



Redcrosse

A new celebration of England and St George



Thursday 17 March 2011, 7.00 pm
at St George's Chapel, Windsor

Sunday 8 May 2011, 5.30 pm
at Manchester Cathedral



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Redcrosse: introductory notes

'A redcrosse knight was pricking on the plain': this is the first line of Book 1 of Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, which is in part the inspiration of the present event. Spenser lived from c.1552 to 1599. He was not an entirely admirable man: as a colonial landowner in Ireland, his polemical contribution to Irish politics is infamous. But *The Faerie Queene* remains a great neglected masterpiece. As it exists, in unfinished form, it is divided into 6 large books; each with a fantastical chivalric narrative meant to illustrate a particular virtue. Book 1 has to do with 'holiness'. And the 'redcrosse knight', in his glittering armour, is eventually identified with St. George.

There are various allusions to Spenser's text in what follows. The knight is a very fallible character, often led astray. At one point he is lost in a 'wandering wood'. Later, he is locked up in a giant's dungeon. When at length he comes to fight the fiery dragon, he falls into water, which magically imparts to him the strength to prevail: a symbol of God's grace.

The Fraser Chapel in Manchester Cathedral has a reredos painting by Mark Cazalet in which St. George appears as young black man in an England football shirt, amidst a scene of inner city decay. He is cutting the chains which bind a miserable looking dragon. The dragon, as always, stands for passion. But not unruly passion, needing to be subdued – rather, it is a passion for urban renewal, being liberated from despairing apathy. The 'Fire Sermon' here, written in Spenserian stanzas, alludes to this 21st century image; as well as to the redcrosse knight's love for his lady, Una.

We use the 400 years old Authorized Version of the Bible ('sexist language' and all!) because of its closeness in time to Spenser, and the depth of history it evokes.

Another poet in the background is William Blake (1757—1827). Blake's text, 'And did those feet', which has become the great hymn 'Jerusalem', originally appears at the beginning of his epic *Milton*, where it is immediately followed by a line from the Bible, *Numbers* 11. 29: Moses' cry, 'Would to God that all the Lord's people were Prophets!' This poetic 'Celebration of England and St. George' is conceived very much in the

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We are very grateful to all who have helped!

Acknowledgements

Ewan Fernie, Michael Symmons Roberts, Jo Shapcott and Andrew Shanks wrote the text.

With help from, in Windsor, Sarah Apatrei, David Fuller, Graham Holderness, Monawar Hussain, Kevin Morris, Ben Quash, David Ruitter, Andrew Taylor and Salley Vickers; and, in Manchester, Pam Elliott, Rachel Mann, Jan Dean, Michael Powell and Albert Radcliffe. It features a new, opening poem by Andrew Motion.

Tim Garland wrote the music.

Acoustic Triangle – Tim Garland, Malcolm Creese and Gwilym Simcock – are playing it.

The Choir of Royal Holloway College, University of London, is singing it.

'Redcrosse' was co-ordinated by Ewan Fernie and Andrew Shanks, and is one outcome of 'The Faerie Queene Now' project. Ewan Fernie initiated this overall project with Simon Palfrey. Andrew Taylor administered it.

Elisabeth Dutton helped with the 'staging'. She and her ensemble are performing it in Windsor.

The Windsor event is part of the Windsor Spring Festival. An additional feature of the Manchester event is the presence of the George and Dragon processional 'giants', made by a team from the Booth Centre for the Homeless, under the artistic guidance of Paul Devereaux. David Fuller stepped in to 'be' Andrew Motion at Windsor, when Andrew was unable to be there.

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spirit of that cry: a prayerful protest against cruder, merely propagandistic notions of patriotism. We should note that Blake was very much a rebel. The 'dark satanic mills' of his poem were, in part, intended by him as a general symbol for the Establishment. The Church of England being part of the Establishment, he would have seen this event as taking place *within* such a 'mill'. As a call to struggle against what might be called the spirit of Propaganda, 'Redcrosse' is not least a wrestling with the complex ambivalence of our history and institutions in an effort to renew and so affirm them.

In the area of Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, St. George is the Christian name for a figure also honoured by Muslims, as 'Al Khidr', and by Jews, as 'Eliyahu ha Navi'. Several historic figures seem to have contributed to his persona. But he has become a general symbol for the conjunction of military and political honour with religious piety. As such, he is patron saint not only of England, but also of Aragon, Catalonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Greece, Lithuania, Montenegro, Palestine, Portugal, Russia and Serbia.

Spenser's particular contribution, however, is to make St. George – in addition – a symbol of spiritual life as an unceasing, restless, troubled yet hopeful, *quest* for holiness.

On arrival, all members of the congregation will be given a red rose.

Introductory music

Introduction

The minister welcomes the people and then continues

Minister Holy of Holies
All **open our lips, our hearts, our minds**

O God, our Life, our Truth, our Way
Make us merciful, compassionate and kind

Come, God, redeem us, heal us
And grant us your peace.

Minister What is this England?
We have a patron saint.
What does he stand for?
We have a flag.
Sometimes it speaks of sporting passion. Sometimes it speaks of pomp. Sometimes it speaks of grief, at memories of war. Sometimes it speaks of vicious hatred. But when it flies upon this church it speaks of something else.
What is this country called to be, and to become?
Beyond the simple answers of the propagandists, let us dedicate ourselves today to a poetic quest.
Let us let ourselves be opened up. Be opened up, to one another and to God.
We are so many different sorts of people; let us enjoy each other's otherness.
And let us listen to God's elemental voice – rustling in England's green, floating in her skies, roaring in her furnaces, and rippling in her waterways.
Let the genius of our language lead us ever deeper, down, into the darkness of divinity.

Will you join together in this quest for England and our unknown god?
All **We will.**

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant Land

C Hubert H Parry

William Blake

Blessing

Minister Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets!
God bless you. Amen.

The red cross is raised and the Choir departs, singing.

Sacramental making of the Red Cross

Readers and actors assemble the new red cross during an extended musical interlude.

Collect of St George

Minister God of hosts,
 who so kindled the flame of love
 in the heart of your servant George
 that he bore witness to the risen Lord
 by his life and by his death:
 give us the same faith and power of love
 that we who rejoice in his triumphs
 may come to share with him
 the fullness of the resurrection;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.
 Amen.

Musical acclamation

Hymn

And did those feet in ancient time.
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Musical acclamation

Reading

Ephesians 6.10-18

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Minister I now humbly charge *you*, also, to don that armour. Let it shine with your resolve to seek, to serve; to serve by seeking. Faith in the unknown God is hard, but, beyond all winning and having, it is outpoured love.

And here we have our surrogate and champion in the consequent adventure. Here is *St. George*: a George whose destiny it is to be forever young and full of dreams; forever changed and changing in the quest; much like ourselves in his confusion and his straying; a troubled soul, in search of truth: the symbol of our restlessness.

Will you accept him as your representative?
All **Yes, indeed we will.**

St George music

Redcrosse

Andrew Motion

When it was time for the field full of folk to go dark,
and the folk themselves to be splintered in clans
then wander away to their homes and their trades,

one particular fellow, a pilgrim, swerved off alone.
He holds our attention. He might even be reckoned
to beckon us over his shoulder to follow his story.

We cannot resist. Why would we? The way we exist
depends on him. But that reminds me. Is he a man
or a woman? And is this a sudden decision or some-

thing he kept up his sleeve? There is no way of telling,
except that I see he has taken to losing himself in the forest
one minute, and making his living there robbing the rich,

and the next has abandoned all this for a spell in the city
where hammers have beaten his kindness into new shapes.
These he accepts, although you might call them the duty

of state. Which reminds me. What is he called? Forget that.
The greatest mystery facing us now is how to keep faith
as we follow him over the latest threshold, into the world

where everything flashes its label, and we expect to be
getting the dirt, or at least the drift. Let me say it again.
How to keep faith. Here in the field where the grass

has recovered but we have forgotten its names,
and clouds that are carved in the shape of a cave
pour forth in torrents of melting silver the rain.

Silence is kept

waters break as island dry land tapers,
where fresh gives way to salt,
in currents stitched with weed and elvers.

Does water have a memory? Did his cuts
give me this crimson tint?
It was George who split the dragon's throat,

who fought until his sword was blunt.
But beast fell ghost, and George fell to his knees.
He gazed along the line of my descent:

from spring to pool, from tributary
to river, estuary to shallows,
out towards the glorious, the terrifying sea.

Silence is kept

Minister Sisters and brothers, we have come together to seek for God
in the basic elements and scenes of living: in the mazy shade of
woods; in the volatile embrace of *air*; in the blazing rage of
flame; and in sheer liquid *water*.

Everywhere: the throb of *blood*. Of our own lifeblood, not
earned but given us; and of God's blood; the red of that Red
Cross which is the symbol, flag and banner of our nation.

All **Wood, and air, and fire, and water
drawn together and quartered
by blood, in sign of our common life,
prayer, and our creative strife:**

O, may we be one in the struggle.

Musical acclamation

Water Song

Michael Symmons Roberts

I can drown you, slake you or baptise,
can hold you, but cannot be held for long,
am in you as the fall is in the rise.

How do I begin? With rain's dash on stone,
with cool flight of zephyr off the sea
that scales a mountain's face, then

lets *me* loose; a mist, a spit, a flurry,
down to earth, through fissures, gathering
my powers in the dark, to carry

silver out in a rush you call a spring.
Wash your face. In my light-folds, otters
twist for eels, kingfishers catch mayflies. *Drink.*

Here you wrestle angels. *Water. Utter.*
What can a wounded warrior do,
but let my wound-salve rinse him better?

So it was that George, the one who
felled the beast, fell into me; bruised and beaten.
Day one: dragon rose, near-slew

my man, and tipped him in to drown.
Hold him. I healed him in my silent
heart and kept him down until the burn,

the multi-angled careless sun, was spent.
Then up he gasped, remade. For *spring*,
read *source*. I make so many rivers I lose count.

A stream can be crossed with a single
step, but I have mighty mouths, where
Thames and Severn, Tyne and Avon, England's

Minister 'A redcrosse knight was pricking on the plain'
All **Let us follow where he wanders.**

St George music

All **Desire, death-marked and questing, though in vain,
still questing, always questing,
and in that questing free,
still yearning, only yearning, for by that yearning we
may find that life beyond life,
which is what it means to be.**

Minister O God of infinite harmony, we are but fragments;
knit us into a rich and teeming wholeness!

The Four Stations of the Elements

Minister And now we are armed and ready to go together as if to
encounter life for the first time. Our scene is a wandering
wood—

Wandering Wood music

What the Forest Said

Jo Shapcott

You think we don't know you are there,
but the sun glints you so brightly
among the far leaves, we feel your heat

from miles away. You just shine
with your reflective face, your human light.
When you arrive, forget how to smell pine sap, don't

notice the pattern of cones on the path
as you pass, or the snap of twigs. Don't touch the cedar's bark
to feel its distinctive gnarl, nor stroke the viney elm.

Just head for the bower at the heart, don't think
cave, or error, past or present. By now
you'll want to be lost, so don't glance back

down the trails to notice how different it all
looks in reverse: how the aspen, the oak
and the poplar turn, in a twist, to poplar, oak, aspen.

Have the trees moved? Or is it you?
Go off course in time, too, so's not to
remember how long it took to hike

from the dark cypress to the bent laurel,
then past the tall fir next to the weeping willow.
Every route's a story and a teller finds

the way by stitching trees together in a tale: how
the yew bent down to stroke the earth and everything
under it, how birch shafts held up the sky.

Don't get lost in stories, if you want to get lost in a wood
and, at this juncture, you really do - with that look
of embowerment softening your eyes.

Don't stop moving, don't pitch up under the willow,
or drop and wait for rescue under the unlikely myrrh.
Keep wandering, noting how the paths bend together

and sway apart in a rhythm which owes everything
to beech and ash in the wind, to green leaves blocking the sun.
Where do you think you are

as you pass olive trees and plantains
and holm oaks in the dusk, hoping
for a kind grove ahead, a bower

of familiar maples, not this branching
trail which expands and contracts around you,
a green cave in which you know you will go so wrong.

Silence is kept

Minister O God, when we are helpless, lost, alone
All **Guide us**

When we are speechless in the face of evil and injustice
Inspire us

When we turn away from you towards false gods
Rescue us

When we fear that we have lost the fight
Renew our strength

Let us join together in the Lord's Prayer:

All **Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done,
in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Minister And follow me, now, to where freshness springs—

Water music

And comforting and lovely blandishment
She tendered, charging you always to hold her dear,
For sure, she swore, her love was on you bent
From now till Judgement Day, so you should never fear.
And whether this was true or to stem your tears,
No human heart was ever more ravished with delight,
No living ear before or since more soothing words did hear,
As her lips murmured to you that far-off, heaven-sent night
Before their parting whisper, 'Now for me you must *fight*.'

But when you woke and found that she was gone,
And nothing but pressed grass where you had lain,
You stormed and raged to lose all you'd won,
Watering her place with tears throughout the day.
But from that time your element is flame,
And all your days you've loved her face divine,
And tirelessly fought and forged desire's burning way
Vowing never to rest until at last you find
She for whom you search, in fantasising mind.

My way of flame has touched your heart and face
With love, divorce and infidelity,
With this girl's glance, and with that boy's grace,
With glamour, power and celebrity.
At times from dragons you may turn and flee,
But you have learned when you my kin must slay
And you know now when you must set us free
And when to soothe and stroke and make us tame
And when to mount and ride and set the heavens aflame!

When one day, dragon-borne, you drop from the sky,
Diminishing like a golden pea,
Charting the course of your own last sigh
That quickly nothing is but vacancy,
Then, will you perceive life's agony
As lineaments of her face divine,
And struggle will seem an ecstasy,
Failure a thronging diamond mine,
The gift of this knowledge, the gift of the courage to die.

Silence is kept

Minister Come, God as yet unknown. As we, like George, go
travelling in the Spirit, lead us through confusion. And purge
us from our past mistakes.

We pray:

All **O God, we have gone wrong,
and wandered like lost sheep.
We heard your call,
it touched our hearts,
but surface things seduced us.
Spoilt, then, we present ourselves
before your face, and beg to be forgiven.**

Minister Now come with me, further, into the labyrinth—

Air music

Air: A Psalm of Many Voices

Andrew Shanks

1

Listen to the silent trouble in the air:
the hidden hubbub of your neighbours' babbled prayers.

'Lord!' 'Hallelujah! (Halle-lujah?)' 'Hear!' 'Have mercy!' 'Help!'
'O, Come!' 'Save!' 'Heal!' 'And grant us peace!'

In the leaves, a rustling restlessness:
'Where now? There's no clear path. I've gone astray!'

And murmuring, beneath the proud world's steamy din:
'Why? *Why* do I do this? I've no idea!'

Or, in the stillness of the giant's pit:
'Here – craving your forgiveness – I despair.'

Until, at length, somewhere a key creaks in a lock:
and then – fresh oxygen (thank God) floods in.

'Breathe freely now!
The "God" you thought you knew – that *wasn't* God.'

2

Sunlight, as it dances on the knight's hacked helm,
picks out old marks of battle, asking:
'What caused these?'

Air reaches for the flag he holds; folds, flips and fingers it, caressingly:
'What hopes are meant by this?'

Whatever is of heaven flares and flutters:
Nothing is simple, nothing's ever fixed.

His banner, then – it joins two colours:
two prime elements.

One's the effulgence of the sacramental word:
'Let there be light!' till kingdom come, when all at last is lit.

The other, daubed across, is:
Abel's rose-red blood.

So Air unfolds it, flaps it out:
'The "God" you thought you knew – that *wasn't* God.'

'But here's the standard of the One:
you ought to know you do not know.'

For, 'Everything's double':
cry the canny Clouds, on high.

'Cain, *also*, is a shepherd
herding human sheep.'

'Whatever is of heaven flares and flutters:
Nothing is simple, nothing's ever fixed.'

Silence is kept

Minister May the universal God, our heavenly Encourager,
 who urges us to find within our quest
 the joy of perfect freedom,
 pardon all you who truly repent:
 wash you clean of your sin;
 make you strong as sturdy wood;
 touch your hearts with fire;
 revive you with the oxygen of honesty.
 May your chastened life make manifest
 the openness that will unite us all at last.
 In Jesus' name. Amen

Minister And now - brace yourselves
 to go, together, into the dragon's mouth!

Fire music

The Fire Sermon

Ewan Fernie

I am the voice of fire, I am the dragon's breath!
I'm a voice so hot it burns like an angry sun!
Hot air wafts pride, but fire cremates death,
Until all flesh that flowers and rots is gone
And what remains is spirit all alone
To throw itself in any glowing form
New life presents and quest will make undone,
Reshaping as its own what still is warm!
Oh, every questing George should love his fire-breathing worm!

You were a George in red—a black George—
You'd come down the river during your break, to think
And be alone, away from the hot forge
Of the kitchen, and found a gang, starting to drink,
A mixed group, ten or twelve. One girl winked:
You were rooted and mated, your desires mirrored!
But what swept you onward to a further brink
Was her special kind of stillness—stillness that *shimmered*
And pricked and lit your tears while they tumbled forth and glimmered!