

ERIC SHANFIELD

Eric Shanfield

ENS.2014.2 | 12'

poems by Patricia Lockwood

for Pat Swoboda and Eliza Bagg

Soprano

Bass

⇒Each song is preceded by a brief spoken phrase by the soprano. The bass should begin playing immediately thereafter without pause.

⇒ Between the first and second songs the bass retunes II from D down one half-step to C#. This should be done as quickly and unobtrusively as possible.

The Ten-Year-Old-World sets two poems by Patricia Lockwood, a young poet best known for her astonishing Rape Joke. However setting that famous work seemed both impossible and foolhardy, so instead I chose to set two contrasting texts: He Marries the Stuffed-Owl Exhibit is a brutally sad lyric clothed in tattered wonder, while its companion When the World Was Ten Years Old wears its wonder more lightly, though looking forward toward a darkness mirrored in the instrumentation of soprano and contrabass. The Ten-Year-Old World was composed in 2014, rewritten in 2016, and is dedicated to Pat Swoboda and Eliza Bagg.

poems by Patricia Lockwood

He Marries the Stuffed-Owl Exhibit

At the Indiana Welcome Center

He marries her mites and the wires in her wings, he marries her yellow glass eyes and black centers, he marries her near-total head turn, he marries the curve of each of her claws, he marries the information plaque, he marries the extinction of this kind of owl, he marries the owl that she loved in life and the last thought of him in the thick of her mind

just one inch away from the bullet, there
he marries the moths
who makes holes in the owl, who have eaten the owl
almost all away, he marries the branch of the tree
that she grips, he marries the real-looking moss
and dead leaves, he marries the smell of must
that surrounds her, he marries the strong blue

stares of children, he marries nasty smudges of their noses on the glass, he marries the camera that points at the owl to make sure no one steals her, so the camera won't object when he breaks the glass while reciting some vows that he wrote himself, he screams OWL instead of I'LL and then ALWAYS LOVE HER, he screams HAVE AND TO HOLD and takes hold of the owl and wrenches the owl away from her branch

and he covers her in kisses and the owl thinks, "More moths," and at the final hungry kiss, "That must have been the last big bite, there is no more of me left to eat and thank God," when he marries the stuffing out of the owl and hoots as the owl flies out under his arm, they elope into the darkness of Indiana, Indiana he screams is their new life and WELCOME. They live in a tree together now, and the children of Welcome to Indiana say who even more than usual, and the children of Welcome to Indiana they wonder where they belong. Not in Indiana, they say to themselves, the state of all-consuming love, we cannot belong in Indiana, as night falls and the moths appear one by one, hungry.

When the World Was Ten Years Old

He Fell in Love with Egypt

Just as he fell in love with the dinosaurs, just as he would fall in love with the moon—no women in the world yet, he was only ten years old. A ten-year-old is made of time, the world had forever to learn about Egypt. He entered encyclopedias and looted every fact of them and when he had finished looting

there he broke into the Bible. He snuck into his mother's room and drew thick lines around his eyes and those were the borders of Egypt. He carefully wrote in stiff small birds, he carefully wrote in coiled snakes, he carefully wrote in flatfooted humans. The ten-year-old world needed so much privacy, he learned to draw the door-bolt

glyph and learned to make the sound it made. I am an old white British man, decided the ten-year-old world, I wear a round lens on my right eye, the Night. When the sun shone on him it shone on Egypt, all the dark for a while

was the dark in the Pyramids, the left lung of his body was the shape of Africa

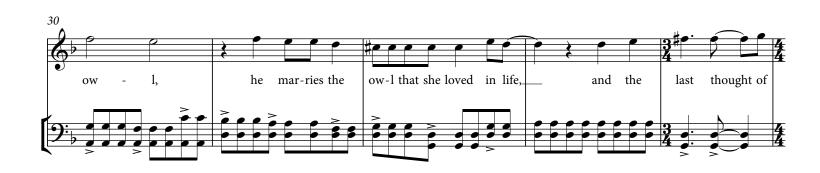
and one single square breath in it Egypt.

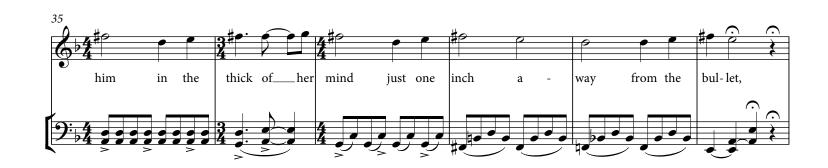
They never found all the tombs, he *knew*. Anyone might be buried in Egypt, thought the ten-year-old world in love with it, I will send my wind down into my valley, and my wind will uncover the doors to the tombs, and I will go down myself inside them, and shine light on all the faces, and light on the rooms full of gold, and light on even the littlest pets, on the mice and the beetles of the ten-year-old kings, and shine light on even their littlest names.

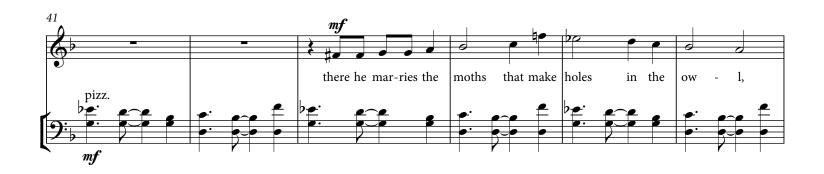
1. HE MARRIES THE STUFFED-OWL EXHIBIT











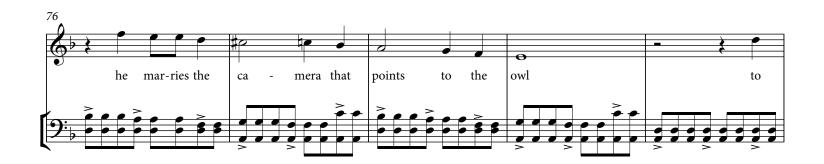


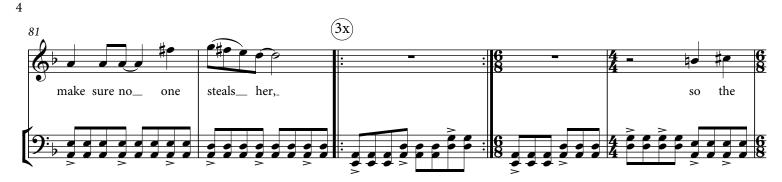


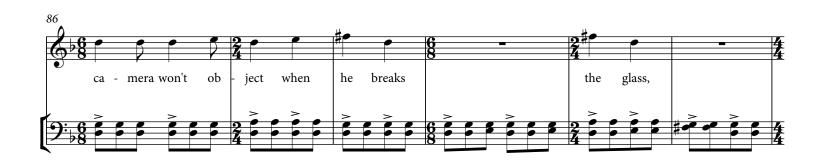






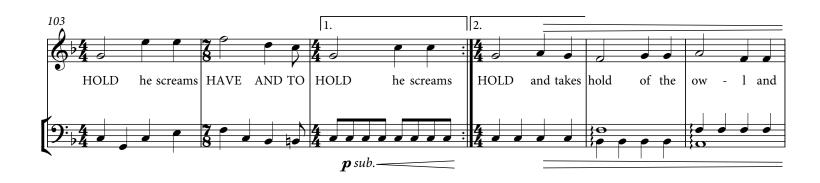


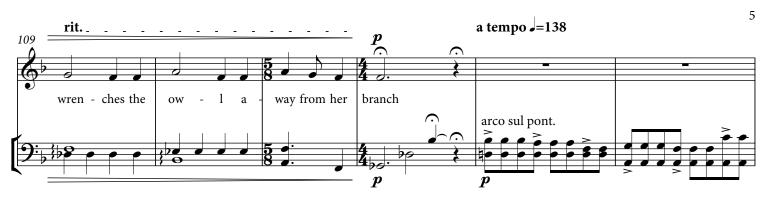




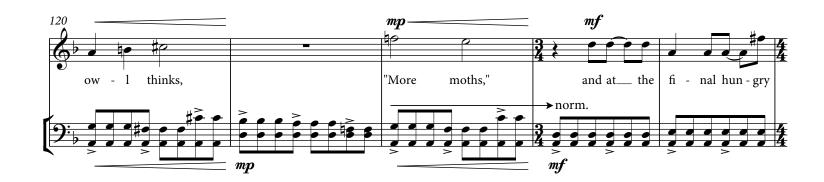










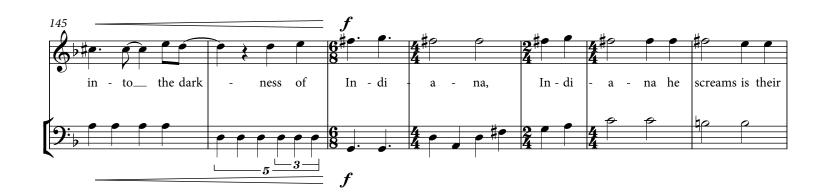




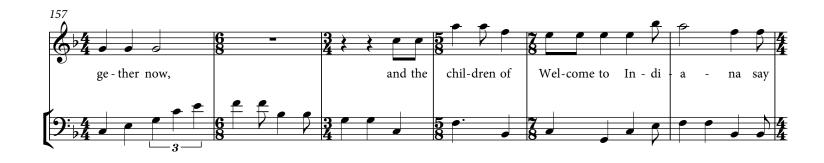






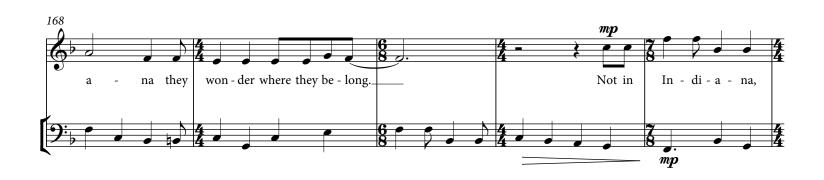




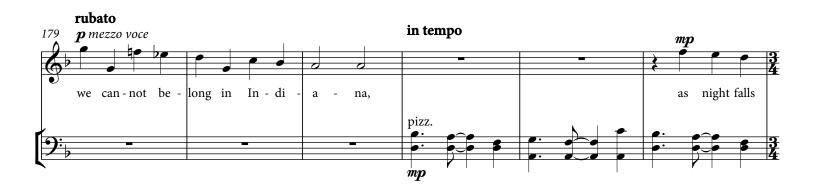














2. WHEN THE WORLD WAS TEN YEARS OLD

Patricia Lockwood Eric Shanfield







