

An Autumn Evensong

*When Millie was crowned head chorister
at St Michael's Church, Highgate*

November 18, 2018

I till this land as I am tilled,
Upearthed, then rotavated down
To a finer powder, slowly lined
With richer matter and our love is grown.
Rotting oak leaves line the furrows with
dread:
So quietly am I husbanded.

My allotment altar's wizened brambles,
Its reredos of gold from the snowshot east.
My cantoris are the withered greens -
The remains of autumn's runner beans.
Ahead the berries dot their vines like frowns
Scarring the cross's face like thorns. Or
crowns.

A *bass profundo*, menacingly near,
Grimly hovers to the left below
Where potatoes grew again this year,
North to south in neatly levelled rows.
Valor, Maris Piper and Desiree
Stand across this nave and point away

To decani where there sound the trebles.
The wind across the dead tomatoes
Whips the faces of the huddled
Crowd of weeping, desolate sopranos.
Their high pitched descants pierce the air
and quite
Obliterate the shape of brooding night.

Note: As you enter a church from the west door the font is usually close by on your right (north) side. Looking (east) up towards the altar and chancel (where the choir sings) you are staring through the nave, where the congregation sits.

In the chancel, the deeper voices of the choir usually stand to the left (south) and are known as cantoris. The higher voices usually stand on the right and are referred to as decani.

The **pulpit** usually stands at the entrance of the chancel on the right hand side: it is where the sermon is given. Opposite, on the cantoris side is the lectern from where the gospel is read. The lectern is usually fronted by a brass or gold eagle, the symbol of St John. The **reredos** stands at the back of the altar, giving it perspective. An **egremont** is a variety of English russet apple.

Opposite the greenhouse-pulpit
A magpie swaggers: blessed St John
Won't harm the bird, though the hawking
culprit
Knows where the holy eagle's gone.
Stolen by the power of poisoned images
Covering up the wisdoms of our ages.

Back to the west, near the door to Eden
A muddy pond serves as a living font
Round where the crumbling spread of heaven
Feeds the looming egremont.
Newly-baptised, the squirrels and robins
Skirt the fallen, failing, fading lupins.

And once again renewal knows her own
In the lime green buds on the currant bush,
The glowering scarlet of the rhubarb crown
Prised up through deadened compost, mulch
and mush.
And Millie's life sings the hymn of the chancel,
A choir girl's dream, a community enthralled.

We till this soil as we are tilled,
Upearthed and slowly driven down
Into a finer powder where we are filled
With richer matter and our loves are grown.
Rotting oak leaves line the furrows with dread:
So quietly are we husbanded.