

John Bradburne

John Bradburne:

Mystic, Poet and Martyr (1921-1979)

Edited by

Renato Tomei

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Ever without just adding one more verse,
It seems to me a sempiternal trend
For blending with The One is none the worse
Even for endless aeons unbegun,
To wit: God - Holy Spirit, Father, Son.
(From '*L'ensuite*', 1974)

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PREFACE

This volume contains contributions based on the papers presented at the 'First International Conference on John Bradburne (1921-1979): Poet, Mystic and Martyr', held in the Great Hall of the Università per Stranieri di Perugia on 30 March 2017.

It was a truly international occasion, with speakers from Italy, France, Spain, South Africa, and the UK, and an attendance that included academics from several university departments, as well as representatives of the Catholic Church in Italy. Many university students were also present, testifying to the way the story of John Bradburne holds an appeal for young people. A photographic exhibition in the corridor outside the Great Hall presented a pictorial history of his life, 'From the Lake District to Zimbabwe', and various books about his life and work were on display. The languages of the conference were English and Italian, and there was simultaneous translation throughout.

The conference was opened by the university rector, Giovanni Paciullo, with other welcoming statements from the head of the department of human and social sciences, Sandra Covino, and members of the organizing committee, including the president of the committee and editor of the present volume, Renato Tomei, assistant professor of English at the university.

The idea for such an event arose in 2015, during an academic visit to Perugia by Professor David Crystal, at the invitation of Rosanna Masiola, Professor of English and Translation at the university. The motivation was to make John Bradburne's writing available to a wider audience in Italy and elsewhere through the medium of translation; and, as this had not previously been attempted, it was felt that a first step would be to explore the issues involved through an academic conference. Perugia seemed to be the obvious location, for it is close to Assisi - a region through which John Bradburne walked on one of his several journeys around Italy, and which he often refers to in his writing. He knew Perugia well.

The primary aim of the conference was to acknowledge the way his poetry and thought has attracted increasing interest around the world, and to provide the first opportunity for translators of the poems to present their work and to discuss the issues that arise in handling such a challenging oeuvre. In the afternoon session, called (after the title of one of the poems)

'A Ring-a-ring of Rosary', participants heard one poem, 'Saint Francis', read in several European and African languages - Italian (Rosanna Masiola), French (Didier Rance), Spanish (Dianella Gambini), Amharic (Renato Tomei), isiXhosa and Afrikaans (Rajendra Chetty). The event, chaired by Enrico Terrinoni, resulted in an illuminating discussion of the way each of the translators had gone about the task they had set themselves.

Although the main focus of the conference was on the poetry as literature, each speaker adopted a broader perspective, placing the poems in the context of John Bradburne's life and the turbulent times he encountered in mid-20th-century Rhodesia, where most of his writing took place. The main contributions in the morning reflected the title of the conference and of the present volume: 'John Bradburne: Poet, Mystic, and Martyr'. By convention, authors will refer to the poet by his first name.

- David Crystal, author of *A Life Made of Words: the Poetry and Thought of John Bradburne* (2017), gave an account of the evolution of the poetry and its main features and themes, and drew attention to John's status as 'the most prolific poet in the English language'. The final section of this volume contains the full versions of the poems quoted by the authors.

- Didier Rance, author of a biography of John Bradburne, *Le vagabond de Dieu*, whose English translation was published in September 2017, reflected on the nature of the mysticism that permeated John's life, and how it was manifested in his writing on creation, and especially in the way bees played such an important role in his life and thought.

- Marco Impagliazzo placed John within the context of Christian martyrdom, drawing attention to the way his death can be seen as a significant moment in the 'ecumenism of blood' experienced in Africa during the 20th century, which he described as the most violent of all centuries.

- Daniele Piccini added a further perspective by exploring the nature of Franciscan poetics in the writing of Jacopone da Todi and John Bradburne.

An additional dimension was provided by two personal encounters. As part of his talk, David Crystal explained how he had come to be involved in editing the online database of poetry - the result of a chance meeting with a friend from his home town, who had met John while travelling in Africa, and been cared for by him after falling ill with malaria. That friend, Kevin Jones, universally known as Casey (from his initials K C Jones), had received a verse letter from John, which he showed to David, sparking his interest. Kevin was present at the conference, and told his story, which

was greatly appreciated by the audience, as he was the only person in the room who had actually met the subject of the conference.

A second personal perspective took the form of a welcoming letter from Celia Brigstocke, John's niece, who looks after the John Bradburne Memorial Society. She was unable to attend the conference, so the letter was read on her behalf by Hilary Crystal. It gave a brief history of the Society and its current work in Mtemwa, along with childhood reminiscences, reference to some of the reported cures that have taken place since his death, and her hopes for progress in his Cause for beatification.

Although the Cause was not part of the remit of the conference, a groundswell of opinion emerged that this event could play its part in developing a climate which would help promote that progress. The outcome was the 'Perugia Statement', which was signed by many of the participants. This read as follows:

The first International Conference on the life, poetry, and thought of John Bradburne, poet, mystic, martyr, and father to the lepers, was held at the Università per Stranieri di Perugia on 30 March 2017. As speakers and attendees at this conference, we firmly believe that the cause for his canonization should proceed at the earliest opportunity, especially in the light of his roles as a model for young people, the ecumenical movement, and the care of those with devastating diseases, and we ask for your help and prayers in taking this movement forward.

Further support was affirmed in a statement read out by Amilcare Conti, secretary of the Archdiocese of Perugia, on behalf of Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, Archbishop of Perugia and Città della Pieve.

The present volume, as well as the conference, aims at providing a foundation for further exploration of the literary, theological, and humanitarian legacies of John Bradburne, also acting as a stimulus for his eventual recognition as a saint of the 20th century.

CHAPTER ONE

JOHN BRADBURNE: A LIFE IN WORDS

DAVID CRYSTAL

John Bradburne is acknowledged to be the most prolific poet the English language has ever had. His 170,000 lines of poetry far exceed the output of anyone else - twice as much as Shakespeare, for example, or three times as much as Wordsworth. And it was almost entirely written during the last twenty years of his life.

There is just the occasional hint in his early years of a future poetic career. In *Excelsior* (1971), he thinks back to his childhood, and puts an adult gloss on a childish verse:

First time I ever wrote a verse
Was in a ruined wall
At Baconsthorpe, I might do worse
Than quote it, - after all
This other stuff that has ensued
On eight and thirty years reviewed.

I quote aright, I cite the note
Made long ago to play the goat: -

Alas, alack, I am undone,
I want to eat a currant-bun;
But God is good, He told me so,
The trees are swaying to and fro.

Would it be wise
To analyse
That silly-sounding thing?
I'd like to spell
Emmanuel
As Currant-bun: our King

In twofold eucharistic kind
 Of grape and grain there reigns resigned,
 If you will have it so;
 Trees swaying to and fro
 Could be the Springing from the Cross
 Of Hagios Athan-atos:
 A toss and two He took, and then,
 Spread-eagled, soared and sent accord to men.

After school, war intervened, along with a period of several years in which he searched for his vocation. He reflects, in *A Ballad of a Lifetime* (1974):

By my twenty-seventh year, had stirred
 In my fancy scarce a single rhyme;
 Then I came to Rome and, homing, spurred...
 Galaxies of brightness at a time!

He began to write more frequently in 1948, but the vast majority of his 5000+ poems come from a remarkable decade, from 1968 to 1979, when he found his vocation in what is now Zimbabwe. Once the poetic floodgates were opened, he could not close them - nor did he want to, as he says in *L'Ensuite* (1974):

I love this inability to end
 Ever without just adding one more verse,
 It seems to me a sempiternal trend
 For blending with The One is none the worse
 Even for endless aeons unbegun,
 To wit: God - Holy Spirit, Father, Son.

Many of his poems are handwritten, and when we look at them one is immediately struck by the fluency of the writing - there are hardly any corrections. One also notes the structural intricacy of the verse - following a strict metre and rhyme-scheme, and interlaced with puns and other kinds of wordplay. The sonnet celebrating one of the lepers, *Timu* (1969), is a case in point. Few people see all the verbal ingenuity at first reading:

Timu's no Timon, Athens were to him
 Inseparable word from hens at hand,
 Many a time I greet him daily, Tim
 Ever is bright, dimness to him is banned;
 Intent on converse and on getting round
 Wondrously well on only hands and knees,

Enters he here and there, all's fairy ground
 Native to happy Tim who's born to please;
 The produce of his poultry he will beg
 That I may purchase any time I pass
 Only providing that it is an egg
 But not a chicken cheeping 'Fresh is grass
 Even as I am flesh!': three pence a time
 Duly I pay and Timu's lay's sublime.

They usually miss the acrostic made up of the initial letters of each line: TIME I WENT TO BED.

He revels in language play, and explains why in several poems, such as these extracts from *Elastic Corollary cum Gymnastic Symposium* (1977) and *Talisman* (1969):

Ripe puns and hidden names
 Yield joy to Him, and hymning birds
 Unbury merry claims.

...

Birds that spontaneously sing
 Ask not reward or anything
 Of man's appreciation, they
 Being but God's make songs each day
 Especially at morn and eve:
 In giving thanks they thanks receive.

In short: God enjoys language play. And it is play with a purpose.

Why is his poetry important?

Two American poets point us towards the answer. First, Archibald MacLeish:

Anything can make us look; only art can make us see.

Next, Robert Penn Warren:

The poem is not a thing we see - it is, rather, a light by which we may see -
 and what we see is life.

So what sort of life do his poems try to make us see?

In a phrase: eternal life. In *Paradise Tossed Aside* (1978) he expresses the hope he has for his writing:

Man is a vandal and a beastly thing
 Where'er his ears are deaf to Pan's sweet piping,
 Yet he was set as viceroy to King
 Eternal once: oh may this dunce's typing
 Re-stir the springs of immortality
 And may my wit befit eternity.

How does he stir the springs of immortality in us? And what is the 'sweet piping' that he wants us to hear? In over a thousand poems he places before us three major themes.

The nature of the Trinity

His insight into the nature of the Holy Trinity is profound, providing us with images that make this ultimate mystery amazingly accessible. The key is love. As he says in *Logos* (1974):

The Thought, The Word, The Voice are Persons Three
 Of Love in Love with Love for evermore.

'Thought, Word and Voice' is his favourite analogy, explored in hundreds of poems, but he is always on the look-out for others. Here is one, *Heat, Light and Sound*, written not long before his death, on Whitsunday 1979:

There is no light, other than that reflected,
 Excepted it is engendered by blithe heat,
 A fresh analogy is thus projected
 For Father, Son and Holy Paraclete;
 The Father, Love The Thought, I call His Heat,
 The Son His Light diffuses it abroad,
 Christ, who is Love Begotten and Our Lord,
 Speaks to us now through Love The Paraclete;

The Thought and Word and Voice go hand in hand
 And yet God has no hand but that of Christ,
 We see His hand not in the Eucharist
 But by our Faith His grasp we understand;

Assumed is our humanity to One
 Whose face and form are warm as God The Son.

He is convinced that his primary task, as a poet, is to explicate the Trinity. Indeed, as he explains in *A Ballade of a Logosophite* (1975), he has taken it on board as a personal responsibility:

The Thought, The Word, The Voice of One in Three
 Are Father, Son and Holy Ghost of God,
 They are The Persons of The Trinity
 That Christ defined not thus as earth He trod;
 Neither the Church has done till now nor odd
 Is it to be esteemed that she, the Church,
 Has given but to me her mutt the nod
 Which indicates the answer to a search.

It is actually not that hard, he says in *Roma, Italia, Il Mondo* (1975), and it is a critical message for a modern secularist world:

I personally am intent on telling
 To Rome, to Italy and to the World
 That, since true Faith is dwindling and not swelling,
 The One in Three should freely be unfurled
 As Dogma of predominance and hurled
 Hard (by some bard or other) at the throngs
 Of peoples too unsteeped for true songs.

But I must find a Maiden first to go
 And see the Pope with Faith and Hope agog
 And tell him that the Trinity is so
 Simple to know as falling off a log:

This is his role, he says in Logos:

The Thought, The Word, The Voice are Persons Three
 Of Love in Love with Love for evermore,
 I am assured that it is up to me
 To write this down as clown and troubadour.

He comments, in a letter to his mother (22 January 1976):

To come first to what matters most: The Blessed Trinity. This is the most important message of the purpose and purport of my life.

So who has given him this assurance?

The centrality of Mary

Our Lady has. In several poems he affirms his total dependence on her inspiration. This is how he recounts his first encounter with her as a Muse, in *Ut unum sint* (1956):

I did not have the least idea what I should say,
 Yet knew that all about wide living wonders were;
 I loved the breath of Summer and its pleasant day,
 As also Winter's sunset and the frosty air;
 I'd seen the beauties of an Oriental clime,
 The dwelling and the wisdom of a distant race;
 I'd listened rapt to music's harmonies sublime,
 And knew the fascination of a woman's grace:
 But still I waited sad and dumb with aching heart,
 Because it seemed that there was naught which I could do,
 Except to gaze on loveliness - I had no art!
 Then spake Our Blessèd Lady, and my life was new:
 She said - 'My child, give me our hand, I'll guide your pen,
 And we will write about the love God has for men.'

And ever after he sees himself as her amanuensis, writing down what she inspires, as he affirms in *Assumption* (1973):

Thus talk I to myself, addressing thee
 Whilst thou dictatest what I set to page.

His love for her knew no bounds, and many of his poems describe the intense nature of his relationship to Mary, fostered through visionary experience, and explicitly described as a marriage. Think of whoever or whatever you find most beautiful, he tells us in *Oneing* (1971), and you will find all that beauty and much more in Mary:

Wherefore, a man who wills to set
 His heart on Love alone
 Should not despise and not forget
 His Totem, but enthrone
 The sum of that which most attracts
 His being to its cataracts:
 Love will for lust atone.

Upon that throne Our Lady Fair
 May sit as Queen of grace,
 Ask her to take

For heaven's sake
 Such earthly form and face
 As you consider is the height
 Of human beauty in your sight.

This, in a Word, is best to do
 If you would be detached
 From aught which might forbid to woo
 High heaven's gate unlatched:
 Marry Maria and remain
 Beside her Jesus, joy to gain -
 None could be better matched.

It is an intimacy open to anyone, he says in *Esurientes implevit* (1971: 'he has filled the hungry'):

Marry or burn
 And Mary is best
 In breaking a fellow of fat;
 Married to Mary is parried the rest
 And (keep it not under your hat)
 Yet there are many she'd marry if they
 Only would ask her: she'd show, in THEIR way
 Of thinking attractive, how far she surpasses
 The beauty of others,
 She smothers allasses!

And why should we get as close as we can to Our Lady? Because that is the way we can get closest to the Trinity:

Attune your heartstrings to The Trinity,
 Let Yahweh's love bestrum you as His harp
 And let no lesser love of he or she
 Hinder God's hand, land you like cod or carp;
 Love of Our Lady, though, is nothing less
 Than tantamount to counting Yahweh All
 Because they share one name and one address
 And one intent of blending in their call;
 Admire I AM with Miriam who bore
 Our Lord in Bethlehem and brought Him up
 To be the Shepherd Good whom we adore
 Each time we graze by gazing at His Cup.
 There is not anything excelling this
 In any man's or woman's span of bliss.
 (*This Above All*, 1977)

His focus on Mary complements his focus on the Trinity:

He that is alone with The One
 Whose name is Love must be
 With Mary and her Son
 And the blessed Trinity:
 The son of Man and the Lord of light
 And the Father great and Our Lady bright!
 (*Aubade*, 1971)

In *Une Ballade a la Mode* (1974) he even invents a new word to show the closeness of her relationship to the Trinity: 'Quoternity'.

His expression is often vivid, intimate, and daring, and readily open to misinterpretation in an age which often confuses love and sex. But we avoid the difficulty, I think, if we see his language as falling within the metaphorical tradition of Biblical expressions of unity (such as the Church as the 'bride of Christ') or the medieval tradition of courtly love.

The metaphor of marriage is extended in many directions. A natural result of a marriage is children. So if Mary marries a poet, the outcome is inevitable (*Freedom in Wedlock*, 1972):

Our children all are poems, far too many for a file,
 My thrust is that of just a troubadour;
 My action is in words because
 There is no better fashion
 Since Christ our Lord incarnate was
 For sublimating passion.

No marriage ever produced so many children! There are 5246 poems in this remarkable oeuvre - with others still being discovered from time to time (for he usually wrote his letters in verse, and not all have yet been found).

The necessity of ecumenism

When John's cause is successful, what will he be a patron saint of? Lepers, of course. The environment, also, for many of his poems celebrate creation in the diversity of the world's fauna and flora. And then there is ecumenism. His longest work, a manuscript poem of 10,184 lines, is called *Ut unum sint* - 'that they may be one'. It reflects the diversity of his own spiritual background. Raised as an Anglican, he became a Catholic, frequently signed off his poems and letters as 'Jew', and in his travels had close encounters with Islam and Buddhism. Here are some extracts:

'That they all may be one' in God's glorious Son -
All the Christians so sadly divided, and come
To the King who is Shepherd: all flocks He will bring
To one fold, and they safely shall graze in the Spring
And the Heavenly Summer - all peoples He calls
From His turret, high up o'er Jerusalem's walls.

Judaism, I imagine he would say these days, is part of our spiritual
DNA:

Now come we to a deeper truth:
True Catholics are Hebrews all
As much as David and Saint Paul,
And this has Eucharistic proof -

The Body and the Blood of Christ
Which are the Holy Eucharist
Were of the Virgin Mary born
At Bethlehem on Christmas Morn.

And therefore Christ's Humanity
Is wholly Hebrew; and when we
Receive in grace we truly be
United with The Trinity.

For Jesus Christ's Divinity
Is hypostatically one
With all that makes Him Mary's Son
And Hebrew fruit of Hebrew tree.

So Catholics whose hearts are true
Are oned with Christ Our Lord the Jew -
He who can say 'Christ lives, not I,'
Has Jewish Nationality.

But John Bradburne is a Jew who reads the Koran, is happy to pray in
a mosque, and who ends one of his poems ('Saharah') with the Islamic
affirmation 'Allah ek akbar' ('God is great').

I went into the Beira Mosque and sat
Awhile upon the floor-fulfilling mat
And then I prayed to Power, more divine
Than love of wine, Agapheh give for that.
(*Even the Quiet Cloys on Earth*, 1968)

Koran I read in Tripoli
 North Africa and thought
 That much it had of poetry
 If such a lack of sport:
 Its acclamations all are great
 Marching in starch to Heaven's Gate
 Whom unabashed they celebrate,
 By Mariam they're caught!
 (*The White Force Ballad*, 1969)

And this is a Christian who repeatedly praises Buddhist mysticism and sprinkles his manuscript writing with the Hindu sacred syllable 'Om':

Where kindles Love's eternal light on everlasting hills
 Hymn Father, Son and Holy Ghost around that flame which thrills
 Whilst each to each in simple speech begins it with 'Shalom'
 Whence it proceeds as Love it feeds, one syllable, in 'Om'.

When bidden to consider what is best in Hindustan
 The Himalayan foothills in a marvellous pavan
 Process along the memory and hold the mindful gaze,
 And thence proceeds the lama through the woodsmoke to the maze.

Wise sadhus chant by glowing fires of charcoal in the eve
 As point by point an argosy of stars appears to weave
 With whirls of wonder round this orb and silences gyrate
 Whilst Venus pirouettes in green, to bars Inviolate.
 (*Om*, 1963)

I have never read anyone who taps so deeply into so many religious traditions. His conclusion (in *Ut unum sint*) is therefore unsurprising:

Hindoos and Buddhists, Anglicans,
 And many quaint Americans
 And legion others, if they seek
 Sincerely, are the Saviour's sheep.

'Tis men of Faith whom God doth choose -
 And pray remember that the Jews
 Of old were His own faithful race:
 We are adopted by His grace.

The world needs a signpost pointing clearly towards the possibility of religious unity. John provides it in a unique way. Whereas there are many examples of people from different spiritual traditions displaying a

willingness to come together, he shows how it is possible to integrate these traditions into a single personality, a single vision. In a world full of Christian/Jewish/Islamic/Hindu suspicions and tensions, he is a much-needed symbol of hope.

The Bradburne vision

John's vision is one in which Catholic Christianity is seen as special because of the unique role of the Blessed Sacrament, which (as he affirms in *Ut unum sint*) adds an extra dimension to everything else we do:

A thankful heart, a contrite heart,
A heart aflame for love of Christ
Is far above all human art
Without the Holy Eucharist.

But in the furnace of His Love
The Host can lift our hearts above
And make them melt for love of Him
Who sits above the Cherubim.

It is also a vision in which the Bible holds a central place. He would like to learn the Bible off by heart, he says in *Caro factum est* (1968), but thinks this would be difficult! In any case, as a poet he finds it better to nibble away at its truths, bit by bit, until eventually one arrives at the whole:

Sirs, I should read the Bible through
And then decide what's best to do
And if you cannot quite be sure
Read it again: a golden cure
For lassitude and idleness
Is getting it by heart I guess
But I would find that far too hard,
Not near enough to art of bard
Who'd rather take a little bit
And whittle it away with wit
Until each little bit he took
Become One Word who'll claim the Book.

It is a vision, moreover, in which prayer plays a critical role. Indeed, many of his poems *are* prayers, as *Sumer is i cumen in* (1958) illustrates:

Among the fading blooms on pleasure's lawn;
 No more to slumber, heedless of Thy chime
 That keeps un failing watch from dawn till dawn;
 No more the quest for this world's fairest views
 Which can but fill the eye with fresh desire;
 No more the crowding vanities and news
 Which keep from souls the Holy Spirit's fire;
 No more the wanderer way, the wide unrest,
 And weary search for joys that pass and cease;
 No more, Good Lord, to turn from Thy behest,
 For now we know Thy Will to be our peace:
 To Thee we tread the path which Jesus trod,
 So rest our hearts in His - Thy Heart, dear God.

And it is, of course a vision which becomes a reality only through a life of service to others. 'Why is John Bradburne important?' The lepers of Mtemwa would have had no difficulty answering the question, though it would have been in very different terms from those used above: because he provided them, as much as he could, with their daily needs in the form of food, medicine, and loving care:

I'll stay to watch and pray and try
 To bring about undoubted ill's decrease
 By standing sentinel in Christ and by
 Issuing rations where the rations cease.
(A Ballade of Non-Despondency, 1975)

He himself saw an intimate connection between the two worlds of daily survival and eternal life:

Mootamewa is God's darling; those who come
 And go or stay may thus work out salvation.
(Mtemwa, 1973)

One hour with burnt-out lepers when the wind
 Of mood and mode is blowing quite contrary
 May change from mellow fast a fellow's mind
 And make him think naught good but God and Mary!
(In June he Changes his Tune, 1978)

It is this continual relating of the realities of this world to those of the next which is the unwavering focus of his writing.

I said earlier that the role of a poet is to make us see. That was John Bradburne's wish as well.

God, I care not what clod forgot my face
 Nor who remembered ever my address,
 So long a song is poured upon the race
 In strains like rains upon a wilderness
 That those who say not No will say me Yes!
 What use to be abstruse to a degree
 Beyond both critics and the common press
 If, reading me but once, saith dunce: "I see".
 (*A Balladey-minded Epilogue*, 1975)

That is what his poems are for: they are, in their 5000+ different ways, beacons illuminating the nature of truth.

In a somewhat mournful poem, *To the Lodestar* (1974), he reflects on his apparent lack of success as a poet:

When Shakespeare died, at only fifty-two,
 Behold, he'd told the thoughts of all mankind!
 There is no shade of mood in me or you
 Which, in Will's way, may not expression find;
 But, since himself that Bard has done this thing
 In such a princely manner for the throng,
 Shall I endeavour to go echoing?
 Or shall I tintinabulate his song?
 Say nay, it were a nightmare travesty
 To try to gild the lily of his art
 Which is as if The Holy Ghost made free
 Both on our mortal and immortal part:
 My age is fifty-three, my lines are many
 And almost all of them not read by any!

That last line is definitely no longer the case. All the poems are now available on the website <www.johnbradburnepoems.com>, and every day people read something there. Several selections are available in traditional print form through the John Bradburne Memorial Society. And my detailed exposition and critique of the poetry, *A Life Made of Words: the Poetry and Thought of John Bradburne*, is available through the website <www.davidcrystal.com> either as an e-book or as print-on-demand. The Perugia conference has brought the poetry to the attention of a wider audience, and through the various translations presented there will reach more people than ever before.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HERO OF A MYSTIC LIFE

DIDIER RANCE

John Bradburne has been called again and again a “mystic” by those who have met or heard about him, such as Jean Vanier, in the foreword of my biography¹. Is it right? What is mysticism? What does it really mean to be a mystic? From the mystery of God to Quiz on the Net (“Are you a mystic?”), one may wonder ... and wander. A French dictionary defines mysticism as: “the religious belief that man can communicate directly and personally with God”, but the little I know of Christian mysticism taught that the mystic is not the man who can communicate directly and personally with God but the man God directly and personally communicates with. There is communication in both cases, but who takes the initiative is crucial. So, is John Bradburne the Hero of a mystic life?

Poetry and mysticism

John Bradburne is a poet, so we must first address the question of his poetry and mysticism. His entrance into the Catholic Church opened for him a poetic tap, or rather an ocean. As David Crystal has already masterfully addressed the topic of John Bradburne as poet, I’ll just add a few words. First, let us stick to a few truisms about poetry and mysticism. Both are concrete but obscure. To take Paul Claudel’s terms, both belong to “*anima* versus *animus*”, the reasoning thought, which is abstract but clear. But poetry aims at forms, namely realities of this world assumed by beauty, while in mysticism, through grace, man embraces a relationship initiated by Him who is beyond all the forms and realities of a world of which he is the Creator and Saviour. And if Analogy of Being allows us to

¹ Didier Rance, *John Bradburne: the Vagabond of God*, Darton Longman Todd, London, 2017.

speak about the fruitful experience of God with words, these can at best only grasp the bark, not give its contents to taste.

The mystic poet must therefore be generally at first a mystic then a poet. Yet, can he be both at the same time? To name but a few, this has already been debated about St John of the Cross and, earlier, St Ephrem. As for John Bradburne? Are his poems a follow-up or even an expression of grace, mystic or not? Before discussing this point, let's pin down the essence and lived experience of his Christian faith and life. I fully agree with David Crystal that "he has only one theme, and it is the most profound of them: the nature of the triune God, as manifested in Jesus, as born of Mary. From this theme comes all others - God's plan in human history, salvation, love, mission ... Bradburne gets as close as he can to the godhead, through the figure of Mary". John was a God-addict. That pun pins down the focus of our investigation: his relationship with God One and Three and with Mary - an experience which possibly led him to mysticism.

Yet, other dimensions of his poetry may, in their own way, testify to a kind of mystical experience. I could start with his life with the lepers, but I'll keep that for later, as they are inseparable from his life with God. I will thus dwell on an example of another important dimension of his religious poetry, namely nature as a potential topic for mysticism: his relationship with bees.

John Bradburne and bees... It's a lifelong story – and even an afterlife one... He had at times up to 50,000 bees living in his cell. And he mused about them in more than 300 poems (note that it is even more than his admired Virgil). Who do we see, in those poems? An attentive, curious, and inventive observer, who goes from acute comments to playful puns? Yes, but a lot more. Realistic observation and symbolic vision of bees and beehive are united in his verses, and it isn't too much to say it was born from a spiritual friendship with the so-called wild kingdom of bees, as he wrote: "... well / Apparent it seems that a mutual joy is shared by these bees and this idiot boy" (*Maybe Matter for a Morning*, 1969). His poetic and theological 'Summa Apifica' follows a long Christian tradition, especially Franciscan. St Francis asked for wine and honey to be put outside for bees, and John was careful that they neither lacked water or food. St Francis had hives forming in his cell, as did John. In John's cell, they nested near or between his legs under his work table, that same table on which he wrote his poems. Neither them nor John found it odd.

So as God spoke to St Francis through his Creatures (the *Canticle*), he may have spoken to John through and by the bee-world knitted in his poems:

A hive of bees is like one perfect being,
 A colony of bees is like to God...
 A hive is like the Kingdom of a Queen
 Who rules with Christ amidst the Trinity
 Keeping each well-willed member blithe and keen:
 A beehive is a universal wonder
 Loving the sun, naught is more marvel under.
 (*Quis ut Deus*, 1971)

His relationship with bees may be seen as a part and an expression of his life with and in God. We have a good witness for this: one day, Colin Carr, a young teacher (later on a Dominican friar), knocked at the door of John's cell at Chishawasha and entered. He sat down and suddenly realised that there were other guests in the room: dozens of thousands of bees...! When asked, his host told him that they were his guests, and that they would be nice to him if he was nice to them. Had he ever been stung? John replied that "when they were killing off the drones they got a bit excited, and he got the odd sting", but he didn't seem to think that was a big deal. And that was all. They kept talking, while the winged guests kept buzzing around. It's when he left that Carr realised that he had experienced some kind of a miracle: he had "forgotten" to be afraid of bees. As he wrote later on: "I had been at least temporarily a resident in the peaceable kingdom where the wolf lies down".²

The "mystical" itinerary of John Bradburne

It all started in 1942. John was then a 20-year-old soldier, doing his "coming of age" duty; that is, at the time, fighting as a second lieutenant for Britain in the Far East. As his battalion was crushed by the Japanese in Malaya, he somehow escaped with Captain Hart for a month in the jungle. There, he was struck by cerebral malaria – often a fatal illness if not

² A mystical dimension similar to the one with bees and with poetry may be found in John's relation to music. As early as the mid-fifties, he wrote: "Yet there is on Earth a music that expresses at the same time both Heavenward longing and profound peace of soul; such music seems to say 'we are mortals, yes, but promised Immortality: we are pilgrims, but our Native Land's in sight, so our hearts can rejoice as we journey.' This mood may be found among works of certain great composers, especially Bach; but its most complete expression is in the Plainsong of the Church, in the chant called 'Gregorian'. Of this chant the Holy Spirit is the Composer, for all the Liturgy is work of His direct inspiration. And the singer is Christ's Church - the Mystical Body of the Son" (*Ut unum sint*, Introduction).

treated in time... One evening, as he dragged himself under the trees, “something happened”. In his words:

Above the rubber-forest shone a star,
The brightest Westward, beckoning afar;
It seemed to me a sign from Christ the King,
Who out of chaos joy and peace doth bring.
(*Ut unum sint*, stanza 1408, 1955/6)

This led him to a second discovery: “I felt for the first time that there is something beyond us – if only we could get in touch with it”. He felt he had some kind of “sixth sense” to perceive this “something beyond us” (in a letter to Shirley James). He rarely mentioned it, and the expression is open to various interpretations, but the important thing is that it is linked to the joy and the peace that Christ brought to him, and we are here in the realm of the mystic.

But was it too late for this dying 20-year-old boy? John collapsed. His companion, himself exhausted and starved by a month of flight into the jungle, supported his groggy fellow until they arrived at a seashore. There, Hart stole a small local boat, a sampan, installed John there, and up they sailed towards Sumatra, 100 kms to the west. But soon the frail boat was caught in a typhoon. It washed them back, violently, but still alive, onto the same shore they had left. Hart was looking for another boat when other British soldiers arrived on the same beach. They hijacked another sampan. On the boat, John became delirious and half comatose.

They finally landed in Sumatra. His companions immediately took John to a hospital, just to learn that the Japanese had begun the invasion of Sumatra. John’s state was judged desperate by doctors and, with no great hope, he was evacuated by plane to Medan. There he stayed three days, in between life and death. He had then the vision of a “Lady” (he spoke only twice of it). On the fourth day, the delirium reduced. John later wrote that, as he awoke from this experience, his life had to be changed:

O blest delirium that told
Me clearly that to find The God
Was all I really wanted! odd.
But thus He called me to His Fold
(*Ut unum sint*, stanzas 1410-11, 1956)

At this point, the Japanese were already nearing Medan, and the Europeans were being evacuated by planes to Padang. Hart carried John to the harbour. There, one of the last English ships, overloaded, was beginning to lift its gangway from the jetty: Hart ran, threw John on the

gangway and clung himself to it, despite the sailors who wanted to push them back. The ship escaped Japanese planes and reached Ceylon where Hart and John, still seriously ill, were transferred to a liner going to Bombay. By the time they left, their previous ship had been sunk by the Japanese air force. The two men finally arrived at Bombay.

So death did not want John, or maybe it's God who wanted him on earth. I think that is the way John understood it, as he began then his spiritual quest. He woke up from that experience claiming he was going to follow his father's path in the Anglican clergy. And notwithstanding he had this vision of a White Lady, he remained "anti-papist". Moreover, at this time, he was also attracted by Hindu and Buddhist spirituality, as well as by young women and alcohol.

The war was to go on for three more years, during which John was to become in Burma one of the famous Chindits. Returning in 1945 to England, he soon became engaged, while continuing to pursue his spiritual quest for God and for a Church. As he later told Judith Listowell: "My greatest desire [was] to belong to a society which could embrace the maximum not exclusive minimum, of people on their way to Heaven". This quest led him at the end of 1947 to enter the Catholic Church at Buckfast Abbey, where he immediately asked to enter as a monk, ignoring the fact that it was necessary to choose between marriage and a monastic life! His previous engagement was soon over.

He actually made five attempts at a monastic or consecrated life, staying from a few months to more than twenty, all of them failing: after a promising start, he was thought unfit for the rules of an organised monastic or religious life. For his part, he felt that not enough time was being devoted to prayer (with the exception of the Carthusians).

In fact, more than a monk, John aspired to be a hermit and to devote himself solely to God. So he tried the eremitic life - more than ten times, over a period of twenty years, from a few weeks to several years, in nature or in cities, in Europe then in Africa, and sometimes in the most incongruous places. He lived in an organ gallery in a church in Italy, on top of a mountain in England, under a reservoir or in a henhouse full of chickens and in a cell full of bees in Africa, and finally amongst lepers, where he found his place: living with them by day, and being a hermit-poet at night. As for sleeping? Don't ask...

Can we understand this life within the classical theoretical framework of Christian mysticism, which has generally been defined as an evolution through three phases: the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive? I doubt it. For example, it is impossible to fit it into the framework of Tanqueray's classic textbook *Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*.

Anna Maksjan tried to analyse in this classical way John's mystical itinerary (*The Mystical Dimension of the Poetry of John Bradburne and the Carthusian*, Analecta Cartusiana, 247, Salzburg, 2007), but although there are interesting insights in this attempt, it is not fully convincing: the three phases seem to be mixed in John's life up to the very end. His fifteen monastic and eremitical attempts to live in God never ended in clear unitive terms but always in failures, not to speak about the similar ends of his other commitments and employments. John was rather, as he called himself "a fool, skilled in fiasco", a vagabond of God, a jester of Christ and of Mary. But this doesn't mean he was not found by the God he was looking for.

I will try to describe some of his life's dimensions that seem to belong to a mystical relationship with God. First, and maybe even before he had read anything about Christian mysticism, John understood that the initiative of the encounter he desired falls within God alone:

We are all lost children until we find our
heavenly Father, or, more truly, until we allow
ourselves to be found by Him.
(*Wild Geese Changing their Ground*, 1949)

And the same year,

Thy loveliness alone may be adored
Yet cannot be desired without Thy grace
(*Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes*, 1949)

He wrote two years later:

Our Lord redeemed us by the Cross because He is infinitely in love with us; with each one as though he or she were the only one. So He died for us and bought us back, and conquered death and hell. Now that was Love in action, if you like. So what am I doing? I'm learning to possess the One thing necessary - the love of God. One cannot give to others what one lacks oneself.
(*Letter to Stephen King*, 1951)

Moreover, he understood, without knowing Gregory of Nyssa, that every *omega* of visitation by God is always an *alpha*, a new start towards Him:

It seems to me a sempiternal trend
For blending with The One is none the worse

Even for endless aeons unbegun,
 To wit: God - Holy Spirit, Father, Son.
 (*L'ensuite*, 1974)

This search has to be, as he wrote, "piped by God," as a tune is piped by a flautist (*Eirenicon*, unknown date). And he sacrificed everything for this search, as Jesus asks in the parable of the pearl and of the treasure. For him, this search is a sign that God has found us and gives us his graces, and he invites us to do the same, in a sonnet about this topic whose acrostic contains the words PATER NOSTER.

Finally, in spite of all his failures, John lived his search for God, of His will on him and of his encounter with Him, with great confidence. When he referred to himself as "a fool, skilled in fiasco", he added immediately, very typical of him: "My soul is full of gratitude, there is no bitterness or shame". This basic trust in God is reflected, among other things, in the way he confronted any decision of any importance to be taken: he made on himself a great sign of the Cross followed by a Hail Mary, then tossed a coin, and kept to the result!

A Franciscan and Carthusian mystic

Deeply original, John's desire for God was no less rooted in the great Christian mystic tradition, and especially in the Franciscan and Carthusian mystics. The Franciscan way accompanied his entire religious life, from his poem to St. Francis shortly after his conversion and his joining in some way the Franciscan Third Order up to his childish joy when receiving the Franciscan habit a few years before his death, which became his "cell". He wore it to go to his death. It even "transcended" it, since the first miracle concerning him seems to have taken place because he was going to be buried without this habit. Besides, the only inscription which appears under his name on his tomb at Chishawasha is "Tertiary of St Francis". For the Provincial of the Franciscans of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, who lived more than a year with him, he was more Franciscan than them all, more imitator of St. Francis, because he was so ordinary and at the same time so extraordinary.

The Franciscan way John followed was, firstly, radical poverty and complete refusal of any contact with money. Except for coins for tossing, he never had money on him, of whatever form. A typical example: to go to Africa, he had to take the status of "volunteer", which stipulated that a monthly allowance would be paid to him in a bank account. After his death, this bank account was found completely untouched: John had immediately forgotten about it! As for his clothes, when he was leaving

for the lepers in Mutemwa (spelled Mtemwa at this time), he had only a shirt, shorts, a pair of shoes, a toothbrush, and a Roman missal. Everything he received, he gave away. Franciscan also were his simplicity and frugality of life: when he was for nearly four years guardian of the summer residence of the archbishops of Westminster, an account was open for his expenses, food and routine expenditures, at the local grocery. From the first to the last day of each month, during all these years, the daily purchase John made was strictly the same: a small box of Heinz beans. At Mutemwa, he fed on powdered milk, and often fasted. Certainly, he often talked of himself as a drunkard - and reading him, it may seem that this was the last "slender and delicate thread" which prevented his soul to "arrive at the liberty of divine union" (St John of the Cross). In fact, he drank wine or alcohol only if a visitor brought a bottle, and more often shared this or gave it to the lepers - abstinence was his last victory just before his death. This asceticism was lived in great humility: he said of himself a few weeks before his killing: "The battle for real detachment finds me a very frail soldier", adding: "But maybe it is better to know what an infant one is than to count oneself the pick of God's Own Infantry!" (*Letter*, June 1979).

Most important for our topic: deeply Franciscan was his desire to serve God both for Himself (as St Francis in his hermitages) and in the poorest and most destitute ones, the lepers (St Francis at the beginning and end of his itinerary with God; John at Mutemwa). Franciscan also was his chaste and courteous love of Mary and his humour in relation to Christ: Celano writes that Francis "joked" with the Lord (2C 95), and John did the same with him and Mary:

Our Lady is a dashing Blonde,
 Our Lord is her delight
 And nobody can get too fond
 Of playing in their sight.
 (*Letter to Bruce Wilkinson*, January 1978)

On the other hand, John remained all his life marked by his eight-month stay at Parkminster Charterhouse. He painted the Carthusian motto *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis* on the wall of his tin hut at Mutemwa (which he described, together with his heart, as a "Carthusian cell"). In addition to the eremitism mixed with community life in the Carthusian way that he practised in Mutemwa, he followed this way as frequently as he could through a life of solitude and silence, striving towards God as preparation for welcoming Him. The lack of solitude weighed on him so much that he wrote that, when he had too many visitors, he felt as if he would die

"murdered" by the lack of breathing the air of solitude (but he never said this about his life with the lepers). He wanted to make his the ideal of the Charterhouse:

Carthusians! O may we race
 As they amid the fields of grace,
 And sprint to see the Saviour's face.
 (*Ut unum sint*, stanza 609, 1955/6)

Carthusian also was his unique relation to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, a text of an anonymous 14th-century English mystic, maybe linked to the Carthusian family, discovered by John during his months in Parkminster. The *Cloud* was, with the Bible, *his* book, and often even the only two he had. It deals with every aspect of the mystical path - defined as man seeking God and God seeking man, and proposes a practical way: to abandon all thought, all idea, all illusion of knowing, and start uttering lovingly and heartily God's name towards the cloud of unknowing where He stands. John wrote:

Uttering but His Name,
 One syllable I claim
 To pierce the dark and, like a rising lark, adore.
 (*El*, 1972)

According to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, it is necessary to renounce the way of knowledge, which strives to understand and so to grasp God, for the way of love in which God, maybe, will grasp us. John followed this path for almost 30 years and tirelessly repeated the divine Hebrew name "El, El, El", or innumerable rosaries and Jesus' prayer. One of his friends who had been introduced by him to this way wrote: "It is not you praying, but the Spirit praying in you". John sometimes also prayed with the Hindu invocation *Aum* or the Buddhist *Om mani padme hum* he learnt during his stay in India before his conversion (he said with humour that the latter was a premonitory echo of *Ave Maria, Dominus tecum* - no syncretism, but a Christianisation of pre-Christian forms, as the Fathers of the Church did with the Greco-Roman world). He added the name of Mary, who is, according to him, the cloud of unknowing where Jesus lives.

He was an apostle of the *Cloud* way: "I tell you that Unknowing is our Mission" (*A Ballade of an Evensong*, 1975). What he lived by practising it shaped his mysticism, "caught, not taught", as he often said about religion, a sentence dear to his uncle, Lord Baden Powell. And he himself had been caught.

Finally, John drew from the *Cloud* the discretion required about God's part when it comes to the encounter with Him, for He is beyond all that we can say, and moreover, love is reciprocal consummation, not exchange of thoughts. This centrality of love as God's gift, because it is God's substance, is emphasized in many of his poems to the glory of love (of charity). For example

Now let me tell you this, you pilgrims all,
 Love is a long desire, a short disease,
 An everlasting healing and a call
 To highest things that do most greatly please;
 Love is an elixir to drink down fast
 And love is like a fool who hails a Queen,
 None of those strolling players in the cast
 Of vast humanity has missed its sheen;
 You'll see it on the leaves that stir and dance,
 You'll feel it in the breezes as they blow,
 Its deep appeal is on the seas that glance
 Up at the skyscape... canst escape it? No:
 Love is the very substance of the Lord
 And merrily He moves and proves accord.
 (*Eirenicon*, 1977)

A trinitarian mystic?

John wrote: "To come first to what matters most: the Blessed Trinity... this is the most important message of the purpose and purport of my life" (*Letter*, 1976). What had he found, or rather, to use his own words: had *he* been found by the Triune God? The answer is basically the one in the *Cloud of Unknowing*: discretion. Can we still get some hints about it? In addition to the little that John said about his experience on the threshold of death in the Malayan jungle and Sumatra, and about his "sixth sense", he referred to the latter in a few poems, particularly related to the Eucharist:

Six senses you may have if you will ask
 The Master kind who hides behind that mask
 And sits amidst the Seven Sacraments
 As Centre of them each in all those tents...
 (*On The Feast of Corpus Christi*, 1978)

On the other hand, John was prolific when it came to the Trinity. He seems to be the Christian poet who wrote the most intensively about it in the 20th century. At least since 1949, and throughout decades, he sought

words and images to express what he experienced in front of the fire of the divine triune love, its mystery and bottomless depth. With this purpose, like St Augustine and other Fathers of the Church, he dug first into analogies from Nature (heat, light and sound, for example). But he especially favoured those concerning man: memory, intelligence and will; love given, love received and love in act; and later on in the daily realities of African life, such as three bricks, three sticks, a central flame.

It was during one of the darkest periods in his life that his Trinitarian meditation skyrocketed. In April 1973 he was removed from his position as Mutemwa Warden and had to leave the Centre under police escort. He didn't go far but settled, in full cold icy winter, at the top of Mt Chigona, above Mutemwa. He was to spend six months there, under a thin canvas tent held up by large stones, while a leopard was said to roam on the mountain. He crept into the Centre at night when a leper was sick or dying. His situation seemed hopeless and, what was worse for him, the situation of the lepers quickly became worse and worse. He knew then weeks of dereliction, and wondered if he was not in fact a madman, as claimed by his detractors.

It was in the midst of this situation that he meditated days and nights on the mystery of the Holy Trinity and on how to share what is revealed to the soul and within the soul that contemplates it with awe. A good number of the 300 poems he wrote on or with mention of the Trinity which have come down to us date from this period. He developed his original analogy, even if it was not totally unprecedented: Father/Thought, Son/Word, Spirit/Voice. It became so familiar to him that it was sometimes commutable in his writing with "Trinity", or became allusive but easily discernible. This analogy may be seen as an original contribution to Trinitarian theology. A question arises: did it come to him from meditation or from a fruitful experience of the Triune God? To this question we can provide a sketch of an answer: John, who was almost always quite indifferent to what he wrote, took this analogy very seriously and wanted it to be known, nearly as a revelation; more than once he seems to say discreetly in his poetry that this mission was entrusted to him from above:

The Thought, The Word, The Voice are Persons Three
 Of Love in Love with Love for evermore,
 I am assured that it is up to me
 To write this down as clown and troubadour.
 (*Logos*, 1974)

Moreover, if Trinity is not explicitly mentioned in the somewhat obscure following poems, the divine mystery seems in them to have addressed him personally:

I'll not forget this day
 So long as I may live,
 Never a better lay
 To me did Yahweh give
 Than "Cogito": I think
 And therefore am alive
 To the fact that at the brink
 Of eternity should strive
 Each Christian soul to stand
 A-tiptoe on God's hand.
 (*Ad completorium*, 1973)

Their meaning is that in us God alone knows how
 To offer God my naked Being (shared by herds
 As to their every individual) - I AM;...
 God The Incarnate Word who, tiptoe on the brink
 In time, forbids my cogitation dive and sink
 Articulately into anything but one
 Monosyllabic deep whence leap I leap will own.
 I AM..
 (*Nothing*, 1974)

God, and it comes upon me oft
 When times rave hard and crave I soft
 And while amidst the waves I wilt
 Thou pipest, piercest, to the hilt...
 (*Panic*, 1969)

The mystical marriage with the Virgin Mary

When John Bradburne became Catholic, his Anglican prejudices against the Blessed Virgin remained, and were even exacerbated in 1949 in Lourdes, seeing a Marian piety which seemed to him idolatrous. He opened his heart in confession, but the priest, far from being angry, said to him soberly: "Let Mary show herself to you YOUR way" (*Areonautics*, 1971). John understood this sentence as meaning that he could remain himself, without having to imitate others in his prayer to the Blessed Virgin and, instantly, the sceptic became a devotee of Mary in his own way, the way of the child playing and of the devotee lover. He wrote: "Lourdes worked a miracle in my body and soul: of that I am now sure.

She has done the same for countless others, but that does not lessen the miracle, but increases its wonder" (quoted in John Dove, *Strange Vagabond of God*, 1997).

Thirteen years later, in Italy, he felt called by the Virgin Mary to a mystical marriage, which took place on 2nd February 1953, in front of a Virgin and Child painting in a mountain chapel. He offered his hand to Mary, and was assured that his request had been accepted and the marriage celebrated by the Holy Trinity. He would remain faithful to this total consecration of himself, which of course involved human celibacy and chastity. He was here in good company, even if the mystical marriage with Mary is quite forgotten today, even among Catholics. Like the one with Christ, it was in the Middle Ages an almost ordinary reality, especially for priests (Mary has been represented on paintings with a cloak on which all the conjugal rings of her "spouses" shine). Several saints, including great ones, illustrated this mystical marriage: St Robert of Molesmes, the founder of the Cistercian Order, St Hermann-Joseph, St Edmund of Canterbury and, later on, St. Jean Eudes and St Vincent Pallotti. The theology of this mystical marriage was developed in the 15th century by Denis the Carthusian, the *Ecstatic Doctor*, who showed its scriptural roots and profound christocentrism, and concluded: "Let each one of us marry this blessed Virgin by the fervour of love towards her and the will of an inseparable attachment ". John wrote similarly:

...I married her
 (Whom mystically may
 Any she'll ask and well prefer)
 (*Reminiscence*, 1971)

The French Jesuit Bertrand de Margerie resumed this study in 1994. For him, more prudent than his predecessor, it is an exceptional spiritual way, very rare but legitimate if well understood.

John would dedicate (completely or partly) some 750 poems to Mary (however, he quoted about five times more in his poetry the Trinitarian mystery of the Father, the Son and/or the Holy Spirit). Did he speak of her in ordinary life? I asked Father Dove about this point and he answered: "He opened his heart to everyone on Mary, but if he felt some resistance, he no longer spoke about her. For him, this sense of Mary, we have it or we do not have it".

What is surprising in John's poems about Mary is his freedom. Love makes lovers creative. This is manifested by the variety of names he used, those of the tradition but also, among others, Fairy Queen, Queen of birds, gnomes, hearts, Sion, smiles, Loveliest Lady of Midsummer Day, Maid of

Glee, of fountains, choice, Love, Milkmaid of my dreams, barmaid; and he made infinite play with her name. His mariology borrowed from and renews on occasion patristic and medieval thought, such as his “Ground Inviolate” (with a triple pun on Biblical, heraldic, and musical levels). We also come across, in the course of his poetry, some bold evocations, such as going for a bath or on the sand or dancing with her, being on her knees, embracing, kissing, rhyming in bed.... Could it be said that in his extravagant poeticism John transgressed the limits of pious familiarity? He was certainly capable of imprudence, but should we not read these poems in the light of the significance he himself attributed to a Roman experience he made in 1968? He had recovered the innocence of a passion both virginal and full of tender humour, even if such a relationship is scarcely intelligible in the contemporary pansexual paradigm, Let us take an example. He wrote:

Our Lady is won in no easier way
 Than praying the Rosary; saying 'Au lait'
 She softly invites you to pray at her breast
 Or else on her knee, neither better, both best...
 (*Not Last of the Miracles*, 1977)

This may seem much too audacious, but it resumes what we find written in a popular medieval legend about St Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Lactatio*, when the Virgin “put her holy breast in his mouth and taught him divine science” with her milk, from which the saint “conceived 700 monks” as “children of Mary”. John’s boldness is the one of Dionysius the Carthusian, who attributed to the spiritual union with Mary all the characteristics of carnal union, *mutatis mutandum*. He is “unafreud”, repeats “Honi soit qui mal y pense”, and tells us how his Marian poetry should be read:

My thrust is that of just a troubadour;
 My action is in words because
 There is no better fashion
 Since Christ our Lord incarnate was
 For sublimating passion.
 (*Freedom in Wedlock*, 1972)

In his enthusiasm for the Blessed Virgin, he even invented a word, “Quoternity”, to speak about Mary's relationship to the Trinity, which may sound heretical but is not : it means that Mary is the declaration (“quote”) that Trinitarian love makes to us (cf. John Paul II: “The Mother of Christ presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son's will, pointing out those

things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested”, *Redemptoris Mater*, 21).

As for the mystical reality of this union, John is discreet. However, he writes

Then spake Our Blessed Lady, and my life was new:
 She said - 'My child, give me your hand, I'll guide your pen,
 And we will write about the love God has for men.'
 (*Ut unum sint*, stanza 1693, 1955/6)

A night as this I know
 That what I say she says is so.

'Fiat!'.
 (*To the Fairy Queen*, 1978)

And one acrostic poem (“Of benevolence”) offers MARY TOLD ME.

A mysticism of participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ?

The touchstone of Christian mysticism is, of course, Christ himself, and mystical experience is an eminent form of the grace of baptism, participating in His salvific mission and paschal mystery. John saw himself mostly as minstrel, troubadour, juggler, jester, idiot, fool, and buffoon of Christ, following the Franciscan and Fools-for-Christ tradition. Moreover, as he entered the Catholic Church on the feast of Christ the King, he felt himself as a herald of the Great King, especially with regard to the Jewish people.

His Eucharistic devotion is strong, and an important dimension of his mystical life with Christ, rewarded by the graces of contemplation which this poem testifies to:

Ah, love is fed by gazing long
 Upon that form and face
 Which in appeal is far more strong
 Than any other's grace,
 But Love made Flesh on whom we look
 Seems featurelessly round...
 Could Jesus possibly have made
 Himself more dimly traced?
 It gleams but seems so unarrayed,
 No head, no limbs, no waist!

O salutaris Hostia,
 Ineffably disguised,
 We know exactly who you are,
 The rest may be surmised:
 (*Aubade*, 1971)

Meeting the leprous God

It is in the lepers that John met eminently and mystically the Christ, of whom he wrote in a premonitory way, a fortnight before hearing for the first time about the lepers' Centre of Mutemwa: "Thou leprous God! Thou outcast stricken thing!" (*Man Friday*, 1968). When he discovered the Centre, a hell on earth, he decided, not without an internal spiritual fight, to move there, where he became not only a manager but also a nurse, cook, gardener, choirmaster, confidant, counsellor, and even undertaker and grave-digger. And the miracle happened: after two weeks in Mutemwa he already could call all the lepers by their names, and soon he knew them so well that he wrote a poem-cycle in which a poem is devoted to each one!

Mutemwa became an oasis of peace, songs, joy, and faith. Like those on St Francis, the *Fioretti* on John Bradburne at Mutemwa are abundant. To give but one, he addressed one day Veronica Karugu, a leper with an excruciatingly disfigured face and very conscious of her misfortune as she had been a beautiful woman - no one had ever seen her smile: "O, *Mai* Veronica, when you get to Heaven, you will look so beautiful, really beautiful". He said this in such a confident and matter-of-fact voice that she smiled for the first time, and everyone saw her as she would then be. She became one of his faithful assistants. As "a toeless ballerina" (*Veronica Karugu*, 1971), she would run to help whenever a resident becomes distressed, and was present at all deaths, always finding the words to comfort. John compared her to Veronica's veil.

If the lepers were transformed, John was no less. Like St Francis, he could say: "What had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body" (*Testament*). He was so assimilated to his companionship with Christ, serving Christ in the least of his brothers, that he used a rare verb to mean it: "Jesus who brothers us in everything" (*Unus Pastor, unum Ovile*, 1974). Does this mean that this life with the lepers was easy for him? No! He was just as unwilling as the rest of us would be. Leprosy is hardly a nice disease, yet John totally gave himself to these people. "I stayed at the side of a bath where he was washing an old man. I don't think you would like that sort of thing, but it has to be done, and John had to do it" (John Gough). "Death is never a pleasant sight, but the death of a dirty,

smelly, deformed creature is repellent. That is when John's saintliness was really apparent" (Mona Smith).

In his eyes, some of the lepers were full of God's presence, and in more than one poem he marvelled about their mystical life with God:

Hazy are not
 These folk, nor forgotten
 By Father not far but full near
 With His Love for His Only-Begotten.....
 (*Mtemwa (Mutemwa)*, 1972)

Lepers - they make a mighty mystery
 Excruciating mainly for themselves:
 ...
 If in my place you stood with these at hand
 By God's good grace you'd better understand.
 (*Mootamewa*, 1971)

Quaint Peter, take the lead,
 You are a saint indeed
 Unless there are no saints to grace our time;
 ...
 You, with your blind-man's stick
 And a faith full Catholic,
 Went roaming slowly up to heaven's clime.
 And that is where you are
 In spirit, like a star
 That shines amidst the darkness of the void;
 Empty of eyes, your face
 Is all a smile of grace
 (*The Vision of the Blind*, 1971)

So, his life in Mutemwa was really a life in Christ, a mystical encounter with Him, God made leprous, outcast in his brothers. His vows were now fulfilled: by the grace of Christ he was serving as Jesus did, and meeting Him in this service.

On the Cross: the passion of John Bradburne

This participation in Christ's Passion through the poor lepers of Mutemwa was crowned by John's own passion and death for them. Since 1976 at least, he knew that his life was threatened, and he wrote the following year:

The terrorists have not yet shot me down,
 But would they waste a bullet on a clown?
 (*Letter*, 1977)

But he knew also that if he left Mutemwa, the lepers would be chased, maybe even killed - the guerrillas had already promised the land of the Centre to their neighbours – so he stayed, even when Dr Luisa Guidotti, his friend and the lepers' friend, was killed in July 1979 (her canonical process is well engaged in Italy). A few weeks before his death he wrote:

In case those 'Vakomana'³ bright
 This very night come here,
 Slowly O slowly let me write
 Why never shed a tear.
 (*Prologue to the Next Possible Exit*, 1979)

Then, on 26th August 1979, he wrote to a friend in Australia: “For some odd reason no one has wasted a bullet on me yet ... Though it may be in transit even now...”. The last sentence was true: his death was indeed being discussed near Mutemwa. Four days later, John told a leper that he had no peace in his hut, that an evil lurked. He knew then a real agony, with inextinguishable thirst and anguish. On Saturday, 1st September, he asked the lepers to pray for him and went to pray on Chigona mountain. When he came down, he seemed calm and told the lepers, who pressed him to leave, that a great Angel had asked him to stay. On Sunday, he spoke to them about St. Lawrence Martyr (even if it was not the feast of this saint), then read the books of Judith and of Esther in his bible and asked the lepers to pray with him, under the terrifying noise of helicopters during the entire day, on their way to a warrior mission, which only increased the tension.

It was about midnight on Sunday evening when the guerrillas arrived and knocked at the door of his hut to invite him out for a prayer. He got up, put on his Franciscan habit and opened the door. They tied him up and dragged him into the bush. He did not struggle, but continued to say that they could pray where they were. He had difficulty keeping pace with his young kidnapers. After walking about ten kilometres, they arrived in a cave. The *mujibhas* (young auxiliaries of the guerrillas) jostled and mocked him. One of them asked if he had ever eaten shit, because he would have the opportunity to do so. They made him kneel, then pushed one of the girls of the group in front of him and ordered him to copulate

³ Members of the guerilla.

with her. He protested, without shouting or struggling. Then they ordered him to dance. The raillery continued all the rest of the night, until his torturers got tired. In the morning, they tied his hands again and led him into a neighboring kraal. He spent the next two days hobbled.

Then he was taken to another cave in front of a "People's Court". Surprise: on the small hill where the Marxist guerrillas were hidden, there was a naive rock painting of Jesus. John fell several times on his knees in front of it, before being dragged to the cave. There, he was accused of helping the Rhodesian army (his radio receiver which they had seized was produced by the *mujhibas* as a proof, but upon examination it turned to their confusion) and also, on a religious ground, of not following ancestral spirits. But the guerrilla commander who ran the "trial" soon understood who he was dealing with and decided that the white man was not guilty and was free to return to Mutemwa to resume his work for the poor Africans. John had not said a word. But the deputy of the commander intervened: the white man could not be released because he had seen their hiding places. The commander tried to rescue John and suggested that he could be sent to Mozambique. But this time it was John who spoke: impossible, the lepers needed him. Then he kneeled down and prayed. One of those who attended the scene would recount his serenity, as if his fate was not at stake.

He was then taken for the rest of the night to a session of indoctrination with the villagers of the area. At one point a young mother, Dorica Mapfunde, came to sit next to him with her twin babies, who proceeded to sit in his lap and quickly fell asleep. Later, he returned them to the mother, got up, and said: "*Amai*, you will not see me again but I will pray for you", and he started praying on his knees, arms raised to the sky. Before dawn, the peasants returned to their kraals. The commandant asked John to join a group of peasants heading in the direction of Mutemwa. John stopped twice on the way to pray, sweating, before they arrived at the main road. There, one of the guerrillas who had followed the group took John by the arm. He did not resist, fell to his knees, and prayed a minute. When he got up again, the guerrilla emptied his Kalashnikov on him – 23 bullets. John fell on his knees, then gently collapsed to the ground, without a word, while his body bled to death: "*hwayana*" (sheep), as an elderly peasant reported later.

The dimension of John's conformation to Christ in His passion is strong: agony, arrest by treason, mockery, insults and bad treatment, trial, religious accusations, silence, the role of Pilate played by the commander, the crowd that claims death, the execution in a garden "outside the city".

Was John Bradburne a Christian mystic?

Leaving aside what happened after John's death - which comes under the judgment of the Church, since it is a matter of numerous miracles which seem to show that if John participated in Christ's Passion, he is working with him beyond death - I conclude with the question: "Was John a Christian mystic?" I asked Father Dove, the man who knew him best, and his answer was:

We could say that John was a mystic, but it came quite naturally in his religious life, in his case. Yes, he was a mystic, but it was so natural, so lovely for him. I would say he was a mystic, a man who readily talked about God, and had an easy conversation with Him. (2010)

Other answers from those who knew John Bradburne are similar:

His was the story of one for whom the final reality was all. That is the difference between John Bradburne and most of the rest of us. In Bradburne there was no false dichotomy; his love was not split between created being and Creator. How could it be? He saw in all the imprint, in beauty, of Him Who is Beauty itself. (Fr Crane, 2003).

His intense longing for union with God was what one experienced with John. I would arrive to visit him with a mind full of the events of my life... the petty upsets of life... or a dramatic horror during the bush war, but before I had off-loaded half my burden on John, who was always sympathetic, I would get the feeling that my problems were circumscribed, that they dimmed in the light of a more immediate reality. John operated in a mainly spiritual dimension. (Pauline Hutchings, 2007).

He saw God in people and in all creatures and situations, and his joy to act in such a way was so visible to everyone he met. It was this desire for God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit that I felt when we were together (Anne Lander, 2009).

I share these four judgments. And as every charism, St Paul tells us, is for the good of the whole body of Christ, the Church, John's mystical charism is also a gift for each of us. Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche, is a good witness of this when he writes about John that "the story of John's life has touched me heart and soul, and brought me closer to God. It has revealed to me a God wonderfully full of surprises, better, more intelligent, more creative than we could imagine. An extraordinary God who cannot be confined in rational concepts or in an 'ordinary' religious life".

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN BRADBURNE THE POET

DANIELE PICCINI

I am tempted to consider John Bradburne as a sort of poetic phenomenon. What do I mean? His lingering, indeed his dwelling in poetry, does not correspond to ordinary education and poetic militancy. It is as if he came to poetry from a distance, and used it without ever wanting to be a poet. He is ironic about his not being a true poet and about the difference between himself and typical poets. Therefore, the first issue to address is related to the role of poetry for him and how he used it. I have to highlight how, not being a scholar of English literature, I investigate the topic as a non-specialist, as a partial observer, who for example does not evaluate the author's relationship with his contemporary literary tradition, in particular with Shakespeare, to whom John has dedicated many poems. Many of the answers, certainly hypothetical, come from the observation of his habits as a writer of verses and from the reading of his verses.

The first point is that John deliberately avoided the identification of poetry with a 'profession'. Clearly, he was a skilled writer, but he never wanted to consider himself as part of a 'chosen' category; he did not want to confer upon himself a qualification that was somehow ennobling his status. For him, poetry was a natural flow, even if technically modulated. He often alluded to the desire to write poetry as birds produce their songs and bees their honey. He saw poetry as a sort of function embedded in human nature, which comes before - and goes beyond - the humanistic habitus, despite the need of technical knowledge, of which he was aware.

This point is particularly relevant. Composing poetry *the way birds sing* means to place the poetic activity at the most humble and essential level. Formal perfection and aesthetic completeness are not priorities, as poetry represents a way of completing the human experience. Yet poetry is not simply a natural activity: there is expertise to be put in place, but this is conceived as a natural element of creation. Above all, like the birds, John did not expect any reward here and now, if not the intrinsic joyfulness in

the act of composing poetry. Therefore, writing was a joy, a fuller participation in the richness of creation.

This is deeply related to the Franciscan roots of John's singular experience - a source that seems to be decisive. Like the saint of Assisi - so loved by him that he wanted to become a member of the third Franciscan order and be buried in its religious habit - he intends to praise all the elements of creation, amazed by their own variety and their very existence. This comes before any philosophical debate on existential issues: the focus is on the elements of creation, with the aim of praising it and, through it, of praising the Creator. Every creature is therefore a gateway to the creator. Here, Bradburne is much closer to Francis than to the Franciscan Iacopone da Todi: all things and creatures speak of God and represent a pure emanation, refractions, and reflections of the Divine.

Being aware of the debatable nature of this position, Bradburne feels the need to provide further explanations, almost anticipating a possible objection. A poem edited by David Crystal in *Birds, Bees and Beasts* starts with "Good people, call me not a pantheist", and then continues "That God all creatures made I'll not forget". The body of the poem, whose full manuscript (1955/6) has been transcribed in the collected poems by Crystal, develops the theme that all living creatures depend on God alone, and draw their existence from the inexhaustible divine source. The true, new Pan is the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. A Pandean sensitivity is actually present in John's poetics, especially when he refers to animals. But his 'Panism' is an unconditional and sweet praise of the divine source. Everything speaks of God, and everything is praised in God.

Again, this view is more similar to the one expressed in the *Canticle of the Creatures* than in the *Lauds* of Iacopone. In the latter, the uttermost mystical theme of the Divinehood as "non-being", and a negation of all that is, substituted the joyful praise of creation: an unknowable, radical Alterity of the negative theology. Conversely, in John - as in his father Francis, to whom he looks with ecstatic admiration - every species, every sign of existence is a sign of God the creator, a trait of His alphabet. The poet pursues the divine creation, beating on the keys of the typewriter or writing with a pen, behind the marvelous work of those hands. We could say that part of John's poetry represents an admired extension of the initial chapters of the *Book of Genesis* and, indeed, a continued, expanded, and detailed rewriting of the *Laudes* of Saint Francis.

How can this conception be reconciled with the concrete form in which John's poetry is realized? His poems continually emulate traditional metrics and rhymes, where the verses are built on continuous and refined sound effects: echoes, paronomasias, alliterations, assonances, word-plays,

and puns. It is not a poetry of pure and simple effusion - or rather, the outpouring of a creature-like feeling is subjected to a structure. I think that he uses this instrument almost in excess, thus showing his playful nature. Again, he uses the most visible techniques and eclecticism of traditional poetics to affirm that he is not a noble poet: he simply plays with poetry, using a 'regressive' background because he is not interested (only) in literature. In a text commented by Crystal, John says: "We simply love being so retrogressive", quoting the nursery rhymes. He is telling us not to take too seriously the literariness of his poetry, which he saturates and uses in excess. However, verbal play is also an expression of a personal faith in the power of words, which attract each other, meet and merge in their creativity, imitative of the potency of the Creator.

If these observations are pertinent, then one might ask what is serious, profound, and needful in John's poetry. Well, under the shower of sound effects and cadence of rhythm and rhymes, which is like the humility and the childhood of his poetry, he conceals his inspired, high, and prophetic content. This content, in order to be expressed, needs to be, in a Franciscan manner, close to the earth, to attain poetical humiliation, as the speaker is always different from the Self and from the very poet.

The *transparency* of John's poetry can at times be crystalline: in the most joyous and playful mood, he gives voice to the wonder of creation, to the things that, all together, represent the expression of the divine breath. When he speaks of Umbria and in particular of Assisi, this ability to provide a voice to what is not the Self is particularly intense. Again, with Francis, he shares the attitude to the joyous eulogy of the world. Assisi is a place in some ways removed from pure nature and inscribed in the purity of sanctity. Even the tormented Celan, in Assisi, wrote a poem tinged with a vein of nostalgia for the sacred and the divine. It is also the result of the air, the suspension of the place, from which the sweet and suffered spirit of Francis radiates. What follows are the poems of Paul Celan and John Bradburne on Assisi.

1. Assisi (1955)– Paul Celan (translation by Michael Hamburger 2002)

Umbrian night.

Umbrian night with the silver of churchbell and olive leaf.

Umbrian night with the stone that you carried here.

Umbrian night with the stone.

Dumb, that which rose into life, dumb.

Refills the jugs, come.

Earthenware jug.
 Earthenware jug to which the potter's hand grew affixed.
 Earthenware jug which a shade's hand closed for ever.
 Earthenware jug with a shade's seal.
 Stone, wherever you look, stone.
 Let the grey animal in.
 Trotting animal.
 Trotting animal in the snow the nakedest hand scatters.
 Trotting animal before the word that clicked shut.
 Trotting animal that takes sleep from the feeding hand.
 Brightness that will not comfort, brightness you shed.
 Still they are begging, Francis – the dead.

2. The Road to Assisi (1973) – John Bradburne

Might as well
 Set the route of the matter
 In contemporary style
 Otherwise
 They'll curse me for a square
 Roundly!

Dust.
 White Dust.
 That was about it.

Verse Three: In cathedrals
 And places where they sing
 Here followeth the anthem –

Up, up, my soul,
 With gladness now
 Resume by grace of God
 To tell the glory of the Plough
 Seen from the stubbled clod
 Whereon I slept if slept I not
 In the roadside ditch;
 O the nights were hot
 And bright they were
 And the Plough stood fair
 With its jewelled points
 Above in the lovely air.

Assisi was
 My gladsome goal
 And that because

From pole to pole
 Il Poverello's
 Pealing call
 Is a fanfare rich
 Bewitching all
 That have a mind
 And a heart to raise
 To the Lord of strolling Tuscany
 And Umbria's rolling ways.

Upon the Vigil of Saint Clare
 I reached Assisi...
 Three days there.

Trumpets played
 And they made to ring
 That ancient fane
 Reechoing:
 On the Feast of the Sister-Saint of the Saint I sing.

It is certainly not a matter of comparing the two poems or the two poets, but rather to compare that "Splendour, which does not know how to comfort" to the splendour which comforts. Both texts, with different points of view, feature the presence of Francis: in the former, the dead implore him; in the latter he is highlighted for the glorification of creation. Assisi is a place of poetic intensity. Anyone approaching Assisi with an open mind and heart will feel this, according to the resonances of his intimate inquietude and tension. John's poem on Assisi is less regular and structured than usual, as if he was affected by Assisi's freedom and appeal. Saint Francis is his polar star, the cardinal point from which he observes the world of creatures. Therefore, in the chaste light of the 'Poverello', the world of creatures seems to have been already healed by the wounds of Nature.

Only in a Franciscan and prophetic perspective can creatures be perceived as pacified, fraternized, and not subjugated by the mortal law of Nature. The languages of beasts and men meet; the beasts are at peace with one another, as Isaiah prophesies. It is a sort of Eden in which John's poetry is immersed, exalting not the condition of nature, but of grace, with the instruments he has. Eden is the name of the stream near his home, as Didier Rance recalls in his biography of the poet. Eden is the place to which his poetry and his life tends, towards ultimate martyrdom, which also seems to be the gateway.

At the core of his poetics there is love for all creatures, fulfilled by the choice of serving the lepers and by his poetry. Love-Charity is the answer: "This is the panacea over strife". Love is the key of creation, which – as a poem says - makes birds tremble and vibrate in view of migration, and ignites with passion the vagabond, who sees in charity the sacred heart of Jesus burning for us, until the sacrifice: the mystery of divine love.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICA AND MARTYRDOM

MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO

The 20th century has been a new time of martyrdom for Christians, similar to the early days of our era, maybe even more. It was the *century of martyrdom*, to quote the title of the essay written by Andrea Riccardi. The intuition of Pope John Paul II found confirmation in the studies and surveys conducted by Riccardi and the "Vatican Commission of the new martyrs", specifically set up to create a "census" of the new martyrs of the 20th century. It is the sacrifice of Christians in that century which involves and unites, significantly, all Christian confessions. Will martyrdom also mark the history of the 21st century?

The 20th century was the most violent in the history of mankind; a century of world wars, of totalitarianism; a century which 'escaped from God'. In this climate, Christians have witnessed the Gospel, and because of it they have lost their lives. This happened in all continents, and at different times; but a very particular story is that of the martyrdom of Christians in African history. This cannot be understood without recalling some significant experiences in the great continent in the 20th century. Africa found itself to be - in the short period of twenty years, between the 19th and 20th centuries - a huge European 'possession'. From a mysterious and unknown continent, it became a land of conquest and expansion for the European powers: France, Britain, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, and Italy. Colonization was rapid, intense, and widespread. A mixture of economic interests, geographic curiosity, and "civilizing" intentions (the "white man's burden") made Africa an appendage of Europe, with political implications of unprecedented dimensions in history.

Even religious affiliations have changed rapidly, with a fast, albeit unequal, spread of Christianity. It seemed to be a long-lasting process, but in the 1950s there was an unexpected acceleration, in the form of the independence of dozens of African countries. 1960 represents the climax of this process, "the year of Africa". A decade of hope, of optimism, was

soon replaced by a wave of negativity due to the failure of applying democracy, the outbreak of civil wars, the multiplication of dictatorships, and single-party regimes. "Afrique noire est mal partie", wrote René Dumont as early as 1962. However, the enthusiasm of that 1960 had overshadowed the total lack of preparation of young African countries - and I refer in particular to those in the sub-Sahara, rather than the Maghreb. By the explicit will of the colonizing powers, higher education was reserved to a handful of privileged people. Complex and populous countries, whose borders were often arbitrarily defined by the European Chancelleries, were in the hands of the merely insufficient ruling classes: doctors, jurists and administrative experts were generally very few. This choice reflected the perspective of neo-colonialism: the maintenance by Western societies of the main interests and economic districts.

The 1990s constituted another dramatic decade, with various transitions to democracy, but with a deep social crisis due to the "structural adjustment" programs, which brought the average life expectancy of Africans to fall below 40 years, as well as the pandemic spread of AIDS. In this context, Christians witnessed the Gospel of mercy and charity, paying a high price. The 'Commission of the new martyrs' has received 746 reports related to Africa from the dioceses, religious congregations, and others: 349 lay people, 348 religious and priests, 48 bishops, 1 cardinal. They are a part, perhaps small, of the great number of new martyrs in Africa. There are both Africans and Europeans, lay and consecrated, of all confessions.

The first case I would like to mention is the massacre of Ethiopian Coptic monks of the monastery of Debra Libanos. It happened exactly 80 years ago, in 1937. During the night of 19th March, Italian soldiers led by General Pietro Maletti surrounded the monastery, made up of two churches and many traditional houses. Viceroy Rodolfo Graziani - attacked in Addis Ababa a month before and convinced of the complicity of the monks - ordered Maletti by telegraph: "Therefore, kill all the monks, indiscriminately". The massacre lasted several days, and it was cruel and methodical, like the Nazis: between 1400 and 2000 died. Graziani claimed "the complete responsibility of the tremendous lesson" that "made the bowels of the whole clergy tremble". A spiritual lung of Ethiopia was destroyed, not only the clergy; so many others died, including many young people. It is a terrible page in the history of European colonialism, and of Italians in Africa. As Angelo Del Boca wrote, "never in the history of Africa has a religious community suffered an extermination of such proportions".

It is sad to see that the soldiers were blessed by the Italian Church. Cardinal Schuster of Milan praised the army that "opened the gates of Ethiopia to the Catholic faith and to Roman civilization". Did the learned cardinal forget that in Ethiopia Christianity had existed since the fourth century? The sacralization of war, also by military chaplains, led to contempt for Ethiopian Christians. The clergy was - as stated in an authoritative Catholic magazine - "ignorant and corrupt" and the Ethiopian Church "a larva", or rather "a monstrous mixture", because divided from Rome.

The Ethiopian Church would continue to suffer even after independence, especially during the years of the Marxist Derg, when Patriarch Teofilo was arrested and assassinated, and in the following years of the Mengistu dictatorship, which purported to appoint bishops and led to harsh repression. I cannot remember all the cases and situations of martyrdom. In some countries, the first years after independence were punctuated by violence. European missionaries were sometimes targeted as a symbol of the colonial past, with a simplistic and wrong identification. It happened in the Congo, for example, where during the turmoil of the early sixties, after the assassination of Prime Minister Lumumba, the rebels of Pierre Mulele raged against Christians. 1964 was the most terrible year, with 114 victims. In a testimony we read: "The missionaries did not support any faction but suffered continuous threats, especially from the most extreme faction of the rebels. But since January 1964, the missions were attacked, and many missionaries murdered. On the night of January 22, about fifty rebels broke into Kilembe's mission, set fire to the house and murdered Father Defever, Father Hardy, and Father Laebens. The lifeless bodies of the three missionaries were found outside the house, mutilated and marked by deep wounds". It is one of the causes of martyrdom in Africa: the choice to stay, also in difficult situations, not to abandon the communities and populations they serve.

In other contexts, Christians have paid the consequence of denouncing abuses of power and dictatorial methods. This is the case of Uganda, where in the 20th century a Catholic Church grew precisely on the experience and the testimony of the 22 martyrs of 1886. A century later, in February 1977, the Anglican archbishop, Janani Luwum, was assassinated. He had dared to direct himself to the dictator Idi Amin, asking him for a meeting because, as he said, they "we had to bury many deaths because of gunshots and there are many others whose bodies have not been found". The reference is to the indiscriminate killings of opponents, uncomfortable people. A week later, the archbishop and six bishops were arrested and summarily tried. Luwum was not allowed to speak. The president asked

the crowd, "What should we do with these traitors?" "Kill them immediately," replied the soldiers. The bishops were sent away one after the other. Luwum said to his neighbour: "They are about to kill me, but I'm not afraid." His body has not yet been found. The martyrs, as depicted in the icon of the witnesses of the 20th-century faith in San Bartolomeo, have relived the Passion of Christ. This can be seen in Luwum's case, and in many others: the arrest, the mocking, the unjust trial, the torture, the violent and often humiliating killing.

Sometimes higher powers want to silence prophecy. This happened in Brazzaville, Congo, with the assassination of the archbishop of the capital, Cardinal Emile Biayenda, on 22nd March 1977. It happened in Conakry, Guinea, and in Madagascar. Furthermore, Christians were killed in many wars, responsible for so many innocent victims, civilians, especially the poorest and most defenceless in many countries of Africa. I remember Father Michel Halbecq of Brazzaville, a Jesuit, in 1997, when the war was raging. I remember a lay person, Cipriano Parite, father of seven children, extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and coordinator of many parishes in the province of Nampula, in Mozambique. He continued his ministry during the civil war followed by independence, after the priests had been expelled. To bring communion, he violated the laws preventing any movement from one village to another. He was killed in the main square by the guerrillas of the Renamo, not for illegal trespassing, but because he had refused to reveal the name of the local leader of the ruling party, the Frelimo. Cipriano preferred to sacrifice himself rather than collaborate, and with his sacrifice he saved the life of a Muslim.

Again, the Rwandan tragedy. The small and wonderful country of the Great Lakes has experienced one of the most violent and intense genocides of the 20th century, with 800,000 victims in a few weeks. In those dramatic moments of 1994, there were connivances and involvement of Christians in the massacres, but also the strong testimony of congregations where the Hutu Christians refused to separate from the Tutsis and declare their origin, and they were all slaughtered. Similarly, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, thirteen Tutsis and twelve Hutus, and, in nearby Burundi, forty boys of the Buta Seminary, were all killed after Easter 1997. The Catholic Church paid a heavy price: three bishops and 102 priests were killed, along with numerous religious men and women, including the Italian lay missionary Antonia Locatelli, murdered by the Hutu extremists for having denounced the violence and preparation of the genocide: she was one of the very first victims.

In more recent times, we remember the story of many martyrs of charity in Africa. One of them was Annalena Tonelli, a physician in

Somalia since 1969. She took care of her patients, and above all worked for unity and reconciliation. In 2003, she said "My entire life has been devoted to fighting for men to be one. Every day in the TB Centre we work for peace, for mutual understanding, to learn together to forgive ... how difficult is forgiveness! My Muslims are so hard to appreciate it ". Annalena worked in a difficult context, a state-based society, in the hands of the gangs, with fundamentalist groups in permanent conflict. She had chosen to intervene publicly to denounce violence, genital mutilation, extortion, and kidnapping. Her murderer was arrested and sentenced to death, but the Tonelli family strongly invoked grace. At present, the condemnation of Annalena comes from the Imams of Somaliland, described in their preaching as "the irreducible and uncomfortable witness of the power of the Gospel in the Islamic land".

Three years after Annalena, Sister Leonella Sgarbati was killed. During the civil war, she together with three other Sisters of the Consolata, kept open the "village of the child", where it was possible to give birth safely and find care, after the only hospital had been destroyed. Her death affected the country and its capital, where she was condemned by the head of the "Islamic Courts". In the stateless Somalia, the failure of an international military operation, Restore Hope, in 1995, under US and Italian leadership, sadly decreed that: "We leave Africa to Africans, the situation is too complex to be solved, and above all, the sacrifice of our soldiers is not worthwhile (a sacrifice due, moreover, to the poor preparation of the operation)". It was a choice of disengagement - partially revised when it was clear that many of those countries had become the land of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups - an option that Leonella, Annalena and many others did not share! But the list of victims continues. It is long, tragically long. The Italian priest Raffaele Di Bari and the Ugandan Peter Obote, killed in Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army; the 77-year-old bishop Luigi Locati, in Kenya; the Nuncio to Burundi, Michael Courtney; Floribert Bwana Chui in Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, killed because he opposed corruption; Benedict Daswa in South Africa, killed because he was fighting witchcraft.

I also must mention the "martyrs of the Sunday liturgy": all those Christians who suffered terrorist attacks while Sunday Mass was celebrated. This has been occurring especially in Nigeria, in the northern regions where the Boko Haram group is in control of the territory. In this case, it was not a matter of eliminating an incorruptible eyewitness, a figure who, with his presence and work, shows a path of peace, justice, development, and the fight against corruption: it was an attempt to drag Christians into a civil war, throwing a big country into chaos. It was a

blind and cowardly violent fury against the helpless and defenceless during the time of greatest exposure, as happened on Christmas Day 2011, with 27 victims in a church in the capital Abuja. The attacks were numerous. But thanks to the foresight and faith of personalities such as the bishop of Jos, Ignatius Kaigama, who urged all men of faith not to seek revenge and further bloodshed, efforts were made to oppose violence and to create an inter-religious common front to isolate terrorists and enemies of cohabitation. Moreover, Africa has no alternative. Many countries represent laboratories of cohabitation among peoples, ethnic groups, and religions, which must find their way to live together. The 148 students of the campus of Garissa, Kenya, killed because they were unable to recite Koranic verses, were living together in this way.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize two aspects. This contribution has recalled several stories which have for too long been overshadowed - stories that speak of a lived Gospel, that reconciles, cares, and gives hope in desperate situations. The blood of martyrs always bears fruit; yet, we need remembrance, closeness, and solidarity, and not indifference or oblivion. We - who as *Hebrews* reads, "have not yet resisted unto blood" - have the duty to treat and venerate their memory.

Finally, I would like to observe how, during the three pontificates that introduced us to the third millennium, there has been an emphasis on the need for this memory not to be self-pitying, compensatory, or blaming. It can never be functional to a preaching of hatred, of opposition, of a clash of civilizations, or used against anyone. It is the martyrs themselves who ask for this emphasis, as in the case of the great prior of the Trappist monastery of Tibhirine, in Algeria, Brother Christian de Chergé, killed with five of his brothers. His will, where the love for the Algerian people and Islam is explicit, contains the wish that their bloodshed as an offering will make everyone grow in love, and never in hatred and resentment.

CHAPTER FIVE

ONE DAY IN AUTUMN
I MET JOHN BRADBURNE

AMILCARE CONTI

Life continually offers us occasions to meet persons.

Sometimes it is colleagues in study and work, sometimes friends in travels and leisure time. Almost always these are ordinary people who enrich us by their presence, good advice, and feelings. However, we sometimes happen to have some particular encounters, to approach persons that are distanced from the usual categories, and who nuance their personalities in something extraordinary and admirable for their earnestness of life, capacity to achieve good, and a unique capability to the quest for beauty of the Absolute. It has happened to me more than once to find myself in contact with some exceptional persons who have transfigured their life in the light.

I am referring first of all to Colomba from Rieti,¹ a mystical figure of the Renaissance era, who was declared 'beata' in the 17th century, and whom I encountered by mere chance on the occasion of my participation in a history conference. I have supported for 25 years the Association promoting the cult and knowledge of Beata Colomba, founded by the late Monsignor Ghino Montagnoli of Perugia. Through historical studies and meetings, what is currently coming to light is the figure of an extraordinary ascetical and historical figure, totally involved in the civil and social life of Perugia at the turn of the 15th century. She was a prophetic voice of peace, at a time when fratricidal struggles raged amongst the nobility and the powerful families then dominating the city. One would wish to see her proclaimed a saint, and to this end the

¹A rich source of information is Maria Luisa Cianini Pierotti, *Colomba da Rieti a Perugia. Ecco la Santa. Ecco la Santa che viene*, Edizioni Studio Domenicano, Bologna, 2001.

opportune contacts with the Vatican Congregation are being formed and weaved.

Before that, another fundamental encounter was with the Mother Hope of Jesus, Alhama Valera,² whom I had the fortune to get to know during the last years of her earthly existence. Born in Spain at the turn of the 19th century, she lived for many years in Italy, at Collevaleza of Todi, in Umbria, where she established an impressive sanctuary dedicated to the Merciful Love of God for humanity. When the life of this Sister is eventually entirely reconstructed, many events in the history of Europe during the second half of the 19th century will be understood better. The Church declared her 'beata' in 2013.

Many events have linked me to Vittorio Trancanelli,³ a surgeon from Perugia. Trancanelli was the father of a boy, and putative father to dozens of others, who thus formed his great human family. He established in Perugia a community of reception for abandoned children, called then 'Alle Querce di Mamre' ('By the Oaks of Mamre') - the biblical location in Palestine where Abraham hosted under his tent the most Holy Trinity under the semblance of three young angelic beings. Vittorio died of a tumour in 1998 and was proclaimed Venerable in 2017.

And there is yet more. In 2003, during the Easter festivities upon the occasion of a liturgical celebration in the Cathedral of Perugia, I was approached by a couple, Angelo and Adele Veneziani. They spoke to me about their aunt, who passed away in sanctity twenty years ago. Maria Teresa Carloni⁴ was a consecrated laywoman and a protagonist of supernatural events, entirely devoted to the aid of the bishops, priests, and Christian population victims of the communist persecutions in the countries of Eastern Europe, Asia, and Saharan Africa. It was a life full of events bordering on the impossible, and yet real and as such witnessed by many men of the Church, and any worshipper.

She was a person who always operated discreetly and in silence; for this reason, she was often not understood and marginalized. Bringing to light her great activity of fraternal Christian aid, a span of thirteen years was needed. I have helped in organizing conferences, and editing books

² See Giovanni Ferrotti, *Madre Speranza... pane e sorriso di Dio*, Edizioni L'Amore Misericordioso, Collevaleza, 2010.

³ Enrico Graziano Giovannini Solinas, *Servo di Dio Vittorio Trancanelli. L'Amore di Dio in sala operatoria e nella vita*, Edizioni Elledici, Turin, 2013.

⁴ There are numerous publications on Maria Teresa Carloni, also containing her writings edited by Alberto Di Chio and Luciana Mirri, such as *Martirio e speranza. Il carisma di Maria Teresa Carloni*, Frate Indovino Edizioni, Perugia, 2009.

and articles in Catholic magazines and journals. I have contributed in pleading her sanctity cause with bishops and cardinals. I have experienced uncommon and perturbing events while devoting my efforts to this end - trains coming to a sudden halt, and three car accidents. Eventually, in the Cathedral of Urbino on 1st October 2016, the process of beatification for this humble and courageous woman was solemnly opened: Maria Teresa Carloni, an apostle of the persecuted Church, and intrepid testimony of the nearness of God to the Christian in sufferance.

In October 2016, convinced that my singular story of the relationship with saints was ultimately completed, I was organizing a conference on a theme which turned out to be quite appealing: “The lure of Italy in the Anglo-American World”⁵ - in other words, the appeal in the Anglophone world of Italian history, art, and culture in general. The eminent speaker was Frances Andrews, a professor at the University of Saint Andrews, Scotland. The structure of the conference perhaps overshadowed the fact that there is a further element of appeal that our country has for the rest of the world - its spirituality and multimillennial history of faith, interspersed with extraordinary figures of saints and mystics, known and admired everywhere. We were completely unaware that the conference would be the vigil of the tragic earthquake of 30th October that was to devastate Norcia and destroy the basilica of Saint Benedict, one of the shrines of Christian Umbria.

It was during those days that Professor Rosanna Masiola, University of Foreigners of Perugia, came to see me. She asked me if I could help her in organizing a conference on John Bradburne. I had never heard anything about such a singular person and his very adventurous - and in the end, tragic - life. He is a fascinating figure as a man and Christian: a testimony of the passion of Christ, lived amongst the desperate of the earth, but also of the harmony of the universe, where all its living species, earth, sky and atmospheric agents end up in showing the invisible hand of God and the extraordinary Providence linking the destiny of men and creation.

The life of John Bradburne began in the green and tranquil English countryside (31st July 1921) and tragically ends among the arid rocks of Zimbabwe, a victim of tribal struggles at the time of decolonization (5th September 1979). John’s education was undoubtedly imprinted by the strict principles of Christian doctrine and morals, according to the best Anglican tradition, like Thomas, his father, who was clergyman and dean of the parish of Skirwith in Cumbria. Here, little John must have fed his

⁵ The conference was promoted by the Associazione Culturale Beata Colomba da Rieti, in Perugia, at Salone d’Onore of Palazzo Donini, seat of the central government of the Umbria region.

spirit with evangelical teaching, stemming in simplicity and purity from assiduous biblical readings.

The Second World War, which Britain fought on a planetary level, drags him to the Far East, showing him not only the horror of blood and death, but also the despair of solitude and abandon, in the middle of the Malay and Burma jungle, where men, animals, and vegetation try to cohabit in a terrible and humanly impossible scenario. After managing to overcome innumerable trials, he eventually returns home. The victorious nation celebrates her triumphs, but John is no longer the same person. The hardships of experience have changed him. He has formed a new idea of the world, and his soul begins to feel the thirst for the absolute. His approach and thence adhesion to the Catholic Church appears altogether as a completion of the teachings he has received, a further investigation of the Christian experience, and certainly not a denial of his origins. The former frequenting of the Benedictines, and later of the Franciscan world, seem to grow contemplation and itinerancy in him.

He travels across half of Europe and Israel accompanied only by a bag with very few personal belongings. He tours Italy. In 1950 he is a pilgrim in Rome, and then in Castel Gandolfo to see the Pope. His arrival at Assisi in the Summer of 1952, on 10th August, is most interesting. "He sleeps in the woods above the city, and early in the morning he comes down by foot as, he thinks, that Saint Francis would not have been happy had he entered into his city in a bus".⁶ The ancient citadel enraptures him. He visits basilicas, attends Mass, prays, and begins to play his recorder to collect some offerings. He spends three days at Assisi, by his favorite saint.

As I do not live far from the 'seraphic city' and am frequently there, I can well imagine the emotion felt by the young John. In the summer evenings, when the heat is not yet so felt, one is not displeased to pass the night outdoors. If there is a moon, one can glimpse the profiles of the houses and villages. The lights of the city sparkle. The olive and the cypress trees emanate their odorous scents; cicadas and crickets cheer up solitude. The Umbrian countryside even at nighttime does not frighten. Saint Francis would take shelter among the ravines in the hills, and in the woods, and wait there in prayer for the sun to rise. In the valley of Assisi, beyond Santa Maria degli Angeli, towards Cannara, there is Piandarca, the still silent and verdant place of today, where Francis 'preached' to the birds. We do not know if John visited all these sites. Indeed, while travelling on foot or makeshift and sleeping in the open, in close contact

⁶ Didier Rance, *John Bradburne. Le vagabond de Dieu*, Éditions Salvator, Paris, 2012, p. 187.

with nature, he must have experienced in a way the same sensations of the Saint. John's visit to Umbria and Assisi confirms him in his pursuit of an ascetic ideal of life, simple and essential, detached from worldly interests, a lover of the poor and of nature, which he will always address with respect and passion. He will be united to the Franciscan world as a member of the Third Secular Order, and he will often cherish wearing the habit of friars, asking to be buried in it (his third wish). He also experiences prison, as he is accounted a vagabond, and suspected by the Carabinieri of a police station in a place in Campania. He will be saved thanks to the intervention of a good family, who welcomed pilgrims.

John's experience is in many aspects similar to that of Saint Benedetto Giuseppe Labre, as they were both 'vagabonds' for the love of God, both witnessing how even in the most extreme poverty a saintly life can be led. It is not roaming as a 'tramp,' meaningless, with no horizons and hopes for the future. A unique vocation is manifested in him: that of discovering God in the simplicity of human gestures, the contemplation of nature, and in a profound and intense prayer which involves the whole person reconciling it with the immensity of creation and beyond. In John's experience, the mystical aspect is likewise present, in the invisible but real and indissoluble tie which links man to God. It is an adventure of the Spirit experienced by him at a moment of particular intensity, as shown by his visit to the church of Santa Maria in Miano, near Naples. It is a supernatural event, but common to many souls dear to God. A mystic like Maria Teresa Carloni, whom I mentioned, had the same profound experience, almost in the same period, in the church 'dei Morti' ('of the Dead') at Urbania in the Marche. Hidden under a lateral altar cloth, she found a ring, left there by we know not who: she put it on, and consecrated herself to Jesus forever. Something similar occurred to John.

It was the 2nd of February 1953, the day of 'Candelora' (Candlemas). Like many devotees of the place, John climbs to the chapel of Santa Maria in Miano. He stops at length in prayer in front of the image of the Virgin with Baby Jesus in her arms. It is perhaps not an image particularly prized from an artistic point of view; the painting had been redone in the 1920s, after a fire. The effigy of the Mother of God is that of a woman of the people, of about thirty years of age. The Bambino, with bright eyes, holds in his hands a heart inflamed by love. John feels he has to consecrate himself to the Virgin, and become her spouse and stay faithful in celibacy forever. He will later write (8 April 1975):

Drawn by my Belle I'll call myself her bow
 And not without a touch of vanity
At Candlemas, at half-past six or so

I married her in Nineteen Fifty Three
 Green between Apennines and shining Sea
 Campania lay wakened to the morn,
 And, to the fact that Mary's married me,
 I'll wake the world and shake it with my horn! ⁷.

There are other poems relating this episode. The mystical marriage was a quite diffused devotional practice during the Middle Ages. More often, such mystical union was addressed to Jesus, the spouse par excellence of any person who walks along the road to sainthood. But for many mystics, it was natural to consecrate themselves to the Virgin, as if to a spouse to whom eternal love is pledged. For Saint John of the Cross one can arrive at the spiritual wedding only after having overcome the dark night of the senses, and even more terrible and purifying, that of the spirit. Mystical marriage is always the work of God Who brings closer to Him those whom He loves. In spiritual marriage, the soul and its Creator become one thing. Of this also Saint Paul refers, when affirming that: "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." ⁸

The years passed in Italy mould the mind of John, refine his spirit, rendering him yet more restless, always on the quest for something to occupy all his life. Once back to England, he passes his time in diverse occupations, attending conferences, praying constantly on the move, with no fixed abode. He is perhaps on a quest for the meaning of his life. The opportunity does not delay in showing up. Thanks to some Franciscan friends, he receives an invitation to go to Rhodesia, the vast territory in Southern Africa, at the time still a British colony, where there is a great need of people of good will to educate the youth, assist the sick, and spread the word of the Gospel. On 20th June 1962 he writes to his mother that he has never felt so little enthusiasm for an enterprise such as that, but he is convinced it is a really good sign. ⁹

After diverse missionary experiences, John reaches the place where he will satisfy his Franciscan vocation and conclude his life, as he had perceived many times: killed as a martyr for Christ. He passes ten years as a warden and servant to the lepers in the leprosy centre of Mutemwa, about 100 kilometers from Salisbury. Very much like St Francis, he goes to meet the lepers without fear, and with reverence. He helps them in any way, cleansing them, treating them, and decently feeding them. He builds

⁷ *A Ballade at a Venture* (1975) – full text in 'The Poems' section.

⁸ *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 6, 17.

⁹ Didier Rance, cit., p. 247.

for them small lodgings, simple and clean. He is not understood by many, but is not concerned about it. He prays, always, and with great intensity.

Once banned from the leprosy centre, he withdraws in solitude to the mountains nearby. Nobody looks for him, but it is 'perfecta laetitia' as he feels realized; his life has a precise purpose: love for the Lord and the Holy Virgin – which he transcribes in thousands of verses – and aid to one's neighbour, the most miserable and downcast. The Church embodied by John is a Church near and at the service of the poor, bent upon the sufferance of humanity, prompt in recovering the 'waste' and human discards of an opulent society. It is the Church dreamed and called for in a loud voice by Pope Francis.

John's relationship to animals, from the tiniest ones to the most rapacious, is fascinating and in a way a bit disquieting. He would keep in his poor hut a beehive, with bees even nestling in his beard without harming him. In a very suggestive photograph, one can see John drawing to himself an eagle, perching on his arm. His Franciscan experience reaches its climax: poverty, prayer, love for creation - all blends into his human experience. John is a mystic made Samaritan, interpreting at its best the Franciscan and evangelical message. His existence, so adventurous and wondering, seems almost incredible, as he is totally careless of any mundane preoccupation, thus fully confirming the word of Jesus:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them...

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.¹⁰

Evangelical radicality shapes the life of John and makes him an instrument of peace and fraternity for those who meet him. The lepers express their appreciation of the affection they receive, an affection he gives to the animals dwelling in the vast savanna, the forests, and the skies of that land which has already entered into his heart, as a place of the spirit, where he finds his way to God.

¹⁰ *Gospel of St Matthew* 6,25-33.

In summer 1979 there is an outburst of violent tribal struggle and warfare, connected to the anti-colonial movement of Rhodesia, which will soon become an independent nation with the name of Zimbabwe. Bands of guerilla youths roam through villages, spreading terror and death. John feels that his hour has come, and notes down: "Come Sweet Death." He feels the "sweet death" arriving. He is about to crown his dream of dying as a martyr. Captured, tortured, publicly humiliated, he utters no complaint, he lets them have their way, now that he knows that his time is over, yet he sees beyond the hills...

Eventually released, he is shot in the back, and his body dumped at the edge of a road. He thus embraces, for the last time, the beloved country, soaking her with his own blood. Some drops of blood will mysteriously fall upon the floor of the Cathedral of Salisbury, during the funeral service. It is discovered that this is a sign that his body needs to be dressed in the dearly loved Franciscan habit, as he had always wished. Many miracles would take place on his tomb in the cemetery of Chishawasha Mission, to this day a pilgrimage site.

What does John Bradburne have to say to each one of us? He is, first of all, our contemporary. He died only forty years ago, in a tragic moment in the history of Africa and great turmoil all over the world, still under the fear of the Cold War. He reminds us of the brutality of war, the unbearable subjugation of one people by another. He tells us of the undeniable dignity of every human being, even the most derelict and outcast, as seen in the lepers of Mutemwa, abandoned by all, and destined to a horrible end among excrement and infected rats.

He teaches us in the ecclesiastical and social dimension the necessity not only of a sincere respect among the different religious confessions, but also of a true and profound dialogue, as being all children of one God, the saviour, and rich in mercy. His Anglican formation, his adhesion to the Catholic Church, and his passion for the people of Israel, that he, in a thrust of entwining love, wishes to take back to the one fold, thus advancing the messianic times, is no visionary inclination. It is a possible dream of unanimous gathering upon the holy mountain where the Lord has prepared a lavish banquet for all the peoples of the earth.

John shows us the true love which must link all creation. His passion for animals, plants, and waters is not only matter for poetical verses or edifying *fioretti* destined to a devotional usage. These are real facts: documented episodes which surpass any conventional ecology, yields of the bad conscience of the Western world, rich, replete, and polluting. In his human experience the 'natural' harmony among all living beings is recreated. It is a harmony also prophetic of the last times where "the wolf

also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them".¹¹ Thus is recreated the primordial order that the fall of humankind has spoilt since the beginning.

We are indebted to John for letting us rediscover the beauty within every man, made "in the image and likeness of God."¹² It is the beauty of the song, praise for the Lord, and joy for the heart; the beauty of poetry which makes eternal feelings and prayers which flow from within and are shared with other brothers. It is the beauty of extreme poverty, where the true freedom of the children of God can be realized. It is the beauty of an accepted death, received as a gift and ultimate consummation, as "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."¹³

In this day and age, there are many Christians who have given their lives for faith in Africa. Two months before John, also in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, Doctor Luisa Guidotti from Parma, from the Associazione Sanitaria Internazionale, was murdered. Guidotti, now 'beata', was one of John's closest friends and collaborators, and he carried her coffin at her funeral Mass. Annalisa Tonelli, a lay missionary, was killed at Borama, in Somalia, in 2003. We also remember the Trappist monks kidnapped and murdered at Tibhirine, in Algeria, in 1996, and the African Samuel Benedict Daswa, martyred at Limpopo in South Africa in 1990, because he fought against superstition and witchcraft. Daswa was beatified in 2015.

Many others have been testimonies of the Christian faith in a very vast continent with the most diverse cultures, where it is not always easy to cohabit and where brave souls have given their lives without reserve. A very famous African author and Christian apologist, Tertullian, who lived in Carthago in the 3rd century AD, wrote that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians."¹⁴ So the land of Africa, with its many contradictions, beauties, and extreme poverty, is at present the continent where Christianity more rapidly spreads, helping its peoples to live in the freedom of Christ.

The Church offers the opportunity for the beatification of John, which would certify his life of sanctity and martyrdom. It is a story deserving attention and admiration; it actualizes a vision of the world and human existence which seems to partake of the incredible, and yet reminds each

¹¹ *Gospel of St. John* 12,24.

¹² Cfr. *Genesis* 1,26-27.

¹³ *Gospel of St. John* 12,24.

¹⁴ *Apologeticus* 50,13.

one of us of the necessity to look beyond, to glimpse those horizons that time, fatigue, and the banality of the becoming of every day often conceal. I will keep in my heart the memory of that autumn day in which I met John Bradburne.

CHAPTER SIX

TOPOPHILIA IN TRANSLATION: HOLY TEXTS AND SACRED SPACES

ROSANNA MASIOLA

Translating John Bradburne's poetry may pose the highest grade of un-translatability, as usually happens with poets whose verbal resources are highly creative, polymorphic, and polysemantic, using a lexicon that also extends to distant languages and cultures.

In the case of John Bradburne's Franciscan poems, the translation appears to be deceptively simple, as in the case of the poem dedicated to "il poverello". If we consider the poetry on its own, unrelated to any symbolic and thematic sequence which episodically occurs throughout his life, the answer to the question of translatability is yes: Bradburne's poems are highly translatable into Italian. It seems as if there are no cultural filters when the poem is translated into a spiritual context shared by Italian readers. In Umbria, John contextually refers to Italian landscapes and is inspired by the Franciscan poetics derived from the *Song of Creatures (Il Cantico delle Creature)*. Placed as we are on *The Road to Assisi*, the skyline and the landscape are currently almost unchanged from the time when he walked across the region. There are echoes in his poems - evoking a soundscape with all the bells ringing, choirs, and church services during religious festivals (*Road to Assisi* celebrates the vigil of Saint Claire/Santa Chiara, 10th August) - which can still be heard and experienced. Furthermore, he exports his Franciscan mysticism everywhere, from Jerusalem to Africa.

The whole poetic texture is rich in Franciscan intertextuality. If his poetical description is premature in the sense that he has not actually "seen" the landscape and has not yet undertaken his Italian pilgrimage, his theological language is beginning to emerge through this virtual vision of Italy and Umbria. There are, however, occasional hints of what would become his "major phase", in the last twenty years of passionate and unrestrained poetic writing, following the gift of a typewriter. The theme

of divine love, his obsessively Trinitarian poetics of the Eucharist, will be strengthened by his Marian experience in Italy, following his mystical wedding, with Lady Mary ('and she's my Lass...') guiding his handwriting and, subsequently, his typewriting. All such themes are grounded in the Franciscan discourse on creatures and creation, as the presence of a guiding hand is always there to explore and expand the love of all creatures created. There is no shift or waning of passionate diction in inspirational motifs, whether working with the lepers, writing family letters, or playing music to bird's nests and hatching eggs, as we know from his life, documented by his friend, Father John Dove, and subsequently by Didier Rance.¹

The Trinitarian aspect, as evidenced in Bradburne's axiomatic clarification, is that God is the Thought, Christ the Son is the Word, and the two emerge and merge in the third which is the Voice (Sound), and all are united in Love, as very clearly shown by David Crystal, who edited three collections of poems focusing on his main themes (*Songs of the Vagabond; Birds, Bees and Beasts; John Bradburne on Love*). Even if the message is universal, however, the language of religion and sacred texts remains the most dangerous and difficult, in that it also implies a cultural localization and space-time dynamics.

In the manifold (and overlapping) approaches to theoretical and operational frames of translation, I cannot but think of approaching John's oeuvre as theological poetry. The genre has always posed crucial issues in the history of translation, as a very recent debate involving a multi-confessional perspective has highlighted. His mysticism, aesthetics, and philosophy are emblematic of the challenges posed by the practice of translation dealing with religion, as "Holy and Untranslatable".² Cultural factors and filters, linguistic and conceptual constraints in religious translation, have triggered the most violent conflicts in the history of the Western world related to the interpretation and understanding, adaptation, and manipulation of sacred texts.

¹ Dove, John Fr. 2001 (1997). *Strange Vagabond of God*. Leominster, Gracewing; Rance, Didier. 2012. *John Bradburne. Le vagabond de Dieu*. Paris, Salvator.

² After two thousand years of theoretical debate on Western religious translation, during the 1970s with the pioneering works of Louis Kelly, and George Steiner with *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975), the range of theories and concepts was critically analysed in a diachronic and comparative perspective. A more recent, although fragmentary, collection of essays is presented by Lynne Long in *Holy and Untranslatable* (2010), where different authors examine different religions and sacred texts.

The triadic perspective expounded by translation historian Louis Kelly seems to be the most fitting frame of reference. His groundbreaking *The True Interpreter: A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West* (1979) accounts for the main currents in Western theories, stemming from the Latin and Greek world, inclusive of devotional poetry and chants. Kelly also correlates his approach and perspective with Gerhard Ebeling's *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (1971). The significant examples Kelly chooses are from religious and sacred books. He published his influential book in 1979, as the English translation of Gerhard Ebeling's had appeared some years before.³ Translating John Bradburne and the poems of his "real" Italian and Franciscan experience implies an awareness of interconnectivity and a holistic approach where concepts (God, the Thought → symbol), words (the Son, Christ, Word/Logos → symptom), and sounds (Paraclete, the Sound → signal) are explicit in what he announces and claims in his theological discourse and mystical poetry. Another conditioning factor in translating his Franciscan poems, and those set in specific regions of Italy describing sacred spaces and holy places, is his topophilia - the love of places and spaces - as his representations have to be conveyed to an Italian readership who may have a different perspective and sensitivity regarding familiar places, whereas for John they are part of a personal discovery through his walking across the Italian regions on his way to Jerusalem.

With reference to diachronic variation and focus, we may distinguish a "genetic" development along three main lines: Italy as an imagined country, Italy as a travelled and subsequently lived country, and Italy as a space of memory, when he writes about it while in Africa. This means problematizing what apparently seems to be a very simple poem, as in the few lines we have chosen for our translations (see below). This poem has no Italian words, toponyms, or geo-specific lexical items. It relies, however, on Franciscan love for all things created, and intertextually on Saint Francis's *Canticum* or *Laudes Creaturarum* (1224, *Canticle of the Creatures*). The poems inspired by his Italian journey contain Italian words and liturgical Latin. A very practical problem can come in his use of toponyms and localization. The lure and lush of the Mediterranean exotic

³ *Einführung in theologische Sprachlehre* was published in 1971. Ebeling individuates four elements: the authority to speak, the responsibility for language, the challenge to understanding, and the achievement of mutual understanding. Where other linguists speak of indeterminacy (e.g. Quine), Ebeling speaks of "ambivalence" and points out that "truth is not an unvarying quality of language" (Kelly 1979, 32; Ebeling 1971, 99ff), linking the traditional hermeneutic school with the analytical linguist.

are diluted and appeased as they go back to where they originate, Italy. Inevitably, the Italian reader living in Umbria will be familiar with the culture and the places resounding with Franciscan history. Conversely, it would be totally misleading to tackle translation in terms of supposed amelioration and hypercorrection, as this denotes John's progressive experience and deployment of his poetic topophilia. Consequently, if there is a poem where he celebrates the pagan *Fontana di Clitumno* and the "normal" term in Italian is *Fonti del Clitumno* in Umbria, the choice is not for "domestication" (Venuti, 1998)⁴ but to leave intact his perception of place names. *Fontana* in Italian refers to a man-made "fountain" (as in *Fontana di Trevi*), and is properly called *Fonti*, i.e., the source, as of a river, in its plural form. To the Italian reader, it will echo the verses of an Italian poem by Italian poet Giosué Carducci (*Alle Fonti del Clitunno*, 1877). The literary intertextual references for John could have been Virgil, Pliny, and Byron.⁵ There are different cross-cultural dynamics and tensions at work in the perceived and "travelled" space; the painter's gaze and the eyes of the beholder are not the eyes of the local inhabitants, and may see differently according to frames and schemata of their cultural experience and perceptions. The *Fontana di Clitumno* comes some two decades after, in 1969, in Africa (Silveira House, 27th January). It is no longer the "imagined country" of St Francis after his conversion (1948), or the "experienced" country of his spiritual journey to Italy, which lasted over a year (1952-3). It is the sacred space of memory while in Africa, conjuring the green hills of Umbria, after so many years:

...Fontana di Clitumno
Still rises in my mind,

⁴ Venuti, Lawrence. 1998. *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. London/New York, Routledge.

⁵ There is an intricacy of intertextual correspondences in descriptions and themes, from poet to poet, via re-writing and translations. Byron has Virgil and Pliny The Younger in mind, and the latter's vision of Clitumnus. Nymphs and temples occur in all poems, from Virgil to Bradburne. George Byron in his *Child Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV* (1817) has this reference: "...But thou, Clitumnus! In thy sweetest wave / Of the most living crystal that was e'er / The haunt of river-Nymph, to gaze and lave / Her limbs where nothing hid them, thou dost rear / Thy grassy banks whereon the milk-white steer / Grazes – the purest God of gentle waters." John, although inscribed within the literary tradition of the Grand Tour, describes crystal waters and the sylvan lore out of his recollected memories, and confesses that he was "whirled *in via* till we stopped upon the way," intending that the trip had been unscheduled. Such "predestination" and synchronicity of events in travels is not uncommon with him, as with other Romantic poets.

And all the hills of Umbria
Enthralling stand behind...

Finally, there is another intriguing case related to place names and Umbria, referring to Lake Trasimeno. In his poems, he refers to this lake as the "Lake of Perugia." One may be tempted to "standardise" the name to its current usage (*Lago Trasimeno*), yet John is correct: the more ancient name used was *Lake of Perugia*.⁶

⁶ I am indebted for this information to Antonello Lamanna, Cecilia Moretti, and Fausto Minciarelli, who have worked on Trasimeno toponyms and fishing terminology. The poem is *Fanfare of St Joseph*, and John refers to the 25th March (St. Joseph is 19th March). He has a confident use of Italian words, and also narrates his itinerary: "We reached Assisi from Clitumno's fount; / How spell that spellbound ageless angel-place?" and further on "From West to East... wherever Joseph strode; / That little isle on Lake Perugia / Where 'Poverello' fasted forty days." *Fount* and the Italian equivalent *Fonte* are more adequate than former *Fontana* (man-made), as it refers to a natural spring and pool of water and is also extended as a metaphor grounded on epistemic values.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRANSLATING THE SPIRIT: THE TRANSLATOR AS TRAVELLER

ENRICO TERRINONI

As a poet, John Bradburne was a maker, a creator of spaces unknown. But he was a traveller too, and this turns him into a translator: for to translate is to shift as well as to be shifted. In Italian the word for translation, *traduzione*, is employed in prison jargon to mean that somebody has to be moved from one cell to another, or from one jail to another. And who would not agree that the prisoners themselves in fact change deeply when they get moved, say, from a crowded cell to a more livable one, or from a secluded space where they are still in the company of friends and cell-mates, to what was called – in English jails – the “number one” - meaning roughly “bread-and-water solitary confinement”?

The good thing about translation as shifting is that it changes the thing shifted. Translations change texts as well as their readers. Famous is the story of Pierre Menard who, in Borges’s short story, wrote a *Don Quixote* in the 20th century which was exactly the same book as the one written by Cervantes centuries before. And yet, the new Quixote was different, because it was going to be read with new eyes.

The eye is everything in translation, for we always translate with something in mind, and our mind’s eye is a mind’s I. When the Disciples were sent forth to spread the Word in different languages, they were the perfect translators, travellers, and voice-lenders at the same time. For the translator lends his own voice, not to a text, but to an idea, to a spirit, be it holy or not.

It was Saint Jerome who advised us that it might be a good idea not to translate “word for word” but “sense for sense”, and this was because translations have to make sense. And in order to make sense, they have to be involved in some sort of movement. When I suggested that translators are travellers, I should add that they are an odd type of traveller, as they sometimes don’t move at all from where they are. The same happens to

writers and artists, who at times travel just with their minds, and help us travel too. Figuratively. Without moving. This is what poetry is supposed to be, *and* to do: to allow us to travel without asking us to leave the place we need to defend, be it a real place or a place of the mind.

John defended his own spaces, but they were spaces scattered throughout the world: he defended them spiritually and physically, knowing well that the soul and the body are one and the same thing, if we look at them with our internal eye/I. However, with poets, the internal I gets translated into the black-and-white of the page. It becomes visible after having been invisible, and this thanks to printer's ink.

Good poets, just as good translators, are capable of turning their own life into printer's ink. In the end of the self-interview Alasdair Gray used to conclude his masterpiece, *Lanark*, he suggested that turning your soul into printer's ink is a queer way to live, and yet there are worse ways. He could have been a banker, broker, advertising agent, arms manufacturer, or drug dealer, he said, and he would have done much more damage.

Turning one's soul into printer's ink means to translate it as well as to change it at the same time, but also to shape it and to forge it, in both the senses of making it and counterfeiting it. But what is it that we change it into, really? Its own opposite, perhaps? Can the soul be seen as the contrary of ink? Or is it not rather that the many shades of grey in Gray's statement are a metaphor for the continuous translational process our soul "is heir to", a process which is supposed to help us come out of the darkness and into the light? Or should not the soul just stay dark, as Dedalus's labyrinth seemed to suggest? And if so, can't we just drop the word *soul* once and for all, since it has far too many religious connotations and very few cultural ones, and resort to a much simpler one, though not as innocuous: unconscious?

The unconscious was for Jung the mythic land of the dead, and it has often been spoken of by his followers and commentators in terms of shadow. *Umbra profunda sumus* ("We are a deep shadow") is what Bruno tells us at the very beginning of his book on the art of memory: *De Umbris Idearum* ("On the Shadow of Ideas"). The shadow – a theme he derives from Plato and the Neoplatonists – is also Bruno's powerful symbol for the very space of mortality. Shadows are dependent on light, and yet, through the right use of the mental faculties in mnemonic terms, mortals can get near to the threshold of the shadow to have a look at the brightness of the truth. In other words, the shadowy condition is the mortal condition, the condition of mankind, and in suggesting that we are all part of one deep shadow Nolan is suggesting that we all belong to a common

dimension whose borders are not too visible, because they fade into the light that is outside.

This ancient philosophical theme is thus reformulated in an almost optimistic way. If the shadow signifies the human condition, and also the impossibility of human knowledge to directly grasp the truth and the light of things, that is, the ideas, we might still sense them by making the right connections. We can reconnect images through the art of memory, in order to make sense of the universe and understand that it really is an organic whole where anything is connected to anything else. The infinite universe which coincides with God in Bruno is a space where anything *is* something else.

Therefore, if we can't really partake in the light, we can still obtain it by enlarging the faculties of our mind. The light does not come to us: we have to look for it inside ourselves. The real philosophers - that is, in the Greek sense, people who are really in love with wisdom - will find the light inside of them: they don't have to wait for a superior being to illuminate their minds. If the shadow is then a symbol of the unconscious, it is also a symbol of death. And it is not surprising that, in their journeys through the underworld, both Odysseus and Dante do not meet real people but just shadows.

The shadows of ideas, which are really their traces as well as their projections, are then to be connected through the art of memory; and, as I said, memory is a form of internal writing. But memory is also the only means at our disposal that can help us revive the dead, who may keep living in our minds through reminiscence. This is what happens to us every time in the aftermath of a loss, for example. We let the dead live in us, and therefore change us, make us new and old at the same time.

"We walk through ourselves", as I said, was the admonition of Stephen Dedalus in the Shakespeare episode in *Ulysses*. This might also mean that one doesn't have to be afraid of changing shapes. Shakespeare himself, in fact, becomes, in the words of Joyce, "Shapesphere", which can even be read as *shapes fear*. This is exactly what one should never have, for the change of shapes is in our nature. And our nature is a dark shadow.

We always translate ourselves in some new being by simply being, by living, and this is because we live and *are* in time as well as in space. We should resist the fear of shapes, so that our very resistance will become a re-existence.

We are almost always the same thing by being continuously another. This seems to be the implicit secret message of Umberto Eco in arguing that in translating we do almost the same thing; but as I said before, that precious adverb *almost* has to be intended in all its infinite reverberations,

to signify that we can only get near, very near a thought, but never fully grasp it, as thoughts are always ineffably impalpable and shadowy. We cannot grasp them with our own body, hence we have to use our mind. We can *almost* things with our mind, which is supposed to be as infinite as the universe, but always subject to expansion or compression.

And if memory is one of the tools that help our minds enlarge, a lack of it will lead to their shrinking. The internal ink our memory uses can fade too. But while the ink on the page can fade from the page due to the action of time, it will fade at a higher speed if it is not distilled by existence. Though we find ourselves indeed almost at the end of the chirographic era, and though there are around many forms of artificial memory which of course prove to be very helpful in a number of contexts, mnemonic ink is only eternally revived through the life-blood of change, of translation.

And of poetry. A brilliant Italian translator, Daniele Petruccioli, has recently argued that if we have to treat a poem as a person, this is because a person should be treated as a poem. And this is what John does with his poems, which are eternal translations of his I through his eye. John turns his soul, his spirit, into ink. He translates himself not in the way that Touchstone liked when he warned William “I will translate thy life into death”; but rather, in the awareness that each text is always a translation in the first place, a translation proceeding from an original buried in the mind. Therefore, any translation, any creation, is a recreation, in the wisdom of Walter Benjamin who warned us: “a translation proceeds from the original. Indeed, not so much from its life as from its 'afterlife' or 'survival'. If translation is indeed later than the original, it nonetheless indicates that important works, which never find their chosen translators in the era in which they are produced, have reached the stage of their continuing life”.¹

Bradburne’s poetry, that is, his poetic self-translation (indeed a translation of the self) outlived him. It proceeds spiritually from the halo of his poems, so becoming an eternal shadow and echo which can help us communicate, make things common, share: and, I must add, live better.

¹ Lawrence Venuti, ed., *A Translation Studies Reader*, 3rd edition, Routledge, 2012, p. 76.

PART II

TRANSLATION SECTION: A RING-A-RING OF ROSARY

The poem we have chosen to translate into several languages apparently suffers an alienation from its original language and literary tradition, where Italy is perceived as an imagined country through the mind of a British new Catholic convert experiencing the total fulfillment of Franciscan cosmic love.¹ Alienation, however, will be enacted on a binary level, as John Bradburne plunges into the Franciscan tradition through the means of the English language, culture, and literature, and as the translators filter and reformulate the same into other languages, cultures, and literatures (Italian, Spanish, French, Amharic, isiXhosa, Afrikaans).

To Saint Francis (1949)

Bright Master minstrel, Bernardone blest,
You have outsong'd the troubadours of France;
Sweet jester of the King, you did advance
The jongleur's art. O Fool! God's fool the Best.
Being lost in love with Love, you far outran
The muses' measure, overtook the seers
In racing to the fountains whence all tears
Of true repentance flow from fallen man.
So loving Christ, you loved the things He Made,
Each living thing, bird, cricket, lizard, Beast.
All souls for which the Lord so dearly paid.
O pray Him, send us holy Brother Fire,
To light our hearts in flame of pure Desire.

¹ Cardinal Henry Newman (1801-1890), the British convert to Catholicism, now saint, used the motto *Cor ad cor loquitur* ("The heart speaks to the heart"). John's poetic inspiration is in line with this "British" and Commonwealth Franciscanism during the terrible years of South African civil wars.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ITALIAN TRANSLATION

ROSANNA MASIOLA

The last verse of this poem has been chosen as having a universal appeal, featuring flagship Franciscanism, and highly translatable in terms of symbol, symptom, and signal to the present-day audience. In some very rare instances, there were felicitous conditions for a rhyme: “For the feast of the Saint Sister of the Saint / I sing” → “per la festa della Sorella Santa del Santo / Io canto.” This is the “Road to Assisi” referring to the eve of St Claire, 10th August 1952, but composed many years later, in Africa (27th August 1974).¹ The poem is a manifest indication of John’s Franciscan and universalistic yearning in the spirit of Assisi while in Africa, at the time of the tragic Rhodesian-Zimbabwe war, and is a key to all his subsequent poetics, missionary activity, and ultimate martyrdom.

I proceeded to select adequate lexical equivalents. Looming and towering before me, however, there was St Francis with the full power of the ancient vernacular of the *Canticle of Creatures*, and the most ancient document of Italian literature. For those not familiar with the history of Italian language and literature, I will add that this prayer-poem-song has a claim to be the first documentation of the use of Italian, widely anthologized. The poem is also known as the ‘Canticle of the Sun’, and by its Latin title, *Laudes Creaturarum* (“Praise of the Creatures”).

Forgetting “Frate (Brother → Friar) Foco” and giving in to “Brother Fire” and thence, standardized Italian “Fratello Fuoco” was like working tongue-in-cheek “where angels fear to tread.” Below is the complete translation into Italian, almost “literal”, with mild attempts at rhyming:

¹ The adjectives used in this polysensorial description trigger the spiritual call of the past of an area thriving with saints. The name *Clara* or *Chiara* in its semantic range in Italian may refer to the elements of air, water, and light.

A San Francesco

Gaio Maestro Menestrello, di Bernardone la benedizione,
 Hai superato i trovatori di Francia con la tua canzone;
 dolce buffon del Re, hai fatto progredire l'arte della giulleria.
 O folle di corte! O miglior matto di Dio,
 perso in amore con Amore, sei andato oltre
 la misura della musa, hai superato i vedenti
 nella corsa alla fontana da cui tutte le lacrime
 del pentimento sgorgano per l'uomo caduto.
 Così amante di Cristo, hai amato le cose del Suo creato.
 Ogni cosa vivente, uccello, grillo, lucertola, e animale.
 Tutte le creature dalla più imponente alla più banale.
 Tutte le anime per cui il Signore pagò di caramente.
 O pregaLo di mandare santo Fratello Fuoco,
 a illuminare i cuori in fiamma di desiderio puro.

I also had David Crystal's reciting voice recorded on CD, and Didier Rance's published French version. I felt dissatisfied with the above version. So, as often happens to translators, I tried again.

The four lines feature: ST, TLa, TLb, BT (Source Text, Target Text *a* semantic, Target Text *b* rhythmic, Back-Translation):

ST *All souls for which the Lord so dearly paid.*

TTa Tutte le anime per cui il Signore pagò sì caramente

TTb Tutte le anime per cui il Signore ha PAGATO PREZZO

PREGIATO **A**

BT All the souls for which the Lord paid a premium price

ST *Each living thing, bird, cricket, lizard, Beast.*

TTa Ogni essere vivente, uccello, grillo, lucertola, bestia,

TTb Ogni essere vivente, uccello, grillo, lucertola, ANIMALE **B**

BT Every living being, bird, cricket, lizard, animal

ST *All creatures from the greatest to the least*

TTa Tutte le creature, dalla più grande alla minima

TTb Tutte le creature, dalla IMPONENTE alla più BANALE

BT All the creatures, from the imponent to the most banal **B**

ST *O pray Him, send us holy Brother Fire,*

TTb O pregaLo, mandaci santo Fratello Fuoco

TTb O pregaLo, di mandar il santo FOCO FRATELLO MIOC

BT O pray Him, to send (the) holy Fire Brother Mine

ST *To light our hearts in flame of pure desire.*

TTaAd accendere I nostri cuori in fiamma di puro desiderio
TTbAd accender cuori in pura fiamma di DESIO C
BTTo light hearts in pure flame of desire

CHAPTER NINE

SPANISH TRANSLATION

DIANELLA GAMBINI

For the Spanish translation of the poem *To Saint Francis*, my choice has been heptasyllabic lines. The choice follows the example of Ramón M. del Valle-Inclán, who, in *Lirio Franciscano* in the collected poems *Aromas de Leyenda*, moulded into the metrical pattern images of a profound Franciscan sensitivity:

Y la tarde en Oriente
Deshojaba una flor,
E iba la caravana
Por la senda aldeana,
Tan llena de verdor.
¡ Y las llagas en sangre
Eran como otra flor!
Racimo de gusanos,
Flor del jardín de Asís,
Que el aire campesino
Deshoja en un camino
¡ Divina flor de Lis,
Que con su boca ungía
San Francisco de Asís!

The Spanish modernist author has not made a fortuitous choice: the heptasyllabic is a verse embedded in the medieval Castilian tradition, already adopted in the 12th century. Tinted by a *fin-de-siècle* "primitivism", it lends itself to an exemplary expression of the message of the Saint of Assisi, as St Francis celebrates a relationship of fraternity of men with his neighbour and with nature, which is inspired by the love of the Creator for all His creatures.

In this perspective, I have deemed it pertinent to adopt the seven-line verse form: the medieval verse aims to restore the original purity and the richness expanding from the source of John Bradburne's Franciscanism.

I have respected the flow of versification and resorted to the use of truncated heptasyllables and to the metrical figure of synalephe. Line 10 has been inserted to underline the oblativ love, as expressed in line 9. This is because John lived his oblativ love throughout, to extreme self-sacrifice.

So loving Christ, you loved the things He Made,	Tan amante de Cristo	1
	amaste lo que Él hizo:	2
Each living thing, bird, cricket, lizard, beast.	cada cosa viviente,	3
	cada pájaro y grillo,	4
	lagarto animalillo;	5
All creatures from the greatest to the least.	Todas criaturas tuyas,	6
	nimias, de envergadura;	7
All souls for which the Lord so dearly paid.	cada una de las almas	8
	que caras pagó Dios.	9
	A Quien se dio por nos	10
O pray Him, send us holy Brother Fire,	hazle llegar tu ruego	11
	para que nos envíe	12
	a San Hermano Fuego	13
To light our hearts in flame of pure Desire.	a fin de que ilumine	14
	en nuestro corazón	15
	los más puros deseos	16
	ardientes de pasión.	17

CHAPTER TEN

FRENCH TRANSLATION

DIDIER RANCE

A saint François ¹

Brillant maître ménestrel, bienheureux Bernardone,
Tes chants ont surpassé les troubadours de France
Doux bouffon du Roi, tu as fait progresser
L'art du jongleur. Ô fou! Le meilleur fou de Dieu!
Éperdu d'amour pour l'Amour, tu distanças de loin
La mesure de la muse, tu dépassas les voyants
Dans la course à la fontaine d'où toutes larmes
De la vraie repentance coule pour l'homme déchu.
Aimant ainsi le Christ, tu aimas ce qu'il créa,
Tout être vivant, oiseau, criquet, lézard, bête,
Toutes les créatures de la plus grande à la moindre –
Toutes les âmes pour qui le Seigneur paya si chèrement.
Ô prie-le, envoie-nous saint Frère Feu,
Pour allumer nos cœurs de la flamme du pur désir.

¹ This translation of the poem has been published by Didier Rance in: Rance, D. 2012. *John Bradburne. Le vagabond de Dieu*. Paris, Salvator.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AMHARIC TRANSLATION

RENATO TOMEI

Translating John Bradburne's poems into African languages represents a tribute to the "African Bradburne", who decided to die in the hills of Mashonaland, serving his brothers and sisters in what he felt to be his home.

What follows is the translation of *To Saint Francis* in Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, which, alongside with Gee'z, is used in the Coptic Orthodox rituals, vibrating and attuned to the deep beat of powerful liturgical drums. The Amharic translation, as well as the isiXhosa and the Afrikaans in the next section, seems to recreate that *soundscape* of Africa described by John's mystical and poetic flow, as in a journey from Africa back to Africa. I also provide a version transliterated to the Latin script.

ለ ቅዱስ ፍራንሴድስ
To Saint Francis

ሲለዚህ ኪሪስቶስን በመውደድ፣ የፈተራችሁን ነገሮች በሙሉ ተወዳህ፣
So loving Christ, you loved the things He Made,

ሁሉንም ነገሮች፣ ወፍ፣ ጅድጅድ፣ እንሸላሊት፣ አውሬ።
Each living thing, bird, cricket, lizard, beast.

ከትንሹ እስከ ትልቁ ላሉት ፊትረታት በሙሉ።
All creatures from the greatest to the least.

ሁሉንም ነፍሳቶች በወድ ዋጋ የከፈለበትን።
All souls for which the Lord so dearly paid.

አይ ፀሎት አደርገ እና የመንፈሳዊ ወንድም አሳት ላክልን፣
O pray Him, send us holy Brother Fire,

በንፁ ምኞት ነበልባል ልባችንን እንዲሰብህ.
To light our hearts in flame of pure Desire.

Transliteration

Le Kiddus Francesco

Silezih kiristosin bemewded yefeteracchown negheroch bemulu tewedalleh,
So loving Christ, you loved the things He Made,

Hullunm negheroc, wef, jedjed, enshilalit, aure.
Each living thing, bird, cricket, lizard, beast.

Ketinishu eske tiliqu lalut fitiretat bemulu.
All creatures from the greatest to the least.

Hulunm nefsatoch bewud waga yekefelebetn.
All souls for which the Lord so dearly paid.

Oi tzalot adergenna ye menfesawi wendem essat lakln
O pray Him, send us holy Brother Fire,

be nitsu mignot nebelbal libacinin endilokis
To light our hearts in flame of pure Desire.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ISIXHOSA TRANSLATION

RAJENDRA CHETTY

Krestu onothando olulodwa, uzithandile izinto azenzileyo,
So loving Christ, you loved the things He Made,

Nayiphi na into ephilayo, intaka, iqakamba, icikilishe, isilo.
Each living thing, bird, cricket, lizard, beast.

Zonke izidalwa kuqalelwe komdala kuye komncinane.
All creatures from the greatest to the least.

Yonke imiphefumlo uYesu ayihlawulele ngenene.
All souls for which the Lord so dearly paid.

Yeha! mthandaze yena, sithumelele umlilo oyingcwele,
O pray Him, send us holy Brother Fire,

Ulayite iintliziyo zethu ngedangatye leminqweno enyulu.
To light our hearts in flame of pure Desire.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AFRIKAANS TRANSLATION

RAJENDRA CHETTY

Dus om Christus lief te he
So loving Christ, you loved the things He Made,

Is om lief te wees vir alles wat Hy geskape het
Each living thing, bird, cricket, lizard, beast.

Alles wat lewe - voel, kriek, akkedis en dier
All creatures from the greatest to the least.

Al die siele waarvoor die Here so duur betaal het
All souls for which the Lord so dearly paid.

Ons bid vir Hom om die heilige Broeder vuur te stuur
O pray Him, send us holy Brother Fire,

Om ons harte met die vlam van diep begeerte aan die brand te steek
To light our hearts in flame of pure Desire.

ON BEHALF OF THE 'JOHN BRADBURNE MEMORIAL SOCIETY'

CELIA BRIGSTOCKE

The purpose of the Society is to help support the Mutemwa Leprosy and Care Centre in Zimbabwe, and promote, wherever possible, John's inspirational life to others far and wide. It was set up in England in 1995, at the request of Fr John Dove, who was John Bradburne's close friend since their time together during the Second World War in India where they met. Previous to that there were supporters in the then Rhodesia, who managed to raise funds after John's death to help continue to help the leprosy residents at Mutemwa in their hour of need.

Over the years we have had a following of very dedicated members who have supported our work, in honour of a man who so many could relate to easily and found inspiring. John was no pedestal saint, but a man on a mission, who seemed - it began to be revealed to us - to be working after his death! We all thought this was extraordinary, especially as we were not particularly understanding of who John actually was in those early days. This continued to be revealed as time went on, and indeed it was a revelation! Especially when we heard of how the man in Edinburgh's sizeable brain tumour completely disappeared just prior to surgery. What on earth was going on? We were horrified!

Earlier on, we had heard about the drops of blood at his Requiem, and then a report from Winnie Mbaso in South Africa who prayed to John to walk again, and up and out of her wheelchair she got, never to be handicapped again. More stories came out of the woodwork which confounded us further, and then one came from a South African Bishop who spoke about a recorded healing he still has in his office. And on and on it went, so we began to wonder what on earth was happening here. John was certainly not 'lying down and keeping quiet' as we may have preferred! Something quite else was happening, and these things were coming directly our way!

This Conference has a huge meaning. Not only is it a great tribute to the enthusiasm of Rosanna, David, and others to have worked on the idea

of the Bradburne Conference in Perugia after they first met two years ago. I have been in touch with Rosanna during the whole process of organisation, and it is with great sadness that we cannot attend today, due to other life matters getting in the way. Tim and I are however strongly with you in spirit and will look forward in anticipation to your feedback. Within these ancient medieval walls of Perugia, we hope to reach out to a new audience, which is both exciting as it will be illuminating and enlightening, in such beautiful surroundings that John himself would have known.

The whole essence of John is his deep humanity and spirituality, both down-to-earth and uplifting, which once you attune to becomes a journey into the mind of a special person who was wholly human but also deeply spiritual in nature. This was often hidden in those early years, and in one sense his deep longing for God was like a safely guarded jewel, a long quest which was ultimately revealed only in his last years, especially in his poetry and letters. In the early days, he would certainly disguise this depth of longing to do God's will by using his often schoolboy sense of humour, covering up something much more deep and sensitive within him. He would not put words on it openly to the family then, but it was definitely there and we all knew he was a bit different to the rest of us!

His love of nature and being 'outdoors' was obvious, and his infectious ability to have fun in nature, whether walking or climbing trees or watching birds and insects with us as children were always highly memorable. Whatever it was, and in every situation, John was wholeheartedly involved. There was in every sense a great joy and appreciation of everything that was around him, with a dash of daring to add to the 'adventure'. We often got into trouble, but it was character-building, and we became fully involved. It was like having a rather naughty teacher around. He would teach us to sing, to dance, and to romp in the fields and woods, collecting wild fruit or sticks to make a campfire, and when we were in his company he was always a great natural storyteller - the wild beasts to watch out for, stories of pixies and elves, an underworld that became so real for us as children. There was always a cheeky side to him, quipping and joking, and if he got upset or angry, we all knew it! The storytelling was a natural trait of his mother which she continued to pass on to her grandchildren.

I should say that if you explore John B then you will get results, but you need to go deeper than you might expect, and these days who has much time for that? Well, you certainly do because you are all here, and this is truly wonderful. I would certainly encourage the exploration you are planning to do today because this day is a *first*. It is going to be

tremendous and may open up a whole new world. David Crystal and Didier Rance will explore the mind of this man who not so many people yet know much about. Didier's biography of John, due out in English translation this September, but already published in French, reveals much more than we did not know about. David's new book on the poetry will open new doors, and reveal still more to help us understand at a deeper level.

Going back to the people we strive to keep helping at Mutemwa, which is now administered to by the Franciscans: the much-needed funds are raised by the sale of the poetry books, CDs, and other materials, as well as receiving freely given donations. It is an honorable cause to help make the residents' lives more comfortable in basic daily needs, in a country which has suffered so much. In releasing information about John's life, he is becoming better known, but there is still a long way to go! We hope to continue to grow.

We have a lot to thank David Crystal for, who has undertaken the archive of all John's written work, now accessible for students and other interested people. It has taken years of laborious work to achieve, and the new poetry website looks very attractive and easy to access. We also give thanks to Didier, who has walked all the way from his hometown in France to get here, and to all those special people who have made this day possible. It means so much to us, and I hope it will do to all of you who have gathered to hear about John.

Of course, it would be truly wonderful if John's life and work is taken on by the Church, because as John says himself in self-derogatory fashion 'Pray on for my sanctification because it would encourage so many souls if such a wreckage might come to canonisation!' We certainly believe that it will happen one day, given helpful contacts who know about such matters, and any help we get is very much appreciated.

John's life speaks volumes. Is he on the way to canonisation? The only answer I can give to that is: he will be if we want him to be. People do recognise a life totally dedicated to the search for God, and they yearn that in some way they can share in that search. This Conference is a sign of hope for the future, sharing in the knowledge of a person whose life speaks volumes today.

THE POEMS

In this section you can read the full versions of the poems from which extracts have been taken in this book, with the exception of the two extremely long poems *Sumer is i cumen in* (1958) and the ten-thousand-line *Ut Unum Sint* (1956), which can be read online at: www.johnbradburnepoems.com.

Poems that are quoted in full in earlier chapters are also not included.

A Ballade of a Lifetime (1974)

Had I been a Shona cattle-herd
I would not have written English rhyme
But I would have tabulated bird
Upon my memory at every time
I saw a hammerkop amidst a clime
Idyllic as on earth there could be found;
I might have fished a bit and won a dime
By selling what I caught without a sound.

Three and fifty summers have occurred
Since my birth amidst the hottest time
Of this century in England... heard
Cuckoo was upon that June sublime;
As I grew I knew some trees to climb;
As I reached my manhood unrenowned
I did never dream I'd live on rhyme
By selling what I caught without a sound.

By my twenty-seventh year, had stirred
In my fancy scarce a single rhyme;
Then I came to Rome and, homing, spurred...
Galaxies of brightness at a time!
Now there is a ladder that I climb, -
Up I go... I slowly come to ground
Admitting that I do not live (no dime!)

By selling what I caught without a sound,

L'envoi

Prince, though birds do not at any time
Ask reward for singing, bards are bound
To leap for joy if heard! I'll reach my prime
By selling what I caught without a sound.

A Ballade at a Venture (1975)

Drawn by my Belle I'll call myself her bow
 And not without a touch of vanity;
 At Candlemas, at half-past-six or so,
 I married her in Nineteen Fifty Three;
 Green between Apennines and shining Sea
 Campania lay wakened to the morn,
 And, to the fact that Mary's married me,
 I'll wake the world and shake it with my horn!

After that Candlemas, happy, aglow,
 I rode a horse belonging not to me
 More than to all creation, high and low,
 Bareback I rode it, lacking not for glee
 In heyday freedom such as you may see
 If ever you are struck by someone drawn
 To shoot a line amidst the forest... See,
 I'll wake the world and shake it with my horn!

Greenhorn you'll call it if you're in the know
 Concerning who commands the shining sea
 That ripples midst of all the lands that go
 Out to their coasts beholding it with glee
 Because it is so beautiful and free
 And blue as is Our Lady's skirt... at morn,
 Long after sunrise: who is fair as she?
 I'll wake the world and shake it with my horn!

Envoy

Prince, since a greenhorn can but guess the key
 And pitch of her bewitching me each morn,
 Safely mapping her lap as Middle Sea
 I'll wake the world and shake it with my horn!

A Ballade of a Logosophite (1975)

The Thought, The Word, The Voice of One in Three
 Are Father, Son and Holy Ghost of God,
 They are The Persons of The Trinity
 That Christ defined not thus as earth He trod;
 Neither the Church has done till now nor odd
 Is it to be esteemed that she, the Church,
 Has given but to me her mutt the nod
 Which indicates the answer to a search.

'In medio ecclesiae' for me
 Is being where her golden hair (to nod
 Of Mary's head) may fall bewitchingly
 So far as touches mine... such waves, O God!
 Since flowing wavey tresses for a rod
 Airier than was Aaron's or than birch
 Or willow-wand: O fond non-ichabod
 Which indicates the answer to a search!

Ark's large dark eyes are open wide with glee,
 Her slender fingers give a tender prod
 So that I may proceed: The Persons Three
 (Recalled as Thought and Word and Voice of God
 To-day more fitly than when Yahweh trod)
 Are rightly re-defined.... left in the lurch
 No longer... and she gives a stronger nod
 Which indicates the answer to a search.

Envoi

Prince, of the Four Evangelists, it's odd
 Not that the foster-son of Mother Church
 Made choice of 'The Word,' to Voice The Thought of God
 (Which indicates the answer to a search).

A Ballade of Non-Despondency (1975)

There are some states of abject misery
 Which seems condolence only to increase
 Bar being well endowed, as from on high,
 With love and joy alloyless and pure peace;
 To dwell close by while eighty lepers cease
 Not to be under philanthropic frauds
 Calls for a callous heart of wolf-in-fleece
 Or else for a rebellion of the Lord's.

Refrain from line of the refrain shall I?
 First I must arm with love and joy and peace
 At such a pace as grace may chase me by
 And not with goatish anger and caprice;
 Their ever ready threat is the police...
 I do not fear the rigour of the boards
 Too much, but oh for tyranny to cease
 Or else for a rebellion of the Lord's!

Heigh-ho, I'll stay to watch and pray and try
 To bring about undoubted ill's decrease
 By standing sentinel in Christ and by
 Issuing rations where the rations cease;
 So help me God towards the lepers' peace
 And be he trodden down who backs the frauds
 With lies and violence: break wolf-in-fleece,
 Or else for a rebellion of the Lord's.

Envoy

'Prince (saith a stilly voice), rejoice in peace
 Over the fact that you are backed by chords;
 Let not your playing and your braying cease,
 Or else? for a rebellion of the Lord's!'

A Balladey-minded Epilogue (1975)

God, I care not what clod forgot my face
 Nor who remembered ever my address,
 So long a song is poured upon the race
 In strains like rains upon a wilderness
 That those who say not No will say me Yes!
 What use to be abstruse to a degree
 Beyond both critics and the common press
 If, reading me but once, saith dunce: "I see".

I need no "Nihil Obstat" to embrace
 A hamstrung public with my tongue's caress
 Neither do I require a lyre to chase
 My lines along, more strongly to impress
 Prim impudence that martyrs my largesse!
 Bellow with chesty tones, throw stones in glee
 With "Hic, Haec, Hoc, What is it? can you guess?"
 If, reading me but once, saith dunce: "I see".

Lord, the applause! the roars that fill this place
 Like echoes from an empty wilderness
 Are gentle as the doves that interlace
 Their bills they shake like spears with tenderness
 Enchanting as the bagpipes in the Mess...
 In Truth, my Lord, mixed metaphors make free
 Vainly if train of thought is plain, express -
 If, reading me but once, saith dunce: "I see".

Envoy

Prince, certainties surpassing sly finesse
 Are coconuts they'll shy if I agree
 To fix my tricks to fit thick-headedness:
 If, reading me but once, saith dunce: "I see".

Assumption (1973)

My Lady, I assume upon this day
That loyalty is given us by halves,
Let prove it whosoever prove it may -
Earth's love that lacks for heaven's backing starves;
Be loyal first upon a human plane
Until, divinely doubled, it unites
With unfelt ardour for an unseen gain
That strides to meet its strivings from the heights ;
Thus talk I to myself, addressing thee
Whilst thou dictatest what I set to page,
Being my Bride since Nineteen Fifty Three
Thou sharest with me now thy heritage :
A risen King, a Queen assumed, a fool
Used royally to be a loyal tool.

Should I complain if I am used as though
I were an anvil to be struck upon
By ringing hammer's weight as, blow on blow,
Yield they to shape along a scapegrace John?
Or should I murmur anything but this
Monosyllable "Ei" that spells my bliss ?

' "And in my name his horn shall be exalted"
Remains your song aflame, strong and unhaltd'.

Aubade (March 1971)

He that is alone with The One
Whose name is Love our King
May greet the rising sun
And meet with everything
As if it were but this day made
To make him by Love's will arrayed.

He that is alone with The One
Whose name is Love must be
With Mary and her Son
And the blessed Trinity:
The son of Man and the Lord of light
And the Father great and Our Lady bright!

Aubade (June 1971)

Ah, love is fed by gazing long
 Upon that form and face
 Which in appeal is far more strong
 Than any other's grace,
 But Love made Flesh on whom we look
 Seems featurelessly round,
 About Him lies the bell, the book,
 Flies up the tinkling sound,
 No babbling brook, no charming pool
 Reflecting countenance to rule
 Here runs or stands, and yet this thing
 Is fairer than the fair:
 Creation's King.

Could Jesus possibly have made
 Himself more dimly traced?
 It gleams but seems so unarrayed,
 No head, no limbs, no waist!
 O salutaris Hostia,
 Ineffably disguised,
 We know exactly who you are,
 The rest may be surmised:
 The best of all in face and form
 In sweet appealing honeyed swarm
 My mind shall roll into a ball,
 My heart shall sing this King
 Fairer than all.

Encircled Lord, unboasting shape
 Like nothingness a gleam,
 The fact is conned beyond escape,
 We are like them that dream:
 Behold, captivity is turned
 Into our Triumph bright,
 By us albeit quite unearned
 We hail Him, Light of Light
 And as, this Corpus Christi Day,
 The sun swings up in glory gay
 We thank our King for coming thus,

So marvellously small,
Oh All to us!

Caro factum est (1968)

Sirs, I should read the Bible through
 And then decide what's best to do
 And if you cannot quite be sure
 Read it again: a golden cure
 For lassitude and idleness
 Is getting it by heart I guess
 But I would find that far too hard,
 Not near enough to art of bard
 Who'd rather take a little bit
 And whittle it away with wit
 Until each little bit he took
 Become One Word who'll claim the Book.

Reduce the Bible, fresh on fresh,
 To Person of the Word made flesh
 And you will find the mind of God
 Producing, as by magic rod,
 A living symphony much better
 Than the unlife-giving letter:
 Lo, The Spirit of the Word
 Broods upon it like a Bird
 Which one might call the Albatross
 Of Agios Athanatos
 Gliding white-winged and wide upon
 Pages, each an eirenicon.

Our Father timeless thought expressed
 All in The Word whom He addressed
 By thinking on Him, ever heard
 You any thought without a word?
 Our Lord who is The Son took up
 The Book and filled it from a Cup
 Which is the Chalice of His Blood:
 The Paraclete upon that Flood
 Presides, exchanging it for wine
 God consecrates and makes Divine
 By hands of mortal men, His Priests
 Presiding on immortal feasts.

Fortunate symbol is the Dove
For Spirit since it rhymes with Love:
In the beginning it proceeds
Like bird unnamed upon the deeds
Done by The Word creating light,
Order and beauty from the blight
Of nightblack chaos; out of Ark
Noah sends forth, over the dark
Of scowling waters, such a dove
As land much more than sea will love
And later too a Dove descends
On Love Begotten, God who mends.

Be simple, Apostolic men,
As doves and wise as serpents - then
The criticisms of the world
Will back upon its head be hurled!
Beware of men but treat them all
Remembering the special call
Of each of them, of each of us,
Of each of you, is "Oremus":
Out of the mouths of babes may come
The wisest sound of Christendom,
In plainsong gradually heard
Is Ah Ah Ah - side wonder's word
For aye and oh for evermore
Where Love fulfills, fulfilled, its Law.

Eirenicon (1977)

Now let me tell you this, you pilgrims all,
Love is a long desire, a short disease,
An everlasting healing and a call
To highest things that do most greatly please;
Love is an elixir to drink down fast
And love is like a fool who hails a Queen,
None of those strolling players in the cast
Of vast humanity has missed its sheen;
You'll see it on the leaves that stir and dance,
You'll feel it in the breezes as they blow,
Its deep appeal is on the seas that glance
Up at the skyscape... canst escape it? No:
Love is the very substance of the Lord
And merrily He moves and proves accord.

EI (March 1972)

Now it is time to tell
How Christ Emmanuel
Bids both of us to lose ourselves in Him;
We are His members, we
Through Him shall Godhead see
Before whose Brightness cry the Cherubim
Thrice "Holy", out aloud;
God calls us from the crowd
And walls us in a Cloud where all but Faith grows dim.

Little myself I know
Of how the light may grow
Through glowing fire of love to show far more
Than beauty of fair faces
And rare attractive graces
And forms that warm the heart and heat the core;
Uttering but His Name,
One syllable I claim
To pierce the dark and, like a rising lark, adore.

Leave all created things,
Cleave, in the King of Kings,
To having no delight except in love;
Walk hidden in this hall,
Make gladsome madrigal
Only to Being, seeing far above:
Thus doing by God's grace
We'll find that each fair face
And every warming form are His, our hearts to prove.

Elastic Corollary cum Gymnastic Symposium (1977)

May the God of understanding be
 For always in my head
 That in my mouth and speaking He
 May freely play, be said
 Out as The Word Begotten, true
 Son whom The Thought begets
 Before all worlds adore The Jew
 Whom The Father ne'er regrets.

Be in my heart and thinking, Lord,
 As the heart's desires direct
 The movements on the chequered board
 Of brain, prove Love Elect.

Be in mine eyes that I may see
 Light in delight of One
 Love who is substance of The Three
 Concentred on The Son.

Thy flesh and blood and every bone
 Embody in One God
 Only so many as enthrone
 None other Jew, who trod.

Be at my end, blend with it well
 And mend my will today
 Lightly with glee, Emmanuel...
 Low, brother Ox, I'll bray.

At my departing, Master mine,
 May Mistress quickly page
 Enchantment, write it line for line
 Nimbly, and ford the rage.

All that is left from the first is this
 The donkey's last assay
 At getting right the chorus, bliss
 To miss then hit this lay:
 Fulfilled is the Law I will maintain

By Love who reigns, remains, Sir,
 Above the apogee of brain
 And leaves me free to bray, Sir.

When Charlemagne's joy was boyish might
 On the height of Mont C  zar
 He may have had a random fight,
 Tis the right of boys to spar:
 Twas gladly with a Gentile,
 There had followed fast a Prog
 If the big-wig Prig had hit in style
 Some pig from the Sin agog.

Now shake shy locks but break them not
 For keys Dons hold will fit
 Acknowledgement of such a plot
 As much may make of it:
 Fast Bulldogs run through Cambridgeshire
 And half of Hertford too
 Simply to chase a brace from Choir
 That sing The King a Jew.

They run through seven centuries
 And punish Catholics
 For fastening to pillories
 Stoning for heretics
 And setting fretting in the stocks
 Fringing on village fanes
 The People whom the Steeple rocks
 To tell: Hallel, He reigns!

Saint Alban's worthies heard of it
 Amidst 'The Fighting Cocks'...
 Mumbled and hummed, held hard a bit,
 Entreated not to box
 The Publican who had a job
 Heavy as hell to hold
 Entry to heaven closed: 'That knob
 Not to be turned!' he trolled.

The truth of it may well have been

That all the keen were ill
 While all the lukewarm on the scene
 Bespoke a broken will;
 The Publican himself was one
 With whom no fighting cock
 Bettered its plight before The Son
 Of God bid Peter rock -

With laughter sweet, not bitter tears,
 Behold the happy fact:
 The Holy Land is in arrears
 No more, the Law is backed
 Up to the hilt by unjilted Jews
 Who stand at The Western Wall
 Ready for Miriam to choose
 Softly to sing 'Up-trawl'.

Yet, 'What is truth?' asked Pilate when
 He would await no answer
 Leaving The Truth both there and then
 To be crowned with thorn that morn, Sir...
 But later on at noon they saw
 It written, large and clear
 I.N.R.I.: those letters four
 Call Jesus to raise new cheer!

New cheer, due praise to erase and shun
 Old jeering long gone by,
 For The Strong Immortal Holy One
 Is the song: I.N.R.I.,
 And paeans pandean are good
 To give to The God of Greek
 Gregorian modes, bring odes, and should
 The King Himself not speak?

I AM I.N.R.I., I end
 Not ever, unbegun
 I AM The Word's eternal blend
 With The Thought: who sires The Son?
 And who is Love Begotten but
 This Risen from the dead

Abiding in this humming nut
Which the hermit calls his head?'

Om mani padme humming on
I honestly admit
This verse is an eirenicon
And the next one may be fit
To let Thy servant, Lord, depart
In peace till he begins
Thrumming again at the weaver's art
With the whoop of the wharf he wins -

A quiet wharf by side of Thames
And, a stonethrow off or three,
A pleasant Inn with Bethlehem's
Mine Host thereat, as free
As Truth can be with play on words,
Ripe puns and hidden names
Yield joy to Him, and hymning birds
Unbury merry claims.

In good King Charles' molten reins
I would not bolt or break
Away from standing on remains
Of attic art's mistake,
And this is lore which fairies know
Pertains to Charles the First
Not to the Second who was so
Uniron, best or worst.

Van in, Van out, Grand Dyke! I shout
And standing at the set
Uphold as being past a doubt
That Caroline's a pet:
When Carolina's left behind
Behold, who's right af(f)ront?
A certain Queen, a flirt self-signed
'Ashine, and no man's brunt'.

Should you say 'Turn 'er', what's the good?
Upon the other side

Probably naught supports but wood
 Else canvassing or hide
 Repeating Seek, and don't retire
 Not even if you find
 Adamant naught and thoughtless ire
 Linked with unthinking mind.

Those statues called Equestrian
 May also be in bronze
 But meseems I saw a painting, an
 Unbrazen as the Dons:
 Gainsborough pictures always gain
 And Rembrandts never lose,
 No Reynolds revelled in the reign
 Of Bonny Charlie's trews.

Should someone call a Constable
 King Charles at Quarles's best
 Secure it, be responsible
 For his helmet on arrest:
 Hurrah for the Establishment,
 Huzzah then for The Blues,
 May Hallelujah aye be blent
 With the non-dissenting Jews.

That handle in the Mews is turned
 And time and time again
 My mind on The Messiah burned
 Enchantment in my brain:
 If, barking up some other tree,
 You tell me I have failed
 I shall reply with Zion's glee,
 'The Lion has prevailed!'

Pedestrian I've travelled
 To Assisi from Provence,
 Unrivalled song's unravelled,
 Honi soi qui mal y danse:
 Equestrian I'm mounted
 But pedestrian I'm down
 And out as unaccounted

For as foreman of the Crown.

The views of the dissenting throng
 And the queues for Pusey House
 Would not be long as this my song
 Nor stronger should they grouse
 For en amour no troubadour
 Is likely to complain
 At the Constitution or the Law,
 Still Love will in him reign.

Still life in strife, with static art
 Insisting on its peace,
 Took Breughels for a harvest-cart:
 Arrested by police
 Man mumbled on till trundled off
 To skate on thinner ice
 Constable, said with a gentle cough
 'Breughels, you're unprecise'.

So, shoot a line from Avignon
 To Stratford-atte-Bow
 And flute a bit to mute The Swan
 That trumpeting will go
 Against some piece of Bacon's prose
 Which, re(a)d, shows dreadful streaks
 Of scorn for those fatheaded flows
 Of publicans and freaks.

Far freer than Malvolio
 Sweet William is found,
 Maria leaves no folio
 Cross-gartered an uncrowned;
 'Art friendless? then go quit the stage...'
 On Friendship who can tell
 Succinctly as that soured sage
 How lack of it is hell?

Due Touchstone to the Avon-Swan
 Is throned upon his jests
 So if his jokes provoke the Don

Key's mine, ashine it rests;
 Call borderline his bawdiness,
 Undoubtedly the mark
 Saving the Bacon from distress:
 Short Bacon thwarts the lark.

Corollary goes rolling on,
 Let Ham in white and red
 Declare warm-hearted Avon-Swan
 Not artless e'en in bed:
 Warm-blooded, storm not bawdiness,
 No time for timeless fools
 Had cold Saint Alban's... bored? well, guess
 Whence Breakspear was, you mules.

Sixth Adrian from Breakspear Nick,
 Oh lassitude, no time!
 Glows an English Pope, through thin and thick
 Foregoes our English clime
 Until we clamber up to see
 Devon in Heaven New
 And Hertford in accord with glee
 Of Warwick: broad the view!

Roll on the time when the altar shows
 A sublime unaltered stand;
 Almighty Pan as the Grecian knows
 Has a Jewish beak: Rome's grand!
 Mosaic horns (on the Ancient Law
 Fulfilling) brightly fall
 To tossing up for Love... who'll score?
 Back the Lion, Zion's call...

For The Person First Begetting rests,
 For The Second His Mother free
 Leads in to twin appointed crests
 For The Third, heard Voice at plea:
 Love's Persons Three are thus displayed
 As planning and as planned
 Lord of the Family... undismayed
 Our Lady holds my hand.

Arrayed in apron, skirt and blouse
She's rippling to deliver
This (run!) this ball: well-held, carouse,
To the Seas has come the river!
Maria, raise our standard now,
I'll praise the way you bowl,
I need new trousers and I trow
You know whom we'll extol...

How now, brown trousers, uncowed art
Will hit the bull with a Mistressed dart:
'Ejaculating "el" depart
In peace to the ceaseless page'.

Esurientes implevit (Short ode against long odds) (1971)

Where God grows big gross fortune goes more small,
 In hungering may space for grace be found,
 Daughters ran to and from upon the wall
 Beholding comely Joseph, spare and sound;
 Ephraim was, when he "waxed fat and kicked",
 Like to an ass with fodder overcharged,
 Always Olympic runners have been picked
 Rather for swiftness great than weight that barged;
 If "He has filled the hungry with good things"
 Meant much to Mary saying it, then she
 (Though she would grow to bear the King of Kings)
 Was lightsome with a liquefactive glee:
 The greensleeved forests whisper it, the birds
 Sweetly repeat Our Lady's grateful words.

Corollary can cuckoo carol now
 And Charles the Fat may fasten to his fame
 And G.K.Chesterton might take a bow
 Or make one at slight venture to his frame;
 Saint Thomas of Aquin, as like as not,
 Would fill the fattest Penguin with his art,
 He levitated e'en in weather hot
 And did not die from an attack of heart;
 Carrying sixteen stone or so he went
 Enraptured to the chapel as he could,
 Delight in the most holy Sacrament
 Uplifted gifted Tom from where he stood:
 Divisions on a ground of holiness
 Viols de gamba would not sound, I guess.

The chest of six-ton-Tony best may swell
 Not in the elegance of Sainte-Sulpice,
 It is a fact established less than well
 That Anthony was tall as the police;
 Saint Anthony of Padua was fat
 And stature like a sylph was none of his
 Whose statue standing in this habitat
 Is rather thin but fathers mysteries;
 Before it I, at half-past-three o'clock

Ante meridian this very day
 (Wherein long since from dawn the princely cock
 Has strutted forth and crowed, I reign a gay!)
 Did beg Saint Anthony afresh: please find
 Right temperance! last night I over-dined.

Saint Francis Borgia, S.J., grew large,
 His place at table in refectory
 Was markedly abnormal - at its marge
 Incision fit, to sit more easily;
 His appetite was not unduly great,
 To gormandize was far from his desire,
 It simply was his bodily estate
 To be a grate enfolding holy fire;
 Saint Francis of Assisi, (little fellow),
 Was primarily Francis not but John
 And Bernadoney named, (Il Poverello
 Was also as a title added on):
 I, being John and Bradburne, burn to be
 As broad a minded bard, bright Lord, as he.

Marry or burn
 And Mary is best
 In breaking a fellow of fat;
 Married to Mary is parried the rest
 And (keep it not under your hat)
 Yet there are many she'd marry if they
 Only would ask her: she'd show, in THEIR way
 Of thinking attractive, how far she surpasses
 The beauty of others,
 She smothers alasses!

Even the quiet cloys on earth (1968)

Even the quiet cloys on earth, the bars
Of discontent are clamped across the stars
And stillness counts as cramp to damp the zest
Of restless West's activity in cars!

In restless frame of mind I sallied forth
For sense's solace: even grapes were wrath
And when I ordered Omelet it came
Framed in the plate by Chips! I rallied North -

"Om mani padme hum" I murmured, "set
Me free from such a specious Omelet:
Tobacco's layman's incense, but potatoes
Will drive me to deride you, Raleigh, yet!".

Sir Walter Raleigh, you commanded ships,
Swayed the persuasiveness of ladies' hips,
Made conquest of a world be-curved in smoke,
But I will not defame your name with Chips!

Amongst the Latins I'd have thought one free
Of chips thrown in whate'er the order be
But here the Portuguese of Mozambique
Produce them like affrontery in ghee.

I called for Medium, I ordered Sweet
Nor was I ordered dryly to the street:
Beira became a Port so filled with light
The Fleet stood bright as white the wine was neat!

Neat was the wine but I by no means drunk,
The Flagship rode the gale, the failures sunk:
Maria very softly said to me,
"Nor Buddhist neither Moslem but a monk".

I said, "A monk? Maria, please explain"
And she replied, "To serve me is to reign
So reign amidst these seas, nor ease to wine
Your way of life since me to wife you gain".

To seas, to waters, Oedipus to be
In Christ who is the King of Queen Marie
Married to her who is our Mother too
Alone with one I dwell who's Belle to three.

I went into the Beira Mosque and sat
Awhile upon the floor-fulfilling mat
And then I prayed to Power, more divine
Than love of wine, Agapheh give for that.

A loaf of bread? I need it less, O King,
Than Thee like wafer seeming, and I sing
A Woman clad with sun whose gladsome eyes
Reflecting Thine are more than wine for prize.

Idyll of the Spring (1969)

Fontana di Clitumno,
 Most crystalline of springs,
 Where do the wildest roses blow?
 Where widest grow the wings?
 Since temple was to Venus set
 Beside your verdant marge
 How many stood, would not forget
 Thereafter where at large
 They ever went,
 With wonderment,
 How limpid is the stream
 That rises at Fontana di Clitumno like a dream?

Fontana di Clitumno
 Still rises in my mind,
 And all the hills of Umbria
 Enthralling stand behind
 And kindly too the angels stoop
 And widest are their wings
 And wildest are the roses there
 Where recollection flings
 Its fragrance up
 Into the Cup
 Of memory He holds
 Who is the Father of us all, who calls us to the folds.

Fontana di Clitumno,
 Is Venus not a star
 Consorting with the ruined grace
 Which halts the fastest car?
 That linger may its human load
 Beside the road to Rome
 Recalling how the art of Greece
 Became a part of home:
 No halcyon,
 No silver swan,
 But would delight to be
 Beside the stream while glides my theme with love of One in Three.

Fontana di Clitumno,
No goddess wantoning
Is Venus in fulfilment
But the Morning Star, I ween,
Yet better weans the best of Queens
From fetters of the world
Than all the centres of the scenes
Religious that are furred:
Astarte, startle never now,
Athene, leave thy loom,
Minerva wise, but rise and bow
To Wisdom in her womb.

Fontana di Clitumno,
I found you on a day
When I was whirled in via
Till we stopped upon the way
To gaze at gracefulness gone by
Into a ruined fane
But glory founted at the spring
And history did reign;
No water-nymph descried we there,
No dryad fled to leaves
For Queen of Venus is my gain
And she is green of sleeves
Whose Lover is the Lord of light,
Whose Father is our own,
Whose Child is piping by the stream
All into One alone.

Freedom in Wedlock (1972)

With this body I thee worship,
With this ring I do thee wed,
With all my worldly goods I thee endow:
There is not found among them very much it may be said
To crow about - no cock, no bull, no cow;
Nevertheless as chanticleer's
My crowing shall be bright
When love has cast aside all fears
Upon this wedding-night!

I gave it to her gently
And she took it with a smile
And then I gave her more and more and more:
Our children all are poems, far too many for a file,
My thrust is that of just a troubadour;
My action is in words because
There is no better fashion
Since Christ our Lord incarnate was
For sublimating passion.

This poem first I gave her not
But later when the pace grew hot
And prudence had to sway the cot:
Balow, balay.

In June he changes his tune (1978)

One hour with burnt-out lepers when the wind
 Of mood and mode is blowing quite contrary
 May change from mellow fast a fellow's mind
 And make him think naught good but God and Mary!
 I do not say that his intent will vary
 In time of such temptation, needed much
 To show a cuckoo when he grows too airy
 How rabbit feels unmigrant in its hutch.

Mixers with halitosis all combined
 With stumps for hands and feet and crutches chary
 Of being kicked from under by some blind
 Leper who cannot leap or be unwary
 May punctuate gray woes with airy-fairy
 Remarks about the weather being much
 More gay today, but ask some other Mary
 How rabbit feels unmigrant in its hutch.

'Mungaté' is her surname it's assigned
 To 'Man, ungate me from this drear Non-Vary!':
 The huts mount up to eighty, count aligned
 These dwellings all, all just like this of Mary!
 Still stars by night shine brightly, if you're starey
 And have the use of both your eyes for such
 Gazing, The Great Big Bear will ask, maybe,
 How rabbit feels unmigrant in its hutch.

envoi

Princess, send up with faith a prayer to Mary
 That fit Israilis, wraithlike not as Dutch
 Man Flying on French-Horns, may beat that Query:
 How rabbit feels unmigrant in its hutch
 With Russia growling at its door
 With a loaded rifle in its paw!
 Whose pawns are 'the freedom-fighters'?
 French-Horns, dismiss the blighters
 And leap from hill to hill
 Echoing, 'Lepers, still
 Be still and know I AM
 Is The Lion and The Lamb!'

L'ensuite (March 1974)

I love this inability to end
Ever without just adding one more verse,
It seems to me a sempiternal trend
For blending with The One is none the worse
Even for endless aeons unbegun,
To wit: God - Holy Spirit, Father, Son.

Playing it cool beside a pool wherein
There stood knee-deep the Maid Immaculate
I heard an archangelic alto win
Her full consent for sacramental state
Of Pan Incarnate, and that rare contralto
Was instrument through which The Voice breathed, "Lo,
The Holy Ghost shall overshadow thee".....
She bore The Word, but Person Third was He
Of whom conceived she God-made-Man
Whose Father Thought is also Pan.

Letter to Bruce (January 1978)

Your brave Saint Francis of the Birds
And your story of conversion
Lacked not for grace as I for words
On my bad procrastination:
For both the letter and the card
Accept the tardy thanks of a bard.

Your bold calligraphy declares
An open disposition,
Your countenance more surely airs
Your healthy soul's condition:
You are the man who keeps the Parks
And loves the sound of the rising larks.

In this far land you learnt to love
In the space of but a moon
Father Mangan and Father Dove
And even this buffoon
Remain in hope of better things
And the coming of The King of Kings.

Well into second childhood now
I cannot comprehend
Why anyone can fail to bow
To The Lord of End to End
Now can I see how anyone
Can fail to hail the Risen Son.

We joy to be inhabitants
Of the Mother of our God,
In that fair cell we grow as plants
And sway at Yahweh's nod
And as His rod waves over us
We share Our Mary's 'Oremus'.

I hope your wife and you are well
And steeped in Jesu's peace,
Three times a day the Ave-bell
Declares what shall not cease:

The blessings of Incarnate Love
To whose designs our minds do move.

Our Lady is a dashing Blonde,
Our Lord is her delight
And nobody can get too fond
Of playing in their sight:
The song of heaven's Queen and King
Is plainly sung by monks who sing.

Hurrah for the Missa de Angelis!
With every best wish and warm greetings
[signature] John Bee

Letter to Stephen King (March 1977)

Dear Stephen, I was tickled pink
 The verses reached and didn't sink;
 Now sail they may in state upon the waves
 Of such a kingly brain as Bradburne craves.
 I am intent that here shall make its home
 Each fabulously happy palindrome;
 I like the sound of 'Words at Play,' for me
 They spark each other off: by ear, you see,
 I tend to write the bulk of what I do,
 And words than acts are better for 'Who's Who,'
 And catenation in non-sequiturs
 Lulls the mulled sense while spirits dull it stirs.
 With your permission, I will send a clump
 Of further verse, else destined for the dump.

The terrorists have not yet shot me down,
 But would they waste a bullet on a clown?
 I find that feeling brave's a 'piece of cake'
 When there is nothing near to make me shake;
 All fear I do believe is cast right out
 Where Perfect Love expels the final doubt,
 And all those things we think we'd fear to face
 Are banished not by Oddbod but God's grace.

Our rains have been exceedingly profuse;
 With Robert and the hose-pipe make a truce!
 O excellent and Kingly Number Seven
 May all of us attain the reign of Heaven!

Shalom, the Tetracycline is a Boon,
 Love to you each and all from this Buffoon
 unfunny as ever but scouring the earth for palindromes -
 Many thanks - John.

Logos (1974)

The Father we perceive, we see The Son,
We hear The Holy Ghost (in silence oft)
And Love, the substance of The Three in One,
Becomes the substance of our souls aloft:
Yet no man has seen God at any time
Just as He is, I AM, supreme, sublime.

The Thought, The Word, The Voice are Persons Three
Of Love in Love with Love for evermore,
I am assured that it is up to me
To write this down as clown and troubadour:
Never had need almighty Pan to mime,
Ever His Word expressed His Thought with Voice to rhyme.

Mootamewa (1971)

I feel like a usurper in this place,
 A person having little more to give
 Than foreign manners and a foreign face
 And knowledge bare of how they fare and live;
 Vast fields of earthly hope are far behind
 And wide is their experience of woe,
 Never a one of these but has in mind
 Those that are gone and whither he must go;
 Ancient is leprosy, the Bible span
 Goes over it and over it again,
 Eventually there the Son of Man
 Solves not its riddle and resolves its pain
 Only a little: but, beatitude
 Woos legion from one tenth's due gratitude.

Lepers - they make a mighty mystery
 Excruciating mainly for themselves,
 Perhaps a matter for my poetry
 Easily writ by him nor digs nor delves;
 Rose-coloured glasses better are for them
 That never had a cataract nor went
 Totally blind, though I would not condemn
 An optimistic mien where it's meant;
 So much of thought that leads to naught subsists
 In wishing well to fellows in distress,
 Yet, you may enter into heaven's lists
 By sending hither just one simple dress:
 If in my place you stood with these at hand
 By God's good grace you'd better understand.

Orientate I must, this thrust upon
 The probability of what they need
 Is only childplay, such a trust they don
 In God as makes my garment but a weed;
 I've visited, and frequently, some hut
 Wherein a mortal draws towards a death
 Whilst by him lies, as if in wonted rut,
 Some bed-foresaking friend to blend his breath;
 Nor is this matter only masculine

For half of these are women that are here,
Friends, they will come at sunset to assign
The night to floordom, boredom never near:
Orientate I will, fakirs are these
Whose gears change softly oft, their peers to please.

Mtemwa (Mutemwa) (1972)

This people, this exotic clan
 Of lepers in array
 Of being less yet more than man
 As man is worn today:
 This is a people born to be
 Burnt upward to eternity!

This strange ecstatic moody folk
 Of joy with sorrow merged
 Destined to shuffle off the yoke
 Of all the world has urged:
 This oddity, this Godward school
 Sublimely wise, whence, I'm its fool!

This ecdysis, this casting off
 Of falsehood formed from pride,
 This is a little village, doff
 Your hats as past you ride:
 But past it far you'll never go
 Nor fast, since Bundu bids your princely car to slow.

This is a fastness none the less because
 Fortress it is
 Wills time remember
 What, before it, was:
 Strong hold this lays, and so should lazy I,
 Upon the bulwarks of eternity.

Hazy are not
 These folk, nor forgotten
 By Father not far but full near
 With His Love for His Only-Begotten.....
 'You are cut off' (Mutemwa signifies)
 But not from One and all in Him who share His size.

As you come down, as down you must
 On the winding road in its load of dust,
 A wide panorama and wild you scan
 Capriciously free from the hand of man, -

The landscape goats and delights to skip
 In the green that rhymes with summertime's grip
 Or, if in the waning of winter you come
 While spring is a-gaining, you'll sing or be dumb
 With wonder at seeing an avenue long
 Of blue jacarandas whose bloom is their song, -
 Stand strong in their century these:
 But, do not in viewing 'Halloo'
 Till you're out of the wood
 Which mentally blocks you from sighting our plight as a good
 And keeps you from seeing how lepers can easily leap
 Over the nightmare of ill
 And that hill so steep:
 Mutemwa.

This cohort, mixed, mercurial,
 This battered, tattered throng,
 Goes halt towards its funeral,
 Vaults to the Lord in song -

Song, and as harsh cacophony
 You'd hardly ever find,
 But hearts preceded harmony
 And The Sacred doesn't mind!

Martial, no threnody's the sound,
 It storms high heaven's gates
 Whence the wounded God who trod sits crowned
 And the King of Glory waits

On a motley oft so maddening
 That soften must my heart
 To the sweetness, lowly, gladdening,
 Of the Master of my art.

Mtemwa (1973)

Mootamewa is God's darling; those who come
And go or stay may thus work out salvation;
It is the oddest thing in Christendom, -
Politics none, no race discrimination
In that Pan's Africans are each and all
Inhabiting this Ghetto with no wall
Unconscious totally of what debars
One from another in the world that mars
Its meetings and its greetings by its pride
And prejudice and envy: Crucified
Mootamewa is and risen and ascended
On heaven's hope, in faith of being mended.

Not last of the miracles (1977)

(1)

Not last of the miracles worked by Our Lord
 Nor past correct counting by one we'll record
 As having declared that if all Jesus did
 Were written in detail we'd never be rid
 Of looking for space for containing the whole
 Wide wonder of Christ: Alleluia, no toll!
 No knell and no dole, for they counted the fish
 A hundred and fifty and three at your wish.

(2)

Gone up to the East at the sound of a trump,
 Gone into a Cloud... Go to Carmel, no hump
 Like camel you'll carry if telescoped prayer
 Of only God's name is your claim and your air
 Like this: murmur 'Om' or ejaculate 'El'
 With the simple regard of Unknowing... Hallel!
 Get emptied of every discussion of aught
 And one with One Lord in His glorious naught.

(3)

Our Lady is won in no easier way
 Than praying the Rosary; saying 'Au lait!'
 She softly invites you to pray at her breast
 Or else on her knee, neither better, both best
 And, as you pass smoothly from bead unto bead
 You venerate God... she will prod at your need
 Reminding you gently of Mysteries fair:
 Where no meditation, no flowing of prayer...
 What more Apostolic than telling abroad
 The Life of Our Lady as Life of Our Lord?
 If none can assume her good-humoured as God
 I'm off to make hay with Our Lady of Nod
 Where, clothed with the sun, she is blonde as Apollo
 And fond of a hymn which we skim like a swallow.
 Salve, Regina...

Nothing (1974)

I think that God is called I am and so am I
 Provided I can strip myself of any fruit
 And quality I may possess, I don't deny
 That I have nothing piped not on me by His Flute;
 "That that I am, Lord, offer unto Thee, for Thou
 It art" are Walter Hilton's quintessential words,
 Their meaning is that in us God alone knows how
 To offer God my naked Being (shared by herds
 As to their every individual) - I AM;
 Not qualities, not talents, not pure accidents
 Inherently arranged by Providential Love
 And, no, not gifts, distortions, crafty shifts and bents
 Towards perdition, not my lists I disapprove;
 And wherefore what? and therefore why? that which I mean
 Presses for full expression and it is: I Think
 Points to I AM The Father Thought on whom I lean
 Implicitly for very being, breath alone
 Never expressing Thought so well as by The Son
 God The Incarnate Word who, tiptoe on the brink
 In time, forbids my cogitation dive and sink
 Articulately into anything but one
 Monosyllabic deep whence leap I leap will own
 I AM..

(and nothing but for Him whose Flute, whose Voice
 floats like a fairy from the bellows choice
 and linger lightly and invites me come
 yet closer to the Breath of Christendom).

Bottom, Cobweb, Moth and Flute
 Asked me if I'd play deaf-mute:
 Rather (I replied), and let
 Darling Hamspeare steer the Set
 Of strolling players (then I got
 Lots of stage-fright, shakey, hot,
 Panic, stricken but at length
 Had my part pat-pat, full strength!)

From The Father Thought and Word The Son
Comes the still small voice of Flute: at One
In the garment of The Globe They run
Whose Name is?... "Will i am not do? be done!".

Of Benevolence (1970)

Most loveable and most affectionate
Amongst the men and women on this earth
Rank not together as of married state
Yet oft are counted as of equal worth;
The scales of fortune fail in terms of time
On hooks eternal hung, that wishing well
Looking on lowness from its height sublime
Does not debar itself from springs of hell;
Many there are who, lacking naught for wealth,
Entrance themselves by beaming on the crowd
That, despite smell of sweat and aspect bowed,
Haply may have more spiritual health
Indwelling: than the man whose outward grin
Soft goes softly off for secret sin.

Om (January 1963)

Where kindles Love's eternal light on everlasting hills
 Hymn Father, Son and Holy Ghost around that flame which thrills
 Whilst each to each in simple speech begins it with 'Shalom'
 Whence it proceeds as Love it feeds, one syllable, in 'Om'.

When bidden to consider what is best in Hindustan
 The Himalayan foothills in a marvellous pavan
 Process along the memory and hold the mindful gaze,
 And thence proceeds the lama through the woodsmoke to the maze.

Wise sadhus chant by glowing fires of charcoal in the eve
 As point by point an argosy of stars appears to weave
 With whirls of wonder round this orb and silences gyrate
 Whilst Venus pirouettes in green, to bars Inviolate.

Adown the mountain tracks he comes, along the highland streams,
 His hair is to his shoulder and his shoulder to the themes
 Which are the heirs apparent of that wheel of Christendom
 Well known as holy rosary - om mani padme hum.

As Cluny recollected he, as Quarr and Lindisfarne;
 Is solitary, Parkminster, is quiet as a tarn:
 In saffron robe he stills the globe, shall he be christened 'Om'
 When reached the gates? goaled Zion waits, breathing a soft 'Shalom'.

And should he meditate the joys, the seven joys of her
 Whose sweet aroma is of balm and cinnamon and myrrh,
 Already has the lama leapt to sages and their praise
 Of Him who is the King of kings and Lord of pilgrim lays.

Calmly the camels pass him by above the steep ravines
 Along their way to Khatmandu, like lofty rural deans
 Belonging to the Alpine Club and longing to divest
 Of bridals, bells and boys and gels (which Swiss hotels are best?)

As plane trees by the water and as eucalypti tall
 He breathes of Zion's daughter, and she wreathes the Life of all
 As do the laurels and the bays, not with a crown of thorns,
 But with the verdant tribute light as deer upon the lawns.

O Maker Love Omnipotent, O Mediator Christ,
 O Mover of the penitent, where One is sacrificed
 There wheel the eagles, there white-winged O Mighty Albatross
 With Love Thou glidest Militant, presidest with the Cross!

Exalted like a palm in Cades wild which blithesome makes
 The Lord (who comes from Lebanon where cedars new He stakes)
 Exults the Rose of Sharon who did dance before the Lord
 Ere Eden called for Avé e'en as Eva broke the chord.

Considers not the man of God descending to the plains
 Whether his horns of light too bright, whether too dim his brains,
 Will seem to such as sojourn knowing not that they should be
 As pilgrims each day passing whom tomorrow may not see.

He hears the beat of mardal drums, he hears the nautch's glee,
 Not throbs his heart to human art, not tremble does his knee
 To bow to wanton filigree which slips till it is goaled
 Not near so high as hip and thigh but smiting till you're sold.

Calf-length, my strength Immaculate, 's the wearing of your skirt,
 As to the hip there ripples slip; all graceful you are girt
 That, by your belt, no more may melt your babes before the thrust
 Of hobbled steel's stiletto heels - a donkey's he that must!

Considers not the lama as he comes without alarm
 Towards the heart of some bazaar the odds against a charm
 Consisting of a mantle for the soul and of a drum
 Which goes to war 'gainst vanity: om mane padme hum.

The heretofore of Hindoo lore too phallic is for those
 That know the Paschal Candle not nor whence the Steeple rose:
 Vishnu's a thing whereat to sneeze, and Shiva but a shiver
 By such as hail no Maid of fonts made fruitful by Life's Giver.

Enchanted but by Brahma like the Buddha on he goes
 Whose home is far beyond the plain, whose song is nigh the snows,
 And whilst he walks amongst the waves not unaware is he
 Of being heaven's harbinger alone with One in Three.

Supreme is Brahma, Father He; Supreme is Vishnu, Heir;
 Co-equal Son, the Wounded One, Salvation is His flare
 As up He leaps whence Shiva reaps, plants and the increase brings
 Winged in the Love Co-equal: One the Lord, all Three as Kings.

Destroying what is vain with long eternity His care
 Proceeds the Lord of Miriam, who is Love's Lady fair:
 Wise Shiva re-creating in the labyrinthine lanes
 Thrills on the mistressed stillness of a mind where silence reigns.

A lama walking calmly through an Indian bazaar
 Will hardly be considering if he shall meet a car
 With equanimity complete but, lo, the booths are full
 Of pure plebeian pathos sure as Bathos comes, a bull.

Lowling upon the Lofty where Life's lowly love to go
 This is a sacred Beast an seems but cumbersome and slow
 Amongst the homely merchandise where passes motley by
 The proud patrician, whilst the Kings and Shepherds linger nigh.

See, these are wise; but not their eyes most nobles bend so low
 As to adore on a fragrant flow of cowdung One they know
 Not, seeing not: 'what's all that rot? the Mass? a mortal sin?
 Is there a God? apparently not!' (is Summa i cumen in?)

Queen o' the South moves not her mouth, Cham's charmed, she sways,
 hip hip!
 Cock o' the North did flock from wrath, in woad, but now the Ship
 Of Trade outweighs the Ancient Praise: let sing the Southern Seas
 Long lost chorales like Afric' kraals, the Trade's our only breeze!

The bourgeoisie are in the bar and deaf to breath without
 When 'Love's an Equilateral' the wakeful watchmen shout
 Exhibiting their Triangle Symbolic on the walls
 Of Jewish pawns unbroken: gentles, what a lot of bawls!

Now lumbers back the Sacred Bull but softly to explain
 In bellows theological why Italy and Spain
 And other European lands should waken to admit
 That Jesus Christ the Perfect Jew can royally outwit.

Good people, if you fail to see a Crib in this bazaar
 You'd better go to Beecher's Brook by way of Zanzibar
 And should you find you cannot jump from bed to Bethlehem
 Quickly enough to get to Mass you'd share no tent with Shem.

But all the stars were wondering while all the bars asleep
 Piled high with empty glasses (where the wealthy drinking deep
 Stayed shackled in the shallows whereas stood with brother ass
 Deep in the peace of God white ox) did dream a Midnight Mass.

Turns up and over in the dream a glass through which we see
 Whilst looking by the bottom of it fancies fast and free:
 O mark I am a ruby at descrying and, a gem
 Of chivalry, come sails undim, sings Saladin with Shem!

Assumption 'tis that here there is some Lady sweet and rare
 With locks unshy and lightsome eye, some Shepherdess thrice fair
 To bid them come to Christendom whose domes in Hindustan,
 (Salaam), unseen remarked this Queen unhailed in Kubla Khan.

Shalom, need share no tent with Shem, with Japheth or with Cham,
 The Painfree King of Crown and Ring, the Risen Paschal Lamb,
 Yet will He dwell, Emmanuel, in templed tents below!
 Rose too Christ's Ark, blithe as the lark, let's up from Jericho.

As cypresses on Zion, as fair olives in the plains,
 Is Miriam who stood by One whose wood and iron reigns:
 By Zion's living Corner-stone, Jerusalem, and we
 Complete the building if we taste and find Him sweet to be.

Risen Redeemer we would find, His temple's on the hills
 Where Miriam's Magnificat augment a myriad rills
 That praise the Dayspring brilliant, the Orient on high
 Whilst widely rolls the river of Messiah, who is nigh.

There stands a City on a hill, through softly rolls a river,
 The current is The Sovereign and the torrent is The Saviour
 And richly rolls the stream of souls amidst His Precious Blood
 Who took our flesh and flowed afresh and rose upon the flood.

Flows too the skirt of Miriam, Jerusalem the free
Of ups and down in fashion, whilst compassionate is she
Whose shimmering, of filigree, hems azure light aflow
With liquefaction soft and smooth, three inch the knee below.

'The soul of man it is a life consisting of three powers,
The will, the understanding and the memory' of bowers
Where God the Father through the Son makes babes to understand
How Love Proceeding lead us will from haze to Light's high land.

Om mani padme hum atque Deus, qui humanae...
The syllables unravel, fuse, full harmony display
Where tumbles, near, the waterfall encompassing the sound
Of One who will encompass many voices in a round.

On The Feast of Corpus Christi (1978)

We know the Body and the Blood of Christ
 Are with us in His Holy Eucharist,
 Since we believe it too we know He walks
 In those receiving Him and through them talks
 As peaceably to Mister Everyman
 Whom they may meet and greet as Jesus can
 But what we do not know is whether He
 Remains and reigns this day in you and me
 Since neither of us trusts the lusty sense
 And both make simple Faith our sole defence
 Against the demons who would put to rout
 Our deep belief and true goodwill with doubt.

This is that happy morning when we feel
 Safe on the rock while pealing steeples reel,
 The rolling seas can never say us Nay
 Because they mean MARIA: Hip-Hurray!
 Mine Host is landlord of the freest houses,
 Throughout all Christendom our King carouses
 And she who is His Barmaid has put on
 Whatever dress best sends you to élan
 And blends you in The Swan with Cob and Pen
 That are Our Lord and Lady... say Amen
 To being Mistressed quickly as can ford
 Through shallows of this page to deep accord.

Had you been there in Galilee of yore
 And heard that Christ was three miles off or four
 And that He was the whole expression rare
 Of God who made the earth and gave the air
 Would you have said that, since His Spirit is
 Everywhere in His elemental guise,
 You'd travel not a little way to see
 The Word Incarnate? heard in Galilee
 Jesus of Nazareth is in each tent
 Where rests with us The Blessed Sacrament:
 Worship the God of nature and do well,
 Do better and adore Emmanuel.

Four Gospel-makers made His message clear,
Five wounds are in the Host as near as near,
Six senses you may have if you will ask
The Master kind who hides behind that mask
And sits amidst the Seven Sacraments
As Centre of them each in all those tents...
Eight modes Gregorian enchant the choirs
And muses nine are mine to sign the Shires
With Holy Cross: aspiring on the steeple
I'll chant it clearly for the chosen People
That He who is the Good from Nazareth
Is Perfect Jew, before and after death!
Alleluia, Shalom.

Oncing (1971)

An apogean mystery
At the pinnacle of life
Is how one may
Unmarried stay
When nature needs a wife:
Better to marry than to burn
Yet better still the will to yearn.

The willing flame of pure desire
Stays steady not unless
One feels the weal
Of deep appeal
Encircling to caress
The mind, the body and the whole
Informed with an immortal soul.

Wherefore, a man who wills to set
His heart on Love alone
Should not despise and not forget
His Totem, but enthrone
The sum of that which most attracts
His being to its cataracts:
Love will for lust atone.

Upon that throne Our Lady Fair
May sit as Queen of grace,
Ask her to take
For heaven's sake
Such earthly form and face
As you consider is the height
Of human beauty in your sight.

This, in a Word, is best to do
If you would be detached
From aught which might forbid to woo
High heaven's gate unlatched:
Marry Maria and remain
Beside her Jesus, joy to gain -
None could be better matched.

Abide in Christ and, in that Word
Made flesh of Hebrew stock.
Murmur the name
Of Yahweh's Dame
And stroll and roll and rock
And sit and stand and lie and sleep
With Jesu's Shepherdess of sheep.

Panic (1969)

God, and it comes upon me oft
When times rave hard and crave I soft
And while amidst the waves I wilt
Thou pipest, piercest, to the hilt:
Turning the sword that spurns my guilt
Thou burnest, saying in my heart
'Fool, shall I Master not thy kingly part
Of being mocked?
Be laved and rocked
E'en also by My Queen
Sleeved green
And with Me interlocked'.

Then goes the panic fear away,
Tomorrow is another day
Wherein the better I shall prove
By how much more I pray and less I move.

Pipe and pipe on, Thou Lord of Peace,
Enfold me in Thy Golden Fleece
Who is none other than that Dame
MIRIAM: O admire I AM
Enfolded by her frame!

Paradise Tossed Aside: 'Incipit Lamentatio...' (1978)

Here in Mashonaland, God's dwindling park
 Where fragrant cherries wild bloom white midst crowns
 Of red masasas, looms now a large dark
 Dragonlike Axe with many heads that downs
 Badly good woods in lumps, leaves stumps to rot
 Blackened by fires, by bulbul-choirs forgot.

Lest this lament should seem insipid, take
 As starting-point I only one great kraal
 And that's a leper-camp where, for the sake
 Of terror of the Snake, they root up all
 Attempts of grass to grow, and this despite
 Handicaps on the left and on the right!

Salt of the earth in many ways, in this
 These lepers are no wiser than the rest
 Of Shona Kraaldom, scenery like bliss
 Is swept aside with deft defiant zest!
 Twould seem the ancient fiend in serpent's shape
 Has won the desert by the garden's rape.

Here in Mashonaland, where orioles
 With liquid notes make haloes for the Spring,
 Is all the score for war-memorials
 And why then still do bulbuls trill and sing?
 The axe presents the Hammer and the Sickle
 With fellow promise never to be fickle.

Sever the forests, limb by limb, from heaven
 And sharply bring them down flatlong to earth
 So that your habitat, with hell for leaven,
 May crave the Brave New World for all its worth
 Of knavish tricks that gird against The King
 Whose Tree still stands where axe and hammer ring.

Is it fear of snakes and lasting dread
 Of Eden's serpent that they scour the land
 Clean of each blade of grass, to show its head
 So keen? keen winds shall blow on scene of sand

Swept willy-nilly into eyes and chests
Of this mad race that graces glad arrests!

Attests that Garden to the mind of God
But their desserts are Desert as they hack
Since, all along each track Prince Shona's trod,
The trunks are slashed, the branches are bent back
Or severed... nay, not even for their fires
Nor for odd posts to prop their toppling byres.

'Byres' is homely as I'll get in telling
Such savage wantonness, such random felling.

So many think that heaven is a slab
Of concrete! now in both the hemispheres
The mind of potty man has got so drab
That there's no love therein to cast out fears
Of viruses and microbes, snakes and worms:
Take we Hell's diet on the Devil's terms!

Else it is greed, for money and for land,
That makes a desert of God's wide wild Eden;
When I was young a Heronry did stand
With three-score nests and ten twixt earth and heaven:
It stood in Norfolk near King's Lynn until
Cut down to grow potatoes: growing still?

Man is a vandal and a beastly thing
Where'er his ears are deaf to Pan's sweet piping,
Yet he was set as viceroy to King
Eternal once: oh may this dunce's typing
Re-stir the springs of immortality
And may my wit befit eternity.

As gentle and unwarlike as the Shona
May seem to earthbound beings on two legs
He is not fit a bit to be the owner
Even of one odd acre: whose eggs
Him on to getting of good land should tax
Unyieldingly his wielding of the axe!

The snake has triumphed over Africa,
 Can Pan not pipe it to renounce its gain?
 For fear of snakes they sweep the near and far
 Clear of all grass that grows: greedy for grain
 Of sterile sand and barren rock, they bring
 Down to a desert bare fair nature's fling!

Hark, this amongst the gentle lepers: one,
 Who calls his own at least four acres, found
 That two most fruitful mango-trees kept sun
 Off from his maize and razed them to the ground!
 Such ravin, for the sake of mealie-cobs
 Maybe ten more, on this my score sets nob's.

The sun shall glare on thee, unshining Shona,
 Of moonscape only, Goat, be gloating owner!

They hate the flowers and they loathe the blooms,
 Wild cherry-trees in blossom make them writhe,
 Barren their brides are not but hot! their brooms
 Bear away beauty: booty for the scythe
 Is each green blade of grass in reach, they are
 Grooms that graze nightmares on this lightsome star.

Their destiny must be to stoke the fires
 Where there are greenwoods none, no sun, no choirs!

The Shona patience shines not in this war
 Brightly as might attribute it to Christ,
 The Matabele saw its like before
 When here were neither church nor Eucharist:
 Frail apathy in face of whirling woes
 Hails not The Cross that still stands still and glows.

To honour of their titular Saint
 Ignatius were men loyal when guerillas
 Threatened because, upon the face, the paint
 So rightly white gave nightblack knaves the shivers?
 That statue, by those 'faithful', was destroyed
 Utterly and the mutterers deployed.

Unstable Boy, Aunt Mabel ruled you well
 And set you to the garden with the hose
 And if you squirted it at Clarabel
 Over the fence it kept her on her toes
 Till soon, at heat of noon, you two would weave
 Together, yes, and never wish to leave!

Far better be at that than hacking down
 The 'Nyama-ropa' with its flesh and blood
 Or else than laying waste the woodland-crown
 As far from Town as Justice from M'Lud
 Who sentenced you to hanging for your tricks
 So heavily involved in Politics.

Let us salute the shades of bootless fellows
 Who stole the fruit whence bad o'erwhelmed the good!
 Well Bottom wove, well Flute did mend the bellows
 But 'Fudza-mombé' felled not well the wood
 Since, starveling prince, he left the ragged stumps
 Looking like jagged scarecrows in the dumps.

Their sole desire is body's sustenance,
 Main inspiration of their souls is maize,
 Their minds lie fallow to the foe's advance
 With tales of fellowship - fools in a haze
 Of brash transistors, high-heeled shoes and prams
 They skip towards that Russian Bear like lambs!

Daleth hath dalliance with Dillitanté,
 Hies to Dry-Cleaners Hé three times a week
 And both of them have got a book on Danté,
 Of both of them tis better not to speak
 Since neither of them knows two words in Greek:
 Kyrie éleison.

Unstable Boys, Aunt Mabel ruled you well
 And though mine English Aunt was not the rage
 Bad Cain enables you for naught but Hell,
 For cabbages is all your pilgrimage!
 Shalom, Mashonaland? such greeting good
 Will but come back as ill, still hacking wood.

God clothes the earth with humus, grass, and leaves
 Its decking to the forest's tossing crown;
 If we are Adam's still, if still we're Eve's
 We'll seek like migrant swallows not the gown
 Of lasting summers and eternal springs
 With which is clad rich land of angels' wings.

Man unregenerate is drab as dust
 And dry as parchment whereupon he writes
 The history of his unlyric lust
 Which Lucifer bestrolls in scarlet tights:
 I know a bank though, flows that stream beside
 And Babylon has nothing on Love's Bride
 For pure allure as certain of itself
 As she is Queen of angel, fay and elf.

Haters of life, they lust to kill, their joy
 Is first to fell those trees that look most fair;
 Masasas they would utterly destroy,
 Wild cherries in the Spring they'll swing at: There!
 Forty years on their seed shall con but sand
 And read a book about this once fair land!

Green is for mealies only, else for greed
 Or envy of some Shona's shining Fridge:
 White-Bread shall give them cancer, they shall feed
 On natty gain and strain at every midge!
 They shall grow poker-faced, forget to grin
 And change their beer sublime for grimy gin.

Then shall they say, 'Our Progress now surpasses
 That of the white-man! bright, we all wear glasses!'...
 Then at their lasses makes this ass no passes.

Firewood: with 'Hoonee soi qui mal y pense'
 They justify their savage enterprise
 And, playing on your heartstrings, they advance
 With no more truth than beauty in their lies
 But, if their eyes and lips and hips and curves
 Remain alluring, sure, their reign unnerves!

So, match the iron of the axe they wield
And give no wench an inch, though she's appealed
You still must steel your senses and your mind
And heart against that Shona art that shined
And, having shone in vain, watched till you went
Ere swinging on, following her drear bent
For baring earth of greensleeved loveliness
Treeless, her gleeless is the wilderness!

The oriole, the raven and the dove
Agree with me and sign this plea with love;
The augur-buzzard and the lanner-falcon
Accord with The Lord-God and nod with John
Watching and praying on the chicks no less:
What voice more choice to bore the wilderness?

Prologue to the next possible exit (1979)

In case those 'Vakomana' bright
This very night come here,
Slowly O slowly let me write
Why never shed a tear.

Firstly because I do not see
Why anybody should:
I, Bottom, never hit top D
Nor fitted Hollywood.

'Into the dangerous world I leapt'
With something of the touch
Of... can't remember what's yclept
The poet... double-dutch

I loved to look towards the Fells,
I loved to book the day
For climbing up and down the dells
And rhododendrons gay.

A statue called 'Gray Lady'
Stood undraped beside our wall:
She may have been a shady
But I never felt her call.

The spire of Skirwith church was built
Well to withstand The Helm
And that's a Wind to make you wilt
Whether of oak or elm.

Will o'the wisps would flit along
The bottoms of the Fells
After the twilight with a song
Fainter than far-off bells.

My father was an honest man
Who hated all things false:
The garden was his happy span
If the parish not his waltz.

He gloated when surrounded
By his chickens and his coops:
He never was astounded
When my questions looped the loops.

I said to him when I was five,
'Father, could anyone
Jump off the roof of home alive?':
He said, 'A fool, my son!'

From that time forth a deep regard
For fools grew up with me
And therefore do not think it hard
If heaven roofs my glee
But say amen to it and pray
A 'De profundis' over clay.

Omen: Om mani padme hum: dominé, permané mécum, tecum
nobiscum,
vobiscum
till Kingdom coom.
Coombrian.

Quis ut Deus? (1971)

A hive of bees is like one perfect being,
A colony of bees is like to God,
Their sound is compound and their airy seeing
Waits on the Queen whose will's their fairy rod;
To every hive its Queen is heart and mind
That pulses and directs amidst the whole
Whence more and more analogy I find
Bringing up bees from earth to heaven's soul;
A hive is Godlike in its unity,
A hive is like the Kingdom of a Queen
Who rules with Christ amidst the Trinity
Keeping each well-willed member blithe and keen:
A beehive is a universal wonder
Loving the sun, naught is more marvel under.

Reminiscence (1971)

I passed through France when all her corn
Stood stoked and booked in golden sheaves
For harvest-home; no Roman born,
I was and am that ass believes
In Mass and Eucharist as means
Of marrying the Queen of Queens....

But formally I married her
(Whom mystically may
Any she'll ask and well prefer)
In Italy one day:
Before the dawn and long before
I climbed a hill, declined to snore,
Ascending on a winding road
Midst vines and olives barely showed
Till glowed the dawn and gleamed the East....
Then fairness of Campania increased
Before my gladdened sight; and in I went
To ancient church for my great Patron meant:
Into the Baptist's church at high Castello
Di Palma, and he said, "Well wed, young fellow!".

Roma, Italia, Il Mundo (1975)

Beside the mighty Lateran there stands
 A cedar-tree and under it I slept
 A night or two when I patrolled the lands
 In order as recorder to be kept;
 Nearby there is a fountain that has leapt
 Rather than wept with message thus unfurled:
 "Rome first, Italy second, third the World!".

"Il Poverello", figured with a group
 Of followers then newly there arrived,
 Seems to be telling all the world to stoop
 And kneel to Truth through whom the wheel is shrived
 From whirling, whirling, whirling till it dived
 Nearly to hell for ever: evermore
 Congratulate that grateful troubadour!

I personally am intent on telling
 To Rome, to Italy and to the World
 That, since true Faith is dwindling and not swelling,
 The One in Three should freely be unfurled
 As Dogma of predominance and hurled
 Hard (by some bard or other) at the throngs
 Of peoples too unsteeped for true songs.

But I must find a Maiden first to go
 And see the Pope with Faith and Hope agog
 And tell him that the Trinity is so
 Simple to know as falling off a log:
 Ostensibly she might appear to jog
 Off from her hostel for a breath of air
 Only as, all alone, she crossed the square.

She'd cross the square, she'd toss her flocksome head,
 Her fluxom skirt would soon alert the Guards,
 She'd move like Judith, smoothly, but instead
 Of stealing to Holofernes, ye bards,
 She'd climb the stairs, two at a time, by yards
 And fast attain at last with reigning hope
 The inmost sanctum of our holy Pope.

John Bernadonë, nicknamed "Francis" since
 His father Peter was impressed by France,
 Was in his manners much more like a prince
 Than is John Bradburne: wherefore, do advance
 On my behalf, you Belle of all the dance,
 And tell Pope Paul that all men will rejoice
 If God is called The Thought, The Word, The Voice.

I'm glancing at you now: your flowing hair
 Is fair as is the rarest golden corn,
 It may have got an auburn tint, but there
 Is where I meet you, married, with my horn
 Raised in your rippling name and unforlorn:
 Is it a hunting-horn? five inches long
 Is quite enough for stuffing it with song.

"Marry or burn" the parson said... the squire
 Unsnored and scored direct a hit as ever
 By aiming straight at someone in the choir
 And if she is not Heaven's Gate I'm never
 Clever enough to tell if I should sever
 Relationship or not from one ashine
 Who lives in Rome, home of that Wife of mine.

I wed Maria in Campania
 But did not see her clearly till I came
 From Tripoli in Northern Africa
 And saw her near The Tunnel in a frame
 That was a cover featuring a Belle
 Who bathes me daily in my Grand Hotel:
 But what is that to you whom too I claim?

Sicut cervus ad fontes (1949)

O set my heart at liberty, dear Lord,
And let mine eyes look only for Thy Face;
Thy loveliness alone may be adored
Yet cannot be desired without Thy grace.

From Thee proceeds all beauty, all delight,
But lacking Thee, all dulls or turns to shame;
No brightness really shines but in Thy light,
Truth only lives in Love from Whom It came.

I pray Thee, Jesus, take my mind and eyes
And keep them cleared of any dark desire,
That, save Thy blessed good, they'll nothing prize;
Quench passion's flames, enkindle Love's true fire.

So filled with holy longing, make me be
That each sweet sight may speed my search for Thee.

Talisman (1969)

Birds that spontaneously sing
 Ask not reward or anything
 Of man's appreciation, they
 Being but God's make songs each day
 Especially at morn and eve:
 In giving thanks they thanks receive.

Lord, I would ask it now this morn,
 No other task but, unforlorn
 From lack of mortal praise of what
 I need to write for lucre not,
 I may continue, morn and eve
 Songs that Our Lady may receive.

Indeed no other task I wish,
 Neither to hunt or shoot or fish
 For pleasure, all my pleasure is
 In offering these oddities
 To God's good Mother; Second Eve,
 Adamant I, my songs receive!

Though I might go and wonders work
 Amongst the sick, this would I shirk
 Openly only that I may
 Make songs of beauty each new day:
 Sweet Mistress mine, but make-believe
 Were occupation else, I cleave.

"This day I make you this reply,
 Leave all to me for you can fly
 Quite like a swallow, skim with words
 The deeps and shallows; bards are birds
 And here and now these lines believe
 Leaders to readers will receive".

The Vision of the Blind (1971)

All ye who see with eyes
That earthly sights apprize,
Give ear a little while to this my song;
There are near where I dwell
Ten lepers, blind as well,
And, out of four score people in our throng
Of motley lepers here,
They shine with secret cheer,
Their vision of our hidden God is strong.

Quaint Peter, take the lead,
You are a saint indeed
Unless there are no saints to grace our time;
Not headlong down you fell
To the dead abyss of hell
From seeing no more earthly sights sublime:
You, with your blind-man's stick
And a faith full Catholic,
Went roaming slowly up to heaven's clime.

And that is where you are
In spirit, like a star
That shines amidst the darkness of the void;
Empty of eyes, your face
Is all a smile of grace,
A sight that gives a brightness unalloyed:
Your soul it is that shows
And outwardly it glows
Declaring even blindness is enjoyed!

I, when the night is deep,
Survey the starry steep
And strive to pierce its infinite beyond;
But, Peter and the blind,
More peaceful is your mind
And you achieve what I have never conned:
Your fellowship surveys
What passes sight, - the rays
Of hidden Light conduct you like a wand!

Father of lights is He
Whose substance, One in Three,
Pervades creation from the brink of time;
He would not shout the odds
Gainst non-existent gods
For He is One I AM ALONE SUBLIME:
Along the shafts of dawn
He trills upon the horn
Of chanticleer, and here shall end my rhyme.

The White Force Ballad (1969)

Preamble

Now each great age is a dying dream
 Or a dream exceeding young,
 Its warp and woof uphold a theme
 Ungoaled or goaled to be sung:
 But the yarn of every halcyon age
 Is a tale that hails a pilgrimage
 That will not fail while the gales engage
 In elemental tongue.

Take ye a reed and make it five
 And blow upon it rightly,
 There is a pipe where the fairies thrive
 Tripping it featly, lightly:
 Take ye a Book called Pentateuch
 Where God alone is King and Duke
 Then close..... till where you come is Luke
 Whose lead is a Lady spritely.

Think no harm of the charming fools
 For call is all through an ass,
 Saul from a farm where his father rules
 Goes seek them in a mass:
 Samuel, well instructed then
 By Yahweh Lord of the how and when,
 Greets him against his will - Amen
 Says to what seems but crass.

And Balaam's ass has prophesied
 And Lamb of God has ridden
 Olivet round, uncrowned beside
 On colt of an ass He's bidden:
 Asses, ye crowds of proud and lowly,
 Are as the Masses, things most holy,
 Hold Heehaw, be melancholy
 Not, the plot's unhidden!

Though I sit where the witless hand
 Writes in the sight of God,
 Lo, I flit to the Holy Land
 Where the writ was lit to His nod:
 Up on Chanctonbury Ring
 And Glastonbury Tor I sing
 In idleness of Love's High King
 And fling no "Ichabod"!

+++ Non nobis, Domine, non nobis +++

(1)
 While the wide white roof of the whirling world
 Was whisked along its crests
 The mountain airs on the Himalayas
 Piped high at Christ's behests:
 From each of these, in a trillion glees,
 The crystal rills ran down
 And the welkin rang when the rivers sprang
 On a sinless world, sans town.

Pan's tarpan wild of Tartary
 Was planned to roam the plains,
 Out of creation's artery
 Thrilled markhor, still he reigns!
 As to the brains of Lao-tsze,
 The fanes of Ind and Islam's fez,
 The All had thought of them (He says)
 But more as loss than gains.

Behold, the whole creation
 Was none other than a scheme
 For singling out a nation
 Whence, from its golden seam,
 Would Maid God's Mother rise: whose dance
 And song I sing as we advance
 With "Honi soi qui mal y pense",
 Like unto them that dream!

Gurgled the waterfalls, and all
 The bright cascades exalted!

Fallen had man from the Call a span
 But Abram up had vaulted:
 Over that fault of Adam's and Eve's
 With Noah's rainbow interweaves
 Unwritten Promise he believes
 Receiving, leaves the clan.

Who leaves the clan, or old or young,
 That cleave he may to Christ?
 The word expressed (Himself unsung
 When Abel sacrificed)
 The word expressed in deed the thought
 Of God the Father whom, untaught,
 Abram obeyed, went forth and sought
 By faith, by faith sufficed.

(2)

Take olden Arezzo's turrets tall
 And Avignon's winding ways,
 Whilst Claude depicts a waterfall
 Entwine them in the haze:
 Mediterranean lineage
 Is vineyard of our heritage
 But Abraham raced the Golden Age
 By graceful faith, ablaze!

He left the lines of little lights
 That flickered on the plain,
 He left his tribal lands and rights,
 Bereft himself of gain
 And after him comes, with faith aglow,
 No wraith but Michael Angelo
 Whose hand could make hard marble flow
 Inspired by Hebrew strain.

Come motley throngs with pilgrim songs,
 Come centuries of monks,
 But all amongst them mixed are wrongs
 Where Gentleman debunks
 Until: The Mini War, by Gad,
 I knew the Jew was not too bad!

You turncoat trite, whilst went they sad
 You rent their flesh by hunks!

Gad by a troop was overcome,
 By God he overcame,
 Great Juda's whelp that yelped is dumb
 Till, praising, Lamb he'll claim!
 But back, get back from The Wailing Wall
 Which "Western" now through triumph call
 And wait awhile..... too far we trawl
 From waters red: aflame

There danced upon the Red Sea shore
 A maiden Miriam called,
 She took a timbrel at the core
 Of Israel gay who, walled
 By waters held on either side,
 Had passed, by faith, still undenied
 By Moses, over..... Lion's pride
 Bides until Peter's hauled.

(3)
 What of the White, the force so bright
 Combining with the Red?
 Afresh through a flood with flesh and blood
 (Though risen from the dead
 Long since that Prince of Peace has been)
 Move with the Lion, prove His Queen
 As Zion's Daughter blithe and keen
 Bide of the Son she wed!

White stainglass squires of Christendom,
 Why strain ye at a gnat?
 The camel is to Carmel come
 But waxes not too fat:
 Swallow the fact and get good health
 Thereby that not in slyness, stealth
 And idleness they get their wealth
 Who toil where, foiled, you sat!

Waxed Ephraim fat and kicked, we read
 And even sing in Psalms
 (The squire's in choir maybe, the mead
 Awaits him with its charms):
 After their names they called the lands
 But Gentile's down and up now stands
 A Benjamin with Cup in hands
 And galls upon his palms.

Japheth, you scattered seed of Noe,
 Bold Ham a-laughing still,
 To Bethlehem a Shem will go,
 To Shepherd on the hill:
 As to the Kings, the Magi Three
 Who represented you and me,
 They shout with joy at Juda's glee
 As Freedom treads the mill!

Shellestial voice! that White so Choice
 Is found Mine Host to be!
 Thou wily Dan hotelled, rejoice,
 He trod the press for thee!
 The very journalists may come,
 Merrily up the thing may sum:
 Born was Our Lord of Christendom
 Nor black nor white - Khakee!

(4)
 Who would be Lord of the acres broad
 Of Tuscany in gold?
 To gallant gleaning cocks afford
 They grain when gain is told:
 In stubble Joseph strokes his beard
 Wondering what it was that cheered
 So clearly as to triumph steered
 The tanks and ranks enrolled.

Maybe it was a leghorn
 Or maybe a Plymouth rock
 Watching to see if grew the corn
 In Egypt (crafty cock!)

Or if it rose for Is-ra-el
 Whose foes far less are Ishmael
 Than world and flesh and mesh of hell:
 Shepherdess Belle, enlock!

Since David's Tower has a Key
 And He is Christ the King
 Blest turner best is surely she
 Appealing with a ring
 And stealing forth to find if these
 Are grapes of wrath or Northern fleas
 That try to rape the lock and seize
 Stock-Eagle by the wing.

Whilst olives grow in Tuscany,
 Campania, Provence
 And Juda new, in Muscovy
 The sun looks too askance:
 Whereas the oil is pumped full well
 In terrain held by Ishmael
 Siberia has none to sell
 Except by crept advance.

Sweet Pastorella, feed thy flocks,
 To tartary remains
 The pure White Force, the Lure of the horse
 That roves the rolling plains:
 No nightmare now is clouding them
 That crowd to true Jerusalem,
 Mistressed by thee the tents of Shem
 Await that Force who reigns.

(5)
 Into a mist of mysteries
 Magicianless we thrust,
 Who will perceive and tell what is
 That love which isn't lust
 And what that lust which is not Love?
 When souls and bodies are above
 Like Eagles with the Holy Dove
 Those risen know it must.

There seems to be dividing me
 And pulling either way
 A strong desire that makes me free,
 A wrong that makes me stray
 Licentiously so I must find
 Some Public House wherein combined
 Mine Host and Barmaid are so kind
 As to resolve the fray.

In Lhasa lamas of Tibet
 (Ere red the Threat had settled)
 Stayed calm in psalms and peaceful yet
 However highly mettled:
 They reconcile the Force of Life
 With Love above who needs no wife
 And leads them up beyond the strife
 By which the West is nettled.

They do not take to alcohol
 And every kind of wine
 Is quite outside their protocol,
 They gleam like dreams divine!
 However seldom they may wash
 Is none the worse for no debosh,
 On buttered tea and lamah squash
 They thrive, like saints ashine!

Yet Saints there are if heard I right
 (Amongst them stands Our King)
 Who banished not the vine from sight,
 Had Woman whom they sing
 And gave no credence to the tale
 That hellward hops the cake, and ale
 Hath heavenward no yen: a sail!
 The Ship, the Inn, I wing!

(6)
 Friends, there's a parrot in the Bar
 (Maid minds it not at all),
 Its wings are somewhat clipped but, ah,
 It comes, undumbs at call:

"Allah ek akbar!" it will cry,
 Imitate the state of a sty,
 Insinuate that pigs may fly,
 Shakes it a spear at fall

Of mortal man and cries, "Tush tush
 But you must rise, my Master,
 Mind not the clever kind that rush
 To crush you with disaster"!:
 Who knows what such a parrot means?
 Who only knows he is the Queen's
 Who murmurs rippling, "Fool, these scenes
 Be meant for moving faster" -

Quickly she Mistresses, she fords
 Through shallows to the banks
 Where virginals and harpsichords
 Officiate to ranks
 Of lutes and viols at their best
 When they are fruitful at the breast
 Of Barmaid, Maid made manifest
 Mother of God: be thanks -

Odds on the gratitude is his
 Who wallowed in the mire
 Of countless summers, till the whizz
 Of wheels appealing fire
 Whirled to his consciousness and he
 Beheld Mine Host beside the sea
 Sighing for sight of Galilee
 In me, to light desire.

"Ish Ma Elect or ish she not"
 (The parrot's cry anew)
 The Queen of Sharon, Camelot,
 Adopted Gentile, Jew
 And, oh too true, the few that are
 Lambs in the Lamb of David's Star?
 Answer not, dance till the Garden Bar
 Gives onto Eden's view.

(7)

Koran I read in Tripoli
 North Africa and thought
 That much it had of poetry
 If such a lack of sport:
 Its acclamations all are great
 Marching in starch to Heaven's Gate
 Whom unabashed they celebrate,
 By Mariam they're caught!

How is it Milk and Silk and Seed,
 Satin and Latin tongue
 Are swiftly from suspicion freed
 At breasts where Jesus hung?
 The milk is warm, the silk is cool,
 Seed is decreed at need to rule,
 Smooth satin soothes like Latin, who'll
 Say sin on truth I've sung?

Hath Islam Paradise undreamed
 Where Complaine has been chanted?
 Was He awry whose wisdom deemed
 Seed to be good where planted?
 Is all the sweetness known as Sex
 Sent only to be meant to vex
 Or art Thou, Lord, Oedipus Rex?
 "I AM (saith Yahweh), Granted".

His dictis autem, I decline
 From asking any other
 If he is glad to rise and shine
 Clad in my Bride and Mother:
 Only a little I insist
 On emphasizing what is missed
 By any where to many's list
 He leans, whilst Queen's he'll smother.

Some markhor wild to Jumna came
 And leapt into my song,
 It bleated not, it staked no claim
 On Greece ago so long

But strong Siwaliks where it dwell
 Know that the tongues of philomels
 Were tuned by Pan, and Man He spells
 Into His Godhead, Strong!

(8)

Tween Jumna bright and right up North
 In Himalayan fastness
 There is a cell where hate and wrath
 And pride are lost in vastness
 Of Love alone, where lust is won
 Over by smiling of the Son
 Of God: like giant He has run
 Us out from doubt's distress.

A little while by whispering reeds
 At bank I drank my wine,
 Wondering not on thundering deeds
 I pledged the meads as mine:
 King Alfred fought at Ethandune
 And wrought himself to fear immune
 And Chesterton's baptismal tune
 Sunk not beneath the Sign -

Sign of the Cross and Public Sign
 O Ship, of Crown, of Lamb,
 Only one race by grace divine
 I trace to Abraham:
 Sign of The Good Samaritan
 Through all the realms with all their span
 Shows only twice where it began
 In Jericho and, no sham,

In Whitechapel, in London East
 Or, if I slightly err,
 Between Commercial Road at least
 And where that might occur
 Which marks the place of Ur that stood
 With grazing land and strand of wood
 Around it, whence, of all its good
 God Abram did prefer.

Midst of the land, Jerusalem
Thou art: Master of ours is Shem,
Shalom.

L'envoi

Prince, and the Public House is His
Whose Peace releases mysteries
From mists and, Lord, the Inn is Thine
Free as Mine Host within, Divine:
If never Maid it had then I
Would bar it, gladly pass it by
But since, my Prince, it is the Church
Thy Bride, abide I, ends my search.

To The Fairy Queen (1978)

Shall all my stuff and nonsense stay
Intact until my dying day?
Fair Lady, Fairy Queen, do say...
'Indeed, indeed, and Yes!'.

Nonsense and stuff I dedicate
To thee, sweet Queen Immaculate..
I hope and trust that Heaven's Gate
Will cope with it : 'We shall!
My gait will swing and I will dance
To Honi soi qui mal y pense!'.

In such a night as this I know
That what I say she says is so.

'Fiat!'.

Une Ballade a la Mode (1974)

I have simply got a "Complex"
 For the Mother of Our God -
 I am sure it is a Simplex,
 She is pure and He not odd;
 Shall we stroll across the Quad
 With the "swells" who say that she
 And The Three in One unodd
 Now are termed Quoternity?

Very harrowing, it vexes
 When the pedagogic rod
 Rules with irony the sexes
 That relate themselves to God;
 Just another little prod
 And they're eaten up with envy
 Of that King and Queen unshod
 Now are termed Quoternity.

God is Oedipus and Rex, -
 Gives His Queen a knowing nod
 To the brek-ek-ek-ek-ex
 Ugly frogs agog that "odd"
 May go underneath the sod
 As of stigma they shake free
 Since their Mother, Love and God
 Now are termed Quoternity.

Envoi

Prince, Gay Lily has a rod
 At the Lake of Galilee:
 Anglers Four for peaceful cod
 Now are termed Quoternity.

Wild geese changing their ground (1949)

'....Wild geese changing their ground - the sound and the sight of them! Their flight across a winter sky, at dawn or sunset, is wonderful to see, imparting a strange desire to the watcher. The scene is peaceful, but the passing of those widespread wings seem to beckon, almost to challenge, causing an unspeakable longing to blend and follow. Such swift, certain movement through the air tells of things familiar but scarcely formed, cherished yet nearly forgotten.

A bugle-call, heard faintly, and echoing afar, has somewhat of the same; even so the remembrance of cuckoo's song in a land he does not know; so, too, a curlew's cry and the notes of a cor anglais. Such sadness in the face of beauty is the experience of lost children who have to reach home before they find that nothing is lacking, and nothing strange.....

We are all lost children until we find our heavenly Father, or, more truly, until we allow ourselves to be found by Him. And it is very lovingly that the Holy Spirit speaks to those who remember Him, dimly, as it were in an exile, wondering at the beauties of creation.

When through grace a child is led to the bridge which crosses to eternal reality, he becomes more and more aware of the silent friendship and love of the imminent though invisible God. But when that child receives the Christ Incarnate in a small white Host, when he so receives the Lord and Creator of heaven and earth in body and inmost soul, then indeed he has found his Home and met with his deepest desire. And then is he sure that there is no longer any strangeness nor any lack, for he is at one with the All in all. . . . '

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