GALEN H. BROWN

DARKNESS

Song Cycle for Soprano And Piano
Poem by Lord Byron

For Nina Berman

www.galenbrown.com

DARKNESS

George Gordon, Lord Byron

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day,
And men forgot their passions in the dread
Of this their desolation; and all hearts
Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light:
And they did live by watchfires—and the thrones,
The palaces of crowned kings—the huts,
The habitations of all things which dwell,
Were burnt for beacons; cities were consum'd,
And men were gather'd round their blazing homes
To look once more into each other's face;
Happy were those who dwelt within the eye
Of the volcanos, and their mountain-torch:
A fearful hope was all the world contain'd;
Forests were set on fire—but hour by hour
They fell and faded—and the crackling trunks
Extinguish'd with a crash—and all was black.
The brows of men by the despairing light
Wore an unearthly aspect, as by fits
The flashes fell upon them; some lay down
And hid their eyes and wept; and some did rest
Their chins upon their clenched hands, and smil'd;
And others hurried to and fro, and fed
Their funeral piles with fuel, and look'd up
With mad disquietude on the dull sky,
The pall of a past world; and then again
With curses cast them down upon the dust,
And gnash'd their teeth and howl'd: the wild birds shriek'd
And, terrified, did flutter on the ground,
And flap their useless wings; the wildest brutes
Came tame and tremulous; and vipers crawl'd
And twin'd themselves among the multitude,
Hissing, but stingless—they were slain for food.
And War, which for a moment was no more,
Did glut himself again: a meal was bought
With blood, and each sate sullenly apart
Gorging himself in gloom: no love was left;
All earth was but one thought—and that was death
Immediate and inglorious; and the pang
Of famine fed upon all entrails—men
Died, and their bones were tombless as their flesh;
The meagre by the meagre were devour'd,
Even dogs assail'd their masters, all save one,
And he was faithful to a corse, and kept
The birds and beasts and famish'd men at bay,
Till hunger clung them, or the dropping dead
Lur'd their lank jaws; himself sought out no food,
But with a piteous and perpetual moan,
And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand
Which answer'd not with a caress—he died.
The crowd was famish'd by degrees; but two
Of an enormous city did survive,
And they were enemies: they met beside
The dying embers of an altar-place
Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things
For an unholy usage; they rak'd up,
And shivering scrap'd with their cold skeleton hands
The feeble ashes, and their feeble breath
Blew for a little life, and made a flame
Which was a mockery; then they lifted up
Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld
Each other's aspects—saw, and shriek'd, and died—
Even of their mutual hideousness they died,
Unknowing who he was upon whose brow
Famine had written Fiend. The world was void,
The populous and the powerful was a lump,
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless—
A lump of death—a chaos of hard clay.
The rivers, lakes and ocean all stood still,
And nothing stirr'd within their silent depths;
Ships sailorless lay rotting on the sea,
And their masts fell down piecemeal: as they dropp'd
They slept on the abyss without a surge—
The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,
The moon, their mistress, had expir'd before;
The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air,
And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need
Of aid from them—She was the Universe.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

- Tempo and dynamic markings are approximate.
- In the piano part, moving lines, especially in the left hand, are generally the most important. The specifics of interpretation are left to the discretion of the pianist, but as a general rule, in thicker textures the left hand should be brought out more.
- In the sections marked "ped. ad libitum," pedaling should be liberal—a wash of sound is the desired effect.
- The final movement should begin with no pause whatsoever. The final note of movement V should be treated as the first note of movement VI.

For Nina Berman

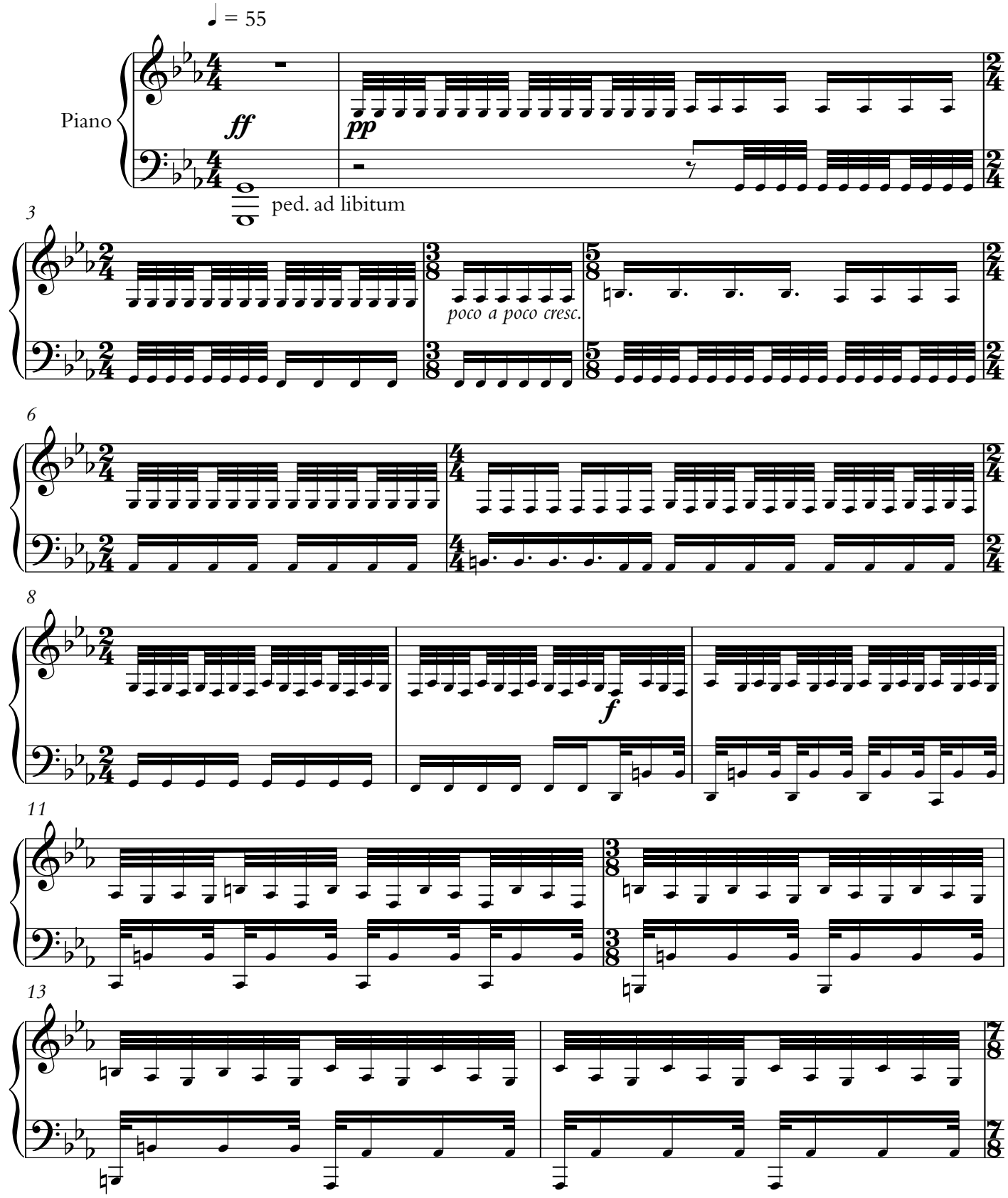
DARKNESS

Song Cycle For Soprano And Piano

I. Introduction

Poem By
GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON

Music by
GALEN H. BROWN



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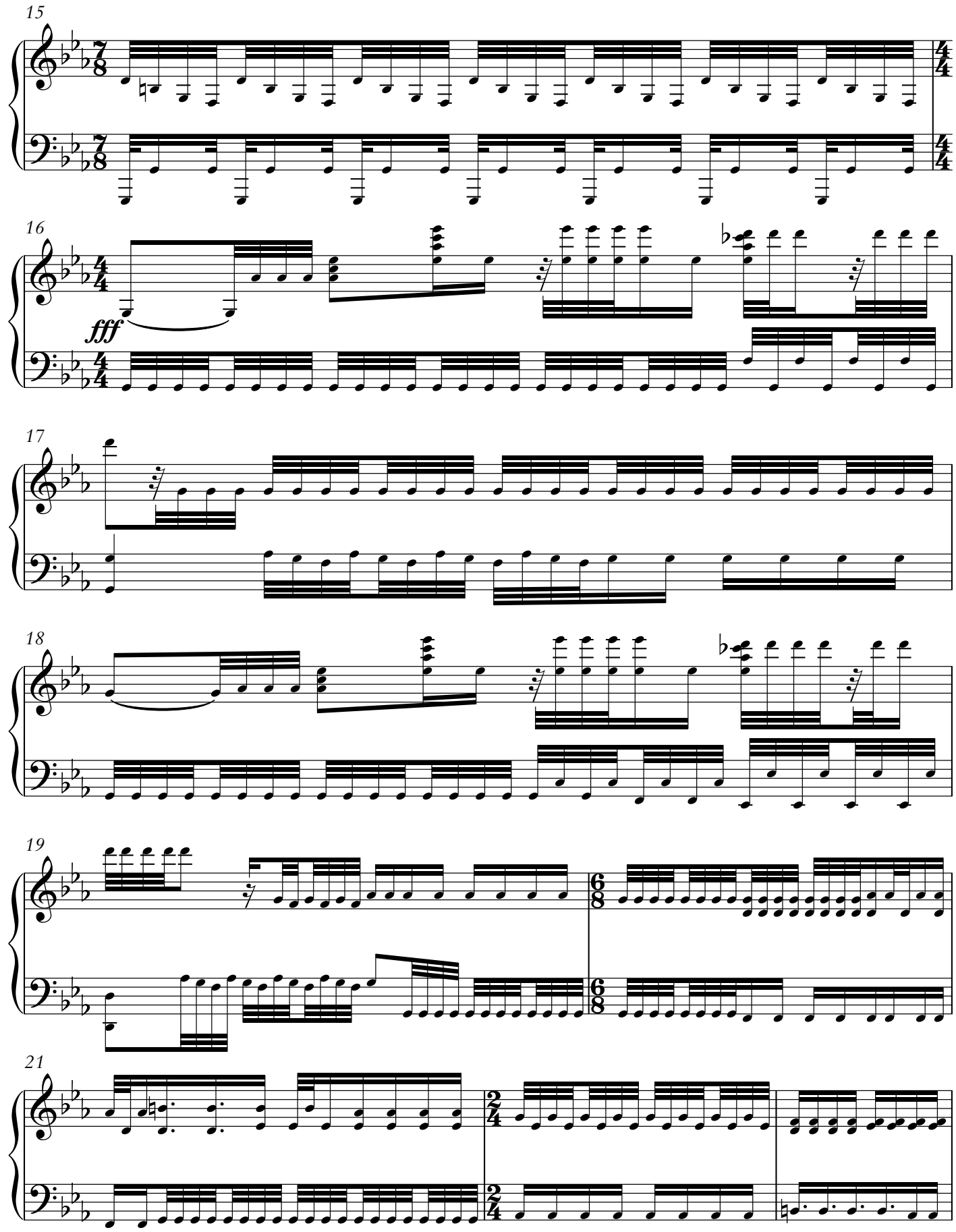
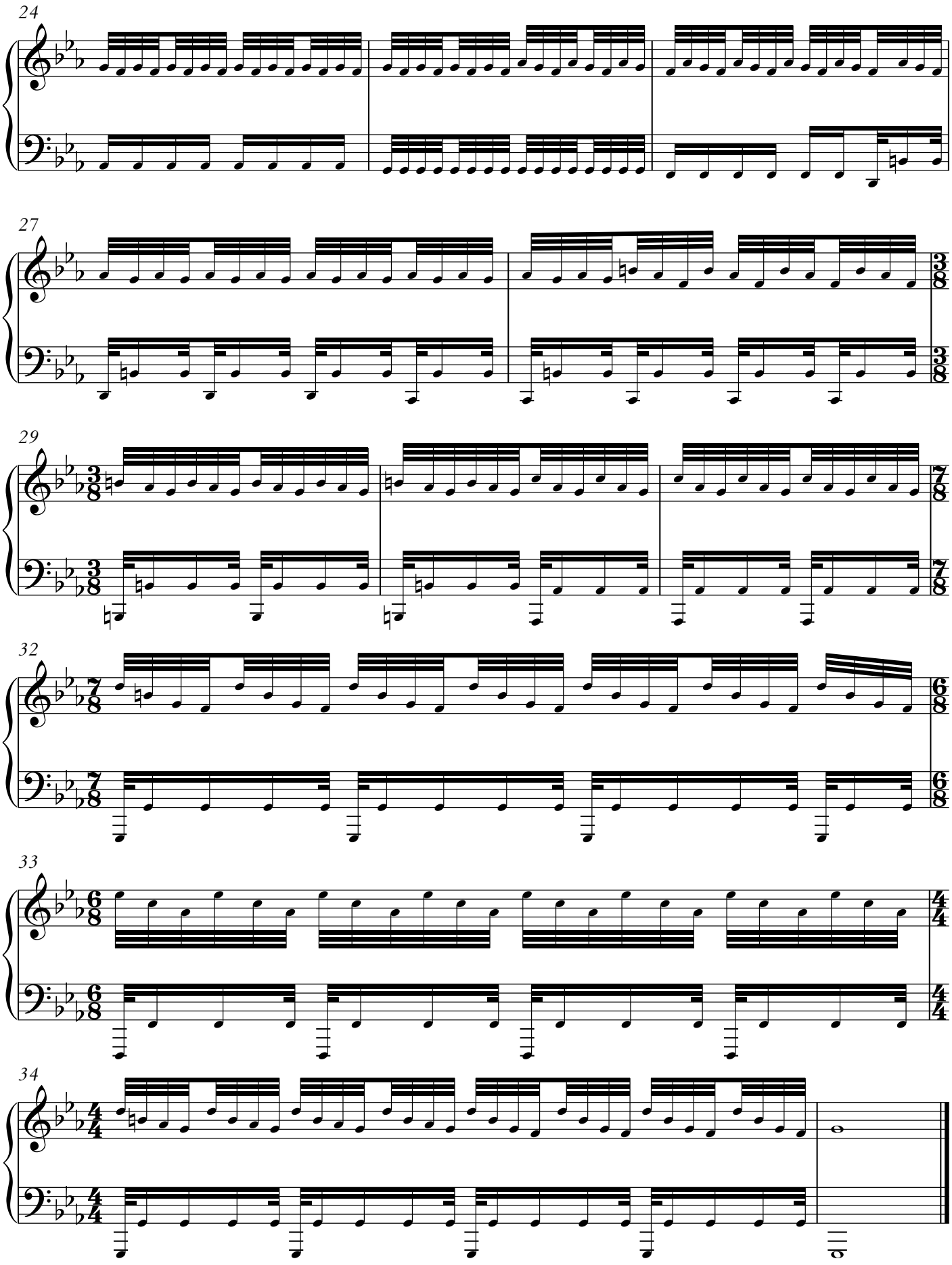
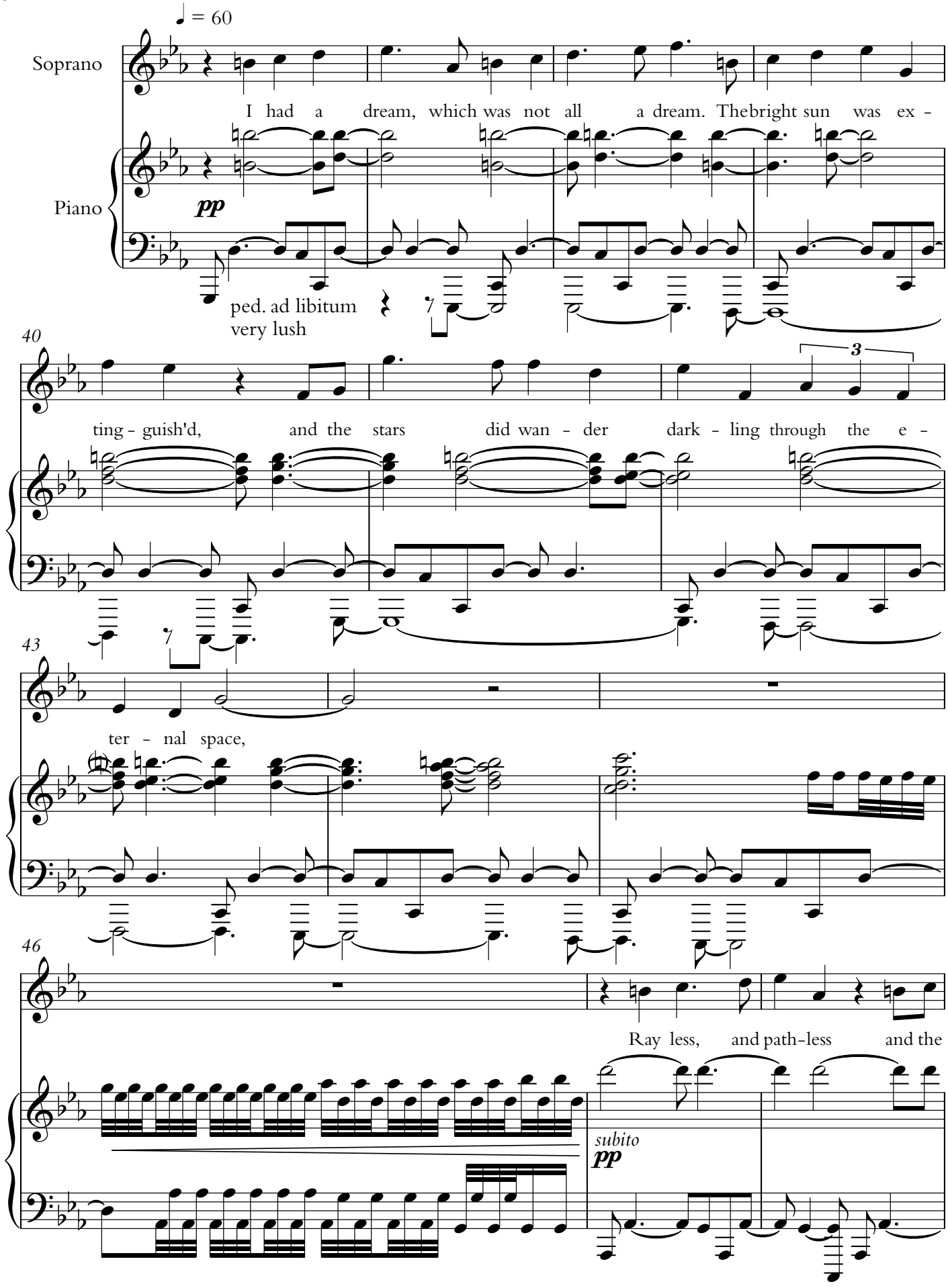
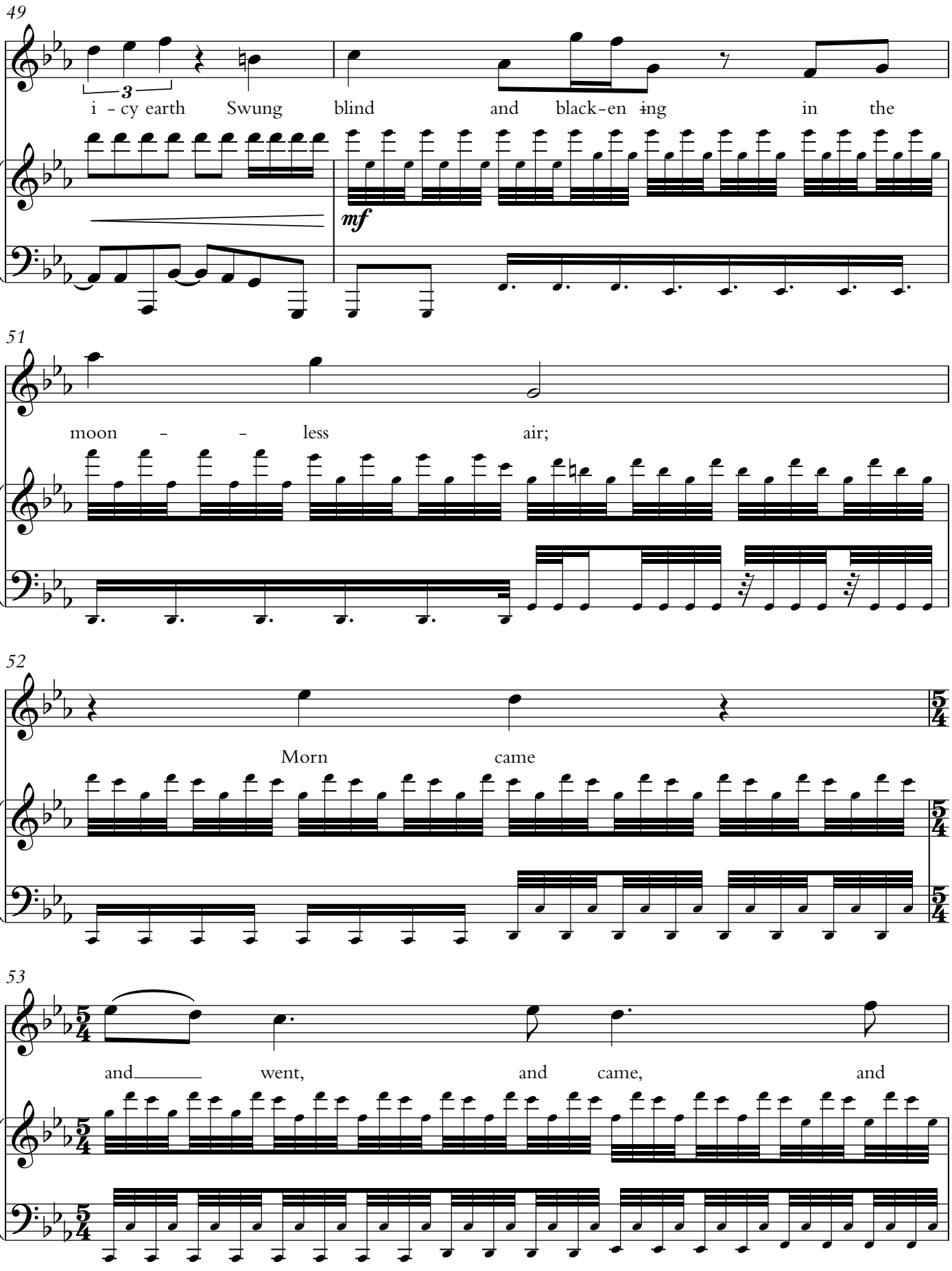
Composed in 2017-18 in New York City

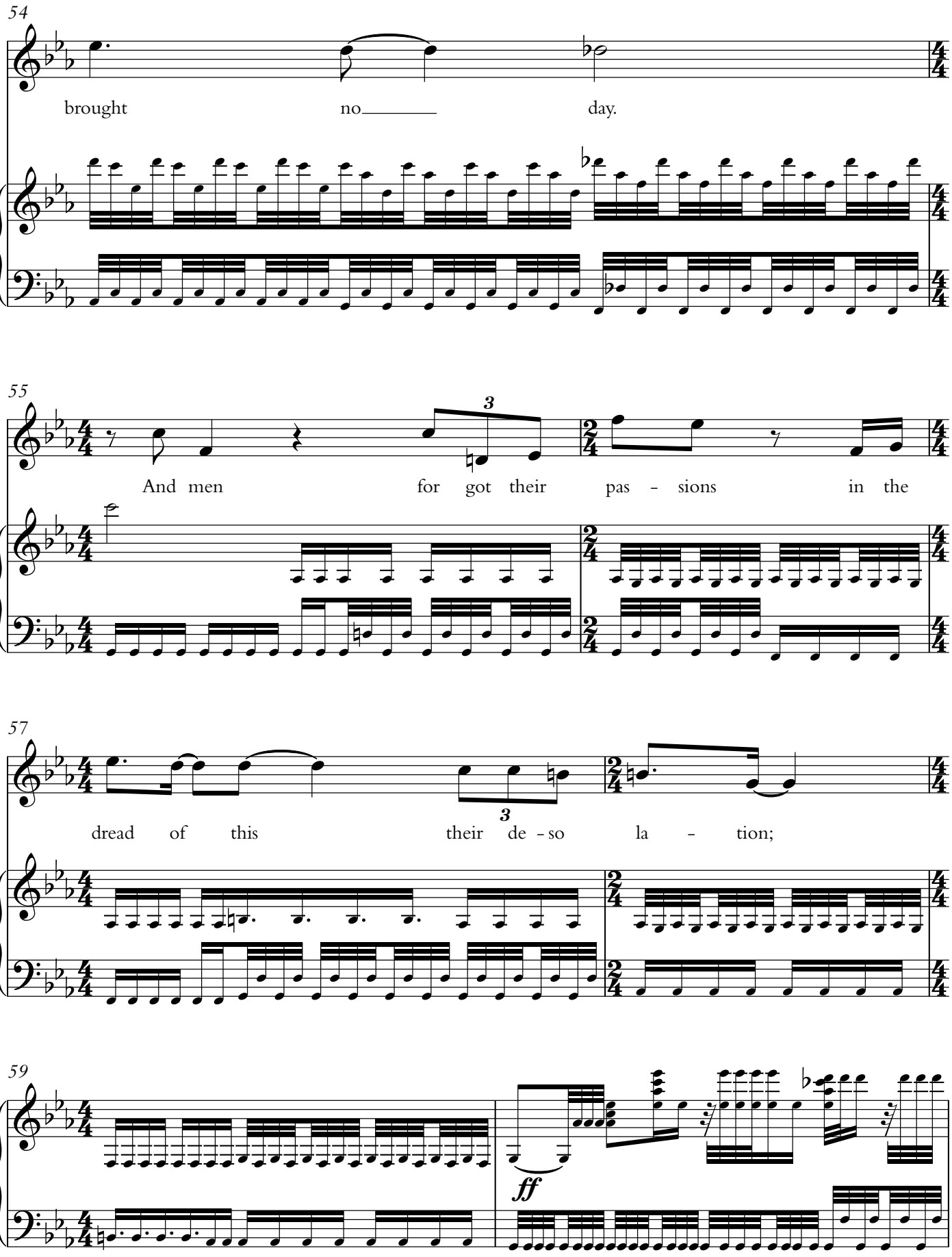

15
16
fff
17
18
19
21

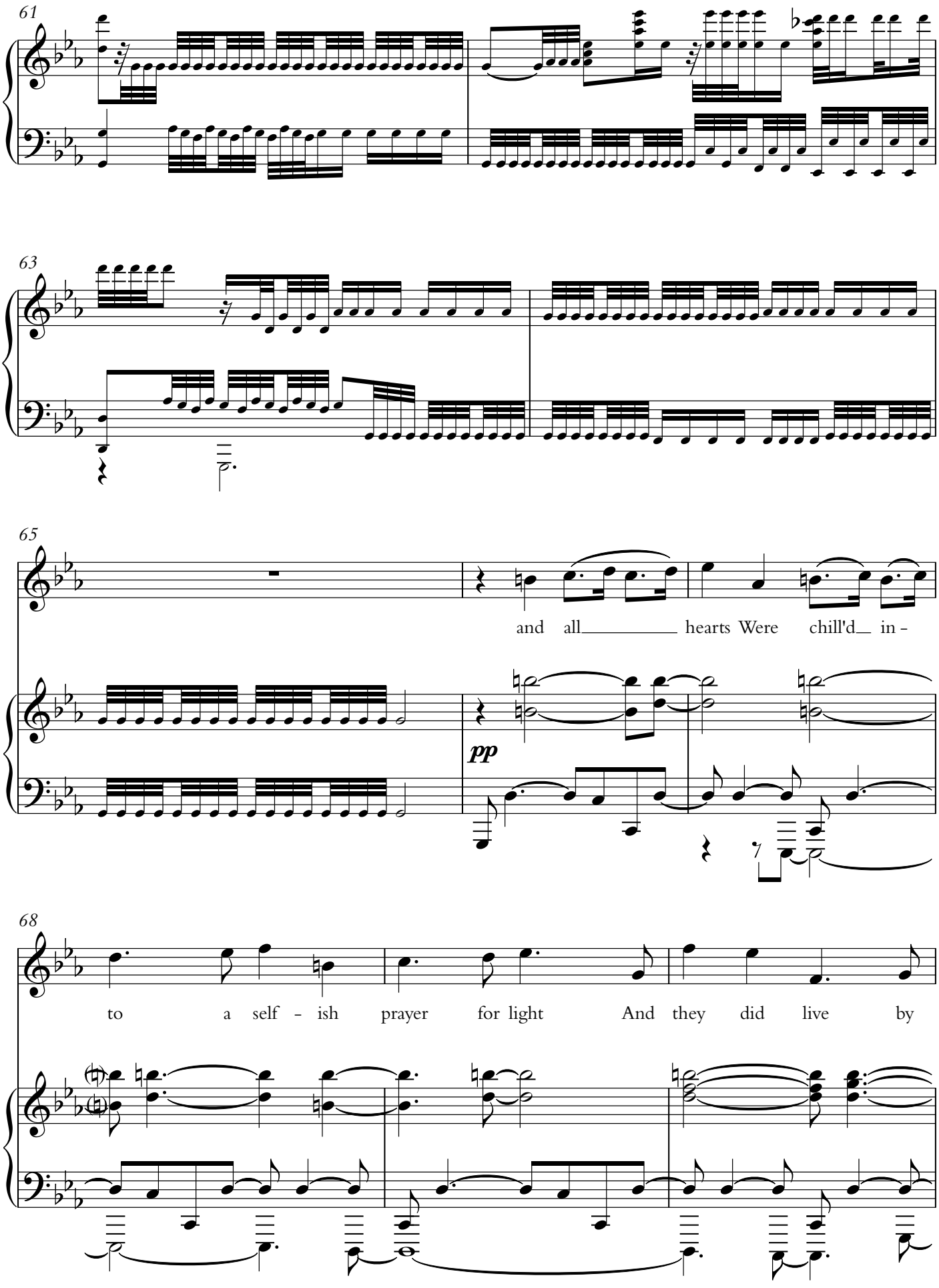

24
27
29
32
33
34

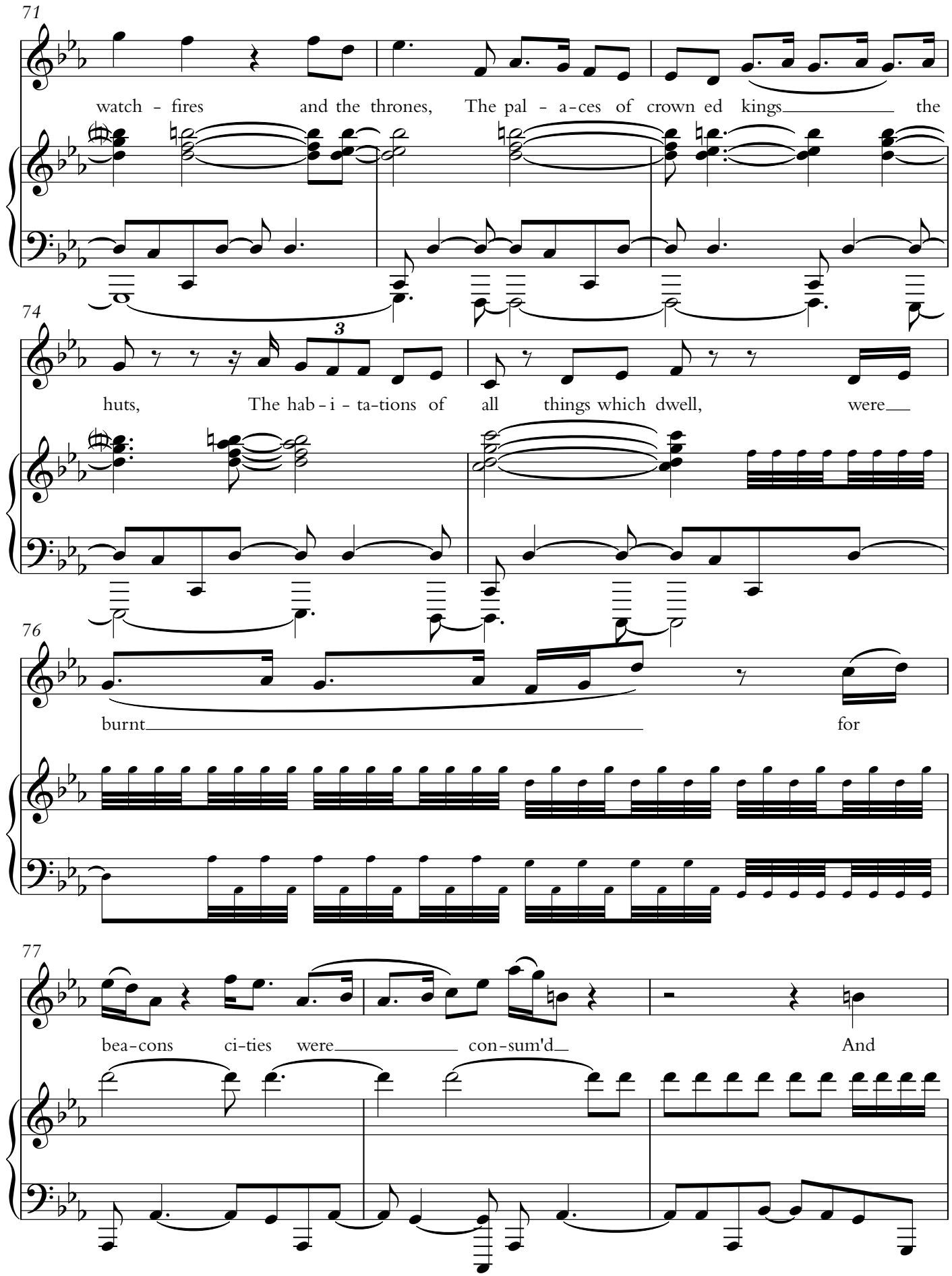
II. "I had a dream, which was not all a dream"

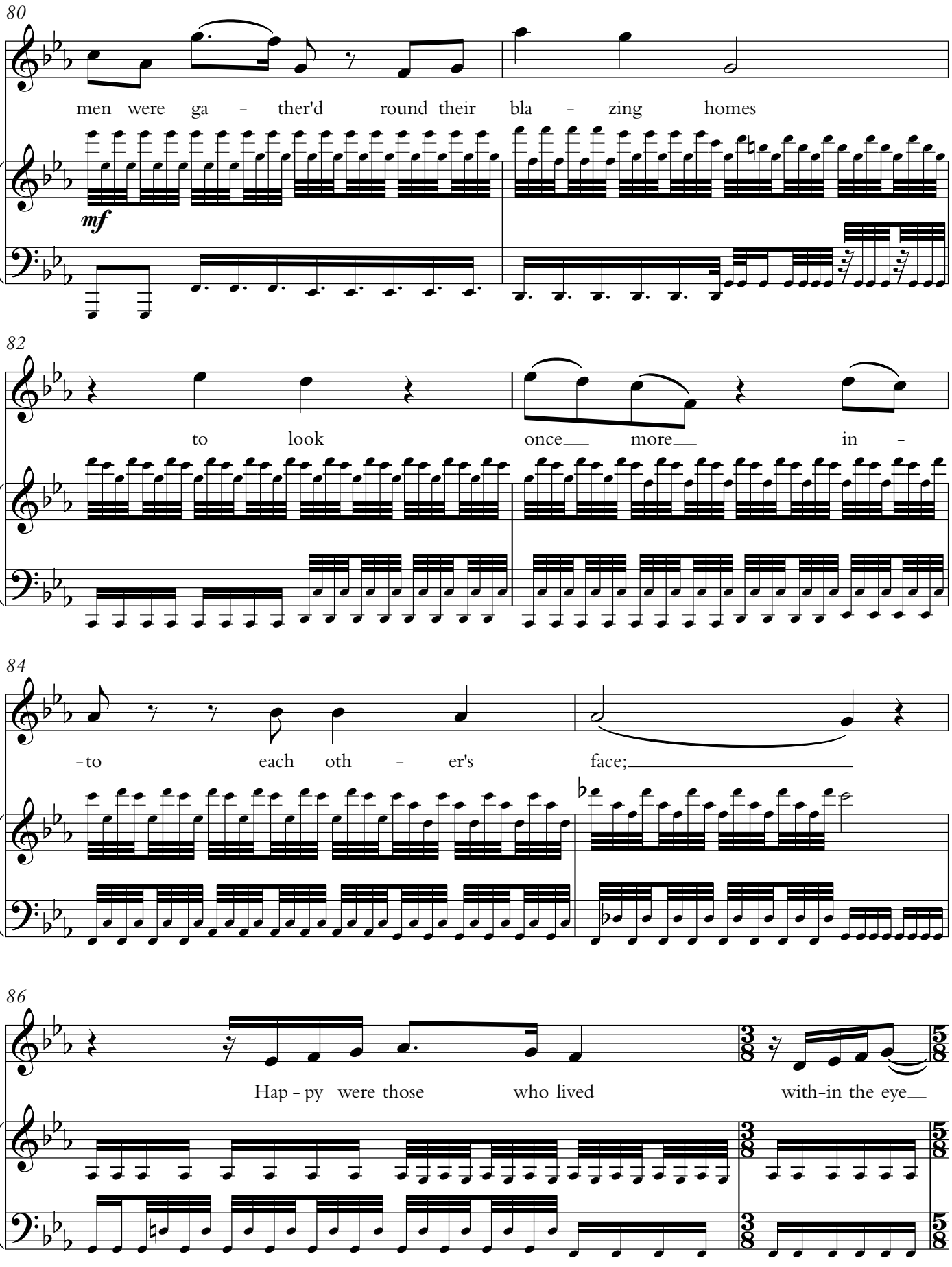


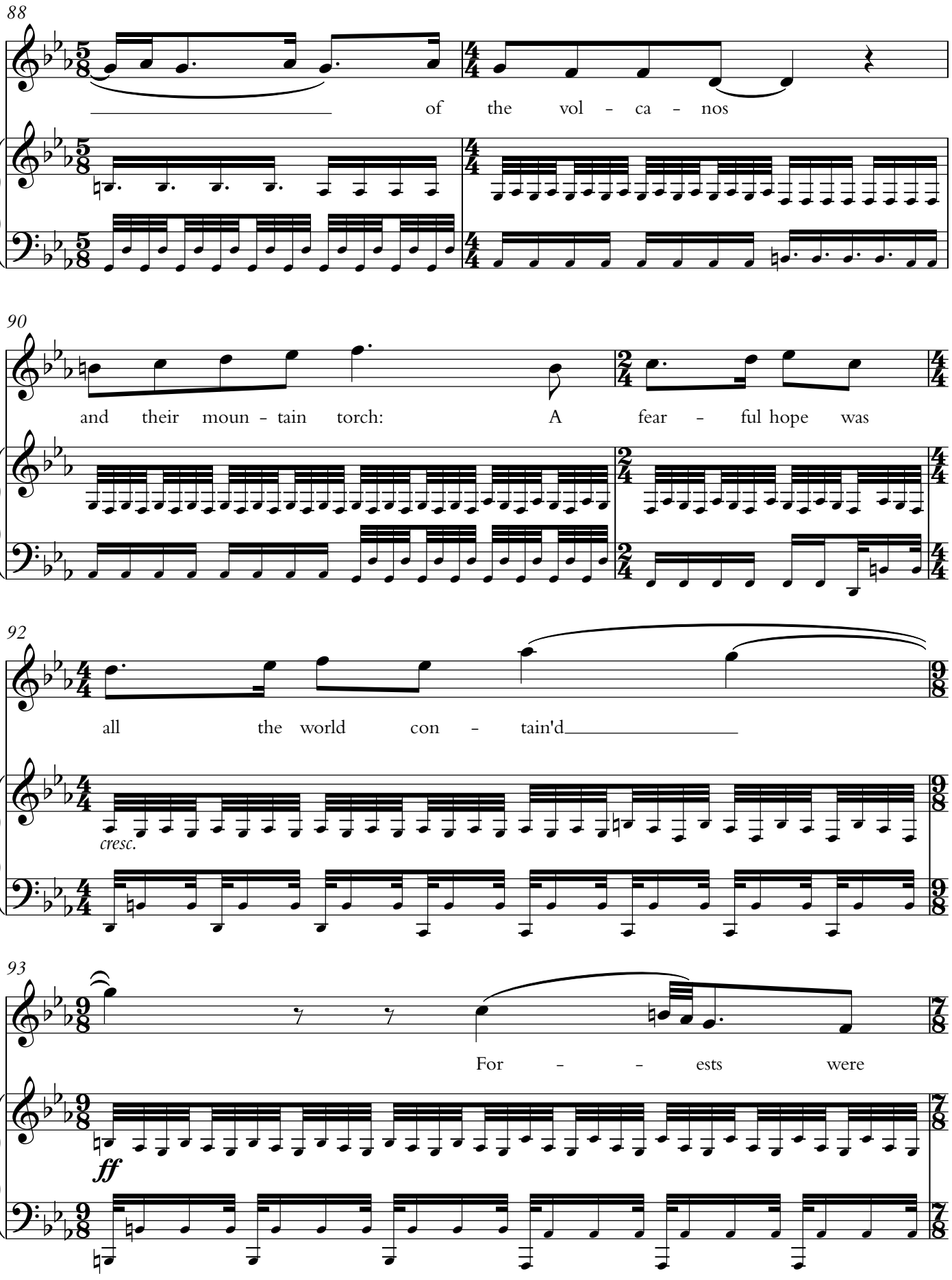

49
3
i - cy earth Swung blind and black-en ing in the
mf
51
moon - - less air;
52
Morn came
53
and went, and came, and

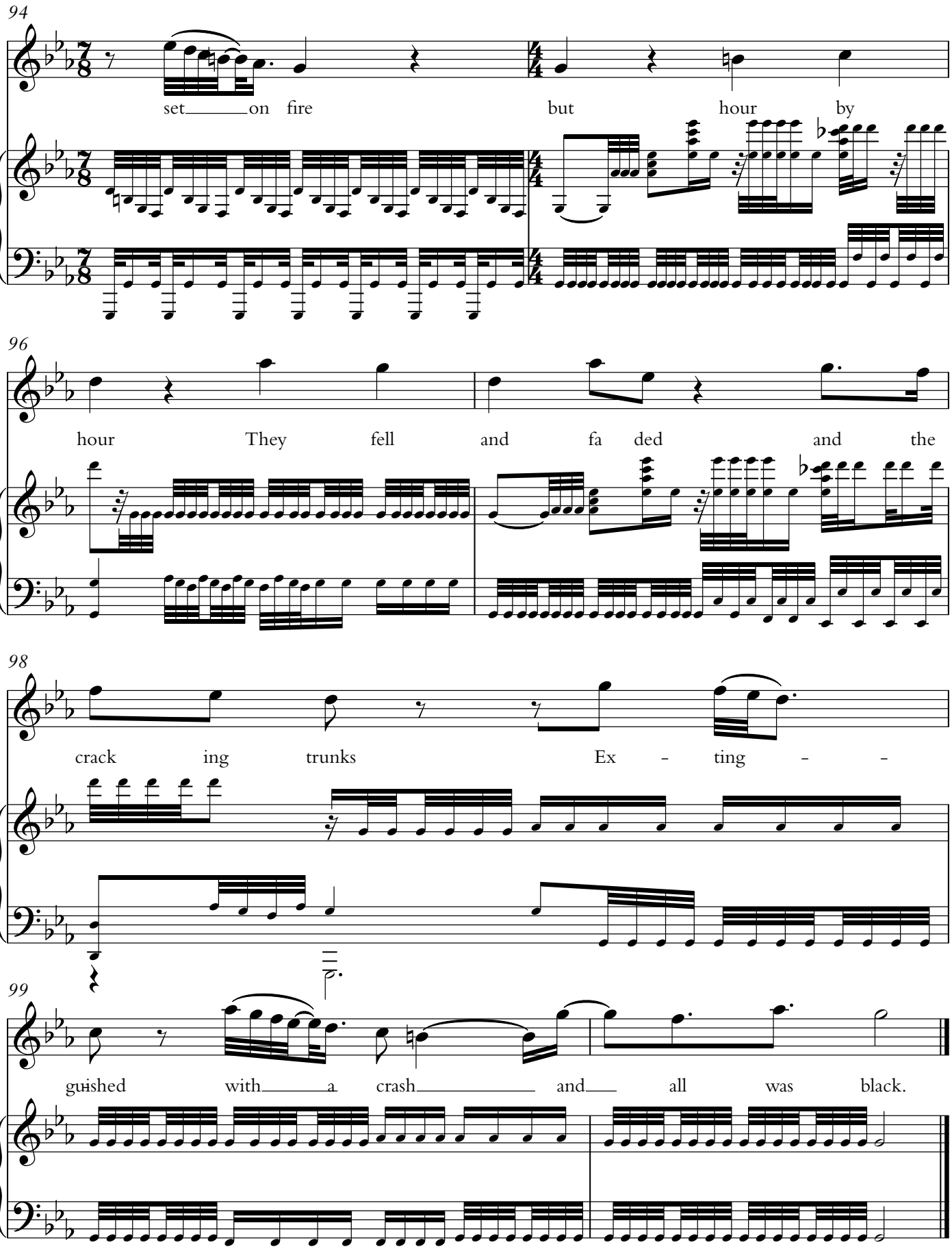

54
brought no day.
55
And men for got their pas - sions in the
57
dread of this their de - so la - tion;
59
ff


61
63
65
and all hearts Were chill'd in -
pp
68
to a self - ish prayer for light And they did live by

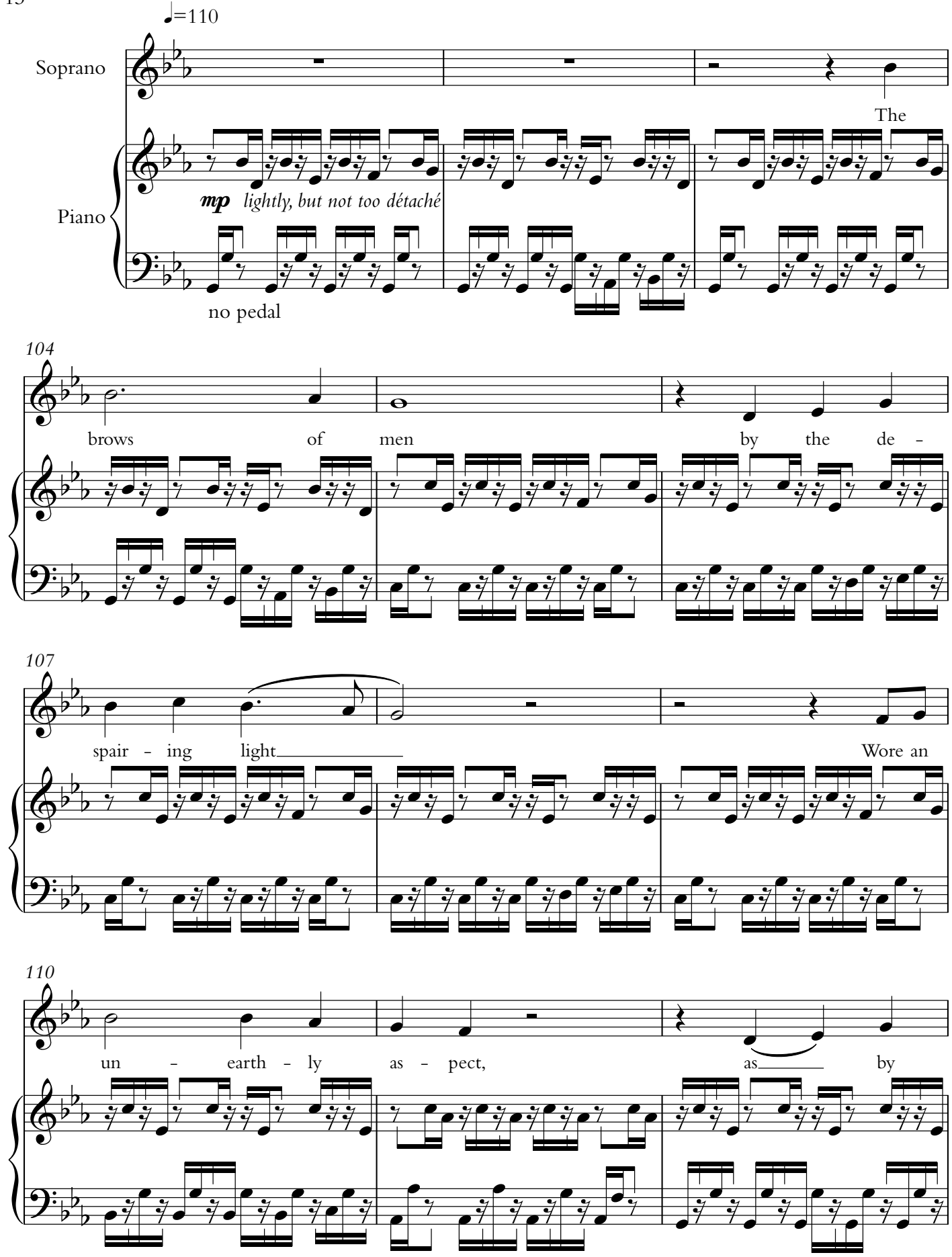

71
watch - fires and the thrones, The pal - a-ces of crown ed kings the
74
3
huts, The hab - i - ta-tions of all things which dwell, were
76
burnt for
77
bea-cons ci-ties were con-sum'd And

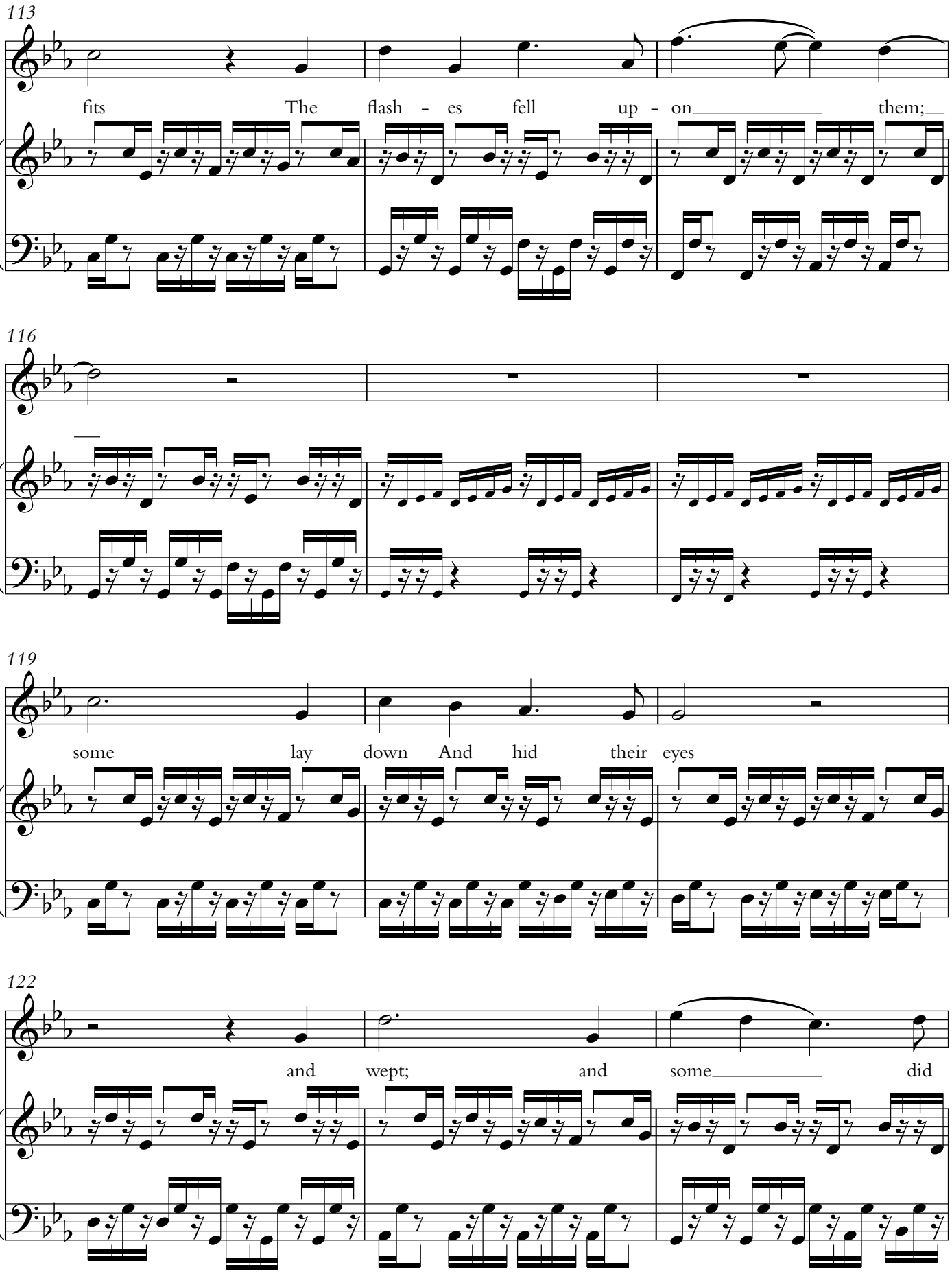

80
men were ga - ther'd round their bla - zing homes
mf
82
to look once more in -
84
-to each oth - er's face;
86
Hap - py were those who lived with-in the eye

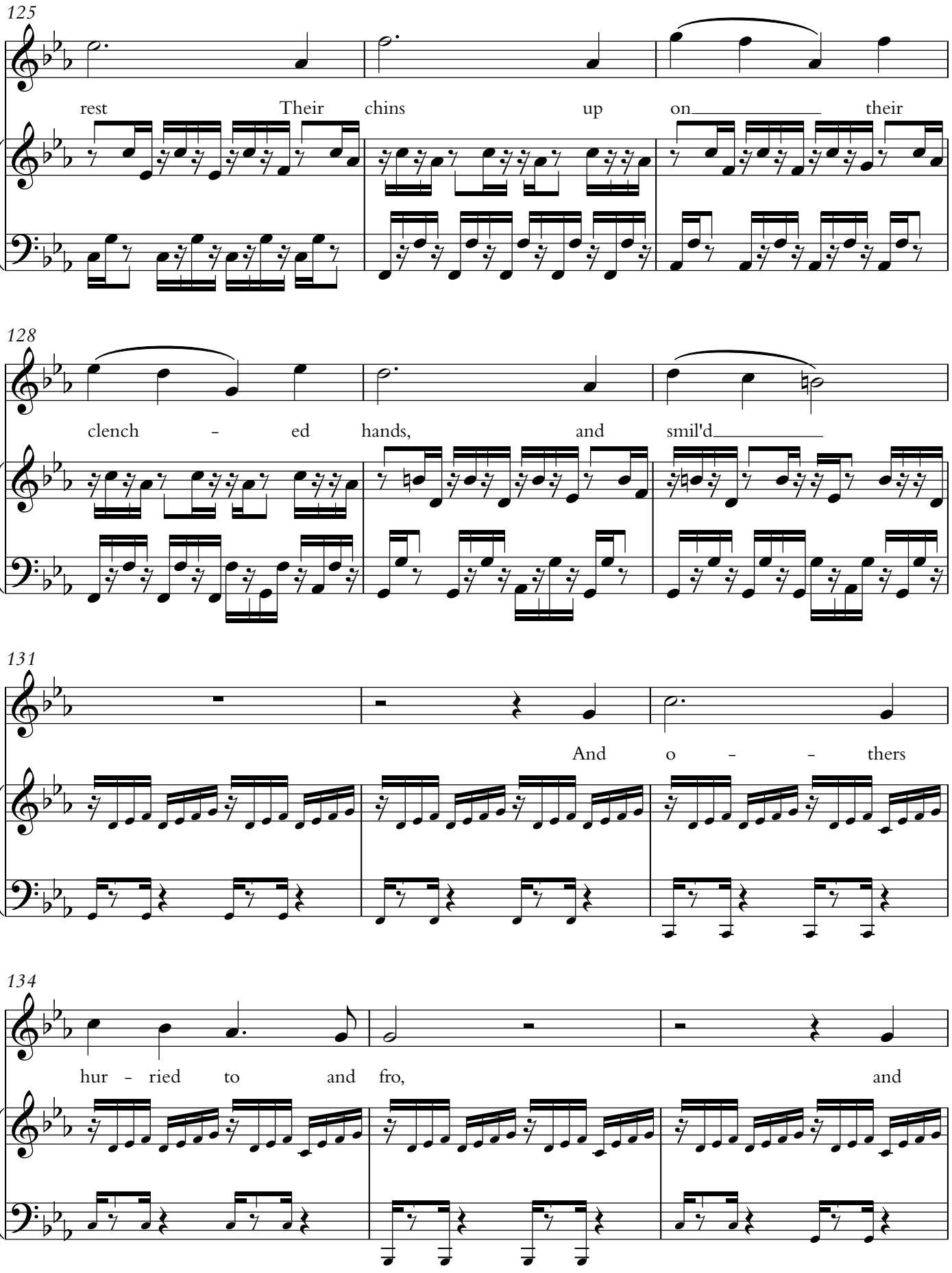

88
of the vol - ca - nos
90
and their moun - tain torch: A fear - ful hope was
92
all the world con - tain'd
cresc.
93
For - - ests were
ff

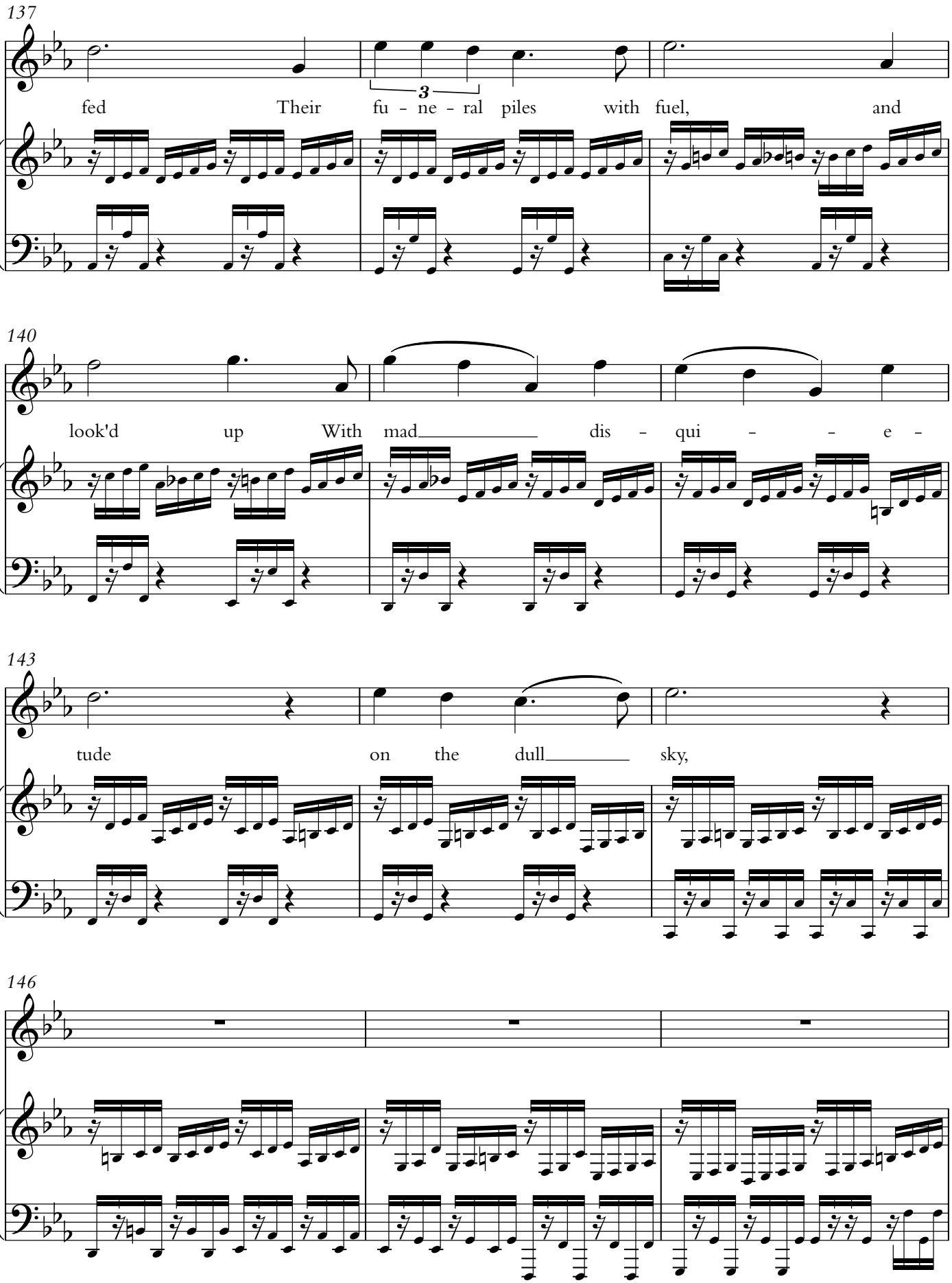

94
set on fire but hour by
96
hour They fell and fa ded and the
98
crack ing trunks Ex - ting - -
99
guished with a crash and all was black.

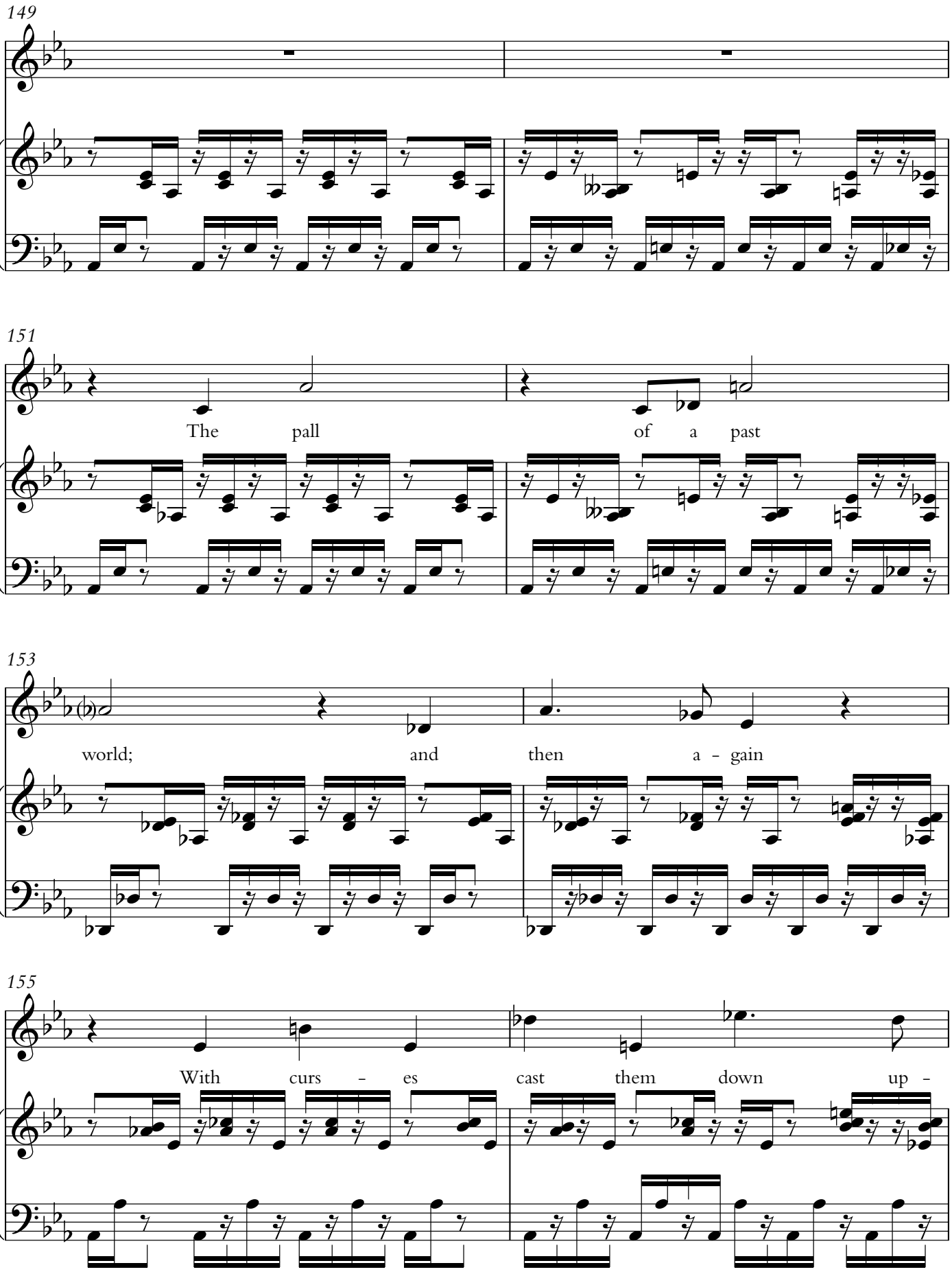
III. "The brows of men by the despairing light"

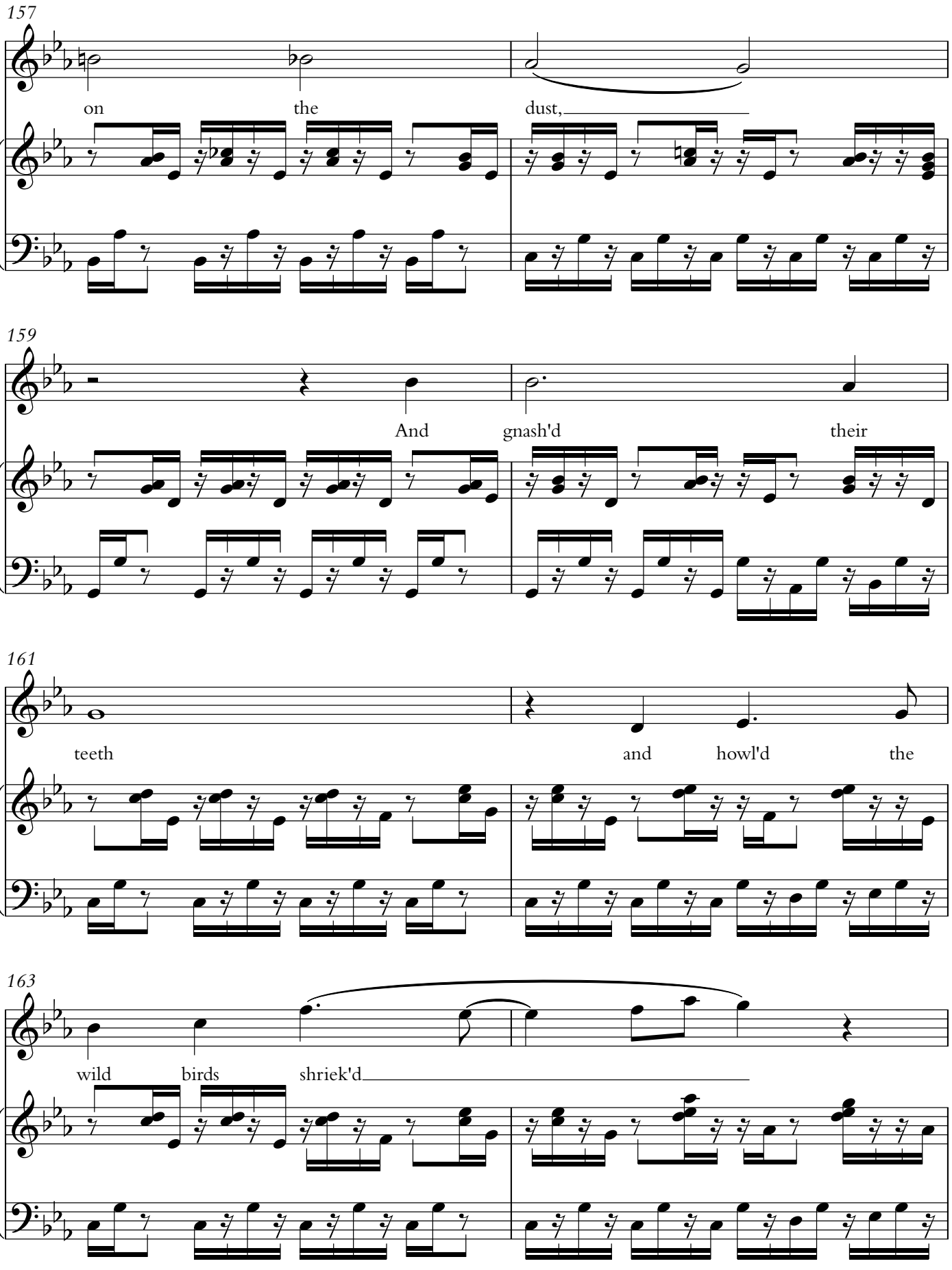


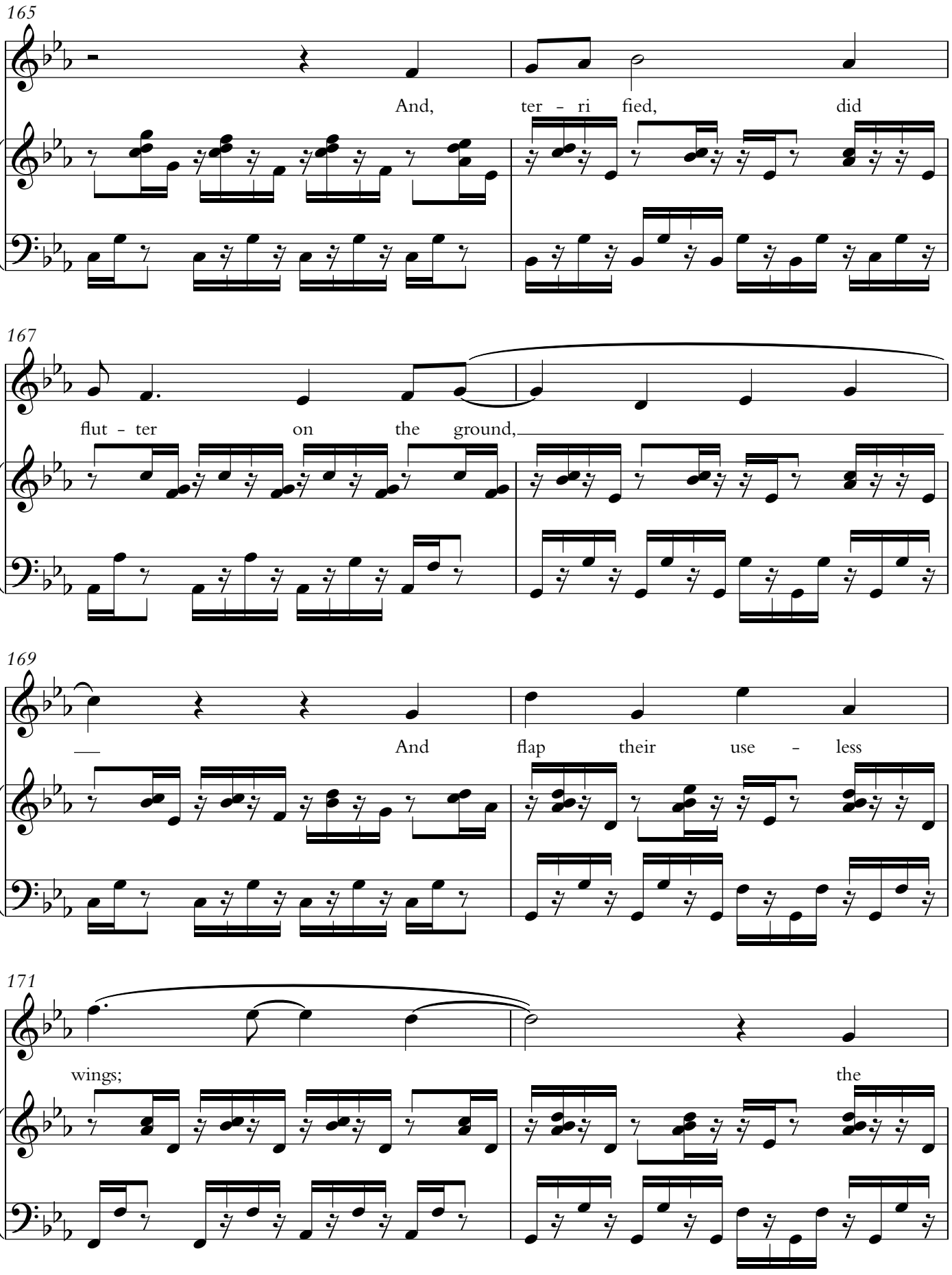

113
fits The flash - es fell up - on them;
116
119
some lay down And hid their eyes
122
and wept; and some did

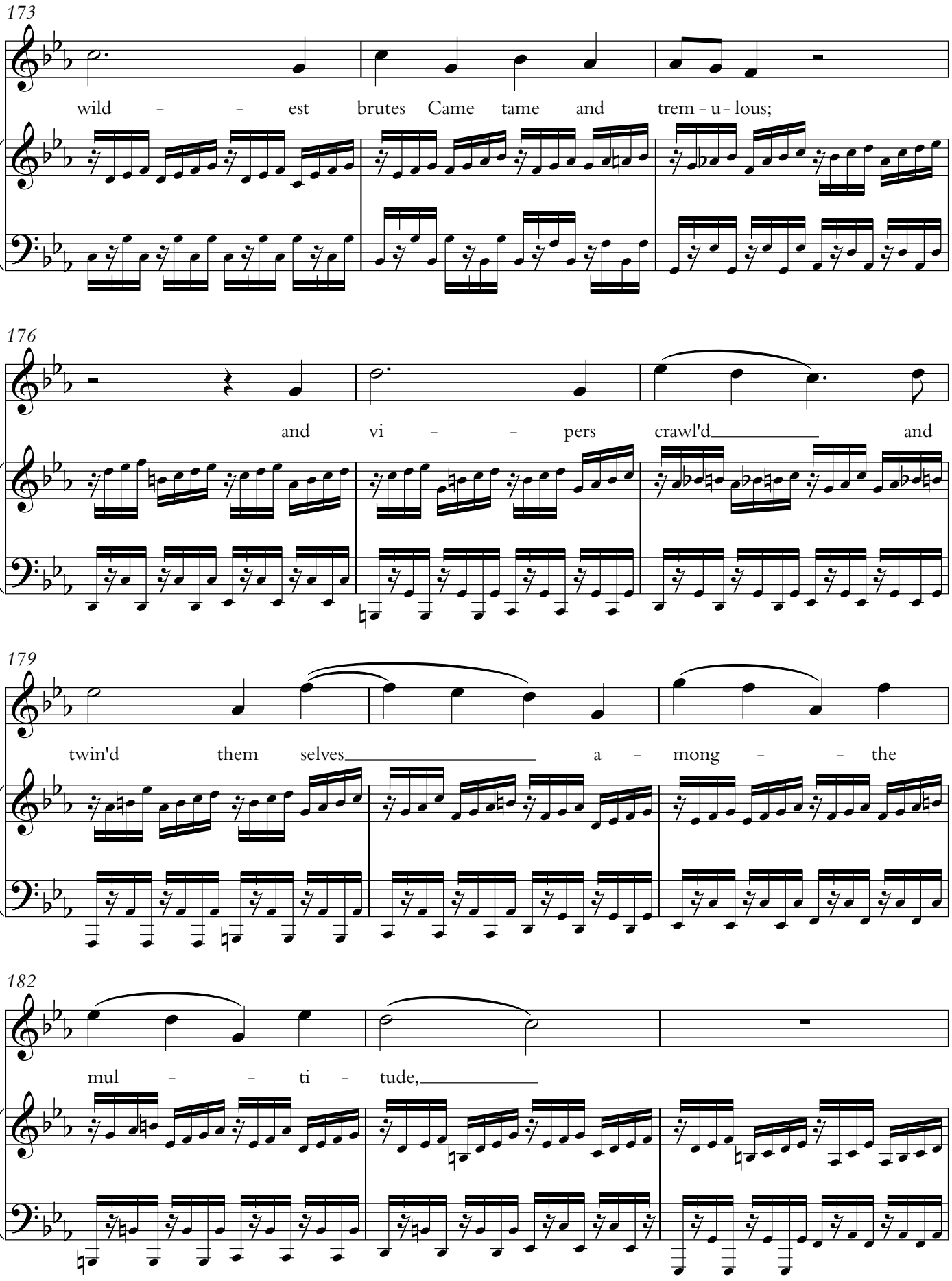

125
rest Their chins up on their
128
clench - ed hands, and smil'd
131
And o - - thers
134
hur - ried to and fro, and

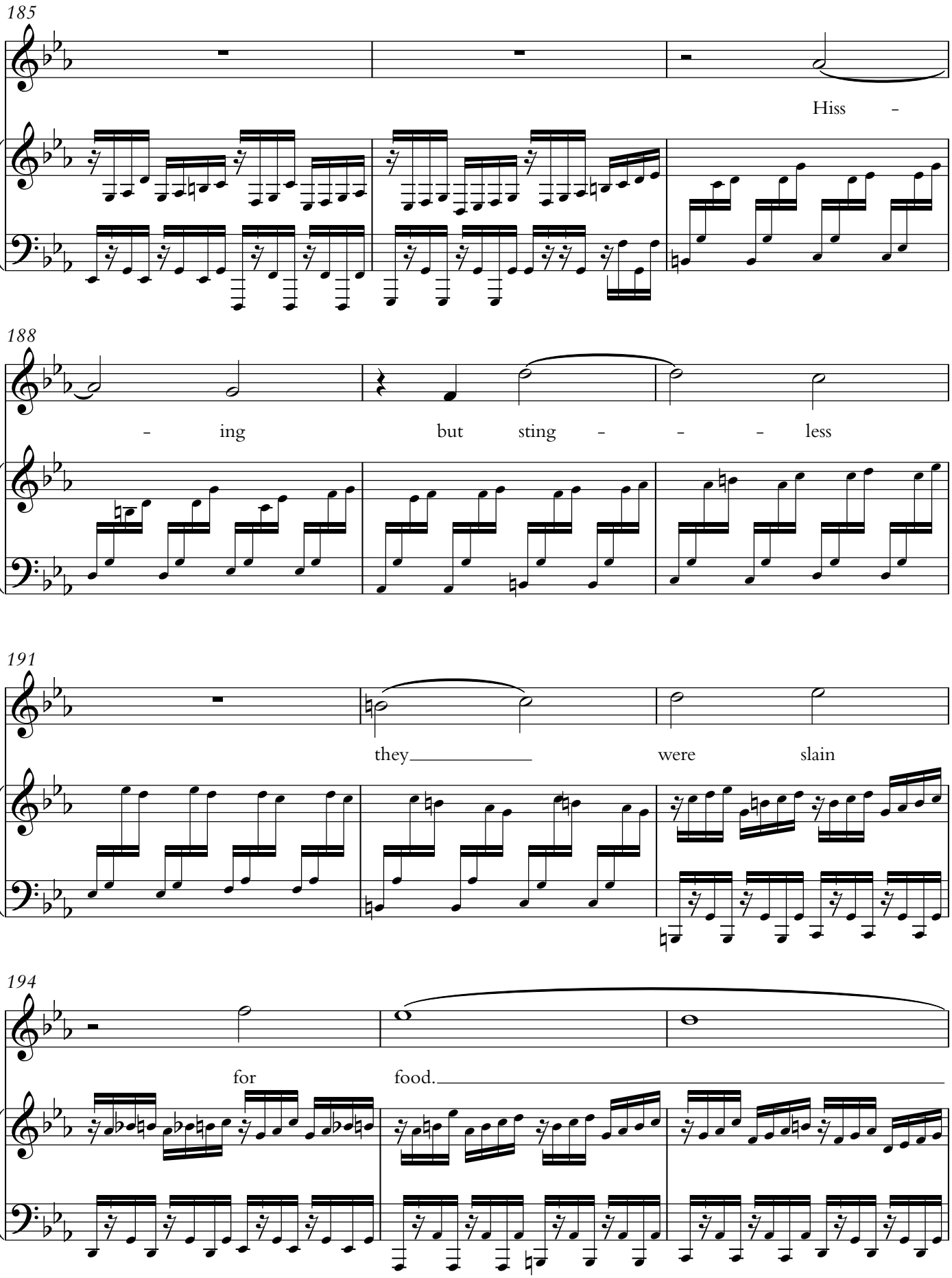

137
fed Their fu - ne - ral piles with fuel, and
140
look'd up With mad dis - qui - e -
143
tude on the dull sky,
146

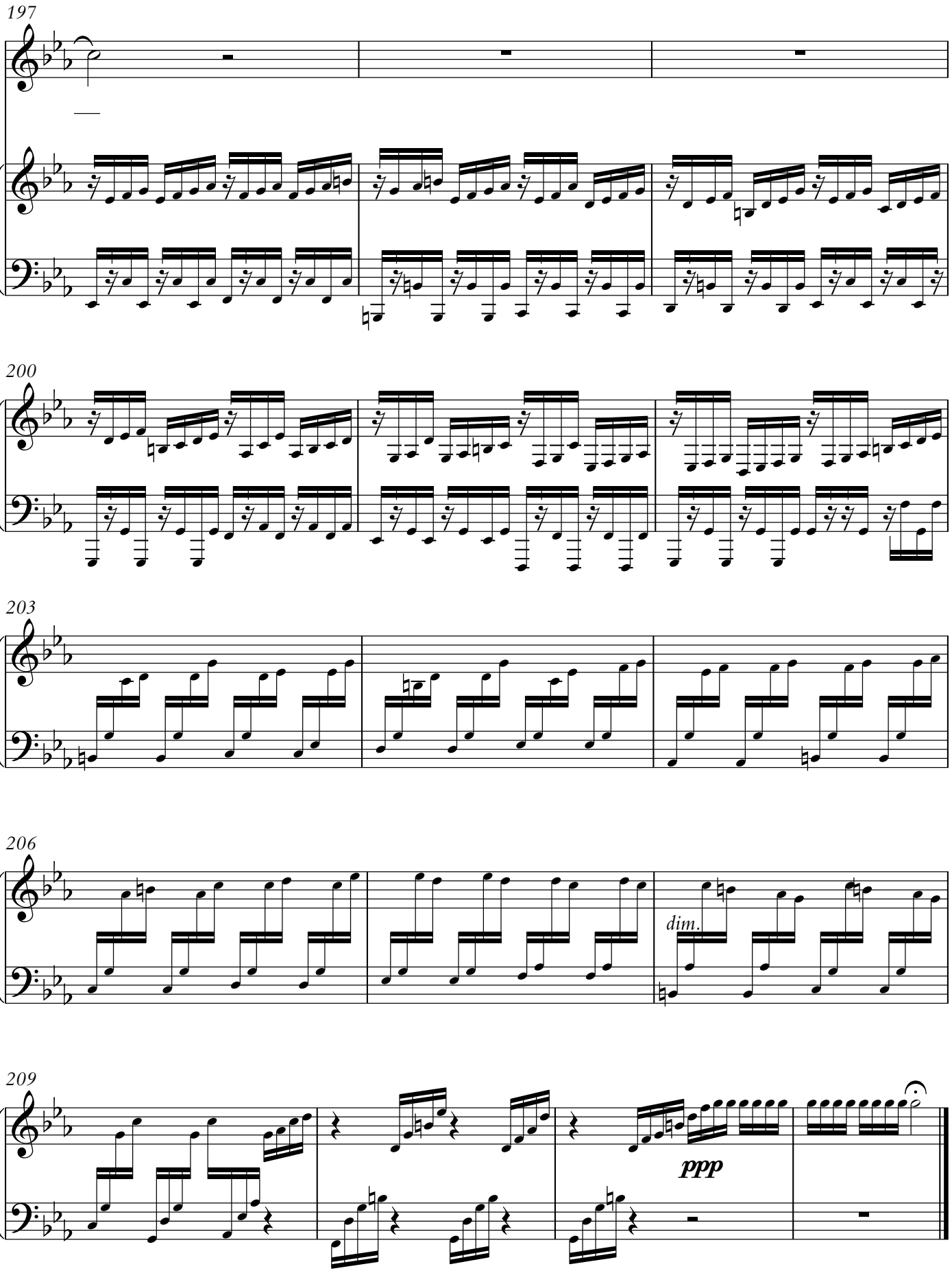

149
151
The pall of a past
153
world; and then a - gain
155
With curs - es cast them down up -


157
on the dust,
159
And gnash'd their
161
teeth and howl'd the
163
wild birds shriek'd


165
And, ter - ri fied, did
167
flut - ter on the ground,
169
And flap their use - less
171
wings; the


173
wild - - est brutes Came tame and trem - u - lous;
176
and vi - - pers crawl'd and
179
twin'd them selves a - mong - - the
182
mul - - ti - tude,


185
Hiss -
188
- ing but sting - - - less
191
they were slain
194
for food.


197
200
203
206
dim.
209
ppp

IV. "And War, which for a moment was no more"

♩ = 60

Soprano

Piano

mp

And

ped. ad libitum

217

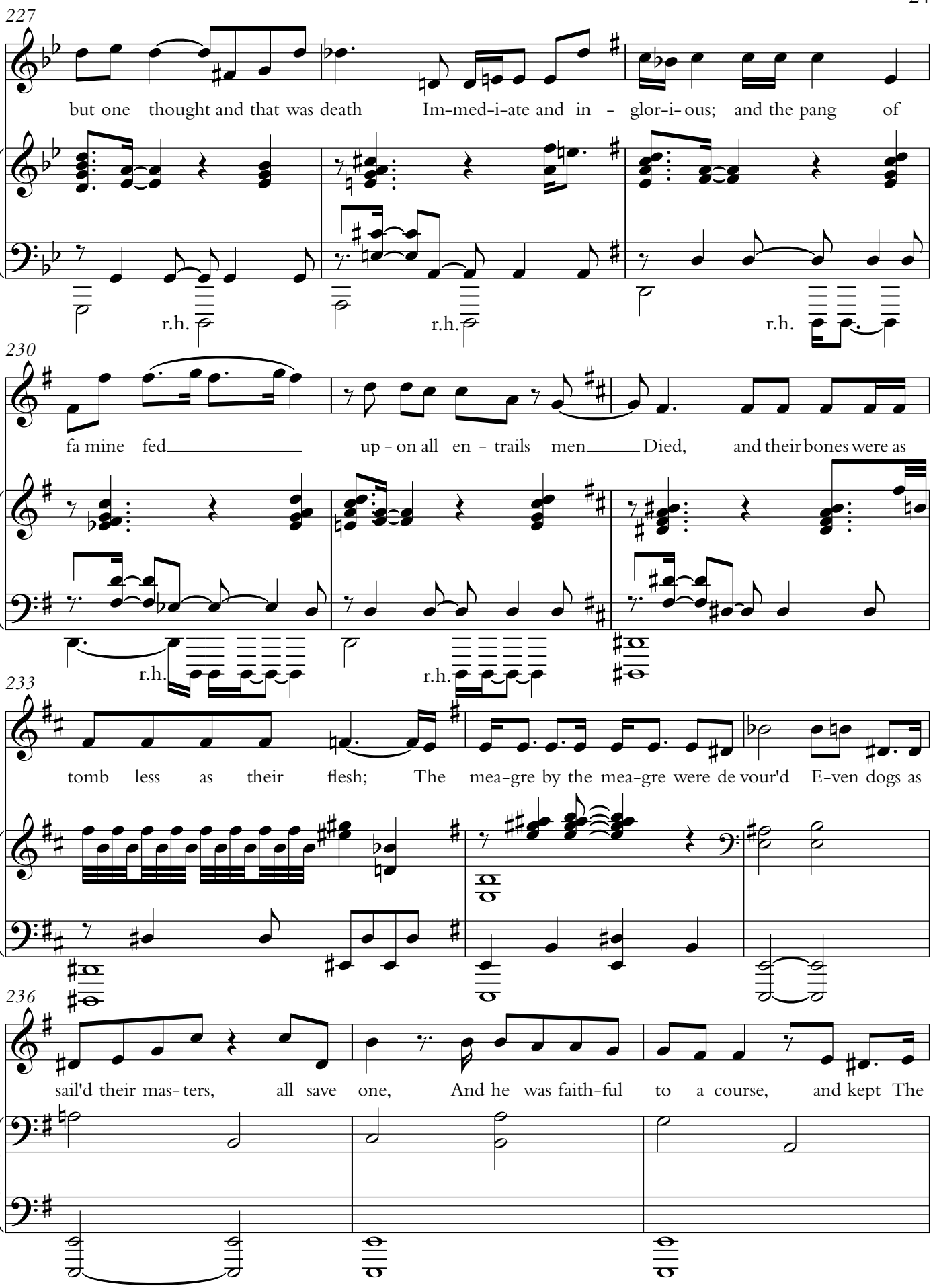
War, which for a mo ment was no more, Did glut him self a gain: a

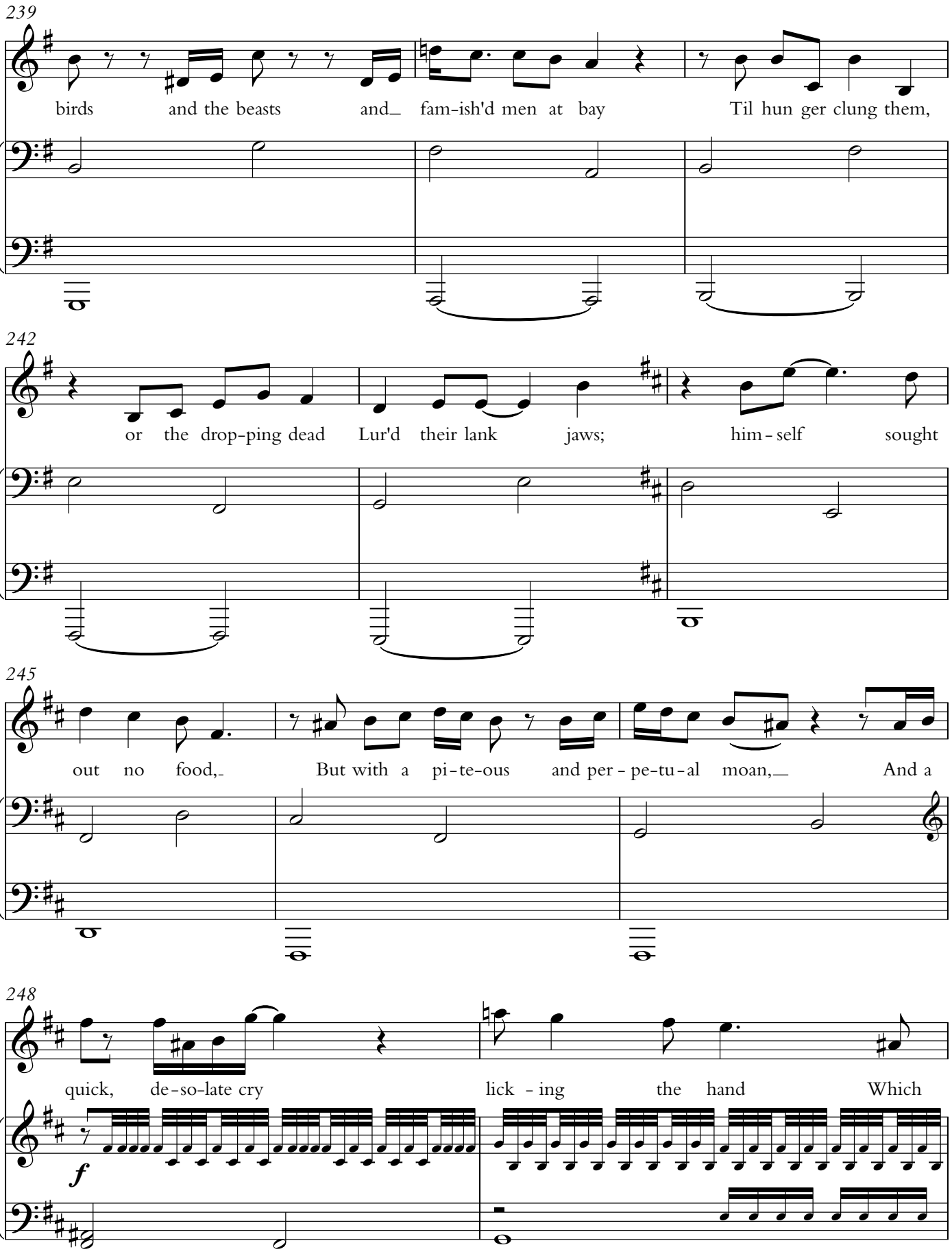
221

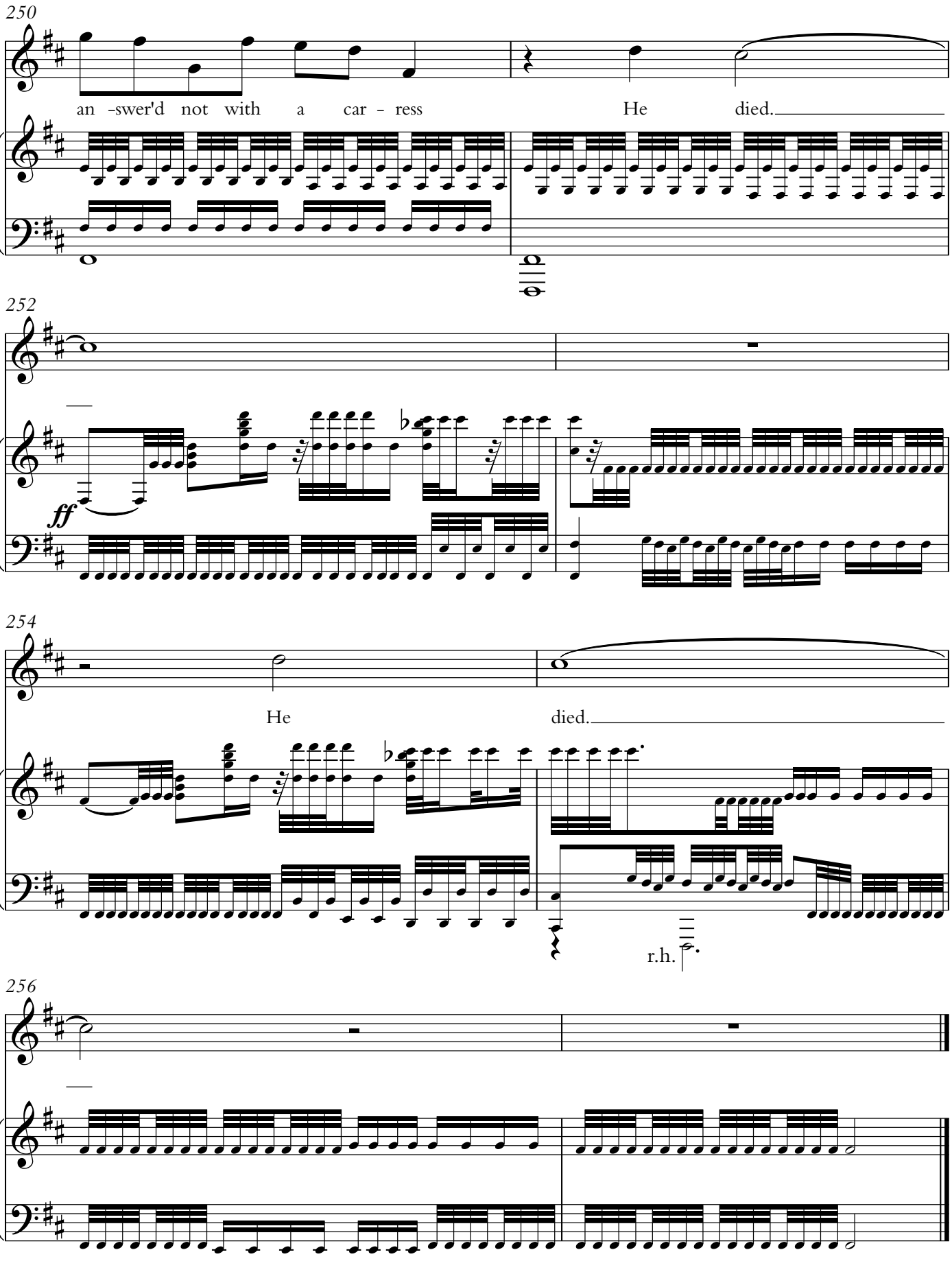
meal was bought With blood, and each sate sul-len - ly a part Gorg-ing him-self

224

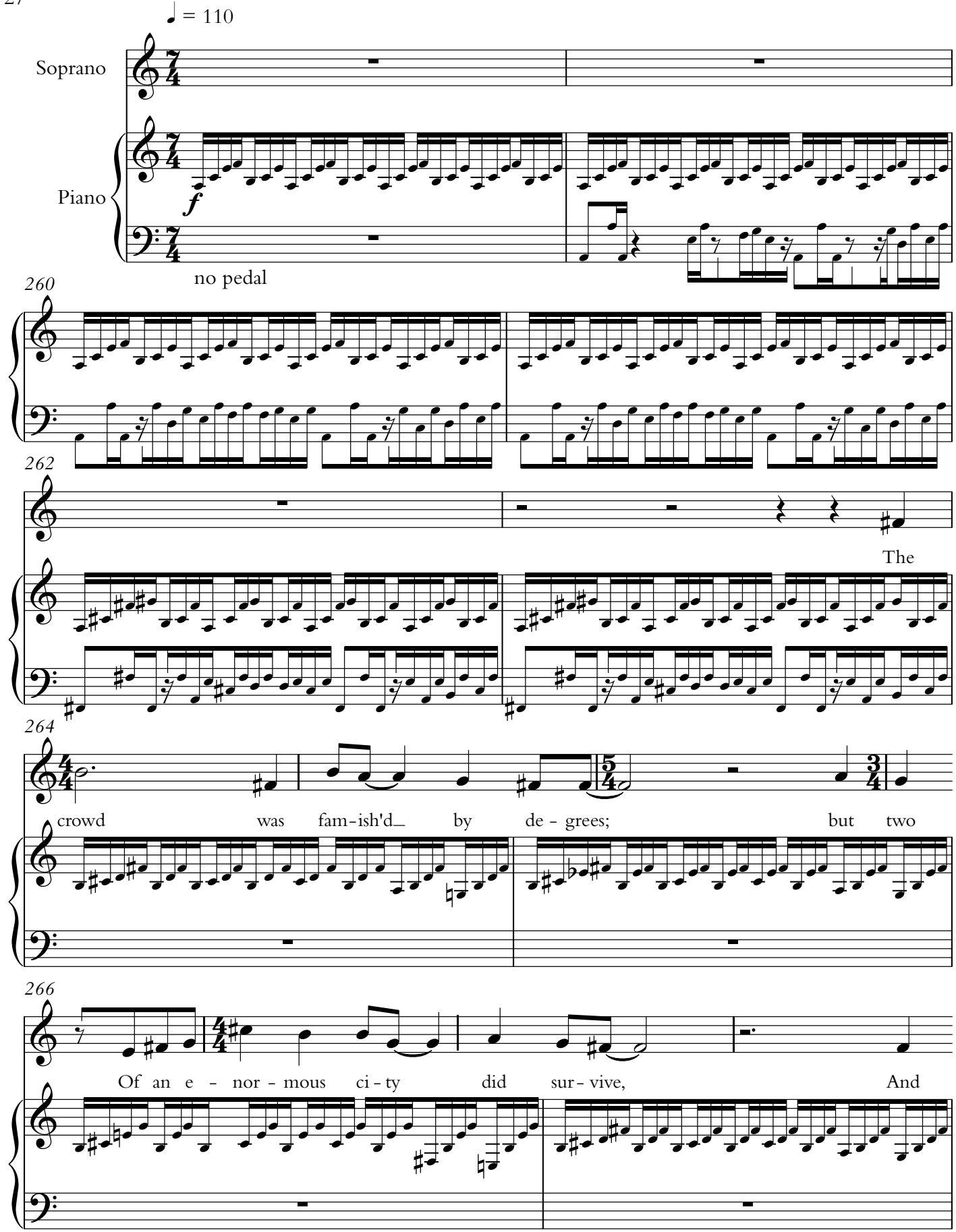
in gloom: no love was left; All earth was

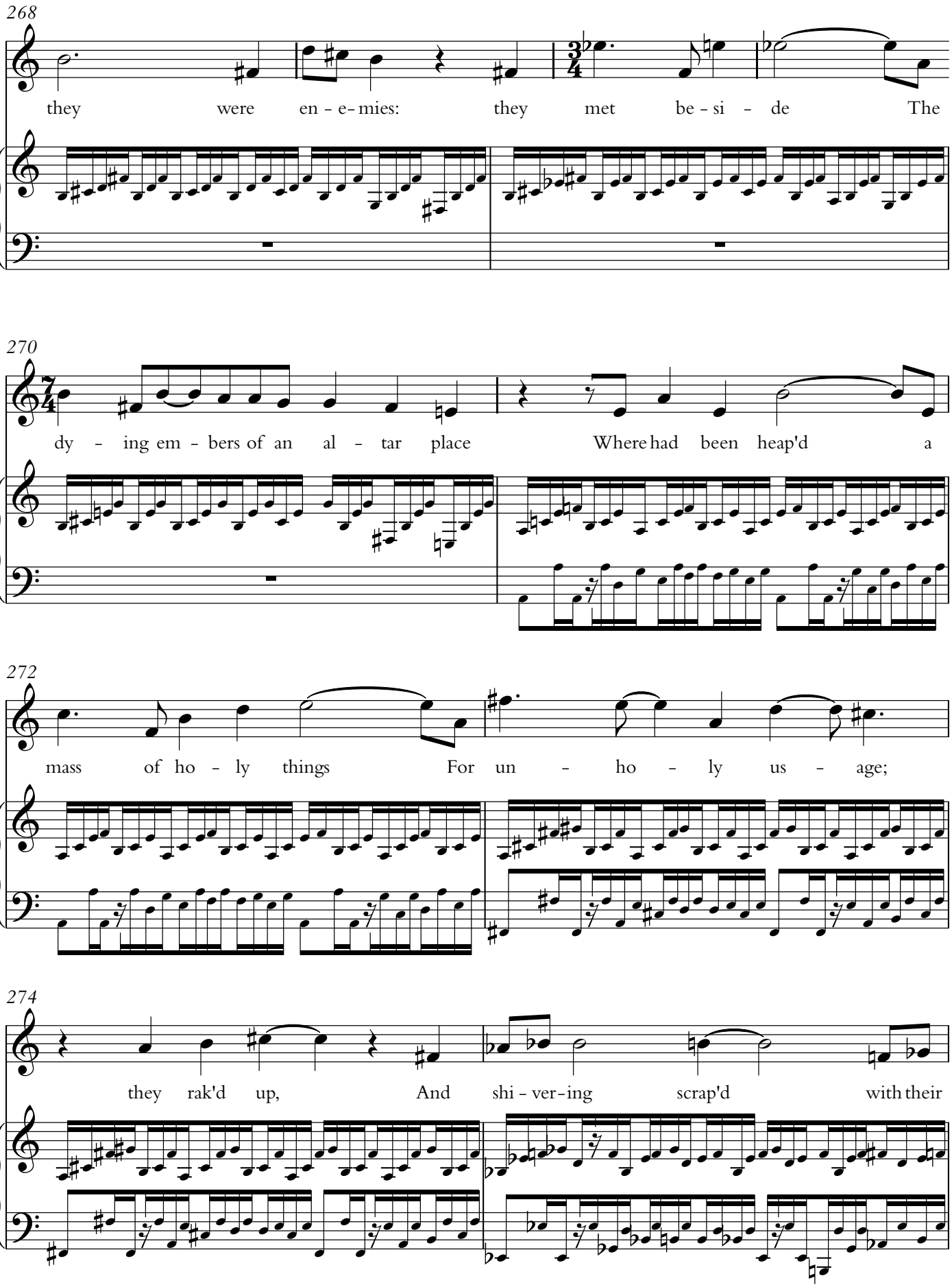

227
but one thought and that was death Im-med-i-ate and in - glor-i- ous; and the pang of
r.h.
r.h.
r.h.
230
fa mine fed up - on all en - trails men Died, and their bones were as
r.h.
r.h.
233
tomb less as their flesh; The mea-gre by the mea-gre were de vour'd E-ven dogs as
236
sail'd their mas- ters, all save one, And he was faith-ful to a course, and kept The


239
birds and the beasts and fam-ish'd men at bay Til hun ger clung them,
242
or the drop-ping dead Lur'd their lank jaws; him-self sought
245
out no food, But with a pi-te-ous and per-pe-tu-al moan, And a
248
quick, de-so-late cry lick-ing the hand Which
f


250
an -swer'd not with a car - ress
He died.
252
ff
254
He
died.
r.h.
256

V. "The crowd was famished by degrees"




268
they were en - e- mies: they met be - si - de The
270
dy - ing em - bers of an al - tar place Where had been heap'd a
272
mass of ho - ly things For un - ho - ly us - age;
274
they rak'd up, And shi - ver - ing scrap'd with their

276

cold skel - e - ton hands The fee - ble ash - es,

278

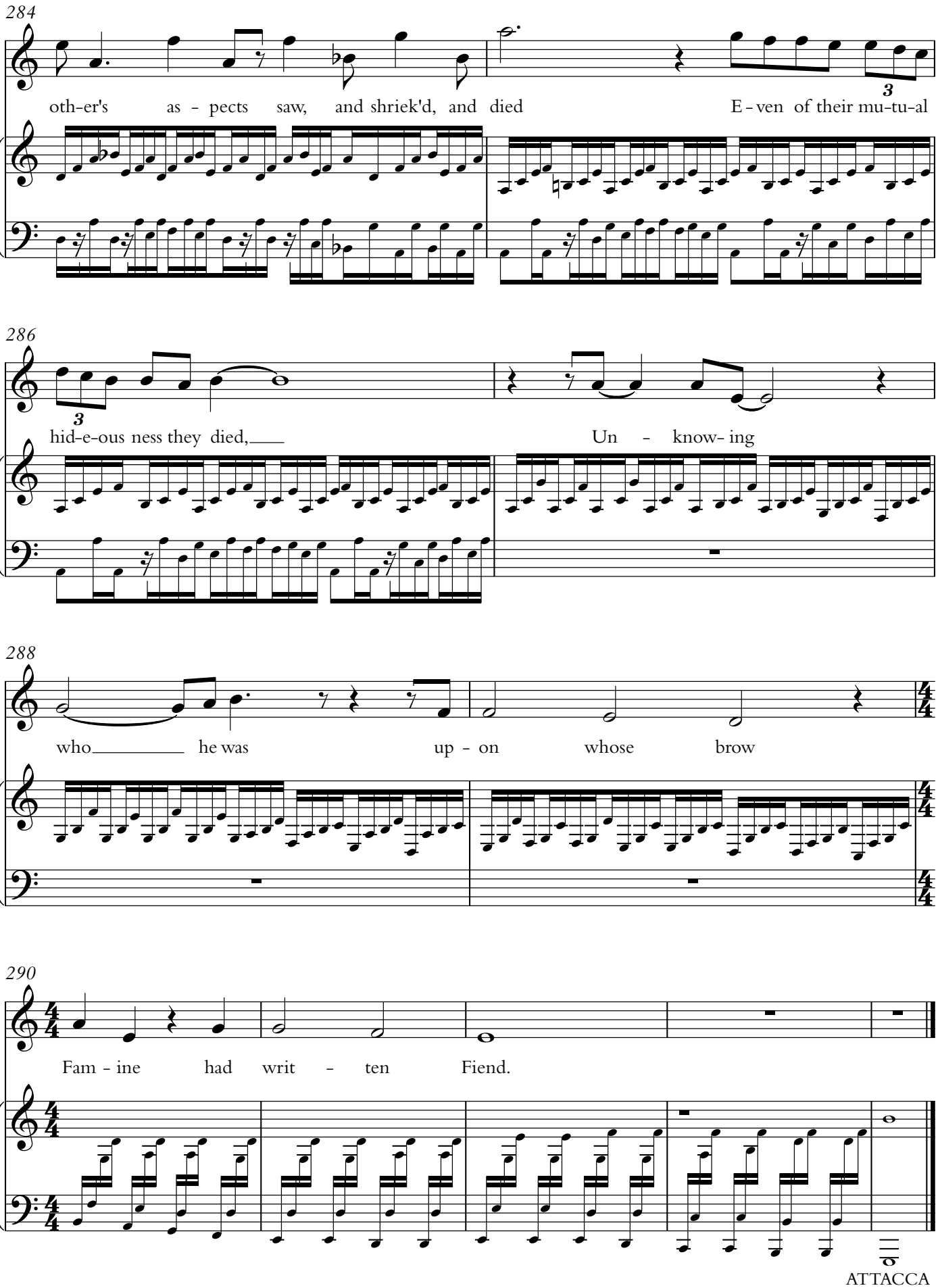
and their fee - ble - breath Blew for a lit - tle life,

280

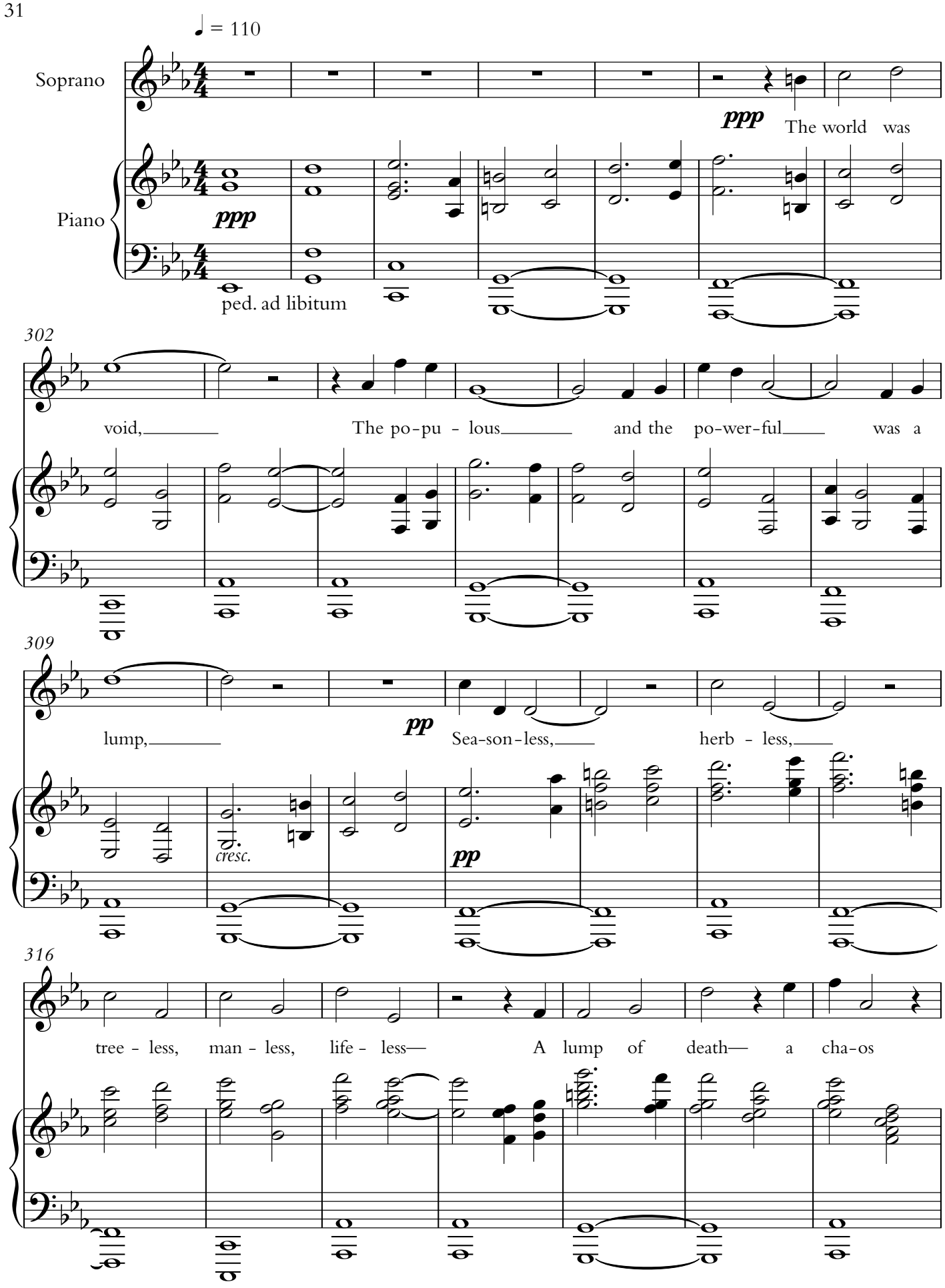
and made a flame Which was a mock-e-ry

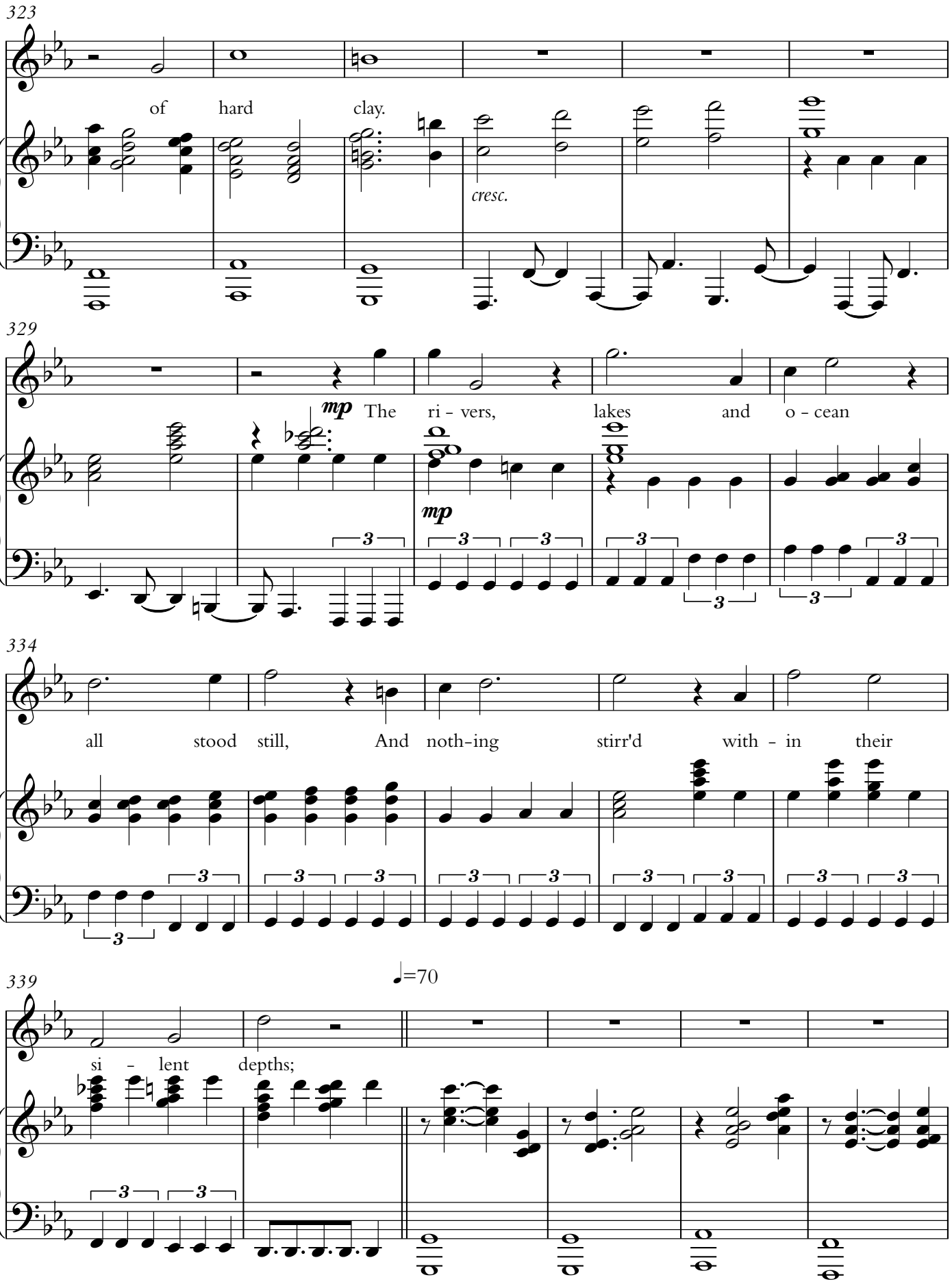
282

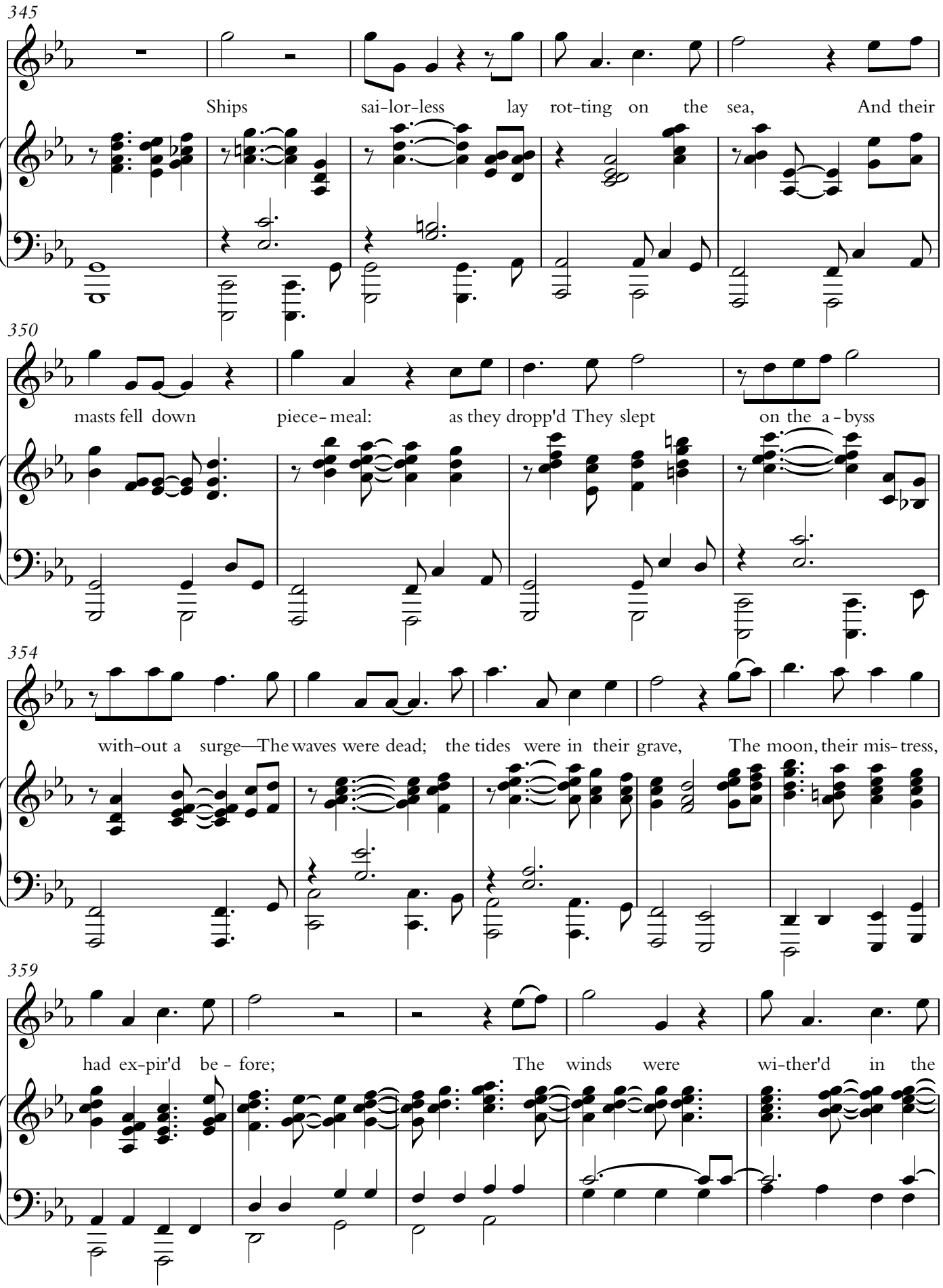
then they lift - ed up Their eyes as it grew light er, and be held Each

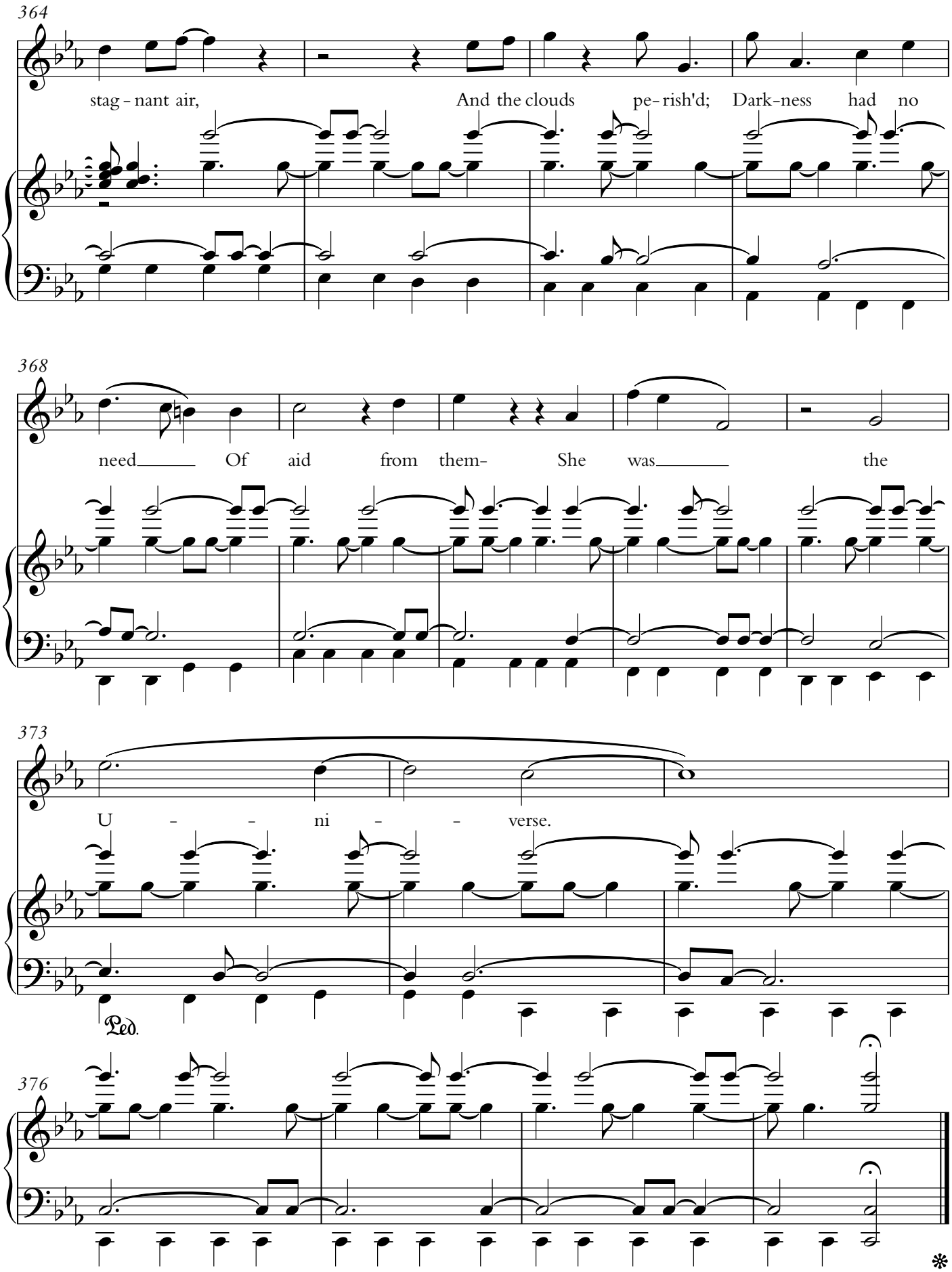

284
oth-er's as - pects saw, and shriek'd, and died E - ven of their mu-tu-al
286
hid-e-ous ness they died, Un - know- ing
288
who he was up - on whose brow
290
Fam - ine had writ - ten Fiend.
ATTACCA

VI. "The world was void"




323
of hard clay.
cresc.
329
mp The ri - vers, lakes and o - cean
mp
334
all stood still, And noth-ing stirr'd with - in their
339
♩=70
si - lent depths;


345
Ships sai-lor-less lay rot-ting on the sea, And their
350
masts fell down piece-meal: as they dropp'd They slept on the a-byss
354
with-out a surge—The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave, The moon, their mis-tress,
359
had ex-pir'd be-fore; The winds were wi-ther'd in the


364
stag - nant air, And the clouds pe - rish'd; Dark - ness had no
368
need Of aid from them - She was the
373
U - - ni - - verse.
Ped.
376