

La morte meditata (*Death meditated upon*)

Four settings of Giuseppe Ungaretti

The Egyptian-Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti lived in Alexandria until he was 24, and the desert regions of Egypt, as well as the ancient world, provide recurring images in his work. Influenced by the poets of the Symbolist movement whilst studying in Paris, he eventually became the founder of the Hermeticism movement of poetry in Italy; yet before the Second World War, in such poetic collections as *Sentimento del tempo* (1933) and *Il dolore* (1947) he returned to the more traditional meters of Italian poetry. Ungaretti always professed to be preoccupied with ultimate questions of man's existence, with the mysteries of life. His complete work was given the title *Vita d'un uomo* (1969; "The life of a man").

This song cycle deals with darker images of death found in Ungaretti's work, from varying viewpoints and from various collections. From the song of the deathly call of the Sirens (song 1), or the call to cease killing the dead themselves (song 3) to the image of sand trickling through the hourglass lending itself to the transient nature of time (song 2) and, in the final song (4), the potential, possibly more life-affirming, chance to resurrect physically a dead friend, to reclaim that which was once lost.

There was much in the language and sound of the poetry, as well as the meaning and subtle construction of the verse structure, to attract me to these poems, and I have attempted to capture the desperate, playful, brutal and finally resolute colours inherent in the words. However, most importantly for me, it was the meaning of the words, each one tinged with loss and sensuality, that drew me to choosing these specific poems which I have titled, actually by using another collection's title from Ungaretti, *La morte meditata*.

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