

# NIGHT



ERIC SHANFIELD

## NIGHT

Eric Shanfield | ENS.2006.5 | 9'

Poem by C. K. Williams

Baritone

Viola

The poem *Night* by C. K. Williams—a poet whose work I have always admired—first appeared in 2006 in *The New Yorker*, where it struck me not only for its crepuscular loveliness but for its apparent or at least temporary repudiation of the extremely lengthy poetic line Williams had long since staked out as his special territory.

The six small verses seemed to lend themselves well to my composition style, so I set them for baritone voice with guitar and viola. After *Sea Change* I was very interested in dark timbres, and the third *Velvet Underground* album with John Cale's viola matching Lou Reed's electric guitar was a clear touchpoint.

Unfortunately, at the time I had no idea how to write for guitar, and the part that was composed turned out to be unidiomatic and virtually unplayable. Though over the next several years I tried making versions of the piece for various instruments none of them satisfied me.

A decade passed. In 2016 I was idly looking over a version I had made of some of the movements a couple of years before for baritone with viola alone, which had been abandoned because a solo viola didn't seem sufficient to perform the polyphony envisioned for some of the movements, when I realized that if instead of trying to recreate the original parts I used idiomatic string techniques to translate rather than transcribe the original textures I could finally make a definitive version of the work for baritone and solo viola. So I did.

## NIGHT

C. K. Williams

1.

Somehow a light plane  
coming in low at three  
in the morning to a local airstrip  
hits a complex of tones  
in its growl so I hear mingled  
with it a peal of church bells,  
swelling in and out  
of audibility, arrhythmic,  
but rich and insistent, then,  
though I try to hold them,  
they dissolve, fade away;  
only that monochrome  
drone bores on  
alone through the dark.

2.

This is one of our new  
winters, dry, windless  
and warm, when even  
the lightest cover is stifling.  
A luxuriant flowering  
pear tree used to shelter  
the front of our house,  
but last August a storm  
took it, a bizarrely focused  
miniature tornado never  
before seen in this climate,  
and now the sky outside  
the window is raw, the inert  
air viscous and sour.

3.

I was ill, and by the merest  
chance happened to be  
watching as the tree fell,  
I saw the branches helplessly  
flail, the fork of the trunk  
with a great creak split,  
and the heavier half start  
down, catch on wires,  
and hang, lifting and subsiding  
in the last barbs of the gale  
as though it didn't know yet  
it was dead, then it did,  
and slipped slowly sideways  
onto its own debris in the gutter.

4.

When Ivan Karamazov  
is reciting his wracked disquisition  
about the evils perpetrated  
on children, opining whether  
human salvation would be worth  
a single child's suffering,  
you know he's closing to breaking  
down, sobbing in shame  
and remorse, and I wonder  
if he'd imagined our whole planet,  
the children with it,  
wagered in a mad gamble  
of world against wealth,  
what would he have done?

5.

What do I do? Fret  
mostly, and brood, and lie  
awake. Not to sleep  
wasn't always so punishing.  
Once, in a train, stalled  
in mountains, in snow,  
I was roused by the clank  
of a trainman's crowbar  
on the undercarriage of my car.  
I lifted the leathery shade  
and across a moon-dazzled  
pine-fringed slope  
a fox cut an arc; everything  
else was pure light.

6.

I wanted it to last forever,  
but I was twenty, and before  
I knew it was back in my dream.  
Do I ever sleep that way  
now, innocent of everything  
beyond my ken? No,  
others are always with me,  
others I love with my life,  
yet I'll leave them scant  
evidence of my care, and little  
trace of my good intentions,  
as little as the solacing shush  
the phantom limbs of our slain  
tree will leave on the night.

# NIGHT

1

C. K. Williams

Eric Shanfield

$\text{♩} = 132$

Baritone

Viola

*mf* *f* *mf* *f* *mf*

5

*f* *ff* *f* *ff*

9

*mp*

Some-how\_ a light plane com-ing

*mf* *f* *mp*

13

*mf* *mp*

in low at three in the mor - ning

*mf* *mp*

17

*mf*

hits a com - plex of tones in its growl\_ so I hear

pizz. (l.h., open strings)

*mf* arco sul C

20

min-gled in it a peal of church bells,

Measures 20-23: The vocal line begins with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 7/8.

24

swell-ing in and out of au-di-bi-li-ty,

Measures 24-27: The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 7/8.

28

a - rrhth - mic, but rich and in - sis - tent, then, though I try to hold them,

Measures 28-31: The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 7/8.

32

they dis - solve, fade a - way;

Measures 32-35: The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 7/8.

36

on - ly that mo - no-chrome drone bores on through the dark

Measures 36-39: The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 7/8.

# NIGHT

2

C. K. Williams

Eric Shanfield

$\text{♩} = 96$

Baritone

Viola

pizz.

*mp* *mf* *mp*

5 *mp* *mf*

This is one of our new win-ters, —

9 *mp* *mf* *mp*

dry, wind-less and warm, — when e-ven the light-est co-ver is

13 *mf*

sti - fl - ing... arco 3 .6. .6. .6. A lux-ur - i - ant

*mf p* *mf*

17

pear tree used to shel-ter the front of our house, but last

4 3 6 6 6 6 3 6 6 6 6

*mf p* *mf* *mf p* *mf*

20

Au - gust a storm took it, a bi -

*mf p* *mf* *mf p* *mf*

23

zar - rely fo - cused min-i - a - ture tor - na-do

*mf p* *mf* *rit.*

27 a tempo

ne-ver be-fore seen

*mp* *mp* *mf* *mp*

31

in this cli-mate, and now the sky out - side the win-dow is raw,

*mf* *f* *mf* *f*

36

the in - ert air vis-cous and sour.

*mf* *mp* *mf* *rit.*



# NIGHT

3

C. K. Williams

Eric Shanfield

$\text{♩} = 120$

*mf*

Baritone

*mf*

Viola

4

5

be watch - ing as the tree fell,

*f*

9

I saw the bran - ches help - less - ly flail,

4

13

the fork of the trunk with a great creak split,

17 *rit.* *a tempo* *ff*

and the hea - vi - er half start down, catch on wi-

*ff*

21

res, and hang, lift - ing and sub - si - ding, in the last barbs of the

Measures 21-25: Bass and piano accompaniment. The key signature changes from one flat to one sharp. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4, then to 5/8, and finally to 2/4. The lyrics are: "res, and hang, lift - ing and sub - si - ding, in the last barbs of the".

26

gale as though it didn't know yet it was

Measures 26-30: Bass and piano accompaniment. The key signature changes to two sharps. The time signature changes from 2/4 to 4/4. The lyrics are: "gale as though it didn't know yet it was". A piano dynamic marking (*mf*) is present above measure 26 and below measure 28.

31

dead, then it did, and slipped

Measures 31-34: Bass and piano accompaniment. The key signature remains two sharps. The time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "dead, then it did, and slipped". A piano dynamic marking (*f*) is present above measure 31 and below measure 33.

35

slow - ly side - ways on to its

Measures 35-38: Bass and piano accompaniment. The key signature remains two sharps. The time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "slow - ly side - ways on to its". A piano dynamic marking (*mf*) is present above measure 35 and below measure 38.

39

own de - bris in the gut - ter.

Measures 39-42: Bass and piano accompaniment. The key signature remains two sharps. The time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "own de - bris in the gut - ter.". A piano dynamic marking (*mp*) is present above measure 39 and below measure 42. A "rit." (ritardando) marking is present above measure 40.

# NIGHT

4

C. K. Williams

Eric Shanfield

♩=96

Baritone

*mf*

When I - van Ka - ra - ma - zov\_ is re -

Viola

*mf*

5

ci - ting his wracked dis - qui - si - tion\_ a - bout the e - vils\_ per - pe -

9

tra - ted on chil - dren, o - pin - ing whe - ther hu - man\_ sal - va - tion would be

*pizz.* *arco* *pizz.* *arco*

13

worth a sin - gle chi - ld's suf - fer - ing, you know he's close to break - ing down,

*pizz.*

17

— sob-bing in shame and re - morse and I won-der if he'd i - ma

arco

pizz.

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of music, measures 17 through 20. The vocal line is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "— sob-bing in shame and re - morse and I won-der if he'd i - ma". The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more melodic line in the right hand. The word "arco" is written above the piano part at measure 18, and "pizz." is written above it at measure 20.

21

- gined our whole pla - net, the chil-dren with it, wa - gered in a mad

pizz.

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of music, measures 21 through 24. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "- gined our whole pla - net, the chil-dren with it, wa - gered in a mad". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The word "pizz." is written above the piano part at measure 23.

25

gam-ble of world a - gainst a - gainst wealth, what would

arco

Detailed description: This block contains the third system of music, measures 25 through 28. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "gam-ble of world a - gainst a - gainst wealth, what would". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The word "arco" is written above the piano part at measure 27.

29

he have done?

pizz.

Detailed description: This block contains the fourth system of music, measures 29 through 32. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "he have done?". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The word "pizz." is written above the piano part at measure 31.

# NIGHT

5

C. K. Williams

Eric Shanfield

♩=96

Baritone

*mf*

What do I do? Fret most-ly, and brood,

Viola

arco

*p* *mf* *p* *mf* *sim.*

6

*mf*

and lie a - wake.

11

Not to sleep was n't al-ways so pu - nish-ing.

*p* *mf* *mp*

16

*mp*

Once, on a train, stalled in moun - tains, in

$$mf$$

*mp*

$p$

$p =$

# NIGHT

6

C. K. Williams

Eric Shanfield

♩=132

Baritone

Viola

pizz. vib. arco 6 6

*mf* *p*

4 *mf* I

5 want - ed it to last for -

6 ev - er, but I was

7 twen - ty,

8

Measure 8: Bass clef, 3/4 time signature. The vocal line is a whole rest. The piano accompaniment consists of sixteenth-note chords in the left hand, with a flat key signature (B-flat). The first two measures feature a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an accent. The last two measures feature a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an accent.

9

Measure 9: Bass clef, 3/4 time signature. The vocal line contains the lyrics "and be - fore I knew it was". The piano accompaniment continues with sixteenth-note chords, including a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an accent in the first measure.

10

Measure 10: Bass clef, 3/4 time signature. The vocal line contains the lyrics "back in my". The piano accompaniment continues with sixteenth-note chords, including a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an accent in the first measure.

11

Measure 11: Bass clef, 3/4 time signature. The vocal line contains the lyrics "dream." and is followed by a whole rest. The piano accompaniment continues with sixteenth-note chords, including a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an accent in the first measure.

12

Measure 12: Bass clef, 3/4 time signature. The vocal line contains the lyrics "Do I e - ver" and is followed by a whole rest. The piano accompaniment continues with sixteenth-note chords, including a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '3' and an accent in the first measure. The measure concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking and the word "arco" written below the staff.



14 *mf* *p*

sleep that way now, in - no-cent of

*mf* *p*

18 *mf* *f*

ev - - - ery - thing be-yond my ken? No,

*mf* *p* *f*

22

oth - ers are al - - - - ways

6 6

23

with me, oth - ers I

6 6

24

love with my life,

6 6

25

25

yet I'll

6 6

26

mf

leave them scant e - vi - dence of my care, as

4

30

30

lit - tle trace of my good in - ten - tions,

mf

3 3 3 3

rit.

34 ♩=100

34 ♩=100

mf p mp p

as lit - tle as the so - lac - ing shush the phan - tom limbs of our slain tree will leave on the

fp

40

40

rit.

night.

mf mp

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3