

The Hour Glass
Chamber Opera in One Act
by Martin Halpern
Based on images from the W.B. Yeats play
Time: the early 20th Century

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composer, 2009)

(Lights come up on the Professor's study. A desk and padded desk chair down left. A door frame up right. The Professor, in his mid-seventies, sits at the desk writing in a leather-bound notebook.)

Andante ♩ = 72

Piano

mp *mf*

(He lays down his pen, rises, picks up the notebook, crosses around the desk, and stands reading what he has written aloud, as though lecturing to a fairly large audience.)

6

Professor

Meno mosso ♩ = 48

mf

For just as a map of the earth

Pno.

10

Professor

con - tains two hem - is - pheres,

Pno.

12

Professor

the one we in-hab-it and the one we do not,

Pno.

14

Professor

and when it is win-ter in one

Pno.

$\bullet = 40$

16

Professor

it is sum-mer in the oth-er, when it is fall in one

Pno.

18

Professor

it is spring in the oth - er,

Pno.

(He walks about, looking around at his imagined audience as though to see that this is sinking in, then resumes reading.)

19

Pno.

mp

21

Professor

so a map of the hu-man soul con-tains two hem-is-pheres,

Pno.

mf

23

Professor

the one it in-hab - its here,

Pno.

25

Professor

du - ring the dream which is *this* life,

Pno.

27

Professor

poco meno ♩ = 36

and the one it will en - ter la - ter when it a - wakes from that dream.

Pno.

mp

29

Professor

(He looks around at his audience again, then resumes reading again.)

And what we call faith

Pno.

33

Professor

is but the soul's way of en - vis - ion - ing, from *this* hem - is - phere,

Pno.

mf

35

Professor

that oth - er, in - vis - ib - le one it hopes will hold its sal - va - tion.

Pno.

f

(A Woman, of indeterminate age, enters right through the door frame and stands smiling at him.. Behind her back, she holds a large hour glass.)

37

Woman

Where win - ter turns to sum - mer

Pno.

mp

(He turns to her.)

Woman

39 and fall to spring. A clever sim-i-le, Pro-fes-sor,

Pno.

Woman

41 and rath-er pret-ty in its way.

Professor

Who are you?

Pno.

mf

Woman

43 But does it real-ly make sense? Ge-og-raph-y is one thing,

Pno.

45
Woman
the - ol - o - gy an - oth - er.

Pno.

46
Woman
That there's a north - ern and a south - ern hem - is - sphere ev' - ry - one knows.

Pno.

48
Woman
That these cor - res - pond, _____ in some fanc - i - ful way,

Pno.

50

Woman

to life here and life here - af - ter is rath - er du - bi - ous, -

Pno.

53

Woman

would - n't you say? (*Slamming shut his notebook*)

Professor

Who are you? What are you?

Pno.

ff

Piu mosso ♩ = 48

55

Woman

Call me the spi - rit of doubt.

Pno.

mp *mf*

Meno mosso ♩ = 40 rit. ----- A tempo

57 *(He turns from her.)*

Woman

Or, if you'd pre-fer, the quest-ion-er with-in you.

Pno.

59

Woman

If all life is a dream,

Professor

I must be dream-ing this.

Pno.

mp

61

Woman

then of course you're dream-ing this, a-long with ev'-ry-thing else.

Pno.

63

Woman

Pos - sib - ly.

Professor

So it's a dream with - in that dream. —

Pno.

65

Woman

But then a - gain, all life may *not* be a dream.

Pno.

67

Woman

And this may not be one ei - ther.

Professor

(Turning back to her) *f*

All right! What is it you want?

Pno.

mf *f* *mp*

Piu mosso ♩ = 44

69 rit. ----- ♩ = 40

Woman
To keep you hon - est

Pno.

71
Woman
by mak - ing you face up.

Professor
Face up to what?

Pno.
mf

(Bringing the hour glass out from behind her back)

73
Woman
Do you see this ho - ur glass? The sands are drop - ping,

Pno.

(She crosses to the desk and lays the hour glass on it.)

75

Woman

grain by grain, to the bot-tom.

Pno.

77

Woman

When the last grain drops, your life in this world

Pno.

79

Woman

will come to an end.

Professor

As does ev - 'ry-one's, soon - er or la - ter.

Pno.

f

(He crosses to the hour glass
and stands fingering it.)

81

Professor

Since I nev - er ex - pect - ed to live this long,

Pno.

mp *mf*

83

Professor

should that pros - pect fright - en me,

Pno.

84

Woman

The ver - y ques - tion you pose

Professor

or com - fort me?

Pno.

(Gesturing at the notebook in his hand)

86

Woman

in lec - ture af - ter lec - ture to your stu - dents El - e-gant lec - tures,

Pno.

mp

88

Woman

wide - ly dis - trib - u - ted and wide - ly ad - mi - red.

Pno.

mf

90

Woman

But are they just words? Or do you real - ly be - lieve them?

Pno.

f

92

Woman

Or is that too just a word?

Professor

Be - lieve?

Pno.

mf

94

Woman

Like "soul," "faith," "sal - va - tion."

Professor

mf

The words I was taught - in child - hood.

Pno.

96

Professor

And I still find them use - ful, in plant - ing the seeds of vir - tue in my stu - dents.

Pno.

98

Woman

Who are all the fam - i ly you have now.

Pno.

99

Woman

With pa - rents and wife long de - part - ed,

Pno.

100

Woman

with child - ren scat - tered far and wide, whom else have you to live for

Pno.

mf

102

Woman

but those a - dor - ing stu - dents?

Professor

I'd hard - ly call them a - dor - ing;

Pno.

104

Woman

(Sitting in his desk chair and laying the notebook on the desk) To

Professor

just at - ten - tive.

Pno.

105

Woman

ev' - ry word that flows from your lips.

Pno.

106

Woman

A so - cial pur - pose?

Professor

If so, those words serve a pur - pose.

Pno.

108 $\bullet = 52$

Professor

I don't much care a - bout so - ci - e - ty. *Their* wel - fare,

Pno.

110

Professor

their mor - al con - di - tion, is all that con - cerns me.

Pno.

112 $\bullet = 40$

Woman

A worth - y con - cern. And how do you serve it?

Pno. *mp*

(Gesturing at the notebook)

114

Woman

By feed - ing them fan - ta - sies out of that child - hood, to

Pno.

116

Woman

keep them on the straight and nar - row?

Professor

Fan - ta - sies?

Pno. *mf*

118
Woman
What else would you call them? For be - ing no long - er a child,
Pno.

120
Woman
you know the diff' - rence now — be - tween those words
Pno.

121
Woman
and what your in - tel-lect tells you.
Professor
You mean
Pno.
mp

123

Professor

that what I call the soul is just a pro-jection from the brain,

Pno.

mf *f*

125

Professor

a bod-i-ly or-gan that lives, dies, and all its pro-jections die with it.

Pno.

mf

127

Woman

You take the words out of my mouth.

Professor

So vir-tue, when it ex-ists,

Pno.

129

Professor

must be its own re - ward, in the here and now.

Pno.

f

131

Woman

And vice its own pun - ish - ment, in the here and now.

Pno.

mf *f*

133

Professor

Hard - ly an ar - gu - ment suit - ed to keep one stu - dent of mine

Pno.

mf

135

Professor

on the straight and nar - row.

Pno.

136

poco meno ♩ = 36

Woman

Where - as the pros - pect of judg - ment af - ter death

Pno.

137

Woman

can ac - com - plish that.

Pno.

138

Professor

As it has done for much of the hu - man - race

Pno.

139

Woman

Per - haps — it has. But in this cen - tu - ry,

Professor

cen - tu - ry on cen - tu - ry.

Pno.

f *mf*

141

Woman

is - n't all that ob - so - lete?

Pno.

142

Professor

Not nec - ces - ser - i - ly. Some now the - o - rize

Pno.

143

Professor

that there are oth - er dim - en - sions in this un - i - verse

Pno.

144

Woman

Ah! Oth - er dim - en - sions,

Professor

than space and time as we know them.

Pno.

f

poco piu ♩ = 40

146

Woman

at least in theo - ry. Well at least those words

Professor

That's right.

Pno.

mf

148

Woman

sound a bit more sci - en - tif - ic. Some - what.

Professor

And less ob - so - lete?

Pno.

rit. ----- A tempo

150

Woman

So for all we know,

Professor

Good!

Pno.

mp

152

Woman

some form of con-scious-ness may live on in one of those oth-er dim-en-sions

Pno.

mf

154

Woman

af-ter bod-y and brain have gone to dust.

Pno.

155

Woman

All right, so far so good.

Professor

You take the words out of my mouth.

Pno.

157

Woman

But tell me: does it fol - low

Pno.

158

Woman

that in that oth - er dim - en - sion - there's a place -

Pno.

159

Woman

where vir - tue is re - ward - ed?

Professor

(Rising quickly)

No it does not fol - low.

Pno.

161

Woman

Ah that word a - gain.

Professor

That is a mat - ter of faith.

Pno.

f

(Gesturing at his notebook)

163

Professor

And as you've - seen, I my - self

Pno.

mp *mf*

164

Professor

can - not en - vis - ion such a place ex - cept in fee - ble. _____ sim - i - les

Pno.

(Gesturing at the notebook)

166

Professor

like this one you've scoffed at.

Pno.

168

Woman

So what can you en - vis - ion - less feeb - ly

Pno.

169 *poco meno* ♩ = 36

Woman
in that oth - er dim - en - sion? Ah hah!

Professor
Some kind of hell.

Pno.

171

Woman
Where vice is pun - ished.

Professor
Oh not mere vice,

Pno.

(He crosses around the desk to stage center; with intensity)

173 *rit.* ♩ = 48

Professor
but rad - i - cal e - vil, — crimes so mon - strous

Pno.

175

Professor

that noth - ing suf - fered in this life could suf - fice as pun - ish - ment.

Pno.

f *ff*

177 $\bullet = 40$

Professor

I en - vis - ion — those crim - in - als forced to en - dure what their vic - tims en - dured

Pno.

mf *f* *ff*

179

Professor

o - ver and o - ver and o - ver through all e - ter - ni - ty.

Pno.

f

181

Woman

I see. So that jus - tice is fin - al - ly done.

Pno.

mf *f*

183

Woman

Well I sup - pose that could be called

Professor

Some - how, yes.

Pno.

mf

rit. ---- ♩ = 36

185

Woman

a form of faith.

Pno.

f

186

Woman

Or at least of hon - est con - vic - tion.

Professor

f

So!

Pno.

188

Professor

Are you sat - is - fied now? Are you done mak - ing me face up?

Pno.

190

Woman

$\bullet = 52$

I will be, when you do so pub - lic - ly. When you tell your stu - dents,

Professor

Pub - lic - ly?

Pno.

mf

192

Woman

and read - ers, all you've just said.

Professor

All I've just said? You mean,

Pno.

f

194

Woman

Your *real* thoughts,


Professor

these pure - ly per - son - al thoughts?

Pno.

mf *f*

(Gesturing at the notebook)

Woman 
 un - like those in that lec - ture.

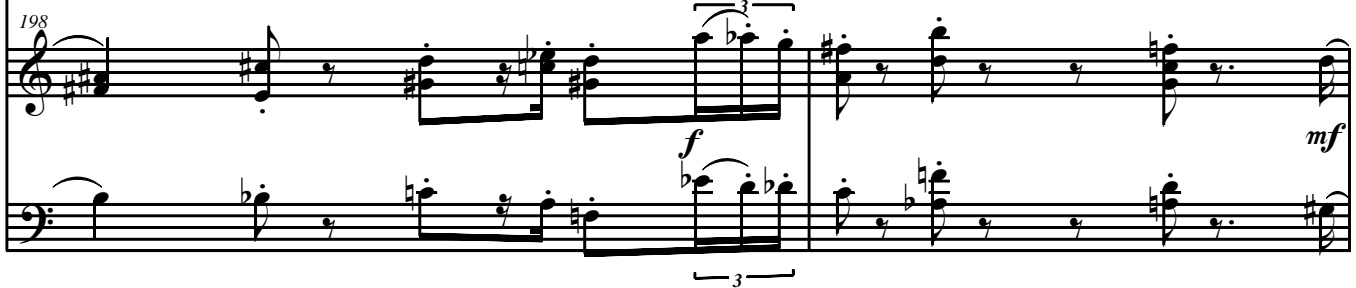
(Picking up the notebook)

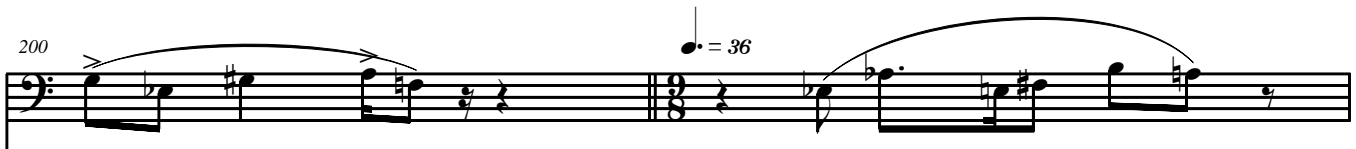
Professor 
 You've judged this lec - ture right - ly,

Pno. 
 mf

(He throws the notebook down on the desk.)

Professor 
 and it's one I will nev - er give! But I can - not, will not

Pno. 
 f mf

Professor 
 make those thoughts pub - lic! The hope of sal - va - tion,

Pno. 
 mf

202

Professor

for them-selves, is what peo - ple want,

Pno.

204

Professor

far more than dam - na - tion for the wick - ed!

Pno.

f *mp*

205

Woman

And of course, you give them what they want,

Pno.

mf

poco piu ♩ = 40

206

Woman

for what it's worth to them.

(Turning from her)

Professor

No long - er.

Pno.

208

Professor

I am fin - ished lec - tur - ing. - - - -With - noth - ing more to say - - -

Pno.

210

Professor

than I've al - read - y said,

Pno.

211

Professor

for what it's worth to them, it is time to be si-lent.

Pno.

213 *Meno mosso* ♩ = 44

Professor

My on-ly wish now, is for a swift and pain-less end

Pno.

215

Woman

And noth-ing more?

Professor

to a life lived too long.

Pno.

f *mp*

217 $\bullet = 40$

Woman

But what a - bout af - ter - ward?

Professor

It is more than *most* are grant - ed.

Pno.

mf

(Turning back to her; with fury)

219 *ff* *poco piu* $\bullet = 44$

Professor

Ques - tion me no fur - ther! I am done with ques - tions!

Pno.

f

221 $\bullet = 48$

Professor

Done with an - swers! So go your way, spir - it of doubt,

Pno.

f

223

Woman

Ah no. I must stay with you to the end.

Professor

and let me be!

Pno.

mf

225

Woman

mf

Professor

f

(He grabs the hour glass and starts to shake it hard.) If you shake it like that,

All right then! Let that end come soon!

Pno.

f *ff* *mf*

227

Woman

the grains will fall quick - ly! Are you sure?

Professor

As I want them to!

Pno.

f *ff* *mf*

229 $\bullet = 40$ $\bullet = 40$

Woman

(Shaking harder) Well then, so be it.

Professor

As sure as I've been of an - y - thing..

Pno.

231 *poco meno* $\bullet = 36$

Woman

The last grains are fal - ling. Soon you shall have your wish,

Pno.

f

233

Woman

such as it is.

(He drops the hour glass.) *f*

Professor

At last! _____ *mp*

At last! _____

Pno.

ff *mf* *mp*

(He stumbles to his desk chair, drops into it, and closes his eyes.)

(The Woman crosses slowly to look down at him.)

rit. ----- ♩ = 32

235

Pno.

237 ♩ = 40

Woman

Well, Pro - fes - sor,

Pno.

237

240 $\bullet = 40$

Woman

if this has *not* been a dream, or a dream with - *in* a dream,

Pno.

242

Woman

to what, if an - y - thing,

Pno.

244 *(She crosses to the hour glass, picks it up, and quickly exits right.)*

Woman

may you a - wake now?

Pno.

f

247 *poco meno* $\text{♩} = 36$ *(The Professor's eyes open abruptly.)* *f*

Professor

Oh God!

Pno.

ff

248 *(He jumps out of the chair and and stands staring dazedly around him.)*

Professor

This was a dream! An ho-ur glass

Pno.

mp

250

Professor

I could sim - ply shake, and death would come swift - ly and pain - less - ly!

Pno.

mf *f*

252

Professor

No such thing!

Pno.

mp

Musical score for measures 252-253. The Professor part (bass clef) has a melodic line starting with a dotted quarter note, followed by eighth notes. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The dynamic is marked *mp*.

254

Professor

My end will not come that way,

Pno.

mf

Musical score for measures 254-255. The Professor part (bass clef) has a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) continues with a rhythmic pattern. The dynamic is marked *mf*.

255

Professor

but from some kind of ill - ness,

Pno.

f

Musical score for measures 255-256. The Professor part (bass clef) has a melodic line with a slur and accents. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) features a rhythmic pattern with accents. The dynamic is marked *f*.

256

Professor

pos - sib - ly short,

Pno.

mf

257

Professor

pos-sib-ly long, and sure - ly not pain - less.

Pno.

mf *f*

259

Professor

Till that hap-pens, what do I do? Just wait in si-lence?

Pno.

mf

261

Professor

Or use what time re-mains seek - ing to find bet - ter ways

Pno.

263

Professor

of giv - ing hope to oth - ers, — and pos - sib - ly my - self as well?..

Pno.

mp

265 $\bullet = 44$ (He sits back down, opens the notebook, and picks up the pen.)

Professor

If so,

Pno.

mf

267 $\bullet = 36$

Professor

will she keep com - ing, —

Pno.

268

Professor

in dream af - ter dream af - ter dream, try - ing to keep me hon - est?

Pno.

f *mp*

270 $\bullet = 44$

Professor

Well, why not?

Pno.

273 $\bullet = 32$

Professor

I may wel - come. her com - pan - y.

Pno.

mf

(With the pen poised in the air, he sits staring off into space as lights fade to black.) rit. ----

274

Pno.

mp *p*

276

Pno.