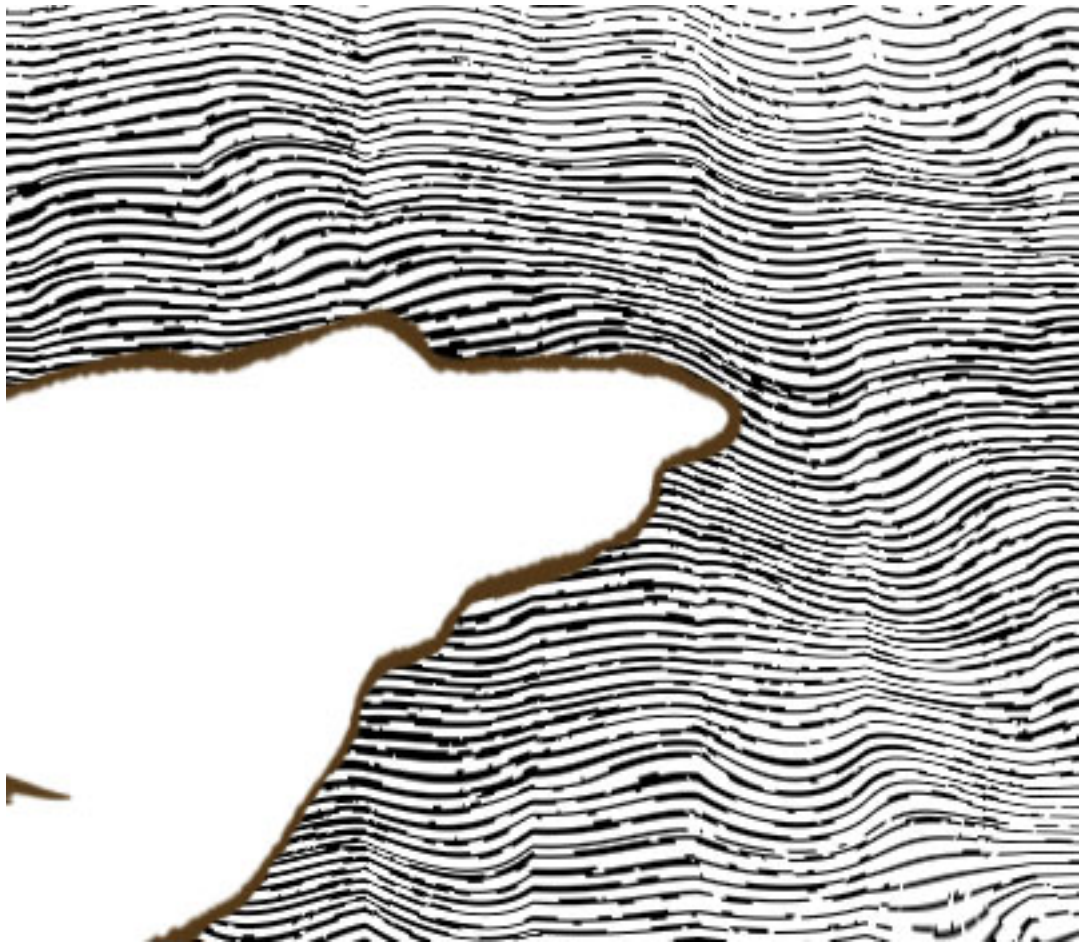


ABOUT GRACE



ERIC SHANFIELD

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texts by Anthony Doerr

ENS.2006.7 | 6'

Tenor

2 Bb Bass Clarinets

2 Violins

Score in C.

I found myself pleasantly surprised by Anthony Doerr's *About Grace*, a "realist" literary novel I'd picked up for a dollar at the Strand because his other book had shells on the cover and I like books with shells on the cover. It turned out to be genuinely moving, combining stretches of astonishing beauty describing the natural world with meaningful insights into human nature. Four brief passages especially struck me, and I set them aside for further use.

One thing that has long interested me is the setting of essentially arrhythmic prose whose only regularities are that of speech. Like Janáček I generally prefer to set such texts as naturally as possible, my music matching the rising and falling of the line rather than attempting to artificially corral the irregular text in a singsong rhythm. However, the latter approach can be effective—as proven by Barber's perfect *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*—and that's the direction I went in this work, with its lilting barcarolles suggesting the rise and fall of the ocean.

Scored for tenor with two bass clarinets and two violins, *About Grace* consists of four brief songs performed attacca, and lasts about six minutes.

ABOUT GRACE

Anthony Doerr

1

In a nightmare Naaliyah dragged chains onto a beach and shook still-living fish from her hair. 'These things happen,' she said, 'not because you foresee them but because you foretell them. The telling makes it so.'

2

If water had its way, if geology stopped, the seas would chew up the continents, and rain would wear down the mountains. Water would eventually scour the entire planet into a smooth, definitionless sphere. We'd be left with a single ocean, waist-deep, all over the globe.

3

Don't all of us, at our ends, whether we die in a desert or a quiet white room, drown in something?

4

The entire valley was enveloped in a huge, illuminated stillness. Above him the clouds had pulled away and the sky burned with stars. The meadow smoldered with light, and the spruce had become illuminated kingdoms, snow sifting from branch to branch. He thought: This has been here every winter all my life.

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$\text{♩} = 63$

Bass Clarinet 1 in B \flat

Bass Clarinet 2 in B \flat

Tenor

Violin 1

Violin 2

mf *mp* *p*

mp *p*

p *mf* *p*

In a

4

night - mare Naa - li - yah dragged chains on - to a beach.

mp *mf* *mp*

mp *mf* *mp*

mf

mf

7

8

p *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*

p *mp* *mf* *sim.*

p *mp* *mf* *sim.*

mp *mf* *sim.*

10

sim.

mf

and shook still liv - ing fish from her hair.

13

mf

mf

mf

'These things hap - pen,' she said,

16

17

'not be-cause you fore - see them but be-cause you fore - tell them.

19 21

The tel - ling makes it so.

22

26 $\text{♩} = 95$

IV (to 36)

31

mf

If wa - ter had its way, if ge - o - lo - gy stopped,

35

the sea would chew up the con - ti - nents, and rain would wear down the

mf

39

moun - tains. Wa - ter would e - ven - tual - ly sco - ur the whole pla - net

cresc.

cresc.

43

in - - to a smooth, de - fi - ni - tion - less sphere.

47

We'd be left with a

50

sin - gle oc - ean, waist - deep, all o - ver the globe.

54 ♩ = 126

Musical score for measures 54-60. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand. The melody is mostly silent in these measures.

61

Musical score for measures 59-63. Measure 59 is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 61 features a vocal line with lyrics "Don't all of us, _____ at our". The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern.

Musical score for measures 64-66. Measure 64 is marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 65 features a vocal line with lyrics "ends, _____". The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern.

68

68
whe-ther we die in a de - sert or a qui - et white room,

This block contains the musical score for measures 68 through 71. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "whe-ther we die in a de - sert or a qui - et white room,". The piano accompaniment consists of chords and arpeggiated patterns in both hands.

75

72
mf mezzo voce
drown in some

This block contains the musical score for measures 72 through 75. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "drown in some" and includes the dynamic marking *mf* mezzo voce. The piano accompaniment continues with chords and arpeggiated patterns.

76

76
f
thing?

This block contains the musical score for measures 76 through 79. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "thing?" and includes the dynamic marking *f*. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets, and the dynamic marking *f*.

79 82 $\text{♩} = 63$

p *p* *p* *p*

gliss. harms. on IV
and sometimes III (harms. cont.)

85 86

p norm.
3 3

The en - ti - re val - ley ___ was en - vel - oped ___ in a huge, ___ il - lu - mi - na - ted

89 90

p

still - ness. ___ A - bove him the clouds had pulled a - way ___ and the sky burned with

93 **94**

stars. The mea - dow smol - dered with light, and the

95

spruce had be - come il - lu - mi - na - ted king - doms, snow sifting from

98 **99** *molto rubato* *a tempo*

branch to branch. He thought: This has been here e - very win - ter all my life.