

to Megan...

Threnos

for soprano and piano

*from William Shakespeare's
"The Phoenix and the Turtle" (1601)*

Ben Stonaker

2003

A threnos (or threnody) is a lament over the dead. In William Shakespeare's poem *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, the last five stanzas are introduced as a lyrical lament "...chorus to their tragic scene." This piece reflects on the entire poem, as strange and unusual as it has been perceived, using only text from the final five stanzas. With the use of different word-painting techniques, extended effects, and dramatic dynamics and colors, the piano part becomes more than just accompaniment to the vocal line. This is my first piece for voice, and has been dedicated and premiered by a very dear friend Megan Barrios.

THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE

Let the bird of loudest lay,
On the sole Arabian tree,
Herald sad and trumpet be,
To whose sound chaste wings obey.

But thou shrieking harbinger,
Foul precurrer of the fiend,
Augur of the fever's end,
To this troupe come thou not near!

From this session interdict
Every fowl of tyrant wing,
Save the eagle, feather'd king:
Keep the obsequy so strict.

Let the priest in surplice white,
That defunctive music can,
Be the death-divining swan,
Lest the requiem lack his right.

And thou treble-dated crow,
That thy sable gender makest
With the breath thou givest and takest,
'Mongst our mourners shalt thou go.

Here the anthem doth commence:
Love and constancy is dead;
Phoenix and the turtle fled
In a mutual flame from hence.

So they loved, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division none:
Number there in love was slain.

Hearts remote, yet not asunder;
Distance, and no space was seen
'Twixt the turtle and his queen:
But in them it were a wonder.

So between them love did shine,
That the turtle saw his right
Flaming in the phoenix' sight;
Either was the other's mine.

Property was thus appalled,
That the self was not the same;
Single nature's double name
Neither two nor one was called.

Reason, in itself confounded,
Saw division grow together,
To themselves yet either neither,
Simple were so well compounded,

That it cried, How true a twain
Seemeth this concordant one!
Love hath reason, reason none,
If what parts can so remain.

Whereupon it made this threne
To the phoenix and the dove,
Co-supremes and stars of love,
As chorus to their tragic scene.

THRENOS

Beauty, truth, and rarity,
Grace in all simplicity,
Here enclosed, in cinders lie.

Death is now the phoenix' nest
And the turtle's loyal breast
To eternity doth rest,

Leaving no posterity:
'Twas not their infirmity,
It was married chastity.

Truth may seem, but cannot be:
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;
Truth and beauty buried be.

To this urn let those repair
That are either true or fair
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

- *William Shakespeare*
(Published in 1601 in Robert
Chester's "Loves Martyr.")

to Megan

THRENOS

from William Shakespeare's *The Phoenix and the Turtle*

Ben Stonaker

Slowly, with much expression

Soprano

Piano

Slowly, with much expression

p *mf* *f* (r.h.) *mp*

Ped. (lv)

Pno.

f *p*

(con Pedal)

Pno.

p *mf* *pp* *ppp* *p*

Ped. (sempre) (lv)

Beau - - - ty, —

gua ———

(*slide fingernail across strings inside piano)

*All "x"-shaped noteheads in the piano part indicate playing on the strings inside the piano.

10 *mp* truth, and rar - i - ty, (port.)

Pno. 10 *mp* *p* (inside piano) *mp*

13 *f* Grace in all *p* *mf* sim - pli - ci - ty,

Pno. 13 *f* *p* *mf* *dim.* (con pedal)

16 *pp* (whispered) Here en - closed in cin - - - - - ders lie.

Pno. 16 *ppp*

(♩ = ♩) un poco piu mosso

Piano accompaniment for measures 18-20. The score is in 3/8 time. Measure 18 starts with a treble clef and a whole rest. The piano part begins in measure 18 with a *pp* dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. Measure 20 includes a trill marked *8va* in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. Dynamics range from *pp* to *mf*.

Vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 21-22. The vocal line starts at measure 21 with the lyrics "Death is now the phoe - nix' nest; And the". Dynamics are *mp* and *mf*. The piano accompaniment for measures 21-22 features a *p* dynamic in the right hand and a *mf* dynamic in the left hand. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and ties, and a triplet of eighth notes at the end of measure 22.

Vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 23-24. The vocal line starts at measure 23 with the lyrics "tur - tle's loy - al breast To e - ter - ni - ty doth". Dynamics are *mp* and *f*. The piano accompaniment for measures 23-24 features a *pp* dynamic in the right hand and a *f* dynamic in the left hand. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and ties, and a triplet of eighth notes at the end of measure 23.

25 rest,

Pno.

25 *f*

3

27

Lea - ving no pos - ter - i - ty:

Pno.

27 *mp*

8^{va} (lh)

mp

(sim.)

29

'Twas not their in - firm - i - - - ty, _____ It was

Pno.

29 *mf*

f

3 3 3 3 3

31 mar - - - ried chas - - - ti - - - ty.

f

Pno.

mp

3 3 3 3 3 3 3

32

mp

Pno.

3 3 3 3 3 3 3

33 Truth may seem, but can - not be; Beau - ty

f

ff *sf* (lv) *f*

4 2 3

Pno.

ff *sf* (lv) *f*

35 brag but 'tis not she:

ff Slower, dragging

Pno.

35 *ff* *ffz* (lv) *ppp* Slower, dragging

8va

38 Truth and Beau - ty bu - ried be.

mf *mp* *p* *poco rit.*

Pno.

38 *poco rit.* (as soft as possible) (lv)

41

Freely Tempo I

Pno.

41 *f* *ff* *mf* (lv) *mf*

Freely Tempo I

8va

p *p < f* *mf* *mf*

THRENOS

6

Piu mosso

mf

46 To this urn let those re - pair That are ei - ther

Piu mosso

Pno.

(con ped.)

poco rit.

Molto grave

mp

pp (whispered)

50 true or fair; For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

poco rit.

Molto grave

Pno.

8vb