

JULIA USHER

RITES OF TRANSITION

Preview File Only

S a t b

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rites of transition

S A T B

for the Hill Square Consort

Julia Usher

with funds made available by the Scottish Arts Council.

"Action is transitory - a step, a blow -
The motion of a muscle, this way or that -
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves, and feel betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity."

WORDSWORTH

"I suggest that one entertains the notion that "All is process." That is to say, 'There is no thing in the universe.' Things, objects, entities, are abstractions of what is relatively constant from a process of movement and transformation. They are like the shapes that children like to see in the clouds..."

from 'Further Remarks on Order'
DAVID BOHM (Physicist, University of London)

"...the myth and the musical work are like the conductors of an orchestra, whose audience becomes the silent performers."

LÉVI-STRAUSS, quoted in EDMUND LEACH: "Culture and Communication".

rites of transition

1 Separation - Ship Burial

Terror of transitions:

Shun the foreshadow,

Ending of the time that is known.

Intransience is error.

Nothing is, only becoming.

Shun the hull of shallowness

From which you emerge;

Ours of hallowing

Falls upon the man who owns

Nothing but the shipways under keels

Of past initiations.

A long draught!

Pass from the wails of keeners,

Washing the uneasy air;

Faces ashen,

Dreading the wonder of clean sails!

Red-gold the ship leans queasily

To the one taking leave of all relations

Headfirst; dark passageway

To the hold.

1 Heave and cant in the torqued channel:

Wave after wave contracted;

From a dead throb flicks a quickening beat.

The ship's prow cleaves broken waters, -

There is terror in birth

Dread of passing from 'not being' to 'is'.

All things go by - so let this.

2 Probe and penetrate the silver channel:
From a lagging pulse drums a leaping beat:
Wave after wave impacted.

The prow scatters seeds of whitening spume.

There is awe in transitions,

Of the power that brings 'not yet' to 'now'.

As things have gone by, so may this."

3 Wrapped, lapped, laid in darkness,

The throbbing pulse beaten low;

Wave ebbing wave.

Blood paling, whitening bone.

There is disorder in death,

In passing from 'being' to 'not now'.

All things pass, so may this.

Prepare for change:

The drowned ship becomes a golden sun;

Dampened timbers blazing dry flame;

Boding silence betokens to a shout,

And unknown cargo receives a new name.

Preview File Only

2 Marginal State

Gone, gone, gone beyond

In the margin

(Quick, cover the footprints, smooth the dust, leave no trace)

Waiting events

(Come, smother the hearth, put out the light, smoke will erase)

In reflection

Things reversed

(Don't look, cover the mirror, fog the glass, turn the face)

Day of Night

Long blackness over short white.

... In another age when men were newly made, the world was set apart and stable. All things were perfected, knowing neither youth nor decay. The sun rose and the sun set, but in a closed circle. Each dawn was of the same day, and each nightfall of the previous night....

Gone, gone beyond

The threshold

(Seize the pendulum, hold the spring, unwind the clocks.)

Passing timelessness

(Hang up the garland, scatter the ashes, bind the locks.)

In reservation

Things immersed.

(Don't speak, douse the candle, breathe on the window, draw the blind).

Melting fire

Burning frost over frozen pyre.

... But where all was good, no one could be good. Where there was no choice, neither was there evil. Only choice could make men good. The sun rose one day, like any other, but the people happened to notice a pile of bundles underneath a tree. They had always been there, but the people hadn't noticed. The sun's light hadn't rested on just that spot before. Like gathering fruit or herding meat, like breathing in or breathing out they harvested the bundles and began to open them....

Gone beyond

Metastasis

(Seal up the cracks, nail up the door)

Changing trains

The future spirit

(Muddy the water, sprinkle the floor)

... "Only one bundle they left behind under the tree. They left it behind because it was dirty..."

Contamination of holiness

(Don't touch, go your way, dare not ignore)

Whispered stream?

Of wakeful slumber in unsleeping dreams.)

... Eagerly they shared out and fought over the gaudy and worthless trinkets they found in the brighter bundles. They did not know - it was suddenly too late - the despoiled and ragged bundle contained eternal life....

In the margin,

Gone.

... In this way, death and time, entered the world.

3 Reunion

Look far, the distant shore approaches,
Crowded with people left long behind.
Stretch, stretch out, so your reach is long enough.
Have you not been kept apart?
This dying is new; this decaying was not chosen.
Keep wide the eyes, so that this light may not be lost.

Catch the awakening in these faces,
Recognising things unknown.
Stretch, stretch out; the chasm is closed.

Have you
Have you not been
Have you not been kept apart
Have you not been kept apart too long?
Have you not kept yourself apart
Too long?

Notes for Performers.

The syllables in brackets (ə) are written in the International Phonetic Alphabet as tabled in the Concise Oxford Dictionary.

The wood block is tuned to E, but any suitable instrument may be substituted as a pitch-giver. It may be handed from one player to another, ritualistically, if wished.

It would be possible to introduce certain theatrical elements if desired, and these are optionally suggested in the score. A conductor is not necessary, but one of the singers needs to indicate downbeats at arrow-points.

I would prefer the words not to be printed in the audience's programmes, especially in small halls.

ɪ = i as in 'bit'
ā = a as in 'fate'
ə = e as in 'taken'
a = a as in 'ago'
ē = e as in 'meet'
əʊ = o as in 'goat'
u = oo as in 'boot'

ʌ = u in 'dug'
ɔ = aw in 'paw'
aʊ = ow in 'now'

Symbols

∩ unmetred, free, unsynchronized bar.

accidentals - one note only (unless immediately repeated) in ∩ normal when a tempo.

∩ short pause
A medium pause
∩ long pause.

↓ solo entry

↓ synchronised entry

There is also a difference between a notated pause e.g. 5sec GP

and a Silence bar, in which there should be no movement and a sense of waiting for the "right" moment to go on.

The click on beat-t-t-t (p3) is produced in the following way:

The tip of the tongue is placed at the top of the inside upper teeth. It is sharply withdrawn under pressure while the mouth is rather closed. The breath is almost held, the lungs tight, so the sound is very hollow and percussive.

1 SEPARATION (Ship-Burial)

S
A
T
B

4 Attacca [$\text{♩} = 104$]
 Com-mence: [P]
 Com-mence: [P]
 Come [P]
 Com-mence: [P]

Slow, steady

Attacca [$\text{♩} = 104$]
 Be-gin, be-gin (n) [P]
 Be-gin (n) [P]
 Be, be-gin (n) [P]

[$\text{♩} = 88$]
 (I-I-I n-n I-I)

[$\text{♩} = 120$]

A
T
B

ad lib
 continue sim
 continue sim

S ||

Ter-ror of tra-(n)-s(i) tions. Shun (n)
 Shun, shun (n) shun
 tion (n) shun
 -tion Shun (n) shun

(I-I n-n-n I-I)
 (faster than Alto)

Con Moto [$\text{♩} = 100$]

mp
 Shun (n)
 (n) sha
 the fore sha dow

senza vibr.
 E(n) di(ng) of the Tra-a-m) that is Known (n)
 E (n) di(ng) T(a-a-m) Known (n)
 E (n) di(ng) T(a-a-m) Known (n)
 E (n) di(ng) T(a-a-m) Known (n)

loco
 E (n) di(ng) T(a-a-m) Known (n)

dim

(T i m e)

p1

normal **A** *Alto: intransience*

Solo, molto vib: con moto

mf No-thing is; O (au-n-au-n)
mf is; O (au-n-au-n)
mf No-thing is; On-ly

(au-u-au-u) etc (I-n)-tra(n)-(s)-(e)-(e)-(n)-(s) is er-ror; (n) (s) (s) (n) is;

(au-u-au-u) etc (au-u) (eee n-n) (s) (n) is;

(au-u-au-u) etc (au-u) (eee n-n) (s) (n) is;

(♩ = 76) etc

(4) *rit...? (♩ = 84)*

mp ly be-co-ming. hull of hal-lo-wing; nus falls
mp ly. the hull of shal-low-ness nus of hal-lo-wing
mp Be co(mmm)ming. Shun of shal-low-ness from which you e-merge; nus
mp Co (mmm)ming. Shun, Shun, mf from which you e-merge;

mp Quiet, but well-marked $\frac{3}{4}$

4 *rit... Sonore Uneasy, swelling Reposing*

u-pon the man
 man
 who owns No-thing but the slip-ways un-der keels of past (I-n)-nl-shē-ā-tions
 No-thing, slip-ways-un-der keels (I-n-I)

mp *mf* *mp* *mp*

Tenor: "initiations"

B *Very chill, numb Molto legato*

f Wood Block

A-long draught! Pass from the wails of kee-ners, Wa-shing the un-ea-sy air; Solo recit
 A-long draught! Wa-e-ā-e-āls) of kee-ners Wa-shing un-ea-sy air; fa-ces a-shen;
 A-long draught! Wa-e) Wails-of kee-ners Wa-shing un-ea-sy air;
 A-long draught! Pass from the wails of kee-ners, Wa-shing un-ea-sy air;

f *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp*

cresc *approx sync only* *c. e. sc* $\text{♩} = 69$ *slacken*

(n) *iah* *Red-gold the ship leans* *(rich)* *leave*

(n) *ah* *(a - ah - au - ah)* *leans* *quea-si-ly: (n)* *One leave* *(diff)*

(or falsetto) *Dreading the won-der of clean sails!* *(a - e - au a - e - au)* *leans* *to the one ta-king leave of all re-la-tions*

Red-gold ship leans, the one leave

Quickening, but unexcitable.

(breathy) *pas-sage-way to the hold.*

Head-first, dark.

Wood Block

f

C *Solo* *Heave and cant in the torqu'd chan-nel* *mf* *molto*

[♩ = 80] loud whisper

diminuendo

Tor-que tor-que tor-que tor-que etc.

diminuendo

Tor-que tor-que tor-que tor-que

Wave af-ter wave con-trac-ted.

flicks a quick'n'ing beat -

from a dead throbb-

There is ter-ror in birth

flicks a quick'n'ing beat

The ship's prow cleaves bro-ken wa-ters

The ship's prow cleaves bro-ken

Sop + Bass Sync. dramatic cresc

wa-ters

cresc

non sync *5 sec*

Dread of pas-sing from not be-ing to 'is'; (ss)

Dread of not be-ing, is - (ss)

Dread of pas-sing

Dread of pas-sing from not be-ing to 'is'; (ss)

Heavy Whisper ♩ = 176

All things go by, so let this

All things go by, so let this

All things go by, so let this

All things go by, so let this

All things go by, so let this

mf *mp*

D *con moto* *argent* *prof* *the sil-ver chan-nel (l)*

probe and pen-e-trate

From a lag-ging

[♩ = 104] accel

mp

Drum (um um um um)

accel... pulse drums a leaping beat (t t t t t) reserved but strong

From a lagging pulse a-leaping beat (t t t t) wave after wave im-posed

agitato cresc A dim 5 sec GP

The prow scat-ters seeds of white-ning spume;

There is awe in tran-si-tions

The prow scat-ters seeds of whit'ning spume.

Non Sync Half-voiced, hushed. 3 sec GP

Dread of pow'r that brings not yet 'to 'is';

Dread of pow'r that not yet 'is';

Dread pow'r that not yet 'is';

Dread of po-wer that is;

E

Whisper

Bea-ten, bea-ten

As things have gone by so may this.

As things have gone by, so may this.

As things have gone by, so may this.

(Accel) (rit)

Wrapped (t) lapped laid in darkness

Wrapped lapped, laid in darkness

$\text{♩} = 60$ $\text{♩} = 52$ rit

The throbbing pulse bea-ten low, Blood pa-ling, bone

The throbbing pulse bea-ten low, whiten-ing bone

Blood pa-ling, whiten-ing bone

Wave eb-bing wave

2 sec GP collapate non sync strong cresc dim

There is dis-or-der in death.

There is dis-or-der in death.

There is dis-or-der in death.

There is dis-or-der'd death:

2 sec GP dim

mp In pas-sing from be-ing to 'not now.'

mp In pas-sing now (u-au-u-au-u)

mp In pas-sing now

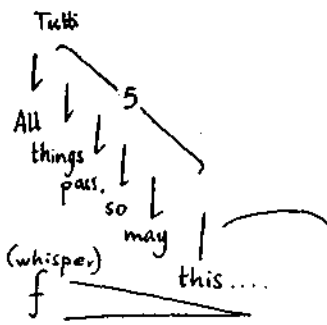
mp In pas-sing from be-ing now

Silence (length to be)

Silence intuitive, not

Silence planned)

Silence



Attacca

Wd Block

(au-u-au-u)-au

Pre-pare for change;

Pre-pare for change;

(au mf au)

F $\text{♩} = 69$

Attacca

Faster, Sync

molto

Bo — ding

Bel-lows to a shout

blazing dry flame

Bel-lows to shout

f The dromid ship be-comes a golden sun

Dam-pened blazing dry flame;

lence Bel-lows, shout s

The dromid ship

Dam pen'd tim bers flame;

Shouts

C² E could be 8ve lower if pos, omitting Tenor doubling

poco cresc...

dim

And un-known car-go re-ceive a new name. (m)

Un-known car-go re-ceive a new name. (m)

And un-known car-go re-ceive a new name. (m)

And un-known car-go re-ceive a new name. (m)

* at these rapid whispered passages throughout the second movement, singers may turn to one another as if passing a charm or incantation.

2 Marginal State

G Free

Free

Gone Beyond

Gone

Gone

Wood block

Gone

Gone

Gone

Gone

In the margin

In the margin

In the margin

6

* Poco Presto, loud whisper, almost half-voiced.

marc. Quick, cover the foot prints, smooth the dust, → 6

8: leave no trace.
9: (loud whisper)
Come, smother the hearth, damp the light

mf
smoke will e-rase
smoke will e-rase
smoke will e-rase
mf (quasi rit)

re-flec-tion re-versed
re-flec-tion Things
re-flec-tion Things
In (n) re-flec-tion

accel. rit. A
wai-ting e-vents.
wai-ting e-vents.

louder, tense
more tense

re-versed (draw one note)

Even Factor.
half-voiced
Don't look
re-versed.

6: cover the mir-ror
cover the mir-ror
turn the face
turn the face
turn the face

rit. approx. sync.
mf short white.
P (hum, steady)
Day of Night:
Day, Night:
over short white.
SPOKEN: "In another age, when men were newly made,
P
black-ness mp < mf mp (hum)

(hum)
SPOKEN mp "All things were perfected, ' knowing neither youth nor decay.
the world was set a part and stable.
(hum)
sun (n)
sun (n)
sun (n)
The sun rose and the sun set...
The sun rose and the sun set...
The sun rose and the sun set...
(draw body up... slacken)

In the SPOKEN passages, great restraint must be used. Pitch the voice low, and monotonously. I have tried to indicate where slight variations in pitch (hardly more than semitones) and pausing occur by word-spacing. The effect must be flat, unemotional, but also ominous.

As before.

But in a closed circle. Each dawn was of the same day - night and each nightfall... of the previous night

mf down (n)

dim

mf down (2)

mf down (2)

The three-shold. (Seize the pendulum, hold the Spring, un-wind the clocks)

mf The three-shold

mf The three-shold

mf The three-shold

The three-shold

pin pesante (half-voiced)

rit

Solo

relaxed

sing Time

Pas

Pas-sing

Time

Time

(H)ang Scatter the as-hes Bind the locks (tk) re-ser-va-tion (Don't)

(hang up the garland Scatter the a-shes Bind the locks (tk))

less-ness

Scat ter the a-shes Bind the locks (tk)

re-ser-va-tion

re-ser-va-tion

things im-merged

Bind the locks (tk)

Presto, fierce

Don't speak, douse the can-die, breathe on the win-dow, draw the blind. (slower) wood block mel-ting fire

Don't speak, douse the can die, breathe on the win-dow

douse the can die, breathe on the win-dow

douse the can die, breathe on the win-dow

(almost inaudible)

ppp

point

point

mel-ting fire

* If actions are used, they should reach a climax during these whispers.

K

mel ting fire
 bur ning
 fro zen pyre
 Bur ning frost
 pyre
 "But where all was good, no one could be good."
 "Where there was no choice..."

(gentle bending)

choose when to stop

Only choice could make men good.
 Neither was their evil.

Wood Block
 sun (A)
 "The sun rose"
 "The sun rose"
 "The sun rose"
 (slightly faster, and slightly more inflected.)
 one day, like any other, but the people happened to notice a

rose
 pile of bundles underneath a tree.

They had always been there,
 They had always been there, but the people hadn't noticed.

(slightly slower)
 "The sun's light hadn't rested on just that spot before."

light
 light

P8

like breathing in... or breathing out...
 like gathering fruit, or herding meat,
 like breathing in... or breathing out...
 like breathing in... or breathing out...
 like breathing in... or breathing out...
 like breathing in... or breathing out...
 "They harvested the bundles and began to open them."
 Wood block
 Gone
 be-yond
 mel-ta-sta-sis
 [The singers become more and more expectant, tense]

(Oubtmbst) *Con Moto*

* These chromatic 'articulated waverings' can be improvised if difficult. The long notes must be correct however.

Chang-ing trains the fu ture spi-rit. (I) (I)

Chang-ing trains- Chang-ing trains the fu ture... (I) (I)

rapid, half-voiced. (Seal up the cracks, nail the door)

with Att. Chang-ing trains-

(Muddy the water...) (Muddy the water...)

[whisper] (sprinkle the floor...) [whisper] (Sprinkle the floor...)

M (loud, monotonous)

"Only one bundle they left behind under the tree." *f*

"Only one bundle they left behind under the tree." *f*

"Only one bundle they left behind under the tree." *f*

quiet, but repellent. (ah) *p*

repeunt *mp*

of ho-li-ness [Presto]

Don't touch!

Don't touch!

Don't touch!

of ho-li-ness

(slower, quieter, but same speed)

"They left it behind because it was dirty."

mp con-ta-mi-na-tion

mp con-ta-mi-na-tion

mp con-ta-mi-na-tion

whisper'd streams, whisper'd

whisper'd streams of

whisper'd whisper'd streams of

whisper'd streams

whisper'd streams.

Go your way, dare not ignore

wa (ā) ke ful

wa (ā) ke ful

wake-ful slum-bers

wa (ā) ke (un)sleeping dreams

in un-sleeping dreams.)

* If the absolute pitch of this bar has been lost, sing relative to the Tenor notes.

(Intense, fast, loud)

"Eagerly they shared out and fought over the gaudy and worthless trinkets they found in the brighter bundles."

"Have you, have you not seen, have you not been seen, have you not"

"No, do you, do you know, do you know what, do you know what is, what is there"

"Can you, let me see, let me have, can you let me see, can you let me have"

LOUD CHATTERING BABBLE to each other

Subdued but not slow.

They did not know
 They did not know
 They did not know it was suddenly too late.

mp
mf

Wood Bl.
 P

less. ten A 222
 The des pis'd and rag-ged bun-dle
 con-tain'd E-ter-nal life

very understated

Silence

mp b² Gone (n)

mp b² Gone (n)

In the mar-gin (n)

(monotonous)
 In this way, death, and time,

mp

b⁰
 b⁰
 and time, entered the world."

Wood Block
 mf [♩ = 40] exact.

→ start next page (not too long)

Preview File Only

3 REUNION

Con Moto, Soprano Solo. *Subito p*

Look far, the dis-tant shore ap-proa-ches; crow-ded with peo-ple left long be-hind. Stretch, stretch out, so your reach is long e-nough; stretch ————— out

Look far, the dis-tant shore ap-proa-ches; crow-ded with peo-ple left long be-hind. stretch ————— out Have you not - been kept a-part? stretch ————— out been kept a-part?

Look far, the dis-tant shore ap-proa-ches; crow-ded with peo-ple left long be-hind. stretch ————— out

non sync *Quicker* *slower* *Con Moto*

This dy-ing is new; This de-cay-ing was not... Keep wide the eyes, light may be lost

This dy-ing is new; De-cay was not cho-sen Keep wide the eyes, light may be lost

This dy-ing is new; De-cay, not cho-sen, keep wide the eyes, so that this light may not be lost; (swell)

This dy-ing is new; De-cay not... Keep wide the eyes; light be lost

(scrit) Solo A Re-cog ni-sing

Catch the wak'ning in these fa-ces, thing in-known.

Wake ————— ning

0 *Presto Energico*

The chasm is closed. Have you, have you not been, have you not been kept a-part, have you not been kept a part too long? Have you not kept your self a-part

Have you, have you not been, have you not been kept a-part, have you not been kept a part long? have you not kept your-self a-part

stretch, stretch out, the chasm is closed. have you been kept, kept a part too long? have you not kept your self - a-part

known (w) a-part too long? have you not kept your self a-part

A handwritten musical score for four voices, likely soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The lyrics are "proof too long?". The score is written on four staves, each with a clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are written below each staff. An arrow labeled "out of" points upwards from the end of the score.

Julia Usher

September-October 1978

Streatham.