On each beast and bird that moves
Turn an envious look.
Sighs for folly said and done
Twist our narrow days;
But I must bless, I must praise
That you, my swan, who have
All gifts that to the swan
Impulsive Nature gave,
The majesty and pride,
Last night should add
Your voluntary love.
W H AUDEN (1907–1973)

To lie flat on the back with the knees flexed
And sunshine on the soft receptive belly,
Or face down, the insolent spine relaxed,
Is good; and good to see them passing by
Below on the white side-walk in the heat,
The dog, the lady with parcels, and the boy:
There is the casual life outside the heart.
Yes, we are out of sight and earshot here.
Are you aware what weapon you are loading,
To what that teasing talk is quietly leading?
Our pulses count but do not judge the hour.
Who you are with, from whom you turn away,
At whom you dare not look?
Do you know why?
W H AUDEN (1907–1973)

A Poison Tree
I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
I water’d it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.
And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine.
And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole,
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

WILLIAM BLAKE (1757–1827)

When you're feeling like expressing your affection
For someone night and day,
Take up the 'phone and ask for your connection,
We'll give it right away.
Eve or Adam, anyone you ask for
We'll find somehow.
Sir or Madam, if you get a taste for
Paris, Berlin, Moscow,
Enter any telephone kiosk O,
Have your say,
Press button A,
Here's your number now.

W H AUDEN (1907–1973)

Not even summer yet
Can make me quite forget
That still most blessed thing,
The early spring.
I watch'd the red-tipp'd trees
Burst into greenery;
Saw the blossom come
Like sea dissolved in foam.
But in the lover's ways,
The summer of his days
Is come from such a spring
As Poets cannot sing!

PETER BURRA (1909–1937)

The Red Cockatoo
Sent as a present from Annam
A red cockatoo.
Colour'd like the peach tree blossom,
Speaking with the speech of men.
And they did to it what is always done
To the learned and eloquent.
They took a cage with stout bars
And shut it up inside.

ARTHUR WALEY (1889–1966) after the Chinese of Po Chü-i, AD 820

Wild with passion (Song, on the water)
Wild with passion, sorrow beladen,
Bend the thought of thy stormy soul
On its home, on its heaven, the lovd maiden,
And peace shall come at her eyes' control.
Even so, night's starry rest possesses
With its gentle spirit these tamed waters,
And bids the wave with weedy tresses
Embower the ocean's pavement stilly
Where the seagirls lie, the mermaid-daughters,
Whose eyes, not born to weep,
More palely-lidded sleep
Than in our fields the lily;
And sighing in their rest
More sweet than is their breath;
And quiet as its death
Upon a lady's breast.

THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES (1803–1849)

If thou wilt ease thine heart (Dirge for Wolfram)
If thou wilt ease thine heart
Of love and all its smart,
Then sleep, dear, sleep;
And not a sorrow
Hang any tear on your eyelashes;
Lie still and deep,
Sad soul, until the seawave washes
The rim o' th' sun tomorrow,
In eastern sky.
But wilt thou cure thine heart
Of love and all its art,
Then die, dear, die;
’Tis deeper, sweeter,
Than on a rose bank to lie dreaming
With folded eye;
And then alone, amid the beaming
Of love’s stars, thou’lt meet her
In eastern sky.
THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES (1803–1849)

Cradle Song for Eleanor
(Sleep, my darling, sleep)
For copyright reasons we are unable to print the words of this song.

Birthday Song for Erwin
See how the sun
Strikes the bronze gong of earth,
Making the linnet lift
Like sparks of sound
Rising to the echo!
For on this day a man was born.
Music his element,
And friendship his echo.
RONALD DUNCAN (1914–1982)

Um Mitternacht
At midnight I would go, hardly willingly,
a very small boy, by that graveyard,
to father the priest’s house; star upon star,
bow beautifully they all shine;
at midnight.

When later in life I must go
to my darling because she draws me,
star and Northern light above me in competition,
as I go I nourish future happiness;
at midnight.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE (1749-1832)

The Holy Sonnets of John Donne

Oh my blacke Soule!
now thou art summoned
By sickness, death’s herald, and champion;
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled,
Or like a thiefe, which till death’s doome be read,
Wisheth himselfe deliver’d from prison;
But damn’d and hal’d to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.
Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
Oh make thyselfe with holy mourning blace,
And red with blushing as thou art with sinne;
Or wash thee in Christ’s blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white.

Batter my heart
three person’d God; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o’erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurpt tone, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend
But is captiv’d, and proves weeke or untrue.  
Yet dearely I love you and would be loved faine,  
But am betroth’d unto your enemie:  
Divorce mee, untie, or breake that knot againe,  
Take mee to you, imprison mee,  
For I except you enthral mee, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

O might those sighes and teares returne againe into my  
breast and eyes, which I have spent,  
That I might in this holy discontent  
Moure with some fruit, as I have mourn’d in vaine;  
In mine Idolatry what show’rs of rain  
Mine eyes did waste?  
What griefs my heart did rent?  
That sufferance was my sinne; now I repent  ’Cause I did suffer, I must suffer paine.  
Th’ hydroptique drunkard, and night scouting theife,  
The itchy lecher and self tickling proud  
Have the remembrance of past joyes for reliefe of coming ills.  
To poore me is allow’d  
No ease; for, long, yet vehement griefe hath been  
Th’ effect and cause, the punishment and sinne.

Oh, to vex me, contraryes meet in one:  
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott  
A constant habit; that when I would not  
I change in vowes, and in devotione.  
As humorous is my contritione as my profane  
Love and as soone forgott:  
As riddlingly distemper’d, cold and hott,  
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.  
I durst not view Heav’n yesterday; and today  
In prayers, and flatt’ring speaches I court God:  
Tomorrow I quake with true feare of his rod.  
So my devout fits come and go away,  
Like a fantastique Ague: save that here  
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.

What if this present were the world’s last night?  
Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,  
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell  
Whether that countenance can thee affright,  
Teares in his eyes quench the amazing light,  
Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc’d head fell.  
And can that tongue adjudge thee into hell,  
Which pray’d forgivenesse for his foes fierce spight?  
No, no; but as in my idolatrie  
I said to all my profane mistresses,  
Beauty, of pity, foulness onely is  
A sign of rigour: so I say to thee,  
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign’d,  
This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde.

Since she whom I loved hath payd her last debt  
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,  
And her Soule early into Heaven ravished,  
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.  
Here the admiring her my mind did whett  
To seeke thee God; so streams do shew their head;  
But though I have found thee and thou my thirst hast fed,  
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett,  
But why should I begg more love, when as thou  
Dost wooe my soul for hers: off’ring all thine:  
And dost not only feare lest I allow  
My love to Saints and Angels things divine,  
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt  
Least the world, Fleshe, yea, Devill putt thee out.

At the round earth’s imagined corners, blow  
Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise  
From death, you numberless infinities  
Of soules, and to your scatter’d bodies goe,  
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o’erthrow,  
All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,  
Despaire, law, chance hath slaine, and you whose eyes  
Shall behold God and never taste death’s woe.  
But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne aspace,  
For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,  ’Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,  
When we are there, here on this lowly ground,  
Teach me how to repent; for that’s as good  
As if thou hadst seal’d my pardon, with thy blood.
Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dim eyes anyway,
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sinne in it, which t’wards Hell doth weigh;
Onely thou art above, and when t’wards thee
By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine;
Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou think’st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sickness dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well
And better than thy stroake; why swell’st thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

JOHN DONNE (1572–1631)