

gouging at a forest sea

for SATB and electronics

Amy Brandon 2017

Tar Swan – by David Martin (2014)

I

As I've told you tide and tide again,
you're not the first to strike the bell
undertoe. I witnessed a single cygnet,
abandoned by cob and pen, fending
in the lichen. His sobs skip-dripped
from sockets and slithered into deep
pools of felicity. Doodle-buggers
and orange-worms will soon mine his
blistered lore. He busked his flags,
heralding a black egg along slipshod
Athabaska, spit the yoke, and under
my fluted lip, a tar-cleaned tongue.
Hold, before your hand-made eyes,
I offer a soup to eat your reflection.

III

All magicians know stubholders
double watch: convincing heart
that behind the trick is trick,
hoodwinking mind-be-body to lunch
with wonder. It's simple, then:
Threshing bitumen is the Devil's
Handkerchief followed by a Question
of Sympathy. Suckers agog, exposed
by boreal thugs who conjure a terrible
prophecy, stringing out Dionysian
muck to smear on highway blacktop.
Finally, by sleight of hand, they
sluice foaming shades from the body,
as the stage manager skins his take.

II

Say Alexander Mackenzie once
netted an elephant by the jugular,
a vein he blotted ashore, and ashore
he cajoled a catheter up its trunk,
a trunk that smelled of sea coal.
Believe me, he never imagined
his dead mammal would tender
its supreme body as petroleum.
We are bitumen farmers, gleaners,
and I wield the wide metal plough,
a plough with ragged furrow-slice
my coulter's wake. Wake, and never
again will Virgil warn, Let the horns
of the moon govern a Soiler's work.

IV

Behold, the Plant is alive! I give you
the loafing-crunch of Draglined Sand;
the shut-eye-beak-ool of Feed Hopper;
the scheming-sheaths of Toothed Rollers;
the rumen-torque of Pug Mill;
the pupa-soup-gyrate of Separator;
the moulted-scales of Tailings Pond;
the magpie appraisal of Settling Tank;
the shadow-tailed-cache of Elephant Storage;
the nagging scent of Water Drained to River.
I submit Nature's Supreme Gift to Industry.
Muskeg, glacial tills, sandstone and shale -
all useless like a turf cutter's scraw,
for we are gouging at a forest sea.

Instrumentation:

SATB (either vocal quartet or chamber choir)

Tape

Duration: approx. 7 min

Notes:

1. This tape for this piece will be built from recordings made in rehearsals, and will not require exact timing with a stopwatch except for the initial cue. Additional note cues can be built in if desired. At bar 6, the mezzo line is heard first in the tape, and then sung at bar 8.
2. Sections should slightly overlap one another, so there are no silences except where indicated by a bar of rest.
3. Inhale and exhale while speaking 'I witnessed' in the rhythm shown, a little unevenly so that the pattern is not exactly in time between performers. Emphasis can be on the word 'I' or on the 'wit' of 'witnessed'. The words may be a little obscured by the inhale and exhale pattern.
4. Sing pitches and rhythms as written, but enter in a slightly uneven manner so that the phrases are out of sync, and then diminishing raggedly to nothing.
5. The buzzing sounds should mimic flies and cicadas as much as possible. The fly noise is pitched only in the sense that it slides around the vocal register.
6. During a concert performance, from bars 40-51 only the pre-recorded vocal lines (from rehearsal) will be heard and the quartet should be silent while this plays. The quartet begins again at bar 50 with the spoken line 'It's supreme body', and the alto line at bar 53 will also be sung live.
7. 'The' should be pronounced as usual (ie. "thuh") except at this point in the soprano and mezzo parts only, where it should be pronounced "thee".
8. Please mimic birdsong as much as possible, whichever bird is easiest to imitate. The parts can also be exchanged if convenient.


gouging at a forest sea

for vocal quartet and fixed media

Amy Brandon 2017

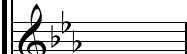
(Note 1 & 3)

Inhale cresc. poco a poco *pp* → *mp* Exhale decresc. poco a poco → *pp*

S.  | |
I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed.


(Note 1 & 3)

Inhale cresc. poco a poco *pp* → *mp* Exhale decresc. poco a poco → *pp*

M.  | |
I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed.

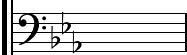
(Note 1 & 3)

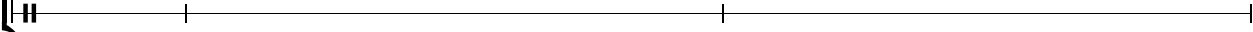
Inhale cresc. poco a poco *pp* → *mp* Exhale decresc. poco a poco → *pp*

T.  | |
I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed.

(Note 1 & 3)

Inhale cresc. poco a poco *pp* → *mp* Exhale decresc. poco a poco → *pp*

B.  | |
I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed, I wit-nessed.

Tape 

Tape (0.00) (0.32) (0.36)
(I witnessed, I witnessed ..)

repeat *ad. lib.* $\text{♩} = 100$

S.

M. *repeat ad. lib.* **(Heard on tape only, not sung except in rehearsals for the initial recording)**
mf
 As I've told you,

T. *repeat ad. lib.*

B. *repeat ad. lib.*

$\text{♩} = 100$
 (0.40)
 (As I've told you ..)

8

S. *mf*
 Tide and tide a - gain.....

M. **(Sung)** *mf*
 As I've told you, as I, as I.

T. *mf*
 You're not the first to strike the bell, you're not. Oo.

B. *mf*
 Un - der - toe.

(0.46) (I witnessed, I witnessed ..)

15 $\text{♩} = 50$ $\text{♩} = 100$

S. *f*
I wit- nessed.____ A - ban - doned._____

M. *f*
I wit- nessed, a sin - gle cyg - net, a - ban-doned by cob and____ pen,

T.
Ah.____ A-ban-doned by____ cob,____ ah.____

B.
A - ban - doned._____

$\text{♩} = 50$ $\text{♩} = 100$

(1.10) (I witnessed, I witnessed ..)

$\text{♩} = \text{circa } 100$
Note 4: Uneven entry, lightly and playfully, decres. poco a poco

21
S. Fend-ing in the lich-en, fend-ing in the lich-en.

M. *pp*
oo. Fend-ing in the lich-en, fend-ing in the lich-en, fend-ing in the lich-en.

Note 4: Uneven entry, lightly and playfully, decres. poco a poco

T. *pp*
Fend-ing in the lich-en, fend-ing in the lich-en, fend-ing in the lich-en.

B. **Note 4: Uneven entry, lightly and playfully, decres. poco a poco**
Fend-ing in the lich-en.

$\text{♩} = \text{circa } 100$

(1.38)

24 $\text{♩} = 100$
 S. His sobs skip-dripped.
 M. His sobs skip-dripped, and
 T. His sobs skip - dripped,
 B. His sobs skip - dripped.
 (1.43)

27 $\text{♩} = 60$
 S. -thered
 M. slith - Slith-ered in - to deep pools of fe - li - ci - ty.
 T. oo, from soc - kets and slith-ered in - to deep pools of fe - li - ci - ty.
 B.
 (1.51)

29 $\text{♩} = 100$
 S. (Distantly) *mf* And or - - ange worms will soon mine____
 M. (Note 5: Mimic flies.) *ff* Zz
 T. (Distantly) *mf* And or - - ange worms will soon mine____
 B. Majestically (Note 5: Mimic flies and cicadas) *ff*
 Doo - dle-bug- gers_ zz tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a
 (2.03)

32 *rit.* $\text{♩} = 80$ *mf*

S. his blis - tered lore.

M. His blis - tered lore.

T. his blister - ed lore. Ah, ah.

B. tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-a tk-a-tk-ah, ah.

mf *f* (In the style of plainchant)

rit. $\text{♩} = 80$

(2.13)

35 Intermittent laughter (mocking the audience) and sad sighs

S. Intermittent laughter (mocking the audience) and sad sighs I, I.

M. Intermittent laughter (mocking the audience) and sad sighs I, I.

T. *f* (In the style of plainchant) Ho - ld, be - fore your hand-made eyes. I of - fer a soup, to eat your re - flec - tion.

B. ah, ah, ah, ah.

(2.33)

39 $\text{♩} = 66$ *ff* (Note 6: Pre-recorded and sung on tape only. In concert do not sing)

S. Ah, net - ting an el - e - phant by the jug - u - lar, he ca - joled a ca - the - ter

M. *ff* (Note 6: Pre-recorded and sung on tape only. In concert do not sing) Say Al - ex - an - der Mack - en - zie, say Al - ex - an - der Mack - en - zie once.

T. *ff* (Note 6: Pre-recorded and sung on tape only. In concert do not sing) Say Al - ex - an - der Mack - en - zie once, say once, by the jug - u -

B. *ff* (Note 6: Pre-recorded and sung on tape only. In concert do not sing) A vein he blot - ed a - shore, and a - shore, say

$\text{♩} = 66$

(3.01)

(Say Alexander ...)

44

S. up its trunk, be - lieve me he nev - er im - a-gined his dead mam - mal

M. A trunk that smelled of sea - coal, say Al - ex - an - der Mack-en - zie.

T. lar, say Al - ex - an - der Mack-en - zie once, oo.

B. once. Net - ting an el - e-phant by the jug - u - lar, say Al - ex - an - der,

48

S. *mp* (Spoken in concert, very rapidly repeated, overlapping, anxiously) Its supreme body as petroleum, its supreme body as petroleum, ...
would ten - der.

M. (Sung in concert) We are bit - u - men far-mers, glea - ners, And I wield the wide me-

T. *mp* (Spoken in concert, very rapidly repeated, overlapping, anxiously) Its supreme body as petroleum, its supreme body as petroleum, ...

B. *mp* (Spoken in concert, very rapidly repeated, overlapping, anxiously) Its supreme body as petroleum, its supreme body as petroleum, ...
oo.

(3.28) (It's supreme body ...) (We are ...) (We are ...)

56

S. its supreme body, ... (fading away) um, um, um, ... $\text{♩} = 100$ *ff* My coul-ter's wake!

M. tal plough, a plough with rag-ged fur - row - slice. *ff* My coul-ter's wake!

T. Its supreme body as petroleum, ... (fading away) um, um, um ... *ff* My coul-ter's wake!

B. As petroleum, as petroleum ... (fading away) um, um, um ... $\text{♩} = 100$ *ff* My coul-ter's wake!

(4.01)
(My!* ...)

rit.

S. (Spoken, quietly) *pp* Wake.

M. *pp* (Spoken, quietly) Wake, and never again will Virgil warn.

T. (Spoken, quietly) *pp* Wake.

B. *f* Let the horns of the moon, gov - ern a soil - er's work.

rit.

(My!* ...)

64 **A tempo**

S. *pp* Oo, oo, oo, oo, oo, oo.

M. *pp* Oo, oo, oo, oo, oo, oo.

T. (Whispered, quickly, breathlessly) All magicians know stubholders double watch: convincing heart that behind the trick is trick, hoodwinking mind-body to lunch with wonder. It's simple, then: Threshing bitumen is the Devil's Handkerchief followed by a Question of Sympathy. Suckers agog, exposed by boreal thugs who conjure a terrible prophesy, stringing out Dionysian muck to smear on highway blacktop. Finally, by sleight of hand, they sluice foaming shades from the body, as the stage manager skins his take

B. *pp* Oo, oo, oo, oo, oo, oo.

A tempo
(4.20)

74

S. *f* I give you thee loa-fing crunch of

M. *f* (Note 7: Pronounced 'thee' here only) I give you thee loaf-ing crunch of

T. *ff* Be-hold, the Plant is a- live! *f* I give you the, *mf*

B. *ff* Be-hold, the Plant is a- live! *f* I give you the, *mf*

(4.57) (Be* ...) (5.00) (Tape cont., fading away gradually)

(..hold!* ...)

81

S. Drag-lined Sand; the shut-eye-beak-ool of Feed-Hop-per; the sche-ming sheaths of Toothed Roll-ers;

M. Drag-lined Sand; the shut-eye-beak-ool of Feed-Hop-per; the sche-ming sheaths of Toothed Roll-ers;

T. the, the, the,

B. the, the,

(5.13)

86

S. ah. The ru - men torque of Pug-Mill; oo, of Se - pa - ra - tor; The mou - scales

M. the ru - men torque, oo. The mou - lted

T. the ru - men torque of Pug-Mill. The pu - pa soup - gy - rate. The mou -

B. the. Oo, the,

93

S. of Tail-ings Pond. The mou - lted scales. The mou-lted scales.

M. scales, mou - lted scales, of Tail-ings Pond, of Tail-ings Pond.

T. - lted scales, the mou - lted scales. *mp* Of Tail-ings Pond.

B. the.

(Like a broken record, slowing down)

98

S. *f* The ma-gpie ap prais-al. Ma-gpie ah, ma-gpie ah, ma-gpie ah, ma-gpie ah, ma-gpie ah, ma-gpie ah,

M. *f* The ma-gpie ap-prais-al, ma-gpie ap-prais - al, ma-gpie ap - prais - -

T. *f* The ma-gpie ap-prais-al, ma-gpie ap-prais - al, *mf* ma-gpie ap prais

B. *f* The ma-gpie ap-prais-al, the ma-gpie ap-prais - al, the ma-gpie ap-prais -

(Tape ends)

104

rit. $\text{♩} = 100$

S. ma - gpie ah, ma - gpie ah, ma - gpie ah, ma - gpie - ah, of Set - tling Tank;

M. al. Oo, ah.

T. al. Oo, oo.

B. al. Oo, oo.

rit. $\text{♩} = 100$

109

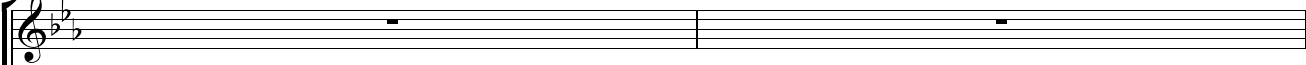
S. *f* the sha - dow - tailed cache of El - e - phant Stor age.

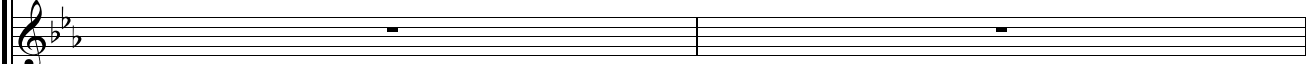
M. *f* The sha - dow - tailed cache of El - e - phant Stor - age.

T. *f* The cache. Ah, Sto - rage. *mp*

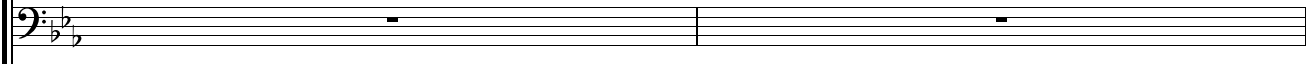
B. *mp* The. Mm.

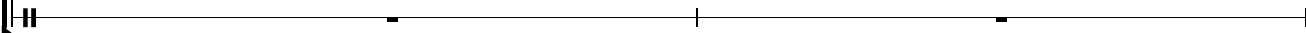
117

S. 

M. 


T. *(spoken, peacefully and calmly)*
The nagging scent, of Water Drained to River.

B. 



(Note 8: Mimic birdsong)

Entry 2. repeat ad. lib
mp



oo- ee?

(Note 8: Mimic birdsong, twittering whistle)

Entry 1. repeat ad. lib
mp



(spoken, peacefully and calmly)


Entry 4.

I submit Nature's Supreme Gift to Industry, Muskeg, glacial tills, sandstone and shale - all useless like a turf cutter's scraw, for we are gouging at a forest sea.


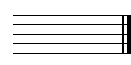
(Note 8: Mimic birdsong, clear fast whistle sliding downwards)


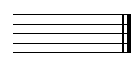
Entry 3. repeat ad. lib


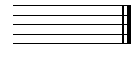
mf



119

S.  

M.  

T.  

B. 