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Misery Island

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Thesis

MISERY ISLAND

by

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B.S., Northeastern University, 2009

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Music

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MISERY ISLAND

SAMUEL ROBERTS BEEBE

ABSTRACT

Misery Island is a monologue for high soprano and string quartet. The libretto, written by Nerissa Cooney, includes original verse as well as fragments from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Collaboration during the production of the libretto offered an opportunity to plan the emphasis and phrasing of the text; in particular, via our voices, we could each express our own "reading" of the text to each other. This process often revealed dynamics and stresses embedded in the text. Being able to volley ideas and rewrite the text established many themes that would be explored as music later on.

I refer to the five movements in the piece as a monologue because it is intended as a single dramatic statement. The libretto offered a bounty of opportunities to compose music with the intention of adding a particular perspective to a given text. I specifically tried to keep the performance in mind while composing, attempting to support the vocalist dramatically with the quartet material; in general, I tried to make a piece in which the text and the music are mutually supportive. In a sense, a major goal of mine was to let the text drive the music to places it would otherwise not have gone. The challenge of experimenting with new ideas in composition while striving to best represent a desired dramatic effect or scenario has proved itself to be a fruitful way of finding fresh material with purpose and character.

Misery Island was premiered at the Boston University Concert Hall on April 8, 2013, with Katrina Galka singing, Nelli Jabotinsky and Hyunji Kim on violin, Evan Perry on viola, Robert Mayes on violoncello, and the composer conducting.

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1. You went to the woods

You went to the woods

Because you wished to live deliberately,

To front only the essential facts of life,

To see if you could not learn what it had to teach...¹

2. In the year Sixteen-Twenty

In the year Sixteen-Twenty,

Shipbuilder Robert Moulton sailed out to the island to cut timber

And was stranded for three days

During a ferocious winter storm.

It is from this that the island takes its name.

Five miles from land,

Eighty-three acres,

And groves of aspen,

Open meadows,

And rugged rocky shores.

There are two miles of overgrown trails

That lead to stony beaches

And wind by the ruins of a summer hotel,

Lost in the fire

That took the lives of lavish sunbathers.

¹ *Italics* indicate excerpts from *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau. All remaining text composed by Nerissa Cooney.

3. Walk from one empty shore to the other

Walk from one empty shore to the other

Just to see that it's there.

Take a stone, skip it,

Watch it sink.

Take another stone,

Put it in your pocket for keeps.

Lay down and fall asleep.

Wake up filled with heat,

Run back and forth in receding waves.

The day is long –

Like it could go on forever.

But morning passed into the stillness of mid-day sun.

Live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.

Rout all that is not life,

And make something new.

4. Once it was full of busy pleasures

Once it was full of busy pleasures,

Afternoons that went on forever.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the full of summer's swing.

Laughter, excess, and revelry,

Salty spray on sun kissed skin,

They basked in day dreams,

Spinning like threads of fate –

Cut down by the swift hand of Atropos in a fiery blaze.

Look at it now,

A few remaining stones

That could never have known

That they would be all that is left.

5. Sit till the sun slips below

Sit till the sun slips below

And makes you shudder.

A moonless night leaves cold hands and loneliness.

Go as far as you can.

See how much more there is?

What else could there be?

What will be left?

And when years have gone by,

Will it make any difference

That this is how the story went?

You went to the woods to live deliberately,

And not, when you come to die,

Discover that you had not lived.

NERISSA COONEY

1. You went to the woods

SAMUEL BEEBE

Largo (♩ = 50)
p

Soprano
You _____ went to the woods _____ You went _____

Violin 1
pp *mp* *pp*

Violin 2
pp *mp* *pp*

Viola
pp *mp* *p* *pp*

Violincello
pp *mp* *pp*

5
S
_____ to the woods _____ went to the woods _____

Vln. 1
mp

Vln. 2
mp

Vla.
mp

Vlc.
mp

9
S
_____ Be - cause you wished _____ to live _____ to live _____

Vln. 1
pp dolce *p* *mp* *pp*

Vln. 2
pp dolce *p* *mp* *pp*

Vla.
pp dolce *p* *mp* *pp*

Vlc.
pp dolce *p* *mp* *pp*

13 *pp* *< f* *> mp*

S
to live *3* de - lib - 'rate - ly, *3* To front on - ly the ess - en - tial,

Vln. 1
mf *3* *p*

Vln. 2
mf *p*

Vla.
mf *p*

Vlc.
mf *3* *p*

17 *mf* *f*

S
The ess - en - tial facts *3* of life, *3*

Vln. 1
poco f *f* *3*

Vln. 2
poco f *f* *3*

Vla.
poco f *f* *3*

Vlc.
poco f *f* *3*

21 *f* *molto rit.* *mp*

S
To see *3* if you could not learn what it had to teach.

Vln. 1
mp *f* *p*

Vln. 2
mp *f* *p*

Vla.
mp *f* *p*

Vlc.
mp *f* *p*

2. In the year Sixteen-Twenty

25 **2** Andante (♩ = 92) *mp*

S
In the

Vln. 1
pizz. *p* *mp* *pp*

Vln. 2
pp *mp* *pp*

Vla.
pp *mp* *pp*

Vlc.
pizz. *p* *mp* *pp*

29
year Six - teen Twen - ty,

Vln. 1
arco *p* *mf*

Vln. 2
mp *mf*

Vla.
p *mf*

Vlc.
arco *p* *mf* pizz. *p*

33 *mp*
Ship - build - er Rob - ert Moul - ton sailed out to the is - land to cut tim - ber,

Vln. 1
p *pp* pizz. *mp* arco *mp* *pp* pizz. arco *mp*

Vln. 2
pp

Vla.
pp

Vlc.
mp arco *mp* *pp* pizz. *mp*

37 *mf* *f*

S And was strand-ed for three days dur-ing a fer-o - -

Vln. 1 *mp* *p* *mf*

Vln. 2 *mp* *p* *mf*

Vla. *p* *mf*

Vlc. arco *mp* *p* *p* *mf*

41 *mp*

S - - cious win - ter storm.

Vln. 1 *p* *mf*

Vln. 2 *p* *mp* *mf*

Vla. *mp* *mf*

Vlc. *p* *mp* *mf*

45 *mp*

S It is from this that the is - land takes its name.

Vln. 1 *p* *pp*

Vln. 2 *p* *pp*

Vla. *p* *pp* pizz.

Vlc. *p* *pp* pizz.

49 *poco rit.* 4 *a tempo* **mp**

S
Five mi-les from land, Eight-ty three a - cres and groves of

Vln. 1 *poco rit.* 4 *a tempo* **p**

Vln. 2 *pizz.* **p**

Vla. *arco* **p**

Vlc. **p**

53

S
as - pen, O - pen mea - dows, — And rug - ged rock - y shores. There are

Vln. 1

Vln. 2 *arco* **p**

Vla. *arco* **p**

Vlc. *arco* **p**

57 **mf** *molto rit.* **mp**

S
two miles — of o - ver-grown trails that lead — to sto - ny bea - ches, And wind by the ru - ins of a sum - mer ho - tel, —

Vln. 1 **mp** *molto rit.* **pp**

Vln. 2 **mp** *molto rit.* **pp**

Vla. **mp** *molto rit.* **pp**

Vlc. **mp** **pp**

5 Adagio (♩ = 56)

S *p*
Lost, Lost in the fi - re

Vln. 1 *sul pont. pp*
p *pp*

Vln. 2 *sul pont. pp*
p *pp*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *mp* *p* *mp*

65 *espress. mp* *rit.*

S That took the lives of lav - ish sun - bath - ers.

Vln. 1 *ord. p* *pp* *p*

Vln. 2 *ord. p* *pp*

Vla. *p* *pp*

Vlc. *p* *pp*

68 *Slower* (♩ = 48)

S

Vln. 1 *Slower* (♩ = 48) *f* *p*

Vln. 2 *p* *f* *p*

Vla. *p* *f* *p*

Vlc. *p* *f* *p*

3. Walk from one empty shore to the other

71 **6** Smoothly, fluidly (♩ = 120)

S *p*
Walk from one empty

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *p*

75 *mf*
shore to the oth - er

Vln. 1 *mf* *mp*

Vln. 2 *mf* *mp*

Vla. *mf* *mp*

Vlc. *mf* *mp*

79 *mp* *p*
Just to see that it's there.

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *p*

7 A little slower (♩ = 104)

83 *mf* Take a stone, *mp* Skip it

Vln. 1 *pp* *mp*

Vln. 2 *pp* *mp*

Vla. *pp* *mp*

Vlc. *pp* *mp*

87 *rit.* Watch it sink, *mp* Take a -

Vln. 1 *p* *mp* *p* *mf* *p* *N*

Vln. 2 *mf* *p* *N*

Vla. *mf* *pp*

Vlc. *mf*

91 *tempo primo* (♩ = 120) noth - er stone, Put it in your pock - et for

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *p*

rit. poco a poco

95 *mf*

S keeps. _____ Lay _____

Vln. 1 *mf* *p*

Vln. 2 *mf* *p*

Vla. *mf* *p*

Vlc. *mf* *p*

8 Adagio (♩ = 76)

99 *mf* *p*

S down _____ and fall a - sleep, _____

Vln. 1 *mf* *mp*

Vln. 2 *mf* *mp*

Vla. *mf* *mp*

Vlc. *mf* *mp*

103

S Wake up filled _____ with

Vln. 1 *pp* *ppp*

Vln. 2 *pp* *ppp*

Vla. *pp* *ppp*

Vlc. *pp*

107 *mp*

S
heat.

Vln. 1
p *mf* *pp* *p*

Vln. 2
p *mf* *pp*

Vla.
p *mf* *pp*

Vlc.
p *mf* *pp*

111

S
p dryly
Run

Vln. 1
mp *p* *pp*

Vln. 2
mp *p*

Vla.
mp *p*

Vlc.
p *pp*

115

S
back and forth in re - ce - ding waves.

Vln. 1
p 3

Vln. 2
pp 3

Vla.
pp

Vlc.
ppp

119

S
The day is long

Vln. 1
ppp

Vln. 2
ppp

Vla.
ppp

Vlc.
pp *p* *ppp*

123

S
Like it could go on for - ev - er.

Vln. 1
pp dolce *mp* *p*

Vln. 2
pp dolce *mp* *p*

Vla.
pp dolce *mp* *p*

Vlc.
pp dolce *mp* *p*

127

S
But morn - ing passed

Vln. 1
pp *mp* *ppp* *espressivo*

Vln. 2
pp *mp* *ppp*

Vla.
pp *mp* *ppp*

Vlc.

p boy's choir-esque *mf* espressivo

131

S in - to the still - ness of the mid - - - day sun _____

Vln. 1 *mp*

Vln. 2 *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vlc.

135

S mid _____ day sun _____ the sun. _____

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p* *pp*

Vla. *p* *pp*

Vlc.

mf

139

S the sun. _____ 3

Vln. 1 *mp*

Vln. 2 *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vlc. *mp* *p*

143 *p* [11]

S Live deep and suck out all the ma - - - row of life, _____

Vln. 1 *p* *pp* *p*

Vln. 2 *p* *pp* *p*

Vla. *p* *pp* *p*

Vlc. *pp* *p*

147 *mf* *poco accel.* *f* *p dolce*

S - Rout all that is not life, And

Vln. 1 *mp* *f*

Vln. 2 *mp* *f*

Vla. *mp* *f*

Vlc. *f*

[12] Adagio (♩ = 66) *ppp*

S make some - thing new. _____

Vln. 1 *pp*

Vln. 2 *pp* *ord.*

Vla. *col legno* *pp*

Vlc. *pizz.* *pp*

4. Once it was full of busy pleasures

155

S *p*
Once it was

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p*

Vla. *ord.* *p*

Vlc. *arco* *pp*

159

S *mp* *espressivo* *mf*
full of busy pleasures. — Af-ter-noon that went on — for-

Vln. 1 *mp*

Vln. 2 *mp*

Vla. *pizz.* *arco* *p* *mp*

Vlc. *pizz.* *p*

163

S *mp* *mf*
e - ver. — La - dies and gen - tle - men

Vln. 1 *p* *mp*

Vln. 2 *p* *mp*

Vla. *p* *pizz.*

Vlc. *arco* *p* *pizz.*

13

167 *mp* *p* *cresc.*

S in the full of sum-mer's swing, Laugh-ter,

Vln. 1 *p* *pp* *normal* *mp*

Vln. 2 *p* *pp* *normal* *mp*

Vla. *mp* *subito p* *pp*

Vlc. *mp* *subito p* *pp*

sul tasto

171 *mp* *espress. mf* *p* [14] *Poco animato* (♩ = 84) *mp*

S ex-cess, and re-vel-ry. Sal-ty spray on sun-

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p*

Vla. *arco* *p*

Vlc. *arco* *mp* *p*

[14] *Poco animato* (♩ = 84)

175 *mf*

S kissed skin. They basked in day-dreams,

Vln. 1 *mf*

Vln. 2 *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vlc. *mf*

179 *f*

S Spin - ning like threads of fate cut down,

Vln. 1 *f*

Vln. 2 *f*

Vla. *f*

Vlc. *f*

183 *espress.*

S Cut down by the swift hand of A - tro - pos in a fie - ry

Vln. 1 *p* *mf*

Vln. 2 *p* *mf*

Vla. *p* *mf*

Vlc. *p* *mf*

15 A little slower, broadly (♩ = 76)

187 *ff*

S blaze!

Vln. 1 *f con forza*

Vln. 2 *f con forza*

Vla. *f con forza*

Vlc. *f con forza*

191

S

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

mf

p

16

195

S

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

rit. ----- *A little slower* (♩ = 54)

p haunting

Look at it now,

sul tasto

pp

ppp

pp

ppp

pp

ppp

199

S

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

A few re - main - ing stones that could ne - ver have known

203

S
That they would be all that's left.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

5. Sit till the sun slips below

207 [17] Adagio (♩ = 76)

S

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

211

S
Sit til the sun slips be -

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

215 *mp*

S low and makes you shud - der. A moon - less

Vln. 1 *p mp pp*

Vln. 2 *p mp pp*

Vla. *mp pp*

Vlc. *mp pp*

219

S night leaves cold hands and hon - est lone - li - ness.

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *p pp*

223 *rit.* *mf*

S Go as far

Vln. 1 *pp mp p*

Vln. 2 *pp mp p*

Vla. *pp mf p*

Vlc. *mp pizz.*

18 Slower (♩ = 60)

227 *p* *mp espressivo*

S
as you can. See

Vln. 1

Vln. 2 *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*

Vla. *mp* *p* arco

Vlc. *mp* *p*

231 *mf* *mp*

S
how much more there is? What else could there

Vln. 1

Vln. 2 *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vlc. *mp* pizz.

235 [19] *espress.* *f*

S
be? What will be left?

Vln. 1 [19] *p*

Vln. 2 *p* *pp*

Vla. *p* *pp*

Vlc. *mp* *f*

molto espress.
mf *ff*

239 S What _____ will be left? _____

Vln. 1 *mf* *f* *pp* *mp*

Vln. 2 *mf* *f* *pp* *mp*

Vla. *mf* *p* *mp* *pp*

Vlc. *mp* *f* *mp* *pp*

molto rit. ----- *a tempo*
mp

243 S And when years _____ have _____ gone by _____ Will it

Vln. 1 *ppp*

Vln. 2 *ppp*

Vla. *ppp* *p*

Vlc. *ppp* *p*

p dolce

247 S make _____ a - - - ny diff - 'rence _____ That this is

Vln. 1 *p* *mp* *p*

Vln. 2 *pp* *p* *mp* *p*

Vla. *mp* *p*

Vlc. *arco* *mp* *p*

251 *p* *pp*

S how the sto - ry went.

Vln. 1 *p* *pp*

Vln. 2 *p* *pp*

Vla. *p* *pp*

Vlc. *p* *pp*

20 Freely (♩ = 52) *p* *mf* *p*

254 S You went to the woods went to the woods Be -

20 Freely (♩ = 52)

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

260 S cause you wished to live you wished to live to

Vln. 1 *pp*

Vln. 2 *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vlc.

265 *mf* *p*

S live de - lib - 'rate - ly, And not, when you

Vln. 1 *mf* *p* *ppp*

Vln. 2 *mf* *p* *ppp* *pp*

Vla. *mf* *p* *ppp* *pp*

Vlc. pizz. *pp* *mp* *pp* *pp*

269 *molto rit.*

S come to die, dis - co - ver that you had not

Vln. 1 *p* *pp* *molto rit.*

Vln. 2 *p* *pp*

Vla. *p* *pp* *p espress.* *pp*

Vlc. arco *p* *pp*

[21] **Largo** (♩ = 44)

273 *mp*

S lived.

[21] **Largo** (♩ = 44)

Vln. 1 *pp dolce* *ppp*

Vln. 2 *pp dolce* *ppp*

Vla. *pp dolce* *ppp*

Vlc. pizz. *pp dolce* *ppp*

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]