

Heaven

O Who will show me those delights on high?

Echo: *I.*

Thou Echo, thou art mortall, all men know.

Echo: *No.*

Wert thou not born among the trees and leaves?

Echo: *Leaves.*

Líscie, Lapas Lísty, Levelek,

(Polish, Latvian, Czech, Hungarian),

Dail, Daun, Delyow, Duilleagan

(Welsh, Indonesian, Cornish, Scots Gaelic)

Foglie, Folia, Folhas, Fýlla.

(Italian, Latin, Brazilian, Greek),

And are there any leaves, that still abide?

Echo: *Bide.*

What leaves are they? Impart the matter wholly.

Echo: *Holy.*

Are holy leaves the Echo then of blisse?

Echo: *Yes.*

Then tell me, what is that supreme delight?

Echo: *Light.*

Light to the minde: what shall the will enjoy?

Echo: *Joy.*

Blätter, Pātā, Blare, Bladeren,

(German, Bengali, Afrikaans, Dutch)

Majani, Caleemo.

(Swahili, Somali)

But are there cares and businesse with the pleasure?

Echo: *Leisure.*

Light, joy, and leisure; but shall they persever?

Echo: *Ever.*

Líscie, Lapas Lísty, Levelek,

Dail, Daun, Delyow, Duilleagan

Foglie, Folia, Folhas, Fýlla.

Blätter, Pātā, Blare, Bladeren,

Majani, Caleemo.

George Herbert, 1593 – 1633

When Southwell Minster commissioned this anthem to celebrate the recent completion of The Leaves of Southwell Project, the brief was to set this beautiful George Herbert poem “Heaven” as its focus on leaves literally echos the most famous and beautiful aspect of Southwell Minster’s architecture. So, thanks to my Facebook friends, I created an 18-language chorus of “leaves” which intersperses Herbert’s lines. He takes inspiration from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where Hera condemns Echo, from that day on, to only be able to repeat the last words addressed to her, and nothing else. My setting has kept faithful to Herbert’s old English, where “businesse” has 3 syllables and “persever” rhymes with the subsequent “Ever”, with the middle syllable accented. The piece ends with an imploring request to the listener to “persever” – despite the hardships we have all endured during the recent pandemic.

My grateful thanks go to the Southwell Minster Choir Association for their commission and my ever-helpful ex-English teacher Tim Williams, for decoding Herbert’s verse.

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