

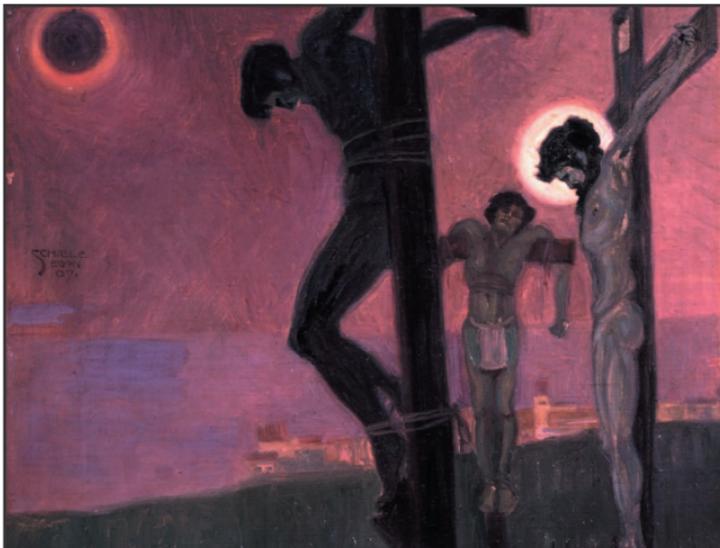
BRITTEN

Canticles I–V

The Heart of the Matter

Philip Langridge • Stuart Bedford

Jean Rigby • Derek Lee Ragin • Gerald Finley • Dame Judi Dench



Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Canticles I–V · The Heart of the Matter

The term ‘canticle’ usually refers to a hymn in scripture or sometimes to certain psalms, but Benjamin Britten gave it a new meaning when he chose it as the title of a setting of a poem by the seventeenth-century Royalist poet Francis Quarles, *My Beloved is Mine*, that he composed for high voice and piano in the first half of September 1947. Eventually he would write five Canticles, each for a slightly different instrumentation, though all of them feature the tenor voice and all were written with Peter Pears in mind. Britten saw them as a new form, though one with roots in the *Divine Hymns* of Purcell. Each is in effect a miniature cantata with several constituent movements that also reflect elements of song-cycle, and each presents a religious (though not necessary scriptural) text in a semi-dramatic context.

Probably, however, he chose ‘Canticle’ as the title of *My Beloved is Mine* because Quarles’s words are an impassioned reformulation of words from the *Song of Solomon*, itself sometimes known as a Canticle in the Anglican Church. *Canticle I* was written for a memorial concert for the tenth anniversary of the death of Dick Sheppard (1880-1937), the Christian minister and broadcaster, pacifist and founder of the Peace Pledge Union. Britten and Peter Pears gave the first performance at this concert, at Central Hall, Westminster, on 1st November 1947. The setting divides into four spans or sections. The stream imagery of the poem’s first two stanzas is echoed in the flowing, barcarolle-like piano writing. There follows a short recitative that leads to a lively scherzo in canon, the canonic writing reinforcing the imagery of mutual dependency between the poet and the beloved. The final stanzas are treated as a warm, slow-moving epilogue, with a reminiscence of the work’s opening in the piano’s postlude.

Canticle II is a considerably more ambitious affair. Entitled *Abraham and Isaac*, it pits tenor and alto voices against one another in dramatic dialogue as it enacts the Biblical story, on a text taken from the Chester Miracle Play *Histories of Lot and Abraham*. Composed in January 1952, the work is dedicated to Kathleen Ferrier and Peter Pears, who gave the first performance that month in Nottingham, with Britten at the piano. Here the effect is almost of a miniature opera, with dramatic gestures and strongly-formed characters. The Voice of God is represented as something above and beyond the individual by the device of having both singers deliver his words in unison. There is also a polarity of key, between the E flat of God and its opposite pole, A major, for Abraham and his obedience. The piano’s arpeggio figure, punctuating God’s initial summons, proves the source of most of the Canticle’s motivic shapes. After the climactic passage of Abraham’s resolve to do God’s will by slaying his son, with Isaac’s acquiescence in his fate, the impending sacrifice is suddenly arrested by the return of God’s E flat tonality, in which key the serene epilogue of the work takes place, with God and man reconciled. Nine years later Britten re-used material from this Canticle for his setting of Wilfred Owen’s bitter rewriting and reversal of the Abraham legend in the *War Requiem*.

Canticle III is usually known as *Still falls the Rain*, though the full title is in fact *Still falls the Rain – The Raids, 1940, Night and Dawn*. The text is a poem by Edith Sitwell which the composer especially admired and the work, scored for tenor, horn and piano, was composed in November 1954. On 28th January 1955 Peter Pears, Dennis Brain, and Britten gave the world première at the Wigmore Hall, London, at a memorial concert for Noel Mewton-Wood, the brilliant Australian

pianist and champion of new music who had recently committed suicide, and the *Canticle* is dedicated to his memory. The work shows strong affinities with the chamber opera *The Turn of the Screw*, which Britten had completed only a short time before. *Canticle III* is based on a theme that uses all twelve chromatic pitches (but not employed as a Schoenbergian twelve-note row) upon which the horn and piano enact six variations. The variations are separated by recitatives in which the tenor declaims the stanzas of Sitwell's poem, each opening with the words '*Still falls the rain*'. These culminate in a daring passage of *Sprechgesang* (speech-song, showing the influence of Schoenberg and Berg) when Sitwell quotes an anguished passage from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. After this, for the sixth and final variation, voice and horn are heard together for the first time in a coda that represents the voice of God, '*One who ... Was once a child who among beasts has lain*'.

Edith Sitwell was delighted with the *Canticle* and for the 1956 Aldeburgh Festival Britten devised a sequence of Edith Sitwell poems in which she could take part as speaker, some of the poems to be spoken and others sung. Into this he incorporated *Canticle III* and also in May 1956 wrote three new songs, two for tenor, horn and piano, and one without the horn. Under the title *The Heart of the Matter*, the programme was first performed in Aldeburgh parish Church on 21st June by Pears, Brain and Britten, with Edith Sitwell herself as the speaker. The three songs were not performed again in Britten's lifetime but were revived in 1983 by Sir Peter Pears, with a revised sequence of readings. The additional musical settings, a prologue and epilogue incorporating a motivic *Fanfare*, and the song '*We are the darkness in the heat of day*' are much simpler and less chromatic in content than the *Canticle*.

Some seventeen years passed before Britten returned to the *Canticle* form. *Canticle IV* sets T.S. Eliot's well-known poem *The Journey of the Magi* for

three voices, counter-tenor, tenor, and baritone, and piano, and was composed in January 1971. It is dedicated to its first singers, James Bowman, Peter Pears and John Shirley-Quirk, who with Britten gave the première at Snape Maltings Concert Hall on 26th June during the 1971 Aldeburgh Festival. The poem tells of the doubts and frustrations suffered by the three kings in search of the child Christ, as recalled by one of them years afterwards, in doubt as to the significance of their journey and what they had really seen. Here again, as in *Canticle II*, the different solo voices often blend into one to enact the part of the poem's narrator. The work is structured as a kind of rondo, and with exploration of the kind of heterophony, the various voices released from a common beat and metre, that Britten had begun exploring in his Church Parables. At the climax of the work the piano part quotes the plainchant melody *Magi videntes stellarum* (The wise men beholding the star), the antiphon before the *Magnificat* at first Vespers for the Feast of the Epiphany.

Britten's fifth and last *Canticle* takes another, much less familiar text from T.S. Eliot, whose poetry he found a powerful source of consolation in the illnesses of his last years. *Canticle V, The Death of Saint Narcissus*, was composed in July 1974 for Peter Pears and the harpist Osian Ellis, who gave the first performance at Schloss Elmau, Upper Bavaria, in January 1975. Britten had just undergone a serious heart operation: this was the first music he wrote on his recovery. He dedicated the work to the memory of William Plomer, the librettist of *Gloriana* and the Church Parables. '*The Death of Saint Narcissus*' is an early, allusive poem of Eliot's and had only just been published in a collection of his juvenilia. The Catholic Church recognizes two actual saints named Narcissus, one a fourth-century soldier and the other a third-century Bishop of Jerusalem, but the figure in Eliot's poem has elements of Saint Sebastian (martyred by having arrows shot into him) and the Narcissus of

pagan legend, trapped in self-absorption. The poem contains fairly explicit erotic and masochistic elements, which come to a catharsis in the final stanza. In common with most of the works of Britten's last years, the musical language of this setting is spare and economical, the vocal line elegantly expressive in the vein of *Death in Venice*, the major work written immediately before it. But it also falls to the voice to articulate the whole work as if along a single line, while the harp does not underpin

or direct the harmony so much as provide a range of abrupt and vivid dramatic gestures in consonance with the wide emotional range spanned. Formally speaking its single movement creates a pattern of exposition, development, episode and intensified recapitulation, this final section also becoming the terrifying climax of the whole work.

Malcolm MacDonald

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Philip Langridge

Philip Langridge was born in Kent and studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He is one of the world's most distinguished singers, whose musical and dramatic qualities ensure that he is in constant demand throughout Europe, the United States and Japan. In recognition of these qualities, he was made a Commander of the British Empire in the Queen's Birthday Honours of 1994. He has also received a number of other awards, including the prestigious Olivier Award for *Osud*, the Singer of the Year Award from the Royal Philharmonic Society and The Worshipful Company of Musicians' Santay Award. He was awarded the NFMS/Charles Groves Prize 2001 for his outstanding contribution to British Music. His remarkable versatility and command of a wide variety of styles is reflected in his extensive discography, ranging from the early classical period to the present day. These recordings have gained him two Grammy Awards (*Moses und Aron*, and *Peter Grimes*), the Gramophone Award (*War Requiem*) and a Classic CD Award (*The Turn of the Screw*). On video he can be seen in *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Idomeneo*, *La Clemenza di Tito*, *From the House of the Dead*, *Wozzeck*, *Oberon*, *Jenůfa* and *Oedipus Rex*, which won the Classical Music Award. International festivals and opera houses with which he is particularly closely associated include Salzburg, the Metropolitan Opera New York, La Scala, Milan, Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Glyndebourne, Edinburgh, and the English National Opera. In concert Philip Langridge has worked with the world's leading conductors including Abbado, Barenboim, Gergiev, Haitink, Haroncourt, Levine, Ozawa, Previn, Rattle and Solti, and appeared with the world's major orchestras.

Stuart Bedford

Whether it is from the conductor's podium or as an accomplished pianist, Stuart Bedford has collaborated with many of the world's most distinguished vocalists. Those he has performed and recorded with include Heather Harper, Ann Murray, Margaret Marshall, Philip Langridge, Sir Thomas Allen, Dame Felicity Lott, John Tomlinson, John Shirley-Quirk and Janet Baker. Recordings include repertoire by composers such as Schubert, Walton, Britten, Holst and Berkeley. Stuart Bedford is based in London and is a highly regarded figure within the field of operatic and orchestral repertoire.

Jean Rigby

Jean Rigby studied at the Birmingham School of Music and subsequently at the Royal Academy of Music with Patricia Clarke, with whom she still studies. She has a long association with English National Opera, where her many rôles have included Penelope (*The Return of Ulysses*), Jocasta (*Oedipus Rex*), Carmen, Octavian, Britten's Lucretia, Rosina, Helen of Troy (*King Priam*), Hyppolyta (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Maddalena (*Rigoletto*), Amastris (*Xerxes*) and Nicklausse (*The Tales of Hoffmann*). She is a regular guest at the Glyndebourne Festival, where her rôles have included Irene (*Theodora*), Geneviève (*Pelléas et Mélisande*), Eduino (*Rodelinda*) and Emilia (*Otello*). For the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, she has sung Nicklausse and Dryade (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), with Isabella (*L'Italiana in Algeri*) for the Buxton Festival and both Angelina (*La Cenerentola*) and Idamantes (*Idomeneo*) for Garsington Opera. Abroad, she has appeared with the Netherlands Opera (Stravinsky's *Biblical Fragments*), the Flanders Opera (Suzuki), Seattle Opera (Charlotte) and San Diego Opera (Nicklausse). Jean Rigby appears with the major orchestras and is a regular soloist at the BBC Promenade concerts. Recent engagements have included concerts with Neville Marriner, Trevor Pinnock, Mikhail Pletnev, Matthias Bamert, Robert King, Richard Hickox, Andrew Davis, Charles Mackerras and Leonard Slatkin. Her extensive discography ranges from Bach, Vivaldi and Handel to Britten, Janáček and Birtwistle and includes the title-rôle in *The Rape of Lucretia* (with Richard Hickox), Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with Mark Wigglesworth and Berg's *Wozzeck* with Paul Daniel.

Derek Lee Ragin

Derek Lee Ragin is regarded as one of the foremost countertenors of our day. In great demand as a master of Baroque vocal style, he is also an inspired interpreter of contemporary music. His performances of such diverse repertoire are characterized by an unusual warmth and expressivity, and he has received unanimous accolades from critics and audiences throughout the world. In recent seasons he sang the 1739 (first performance) version of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* in Budapest, sang in the première of *Der Name der Rose* by the Munich composer Enjott Schneider, a composition for countertenor and organ written especially for him, and with the London-based group Florilegium returned to the Budapest Early Music Festival and the Handel Festival in Halle. Engagements have included appearances with Munich Opera, the Vienna Konzertverein, Apollo's Fire, the Aulos Ensemble and the American Bach Soloists, among many others. In America he made his début at the Metropolitan Opera in *Giulio Cesare*, subsequently returning to appear in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and sang with the New York Philharmonic in the world première of Kancheli's *And Farewell Goes Out Sighing*. In addition to appearances in major theatres and concert halls throughout the United States, Europe and Australia, he also has a number of important and acclaimed recordings to his credit and awards have included those of first place winner in the Purcell-Britten Prize for Concert Singers in England, and first prize at the 35th International Music Competition in Munich. He also lent his voice to *Farinelli*, a film about the famed eighteenth-century castrato which won the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film in 1995. The soundtrack won the Golden Record award the following year in Cannes.

Gerald Finley

The Canadian baritone Gerald Finley began singing as a chorister in Ottawa. He completed his musical studies in the United Kingdom at the Royal College of Music, King's College, Cambridge, and the National Opera Studio. He began his opera work in the Mozart rôles at Glyndebourne and now includes in his repertoire a variety of leading rôles, performed in the world's opera houses including London, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, New York, and Chicago. At the Royal Opera Covent Garden his rôles include Figaro, Creonte in Haydn's *L'anima del filosofo*, the Forester in *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Don Giovanni. He was Owen Wingrave in the Channel 4 film of Britten's opera and he has appeared in leading rôles in major premières, as Harry Heegan in *The Silver Tassie*, Mr Fox in *Fantastic Mr Fox*, and Jaufre Rudel in *L'amour de loin*. This has led to new works being specifically written for him including Turnage's *Three Songs and the Torn Fields* and Saariaho's *Cinq reflets de L'amour de loin*. His acclaimed performances in a wide concert repertoire from classic to contemporary have taken him around the world. His extensive list of recordings includes work with Simon Rattle, John Eliot Gardiner, Trevor Pinnock, and Christopher Hogwood, and award-winning song recital discs.

Dame Judi Dench

Since playing Ophelia in *Hamlet* at the Old Vic forty years ago, Dame Judi Dench has received wide critical acclaim for a career marked by outstanding performances in both classical and contemporary rôles. She has won more than 25 awards, including nine British Academy Awards, in a career that has encompassed the stage, television and motion pictures. She received the Order of the British Empire in 1970 for services to the theatre, and subsequently became a Dame of the British Empire in 1988. Her feature film credits include Franco Zeffirelli's *Tea With Mussolini*, *Mrs Brown* (for which she won a Golden Globe, BAFTA Award and Oscar nomination), *Wetherby*, *A Room With a View* (for which she won a BAFTA Award as Best Supporting Actress), *84 Charing Cross Road*, *A Handful of Dust* (another BAFTA Award-winning performance as Best Supporting Actress) and two films for Kenneth Branagh, *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. Dame Judi also played the infamous 'M' in the latter Bond films, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, *The World is not Enough* and *Die Another Day*. She won an Academy Award, a BAFTA Award and was named Best Supporting Actress by the National Society of Film Critics for her performance in the hit romantic comedy *Shakespeare in Love*, and was nominated for a Golden Globe Award and an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for Lasse Hallström's *Chocolat*. For her performance in *The Last Of The Blond Bombshells* for Working Title Television she won a BAFTA Award, and in 2001 she filmed *Iris* directed by Richard Eyre with Jim Broadbent (for which she received an Academy Award nomination), and *The Shipping News* directed by Lasse Hallström with Kevin Spacey and Julianne Moore. She continues working on the London stage, starring in David Hare's *Amy's View* (winning a Tony Award for her Broadway performance), Peter Hall's *The Royal Family* and the two-hander *The Breath of Life* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, with Dame Maggie Smith, and most recently *All's Well That Ends Well* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford and then the West End. Her recent film credits include David Twohy's *The Chronicles of Riddick* and Charles Dance's *Ladies in Lavender*.

Osian Ellis

Osian Ellis has performed to lavish acclaim all over the world. His numerous recordings of harp music, concertos, chamber music, and songs with harp have received many awards. Many new works have been written for him, including concertos by William Mathias, Alun Hoddinott, Jorgen Jersild, and Robin Holloway, with solo and chamber music by Benjamin Britten, Malcolm Arnold, Gian Carlo Menotti and William Schuman. Osian Ellis worked closely with Benjamin Britten from 1959 until the latter's death in 1976, and appeared in many first performances and recordings of his works. Britten wrote for him the exquisite *Harp Suite* in 1969, and, when Britten could no longer play the piano, following an unsuccessful heart operation in 1973, Osian Ellis joined Peter Pears to give recitals in Europe and America. *Canticle V* was the first work that Britten wrote for them in 1974.

1 Canticle I, Op.40
My Beloved is Mine

Francis Quarles (1592 - 1644)

Ev'n like two little bank divided brooks
That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams,
And having ranged and searched a thousand nooks
Meet both at length at silver breasted Thames
Where in a greater current they conjoin,

So I my best beloved's am,
So he is mine!

Ev'n so we met and after long pursuit
Ev'n so we joined. We both became entire.
No need for either to renew a suit
For I was flax, and he was flames of fire.
Our firm united souls did more than twine.

So I my best beloved's am,
So he is mine.

If all those glittering monarchs, that command
The servile quarters of this earthly ball
Should tender in exchange their shares of land
I would not change my fortunes for them all;
Their wealth is but a counter to my coin:

The world's but theirs;
But my beloved's mine.

Nor time, nor place, nor chance, nor death can bow
My least desires unto the least remove.
He's firmly mine by oath, I his by vow.
He's mine by faith and I am his by love.
He's mine by water, I am his by wine:

Thus I my best beloved's am,
Thus he is mine.

He is my altar, I his holy place,
I am his guest and he my living food.

I'm his by penitence, he mine by grace,
I'm his by purchase, he is mine by blood.
He's my supporting elm and I his vine:

Thus I my best beloved's am,
Thus he is mine.

He gives me wealth: I give him all my vows:
I give him songs, he gives me length of days.
With wreaths of grace he crowns
my longing brows

And I his temples with a crown of praise
Which he accepts; an everlasting sign

That I my best beloved's am,
That he is mine.

2 Canticle II, Op.51
Abraham and Isaac

from the Chester Miracle Play

God:

Abraham, my servant, Abraham,
Take Isaac, thy son by name,
That thou lovest the best of all,
And in sacrifice offer him to me
Upon that hill there besides thee.
Abraham, I will that so it be
For ought that may befall.

Abraham:

My Lord, to Thee is mine intent
Ever to be obedient.
That son that Thou to me hast sent
Offer I will to Thee
Thy bidding done shall be.

Here Abraham, turning to his son Isaac, saith:

Make thee ready, my dear darling,
For we must do a little thing.
This woode do on thy back it bring,

We may no longer abide.
A sword and fire that I will take,
For sacrifice me behoves to make;
God's bidding will I not forsake,
But ever obedient be.

*Here Isaac speaketh to his father, and
taketh a bundle of sticks and beareth
after his father, and saith:*

Isaac:
Father, I am all ready
To do your bidding most meekly,
And to bear this wood full bayn am I,
As you commanded me.

Here they both go to the place to do sacrifice:

Abraham:
Now, Isaac son, go we our way
To yonder mount if that we may.

Isaac:
My dear father, I will essay
To follow you full fain.

*Abraham being minded to slay his son Isaac,
lifts up his hands, and saith the following:*

Abraham:
O! My heart will break in three,
To hear thy words I have pityë
As Thou wilt, Lord, so must it be,
To Thee I will be bayn.
Lay down thy faggot, my own son dear.

Isaac:
All ready father, lo, it is here.

But why make you such heavy cheer?
Are you anything adread?

Abraham:
Ah! Dear God! That me is woe!

Isaac:
Father, if it be your will,
Where is the beast that we shall kill?

Abraham:
Thereof, son, is none upon this hill.

Isaac:
Father, I am full sore affeared
To see you bear that drawnë sword.

Abraham:
Isaac, son, peace, I pray thee,
Thou breakest my heart even in three.

Isaac:
I pray you, father, layn nothing from me,
But tell me what you think.

Abraham:
Ah! Isaac, Isaac, I must kill thee!

Isaac:
Alas! Father, is that your will,
Your ownë child for to kill
Upon this hillës brink?
If I have trespassed in any degree,
With a yard you may beat me;
Put up your sword, if your will be,
For I am but a child.
Would God my mother were here with me!
She would kneel down upon her knee,

Praying you, father, if it may be,
For to save my life.

Abraham:

O Isaac, son, to thee I say
God hath commanded me today
Sacrifice, this is no nay,
To make of thy bodyë.

Isaac:

Is it God's will I shall be slain?

Abraham:

Yes, son, it is not for to layn.

*Here Isaac asketh his father's blessing on
his knees, and saith:*

Isaac:

Father, seeing you mustë needs do so,
Let it pass lightly and over go;
Kneeling on my kneeyës two,
Your blessing on me spread.

Abraham:

My blessing, dear son, give I to thee
And thy mother's with heart free;
The blessing of the Trinity,
My dear son, on thee light.

*Hence Isaac riseth and cometh to his
father, and he taketh him, and bindeth
and layeth him upon the altar to sacrifice
him, and saith:*

Abraham:

Isaac, Isaac, blessed must thou be.

Isaac:

Father, greet well my brethren young,
And pray my mother of her blessing,
I come no more under her wing,
Farewell for ever and aye.

*Here Abraham doth kiss his son Isaac,
and binds a kerchief about his head.*

Abraham:

Farewell, my sweet son of grace!

Isaac:

I pray you, father, turn down my face,
For I am sore adread.

Abraham:

Lord, full loth were I him to kill!

Isaac:

Ah, mercy, father, why tarry you so?

Abraham:

Jesu! on me have pity,
That I have most in mind

Isaac:

Now, father, I see that I shall die:
Almighty God in majesty!
My soul I offer unto Thee!

Abraham:

To do this deed I am sorryë.

*Here let Abraham make a sign as though
he would cut off his son Isaac's head with
his sword; then GOD speaks:*

God:

Abraham, my servant dear,
Lay not thy sword in no manere
On Isaac, thy dear darling.
For thou drest me, well wot I,
That of thy son hast no mercy,
To fulfil my bidding.

Abraham:

Ah, Lord of heaven and King of bliss,
Thy bidding shall be done, i-wis!
A hornéd wether here I see,
Among the briars tied is he,
To Thee offered shall he be
Anon right in this place.

Then let Abraham take the lamb and kill him.

Abraham:

Sacrifice here sent me is,
And all, Lord, through Thy grace.

Envoi:

Such obedience grant us, O Lord!
Ever to Thy most holy word.
That in the same we may accord
As this Abraham was bayn;
And then altogether shall we
That worthy king in heaven see,
And dwell with him in great glorye
For ever and ever.
Amen.

The Heart of the Matter

*Revised version prepared by Sir Peter Pears
in 1983 from The Two Loves
by Edith Sitwell (1887 - 1965)*

3 Prologue

Fanfare

Where are the seeds of the Universal Fire
To burn the roots of Death in the world's cold heart?
When in this world will the cold heart take fire?

4 Reading

The earth of my heart was broken and gaped low
As the fires beneath the equator of my veins.
And I thought the seeds of Fire should be let loose
Like the solar rains -
The light that lies deep in the heart of the rose;
And that the bloom from the fallen
spring of the world
Would come again to the cheek
grown famine-white
As winter frost -
Would come again to the heart
whose courage is lost
From hunger. When in this world
Will the cold heart take fire?

Fanfare

5 Reading

In the hour when the sapphire of the bone -
That hard and precious fire wrung from the earth,
And the sapphire tears the heavens weep
shall be made one.
But, in the summer,
great should be the sun of the heart
And great is the heat of the fires from elementary
and terrestrial nature -

Ripening the kernel of amethysts
in the sun of the peach –
The dancing seas in the heart of the apricot.
The earth, the sun, the heart, have so many fires
It is a great wonder
That the whole world is not consumed.

6 Song

We are the darkness in the heat of the day,
The rootless flowers in the air, the coolness:
we are the water
Lying upon the leaves before Death, our sun,
And its vast heat has drunken us...
Beauty's daughter,
The heart of the rose, and we are one.

We are the summer's children,
the breath of evening, the days
When all may be hoped for -
we are the unreturning
Smile of the lost one,
seen through the summer leaves -
That sun and its false light scorning.

7 Reading

In such a heat of the earth, under
The red bough, the Colossus of
rubies the first husband-
man and grave-digger, the red Adam,
Dug from the earth of his own nature,
the corn effigy
Of a long-buried country god,
encrusted with earth-virtues,
And brought to a new birth
The ancient wisdom hiding behind
heat and laughter,
Deep-rooted in Death's earth.

Gone is that heat. But this is the hour of
brotherhood, the warmth that comes
To the rejected by Life - the shadow with no eyes -
Young Icarus with the broken alar bones
And the sapped and ageing Atlas of the slums
Devoured by the days until all days are done -
To the Croesus of the breadline, gold from the sun,
And the lover seeing in Woman
the rankness of Nature, -
A monstrous Life-force, the need of procreation
Devouring all other life ... or Gravity's force
Drawing him down to the centre of his earth.
These sprawl together in the sunlight –
the negation
Of Life, fag-ends of Ambition, wrecks of the heart,
Lumps of the world, and bones left by the Lion.
Amid the assembly of young laughing roses
They wait for a re-birth
Under the democratic sun, enriching all,
rejecting no one...
But the smile of youth, the red mouth of the flower
Seem the open wounds of a hunger
that is voiceless -
And on their lips lies the dust of Babel's city;
And the sound of the heart is changed
to the noise of revolutions -
The hammer of Chaos destroying and rebuilding
Small wingless hopes and fears
in the light of the Sun.
Who dreamed when Nature should
be heightened to a fever -
The ebullition of her juices and humours -
The war of creed and creed,
of starved and starver –
The light would return to the cheek,
and a new Word
Would take the place of the heart?
We might tell the blind

The hue of the flower, or the philosopher
What distance is, in the essence of its being -
But not the distance between the hearts of Men.

8 Canticle III, Op. 55

Still Falls the Rain

Edith Sitwell

The Raids, 1940. Night and Dawn.

Still falls the Rain -
Dark as the world of man, black as our loss -
Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails
Upon the Cross.

Still falls the Rain
With a sound like the pulse of the heart that is
changed to the hammer-beat,
In the Potter's Field,
and the sound of the impious feet

On the Tomb:
Still falls the Rain
In the Field of Blood where the small hopes
breed and the human brain
Nurtures its greed,
that worm with the brow of Cain.

Still falls the Rain -
At the feet of the Starved Man
hung upon the Cross.
Christ that each day, each night,
nails there, have mercy on us -
On Dives and on Lazarus:
Under the Rain the sore and the gold are as one.

Still falls the Rain -
Still falls the Blood from the
Starved Man's wounded Side:

He bears in his Heart all wounds -
those of the light that died,
The last faint spark
In the self-murdered heart,
the wounds of the sad uncomprehending dark,
The wounds of the baited bear -
The blind and weeping bear whom the keepers beat
On his helpless flesh ...
the tears of the hunted hare.

Still falls the Rain -
Then - O Ile leape up to my God:
who pulles me doune -
See, see where Christ's blood
streames in the firmament:
It flows from the Brow we nailed upon the tree
Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart
That holds the fires of the world -
dark-smirched with pain
As Caesar's laurel crown.

Then sounds the voice of One
who like the heart of man
Was once a child who among beasts has lain -
'Still do I love, still shed my innocent light,
my Blood, for thee.'

9 Reading

I see Christ's wounds weep in the Rose on the wall.
Then I who nursed in my earth
the dark red seeds of Fire -
The pomegranate grandeur,
the dark seeds of Death,
Felt them change to the light
and fire in the heart of the rose...
And I thought of the umbilical cords
that bind us to strange suns
And causes ... of Smart the madman who was born

To bless Christ with the Rose and his people,
a nation
Of living sweetness ... of Harvey who blessed
Christ with the solar fire in the veins,
And Linnaeus praising Him with the wingèd seed!
Men born for the Sun's need -
Yet theirs are the hymns to God
who walks in darkness.
And thinking of the age-long sleep,
then brought to the light's birth
Of terrestrial nature generated far
From heaven ... the argillaceous clays,
the zircon and sapphire
Bright as the tears of heaven, but deep in earth -
And of the child of the four elements
The plant - organic water polarised
to the earth's centre -
And to the light: - the stem and root,
the water-plant and earth-plant,
The leaf, the child of air, the flower,
the plant of fire -
And of One who contracted His Immensity
And shut Himself in the scope of a small flower
Whose root is clasped in darkness ...
God in the span

Of the root and light-seeking corolla ...
with the voice of Fire I cry -
Will He disdain that flower of the world,
the heart of Man?

10 Epilogue

from Metamorphosis by Edith Sitwell

Fanfare

So, out of the dark, see our great Spring begins -
Our Christ, the new Song,
breaking out in the fields and hedgerows,
The heart of Man! O, the new temper of Christ,
in veins and branches!

Canticle III (Still Falls the Rain)

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The Heart of the Matter

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Text of *Prologue, Song and Epilogue*

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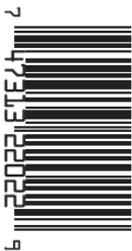
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1	Canticle I, Op. 40 - <i>My Beloved is Mine</i> ¹⁶	7:11
2	Canticle II, Op. 51 - <i>Abraham and Isaac</i> ¹²⁶	16:10
	The Heart of the Matter (rev. Peter Pears, 1983) ¹⁷⁶⁵	24:56
3	Prologue - Fanfare - Song: <i>Where are the seeds of the Universal fire ...</i>	2:50
4	Reading - <i>The earth of my heart was broken and gaped low ...</i> - Fanfare	1:04
5	Reading - <i>In the hour when the sapphire of the bone ...</i>	0:47
6	Song - <i>We are the darkness in the heat of the day ...</i>	1:22
7	Reading - <i>In such a heat of the earth ...</i>	2:44
8	Canticle III, Op. 55 - <i>Still Falls the Rain</i>	11:31
9	Reading - <i>I see Christ's wounds weep in the Rose on the wall ...</i>	1:59
10	Epilogue - Fanfare - <i>So, out of the dark ...</i>	2:42
11	Canticle IV, Op. 86 - <i>Journey of the Magi</i> ⁴¹³⁶	10:50
12	Canticle V, Op. 89 - <i>The Death of Saint Narcissus</i> ¹⁸	7:39

Philip Langridge, Tenor¹ • Jean Rigby, Contralto² • Gerald Finley, Baritone³
 Derek Lee Ragin, Counter-tenor⁴ • Dame Judi Dench, Narrator⁵
 Steuart Bedford, Piano⁶ • Frank Lloyd, Horn⁷ • Osian Ellis, Harp⁸

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Playing Time
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BRITTEN: Canticles I-V

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Britten's five *Canticles* are marvellously vivid, intensely dramatic works. Although they were not designed to be performed together – they span virtually his whole career, from the early 1940s to the mid-1970s, and were composed for a variety of forces and singers – they form a remarkably effective sequence. Each is in some way inspired by religion and takes the form of an extended song, scena, miniature cantata or even, in the case of *Abraham and Isaac*, virtually a mini opera. All five were composed for the tenor voice of Peter Pears, and chart the personal and creative relationship between Britten and his most important muse.

Benjamin
BRITTEN
(1913-1976)

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------|
| ① | Canticle I, Op. 40 - <i>My Beloved is Mine</i> ^{1 6} | 7:11 |
| ② | Canticle II, Op. 51 - <i>Abraham and Isaac</i> ^{1 2 6} | 16:10 |
| ③-⑦ | The Heart of the Matter (rev. Peter Pears, 1983) ^{1 7 6 5} | 24:56 |
| ⑧ | Canticle III, Op. 55 - <i>Still Falls the Rain</i> | 11:31 |
| ⑨-⑩ | The Heart of the Matter (cont.) | |
| ⑪ | Canticle IV, Op. 86 - <i>Journey of the Magi</i> ^{4 1 3 6} | 10:50 |
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Recorded at All Hallows, Gospel Oak, London, on 19th, 20th, 23rd and 24th March, 1996
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