

# Text-Setting in *The Convergence of the Twain*

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## Overall

- Character-based, each voice always fits into at least one of these categories:
  - Nature/ocean/iceberg/deity
  - Humans/Titanic
  - Narrator

## Beginning

- Takes place after the ship has sunk
- Solo; the ship is “solitary”
- G-Ab-Bb trichord foreshadowing the tragedy (letter I)
- Piano texture is water-wavy, and most of the non-soprano stuff too
- “Vanity” in the solo gets amplified by the sections (“self-obsession”)

## Letter A – The Sunken Ship

- The “sh” of the ocean morphs into the “ss” of the ship’s engine and the word “fires”
- Starts unified, “Chopin funeral march” progression for the ship
- The upward “fires” whip us back in time and activate the energy of letter B

## Letter B

- All of the parts are “running smoothly” together (as if in remembrance of the working ship)
- However, the text is still fragmented, as we are now post-sinking and it is eventually overtaken by the “cold currents” of the ocean.

## Letter C

- Still, yet churning like the ocean
- Resolves the large-scale tension of letters A and B by returning to the G key center and wavy texture
- The ocean is “textless,” only “ooh” chords over the “rhythmic tidal lyres” in the piano
- Ends with a large “wave” in the piano, which sets up letter D

## Letter D

- Pointillist and disorganized, like wreckage strewn across the bottom of the ocean
- The “sh” in the word “fish” is elongated to allude to the “sh” of the waves
- For “dim moon-eyed fishes near,” the sopranos and altos converge
- Fixates on the word “gaze,” as the piano is sparkly to represent the once-reflective “gilded gear”

- The tenors and basses take over “at the gilded gear...and query” as both the object of curiosity (the wreckage) and the narrator here

### **Letter E – Building the Ship**

- A is the key center (chromatically steps up each rehearsal letter)
- Go back in time to before the collision – “storytelling”
- SA and TB cross-fade in m. 78 since the story is about the (masculine) ship
- “The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything” interrupts the “shipbuilders” (i.e., the selfish humans) in the stanza, interrupting the work-like rhythm

### **Letter F – Forming the Iceberg**

- Bb minor
- Interrupts the shipbuilding once again, nature is an unstoppable force (the Immanent Will)
- Sopranos and altos repeatedly “build out” amorphously to thicker chords, like ice accumulating, the piano echoes these gestures
- “Shape” is the same chord shape moving upward
- “Far and disassociate” has an echo/delay effect (thank you Caroline Shaw)

### **Letter G – Finishing the Ship (and Iceberg...)**

- B minor
- The “camera” leaves the iceberg and returns to the ship
- “Hue” is more colorful than the previous chords
- The iceberg growing is “silent” (whispered), while the piano hints at the G-Ab-Bb trichord
- The word “too” morphs into an eerie whistle that cascades through the ensemble, as if “beckoning” the ship or imitating whistling wind
- Piano is sparse to connote distance

### **Letter H – Anticipating their Meeting**

- C, then Db key center
- Choir acts as a “collective narrator,” the SA and TB have similar rhythmic profiles and textures
- Text “speeds up” with the rising action (i.e. less repetition)
- Never totally together until the very end
- Soprano asserts the high G, leading to the inevitable collision
- “Now” with D at the bottom to maintain tension

### **Letter I – The Collision**

- Harmonically, “snaps” from Db back to G
- The awaited G-Ab-Bb trichord
- Everyone in unison, dramatic but short

### **Letter J – The Ship Sinks (no text)**

- B minor (macro-level “funeral march” progression)
- Vowels “drown” from “ah” to “mm”, dynamics dissipate as well
- B-G-B-G-B “funeral march” progression again