Robinsongs

for Mezzo-Soprano, Oboe, and Piano

Bill Robinson

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April 30—September 11, 2012
Duration: about 14 minutes Cover photo: Parma Cathedral dome

for Joseph, Mary Kay, and Rebecca Robinson

Joseph and Mary Kay Robinson (no relation) came to a concert in 2006 featuring some of my music performed by Eric Pritchard at Duke University. Joe had a long career as principal oboist with the New York Philharmonic, and Mary Kay has performed extensively as a violinist. They asked me to write a trio for oboe, violin, and piano, which resulted in *Aditya Hridayam*. After they performed this at Duke with Thomas Warburton, I realized how lucky I was to work with musicians of this caliber. In February 2012, Mary Kay was one of the musicians performing my *Clarinet Sextet* for clarinet and strings, which was a wonderful performance.

In 2011, Joe and Mary Kay asked me to write a piece they could perform with their aspiring diva daughter Becky, with Mary Kay playing piano. I wrestled with ideas for lyrics for many months, but found this to be an exceptionally difficult assignment. After finishing *Violations* for viol consort (or string ensembles) on February 19, 2012, it was time to sit down to do *Robinsongs*, a set of songs for, well, the Robinsons. After delays and false starts with other lyrics, I managed to start scribbling Lewis Carroll's *Some Hallucinations* on April 30, but progress was quite difficult. After that came Ogden Nash's *The Purist*. (I've made a good-faith effort to find the holder of the copyright—but then, my music is so far from profitable that I don't suppose royalties will be an issue.) Finally, after much struggle and an uncommonly slow season of composition, came another Lewis Carroll poem, *You Are Old, Father William*, finished on the ominous date of September 11.

In August 2015 I made a new version of *Robinsongs* for mezzo, flute, clarinet, and piano, at the suggestion of Marianne Breneman, clarinetist and member of Conundrum, a chamber music group of soprano, flute, clarinet, and piano. In October 2022, I converted the legal-size format to letter-size, and for the oboe version, made a special score for electronic music readers.

Accidentals hold through the measure and not beyond, and do not refer to other octaves. Sometimes I include courtesy accidentals to avoid confusion. Notes retain their value through meter changes.

Bill Robinson

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billrobinsonmusic.com

Some Hallucinations

He thought he saw an Elephant,
  That practiced on a fife:
He looked again, and found it was
  A letter from his wife.
"At length I realize," he said,
  "The bitterness of life."

He thought he saw a Buffalo
  Upon the chimneypiece:
He looked again, and found it was
  His Sister's Husband's Niece.
"Unless you leave this house," he said,
  "I'll send for the Police!"

He thought he saw a Rattlesnake
  That questioned him in Greek:
He looked again, and found it was
  The Middle of Next Week.
"The one thing I regret," he said,
  "Is that it cannot speak!"

He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk
  Descending from the 'bus:
He looked again, and found it was
  A Hippopotamus.
"If this should stay to dine," he said,
  "There won't be much for us!"

–Lewis Carroll

The Purist

I give you now Professor Twist,
A conscientious scientist,
Trustees exclaimed, "He never bungles!"
And sent him off to distant jungles.
Camped on a tropic riverside,
One day he missed his loving bride.
She had, the guide informed him later,
Been eaten by an alligator.
Professor Twist could not but smile.
"You mean," he said, "a crocodile."

--Ogden Nash

You Are Old, Father William

"You are old, father William," the young man said,
"And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head--
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"In my youth," father William replied to his son,
"I feared it might injure the brain;
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again."

"You are old," said the youth, "as I mentioned before,
And have grown most uncommonly fat;
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door--
Pray what is the reason of that?"

"In my youth," said the sage, as he shook his grey locks,
"I kept all my limbs very supple
By the use of this ointment--one shilling the box--
Allow me to sell you a couple?"

"You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are to weak
For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak--
Pray, how did you manage to do it?"

"In my youth," said his father, "I took to the law,
And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw,
Has lasted the rest of my life."

"You are old," said the youth, "one would hardly suppose
That your eye was as steady as ever;
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose--
What made you so awfully clever?"

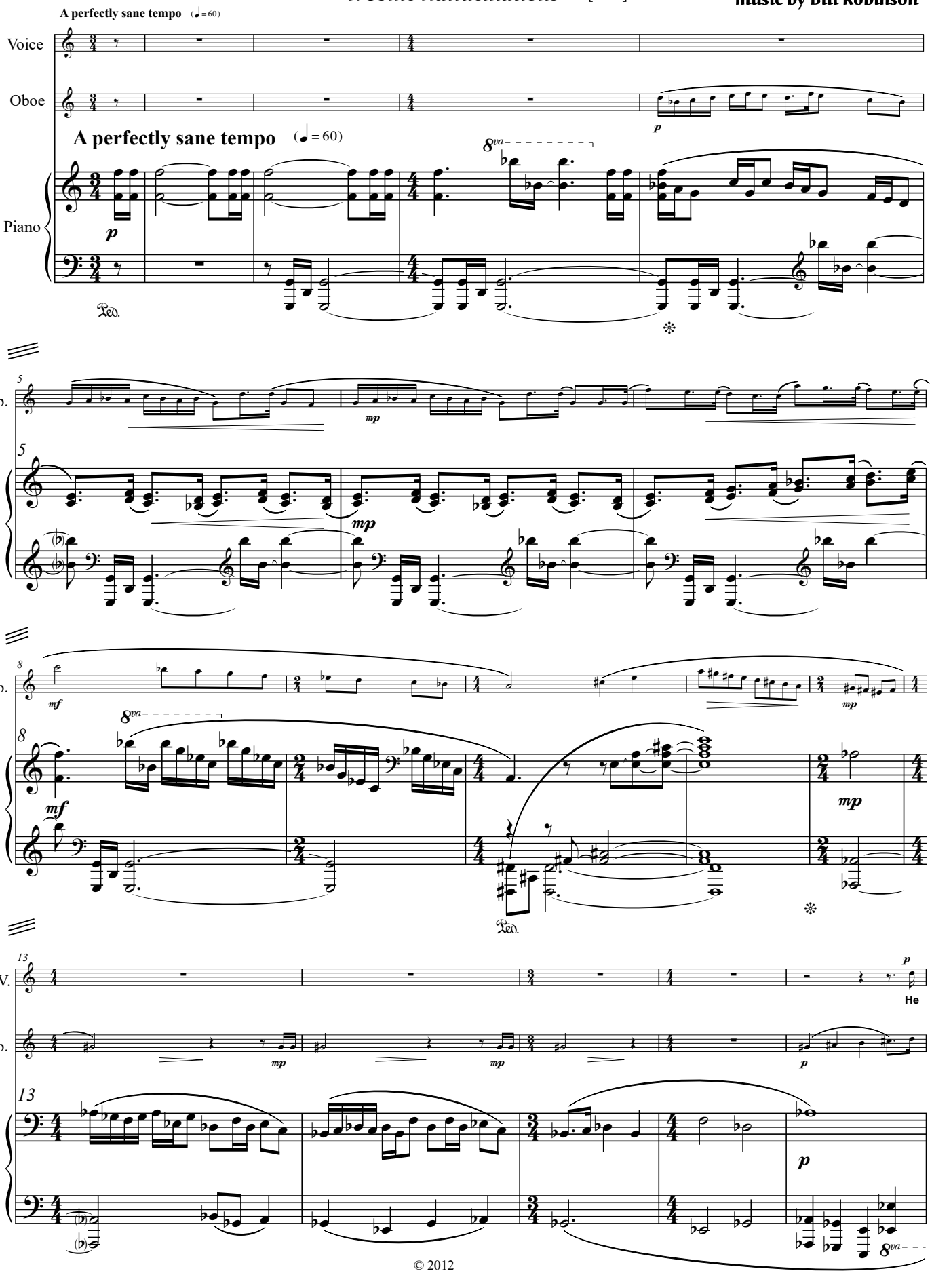
"I have answered three questions and that is enough,"
Said the father. "Don't give yourself airs!
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?
Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs!"

---Lewis Carroll

Robinsongs

1. Some Hallucinations [5:20]

lyrics by Lewis Carroll
music by Bill Robinson



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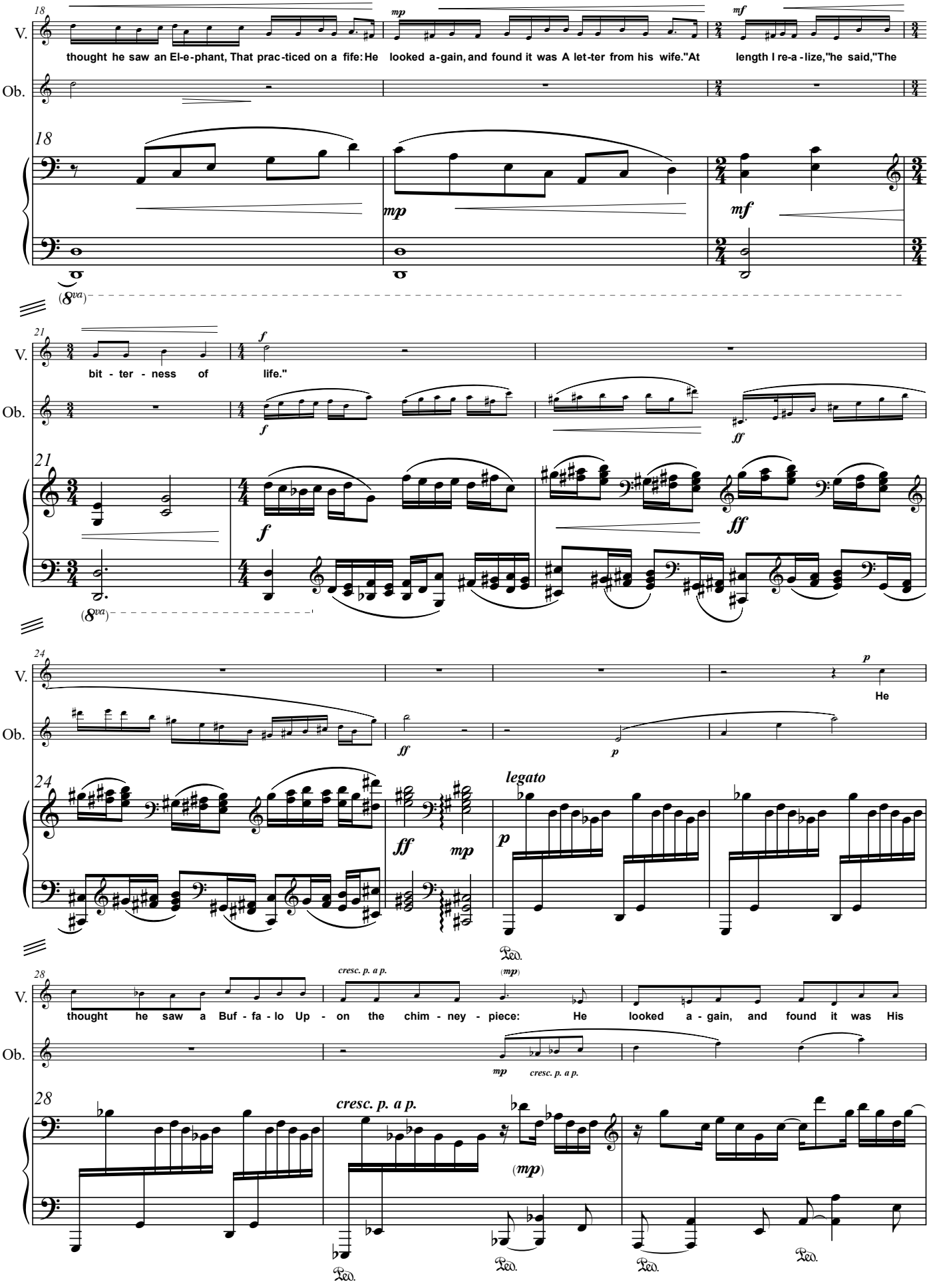
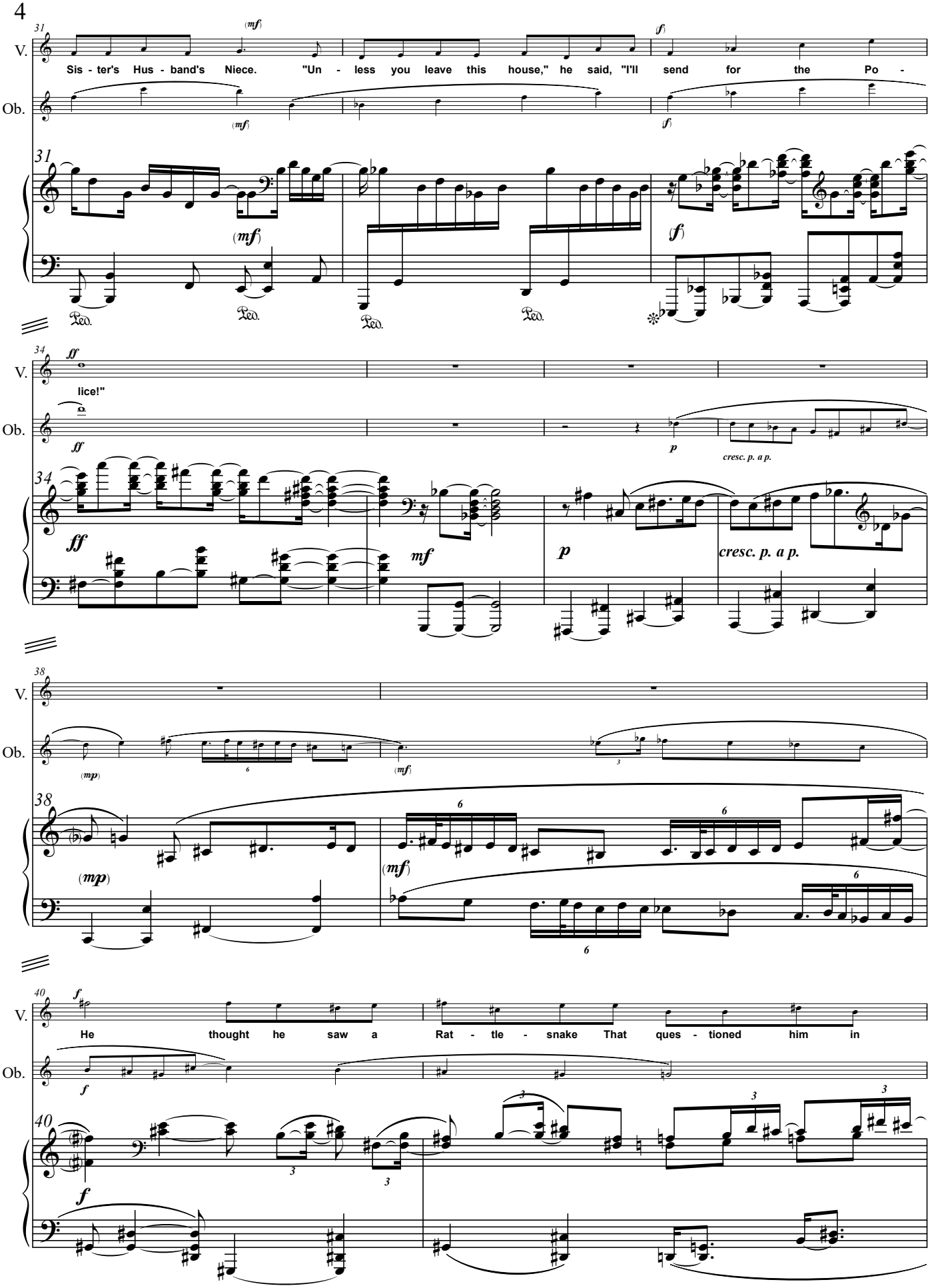
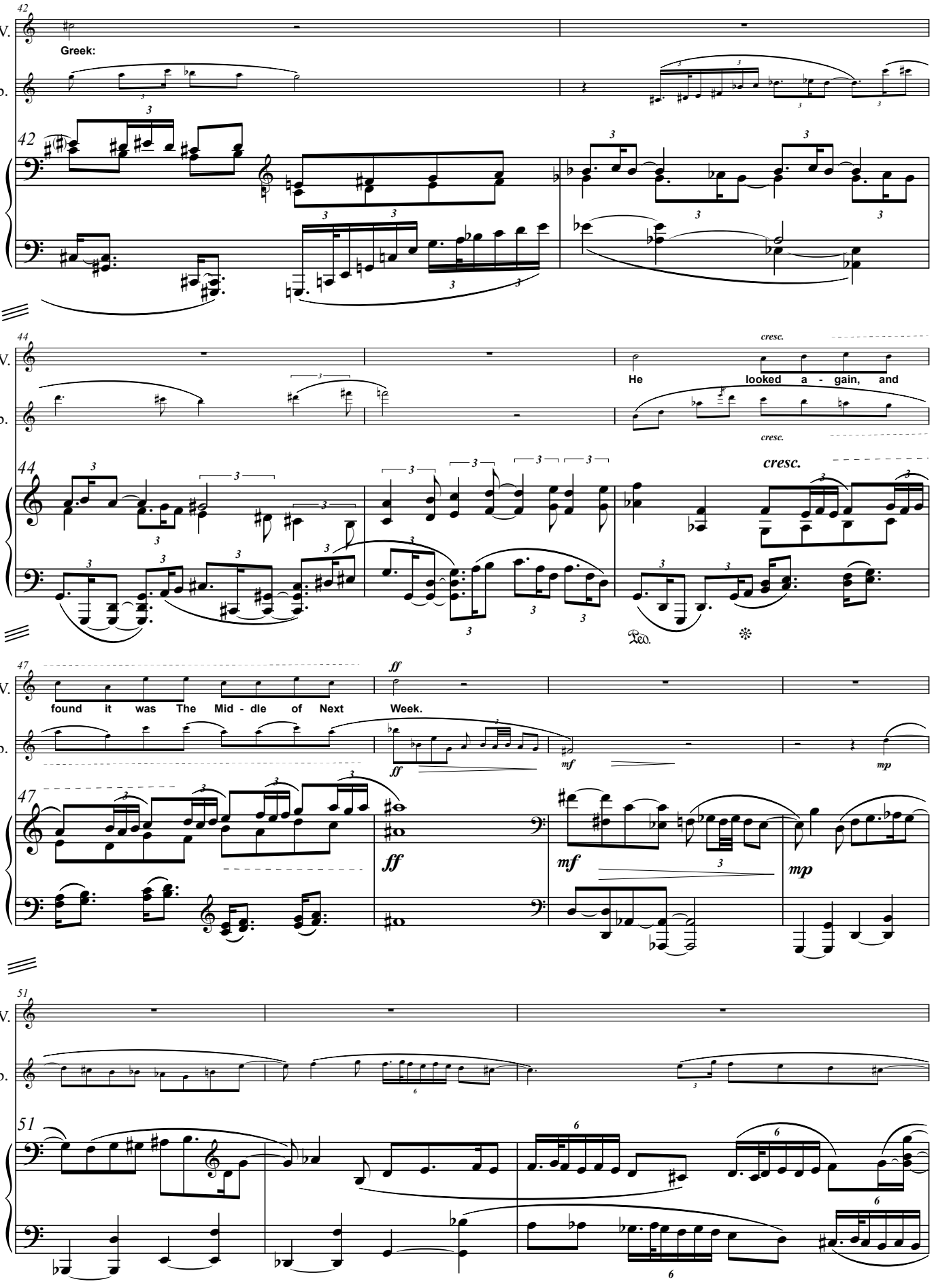
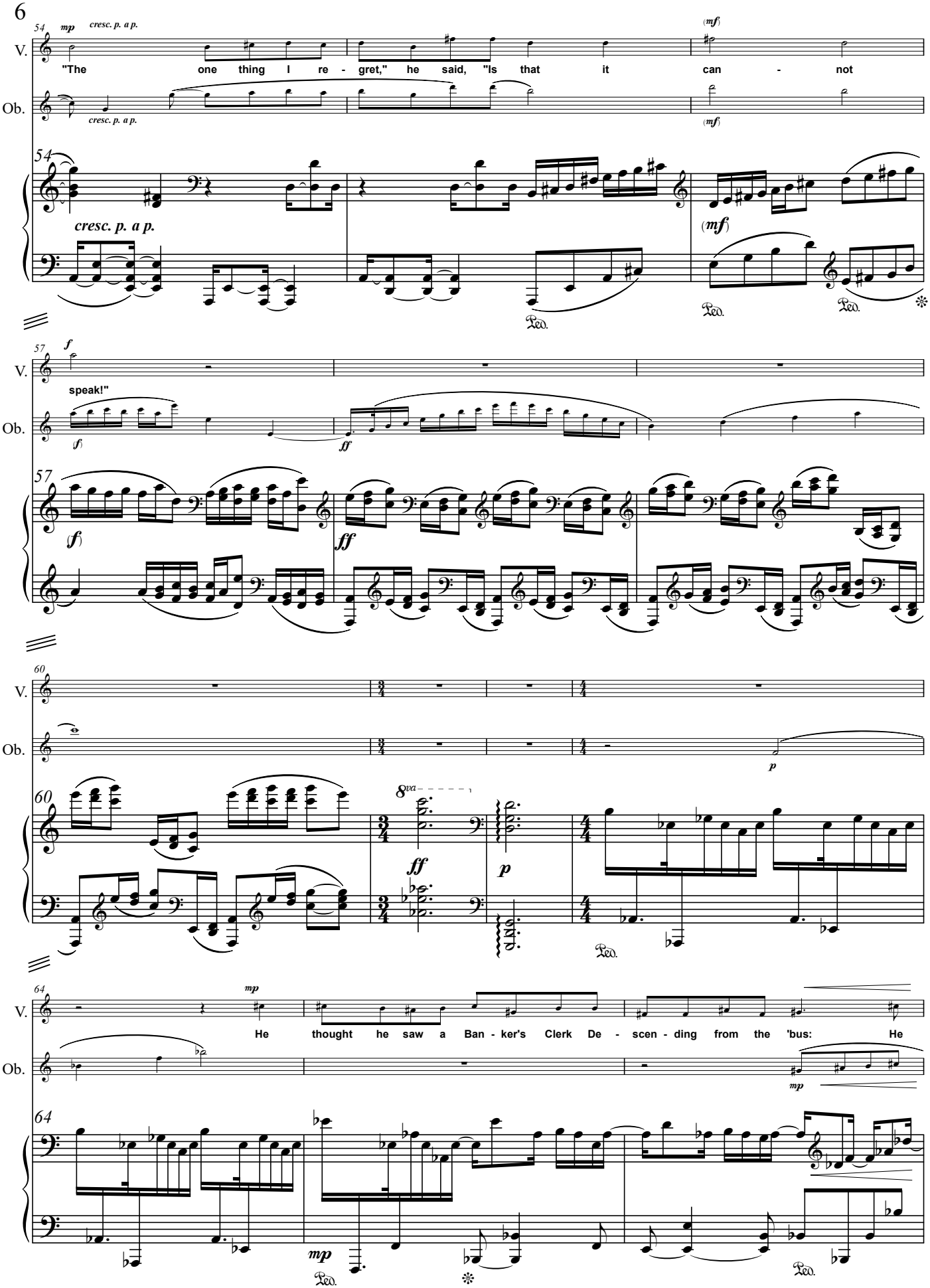
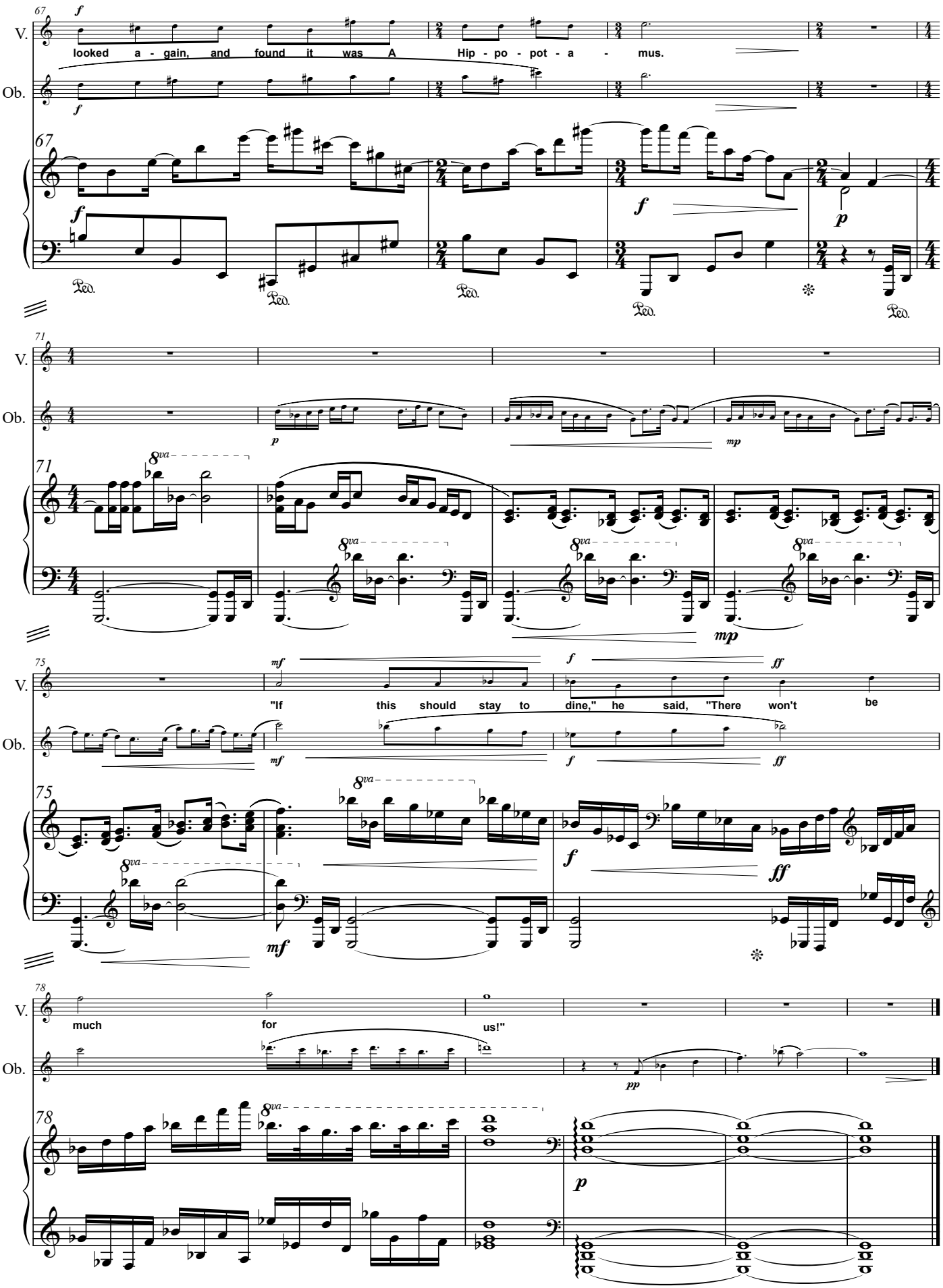

18
V.
thought he saw an El-e-phant, That prac-ticed on a fife: He looked a-gain, and found it was A let-ter from his wife." At length I re-a-lize," he said," The
Ob.
mp
mf
mp
mf
(8va)
21
V.
bit - ter - ness of life."
Ob.
f
ff
f
ff
(8va)
24
V.
He
Ob.
ff
p
legato
ff
mp
p
Ped.
28
V.
thought he saw a Buf - fa - lo Up - on the chim - ney - piece: He looked a - gain, and found it was His
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
Ob.
mp
cresc. p. a p.
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


31
V.
Sis - ter's Hus - band's Niece. "Un - less you leave this house," he said, "I'll send for the Po -
Ob.
(mf)
(f)
Ped.
34
ff
lice!"
p
cresc. p. a p.
38
(mp)
(mf)
6
3
40
He thought he saw a Rat - tle - snake That ques - tioned him in

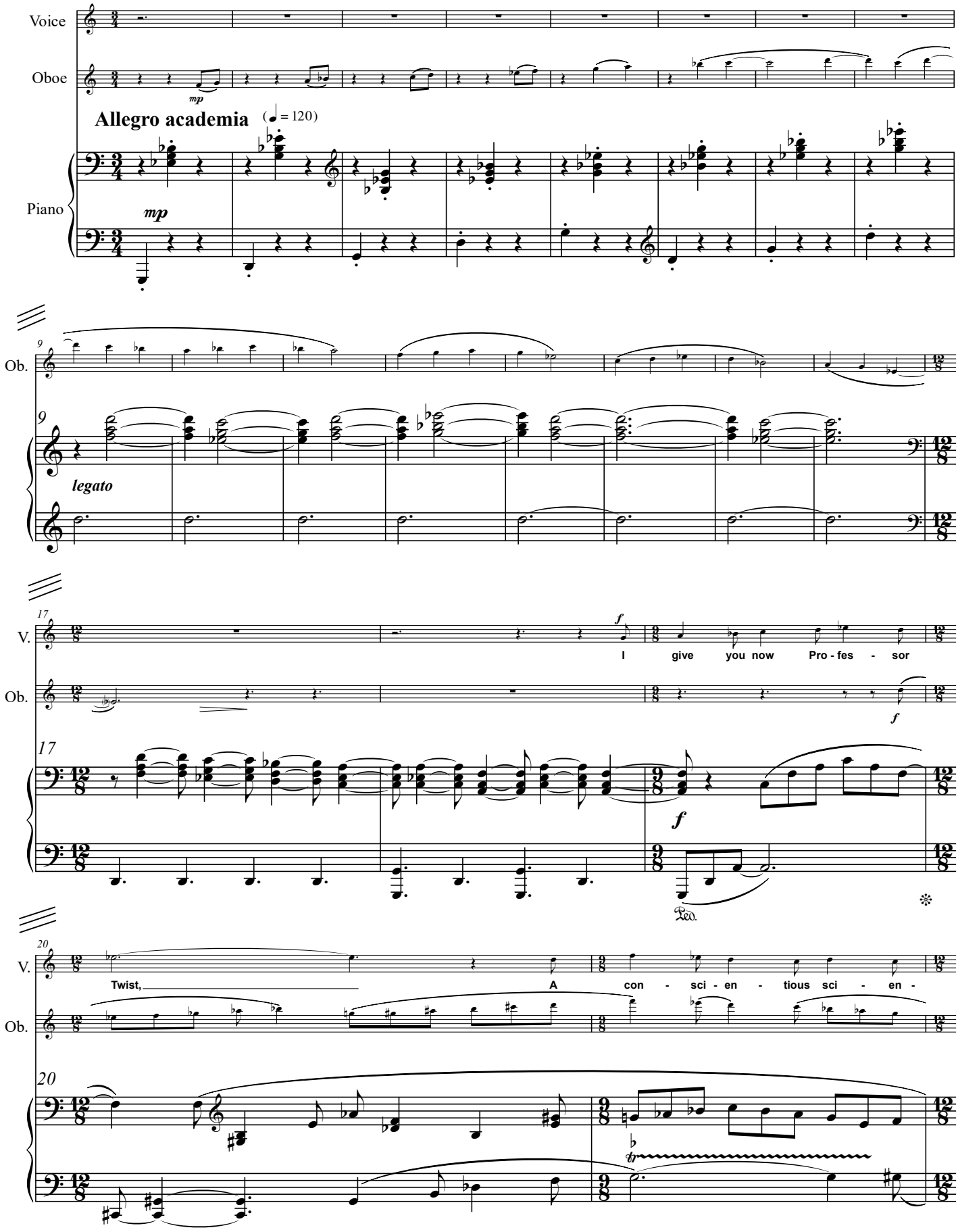

42
V.
Greek:
Ob.
42
44
V.
He
looked a - gain, and
cresc.
Ob.
44
cresc.
Ped.
47
V.
found it was The Mid - dle of Next
Week.
ff
Ob.
47
ff
mf
mp
51
V.
Ob.
51

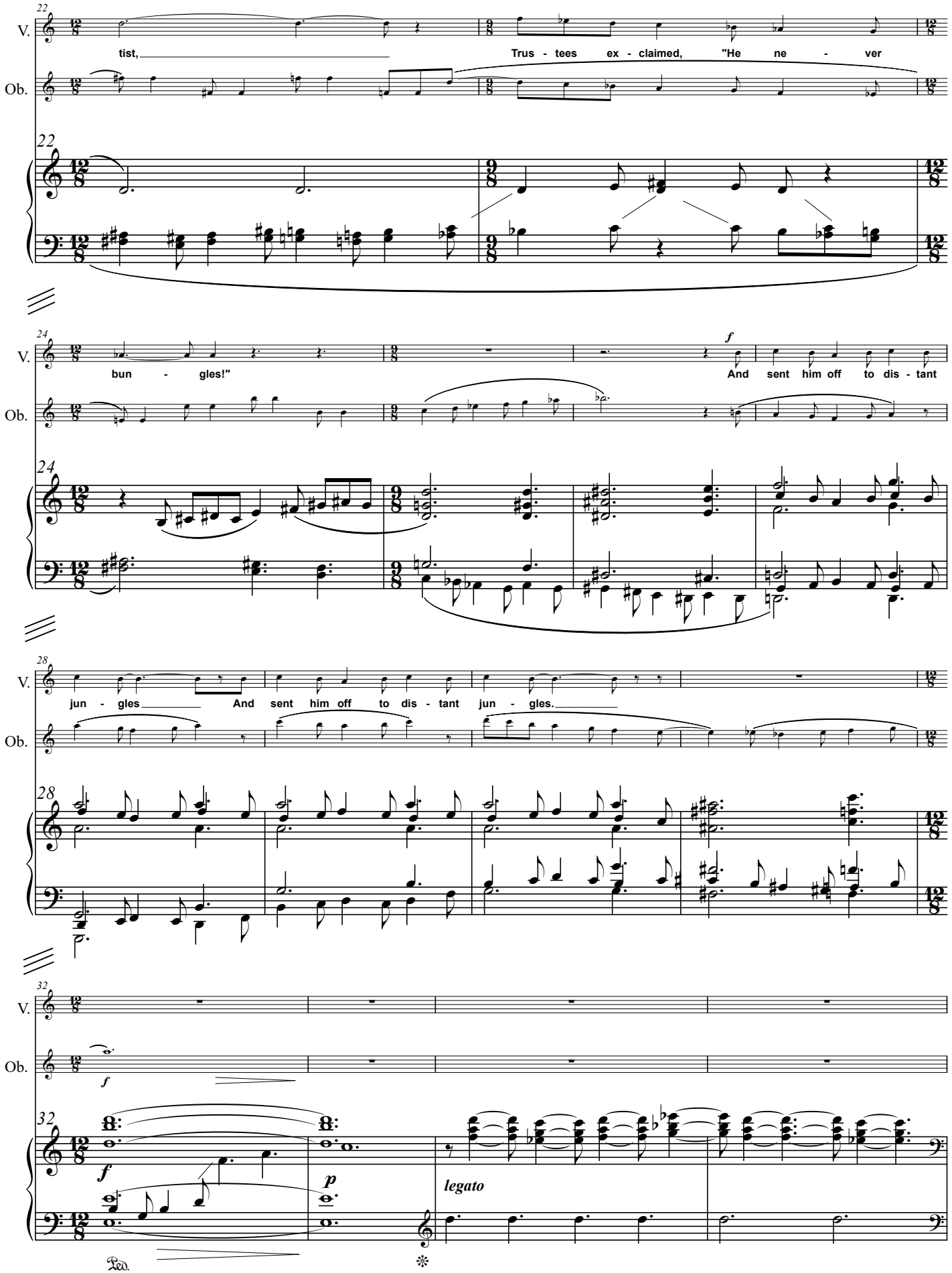

54
mp
cresc. p. a p.
V.
"The one thing I re - gret," he said, "Is that it can - not
Ob.
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
(mf)
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
Ped.
Ped.
57
f
speak!"
(f)
ff
(f)
ff
60
8va
ff
p
p
Ped.
64
mp
He thought he saw a Ban - ker's Clerk De - scen - ding from the 'bus: He
mp
mp
Ped.
Ped.

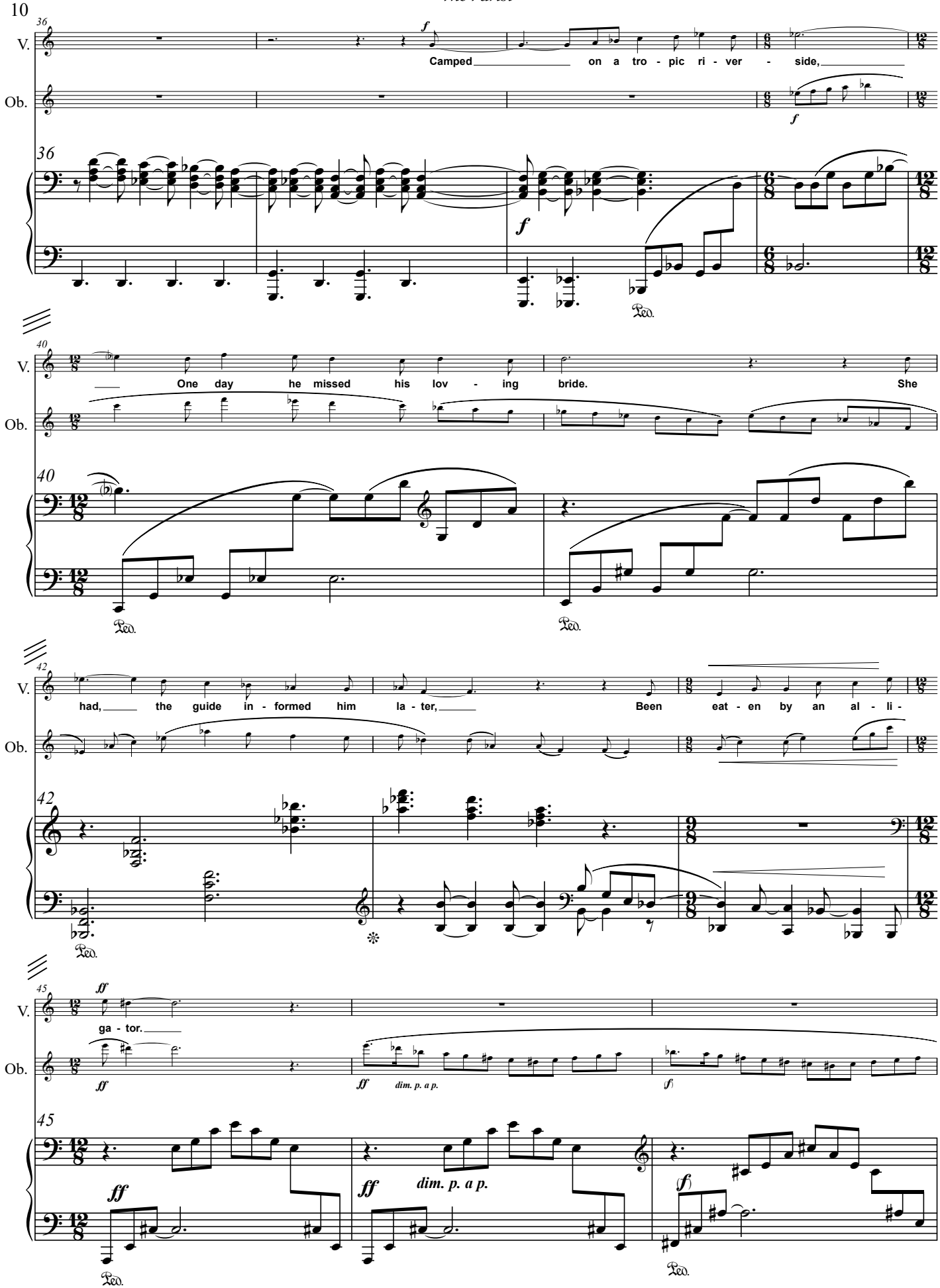

67
V.
looked a - gain, and found it was A Hip - po - pot - a - mus.
Ob.
67
71
V.
Ob.
71
75
V.
"If this should stay to dine," he said, "There won't be
Ob.
75
78
V.
much for us!"
Ob.
78

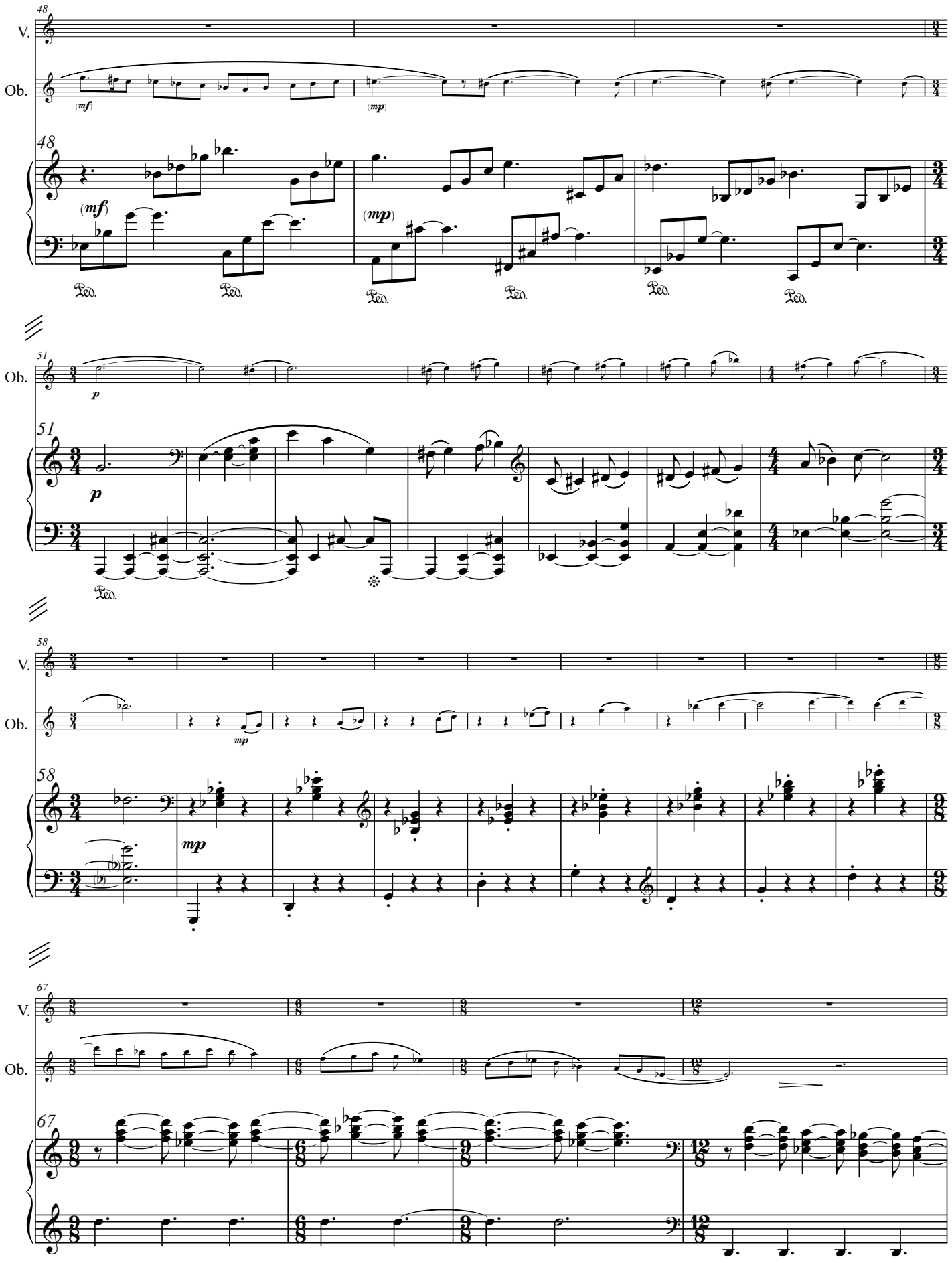
11. The Purist [3']

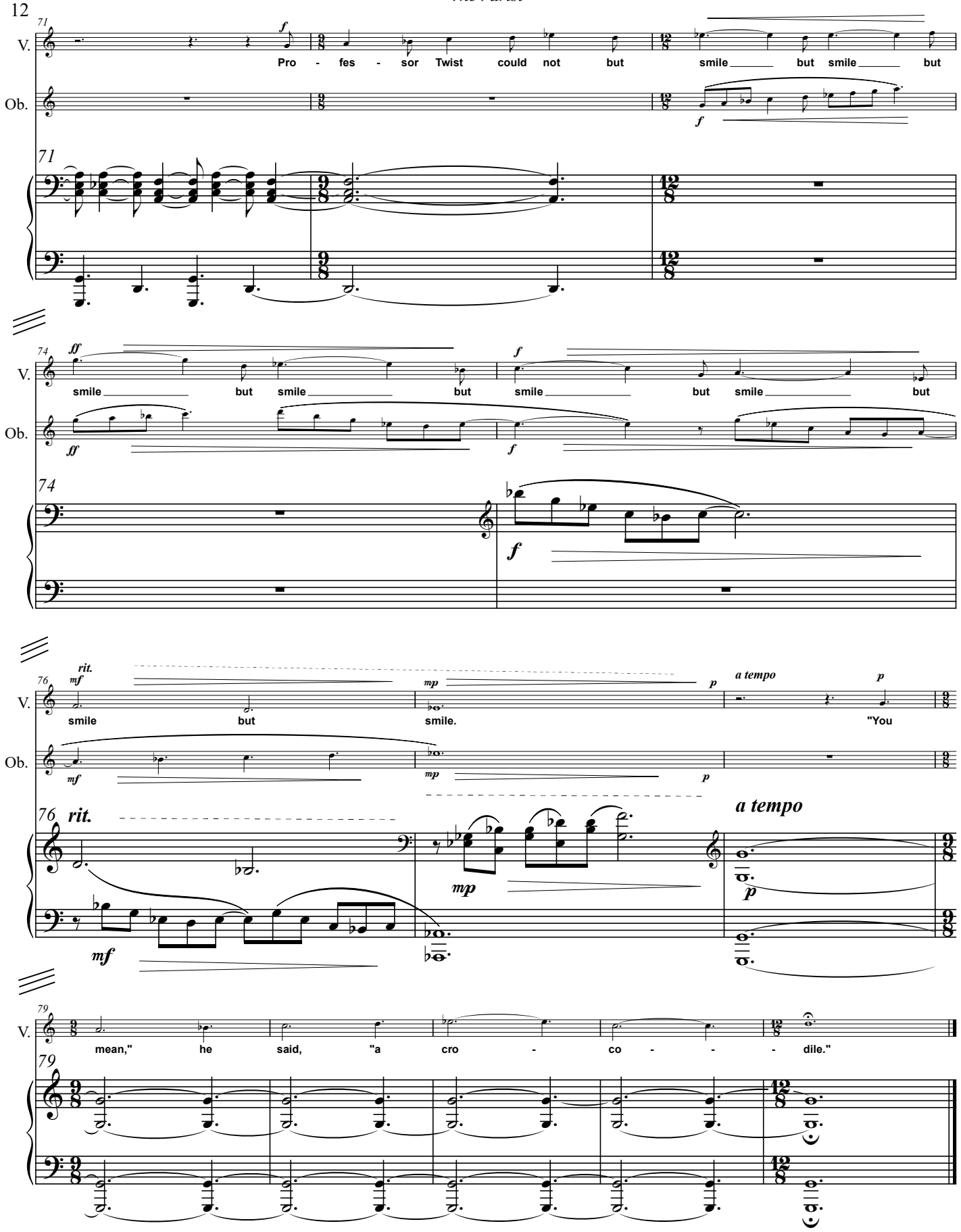
lyrics by Ogden Nash
music by Bill Robinson

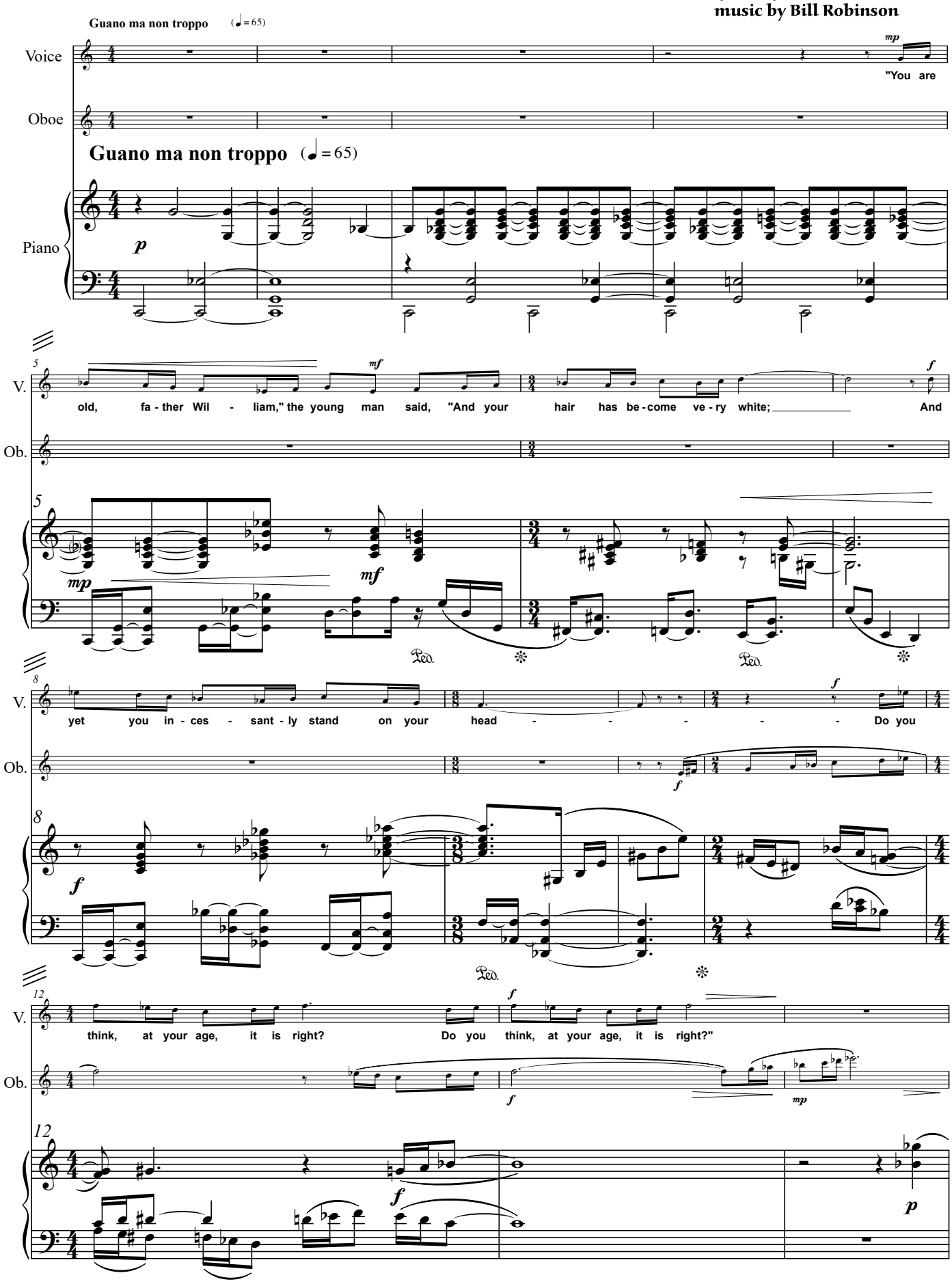


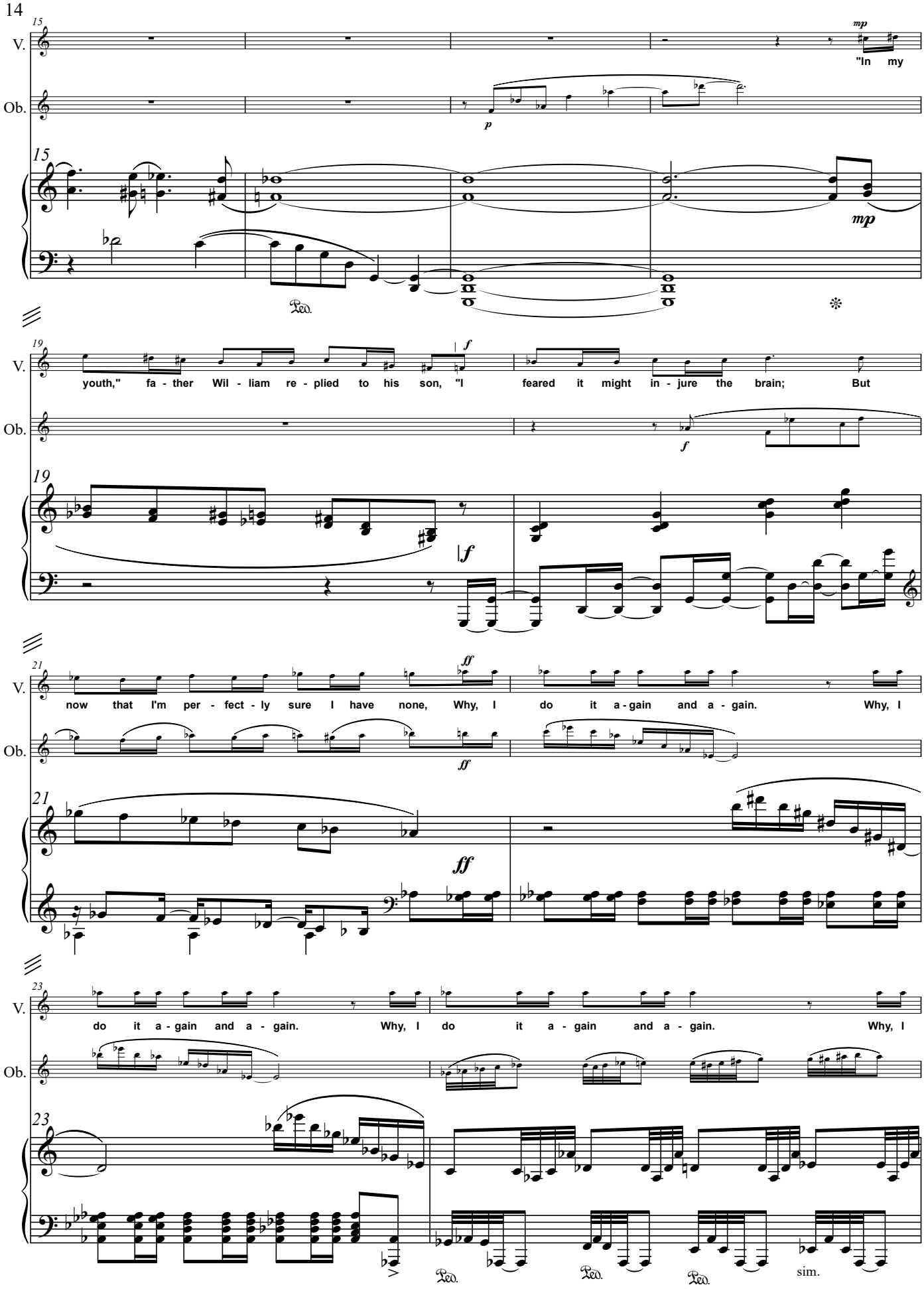

22
V.
tist,
Trus - tees ex - claimed, "He ne - ver
Ob.
22
24
V.
bun - gles!"
f
And sent him off to dis - tant
Ob.
24
28
V.
jun - gles And sent him off to dis - tant jun - gles.
Ob.
28
32
V.
Ob.
f
32
f
p
legato
Ped.

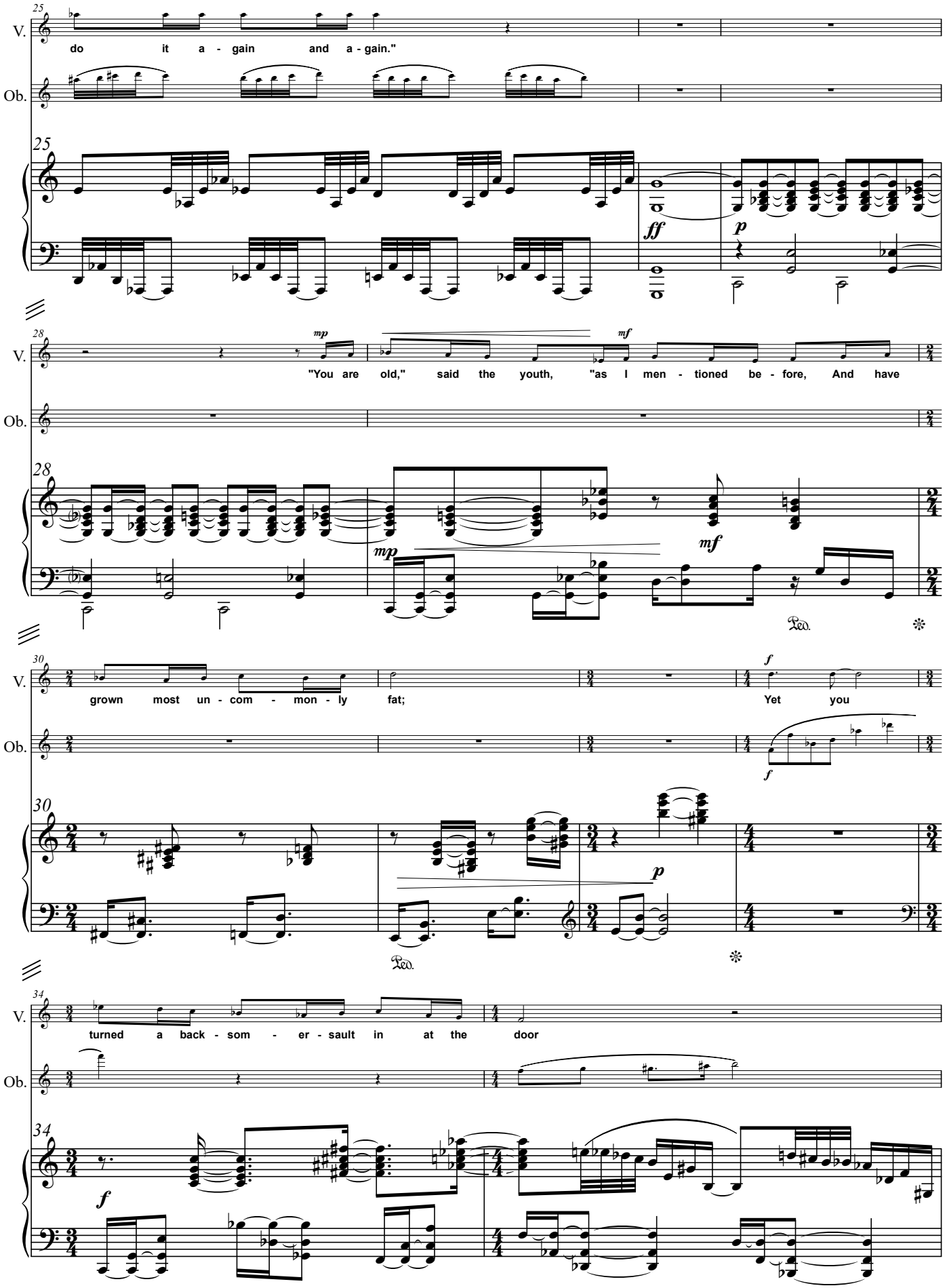

36
V.
Ob.
f
Camped on a tro - pic ri - ver - side,
Ped.
40
One day he missed his lov - ing bride. She
42
had, the guide in - formed him la - ter, Been eat - en by an al - li -
45
ff
ga - tor.
dim. p. a p.
(f)

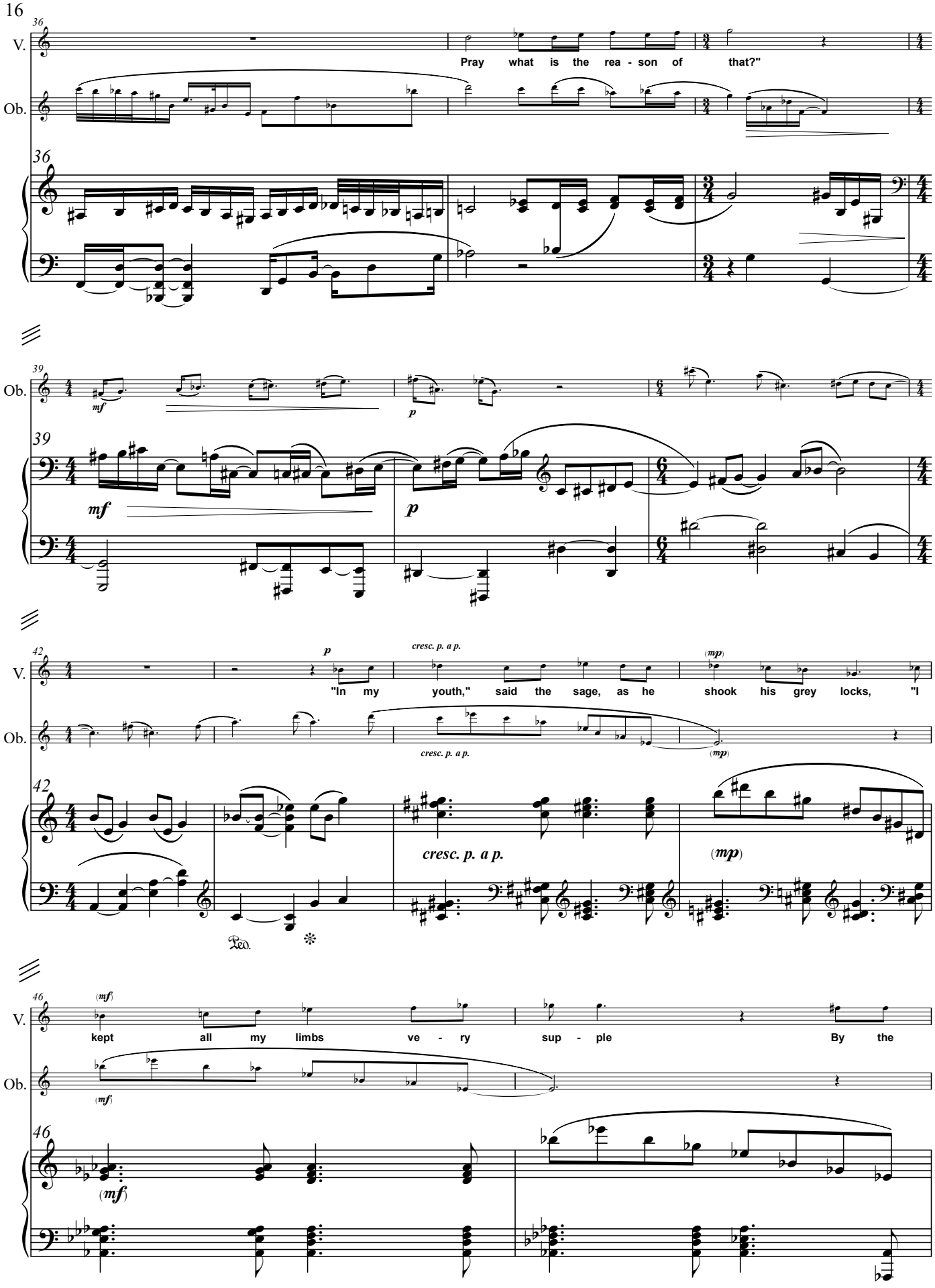

48
V.
Ob.
(mf)
(mp)
48
(mf)
(mp)
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
51
Ob.
p
51
p
Ped.
58
V.
Ob.
mp
58
mp
67
V.
Ob.
67

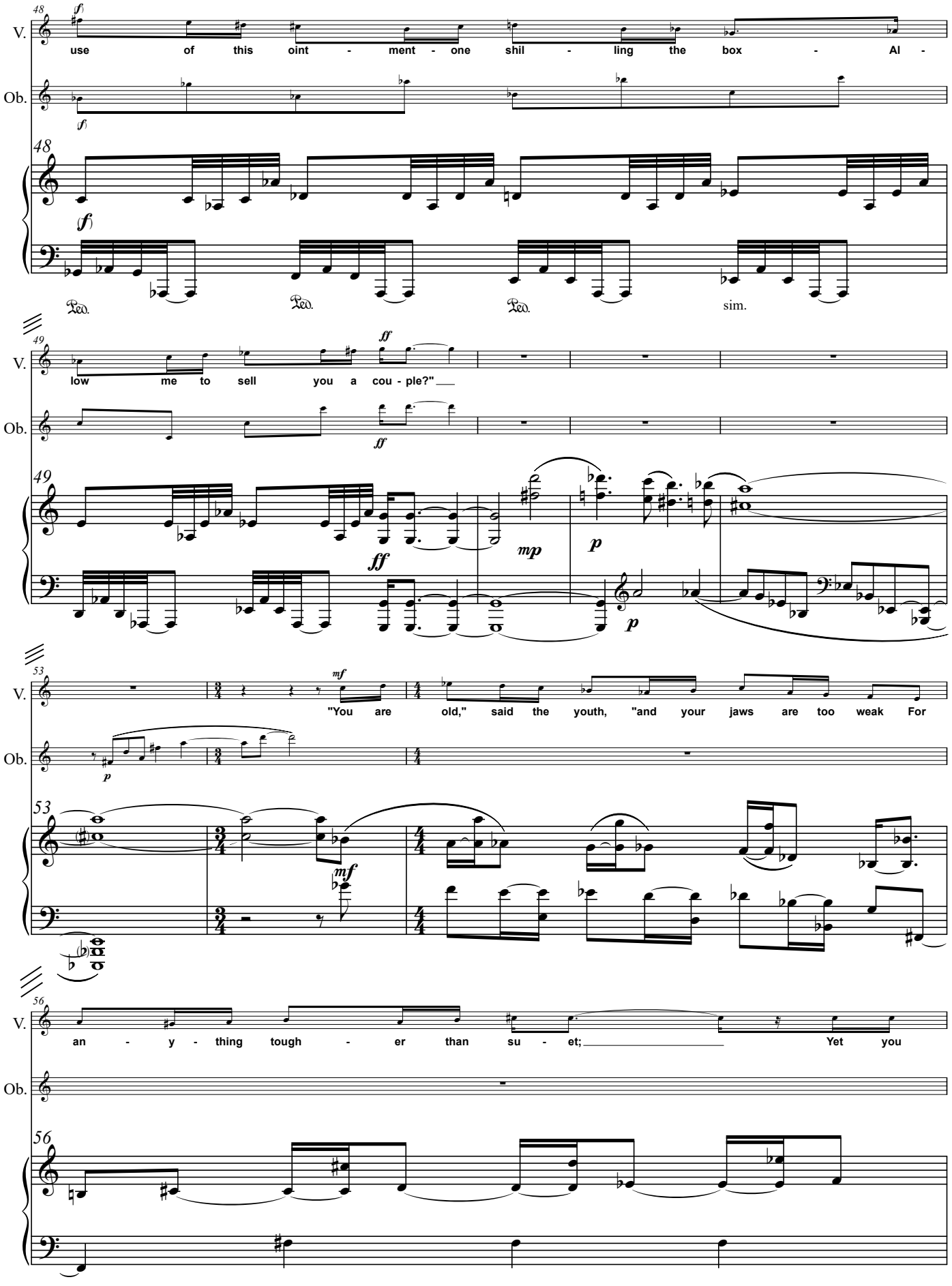

71
V.
Ob.
f
Pro - fes - sor Twist could not but smile but smile but
71
74
ff
V.
smile but smile but smile but smile but
Ob.
ff
f
74
f
76
rit.
mf
V.
smile but
mp
smile.
p
a tempo
p
"You
Ob.
mf
mp
p
76
rit.
mp
mf
a tempo
p
79
V.
mean," he said, "a cro - co - - - dile."
79

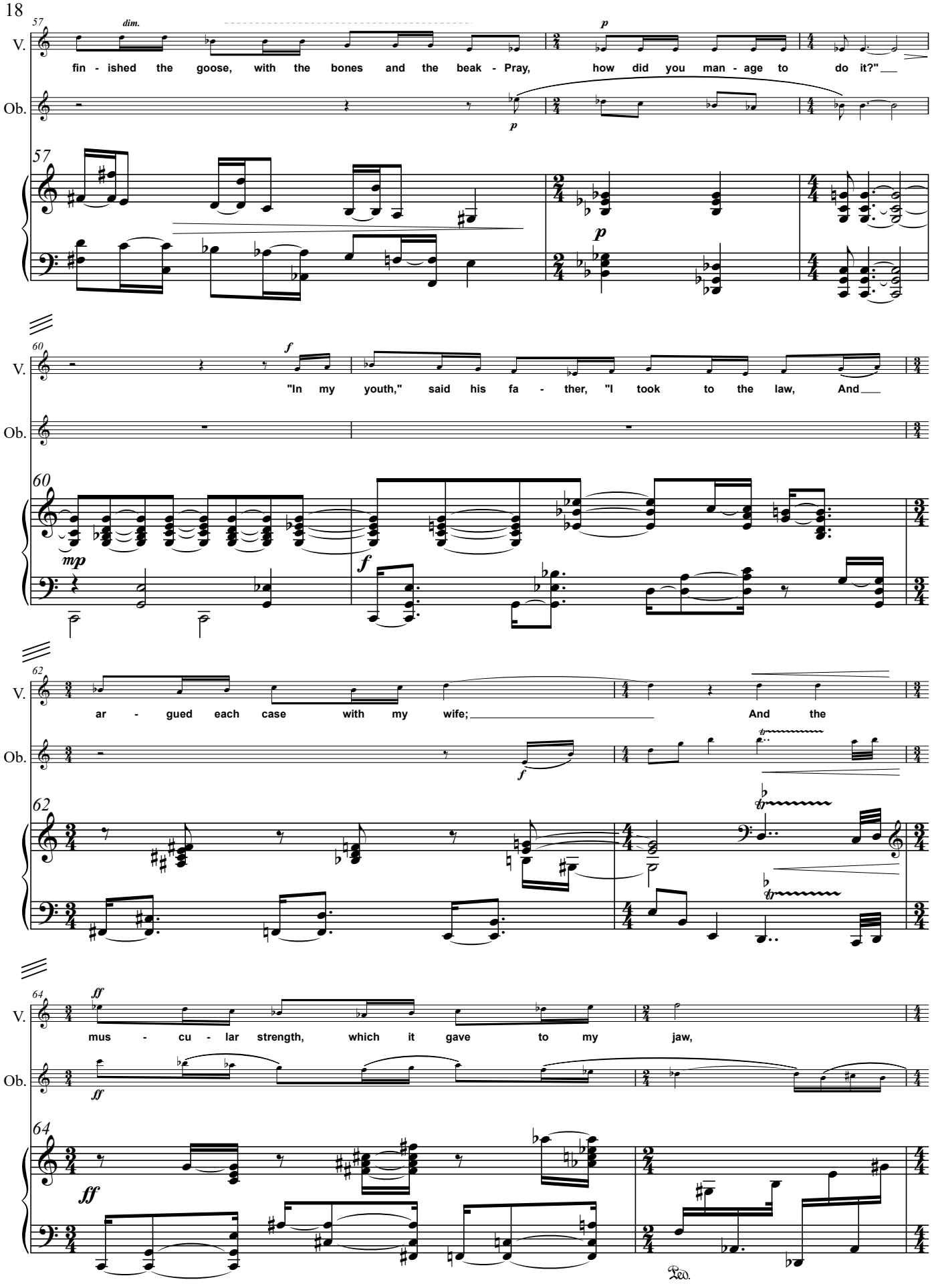

Guano ma non troppo (♩= 65)
Voice
Oboe
Piano
mp
"You are
Guano ma non troppo (♩= 65)
p
5
V.
Ob.
mf
old, fa - ther Wil - liam," the young man said, "And your hair has be - come ve - ry white;
f
And
mp
mf
Ped.
8
yet you in - ces - sant - ly stand on your head - - - - - Do you
f
12
think, at your age, it is right? Do you think, at your age, it is right?"
mp
p

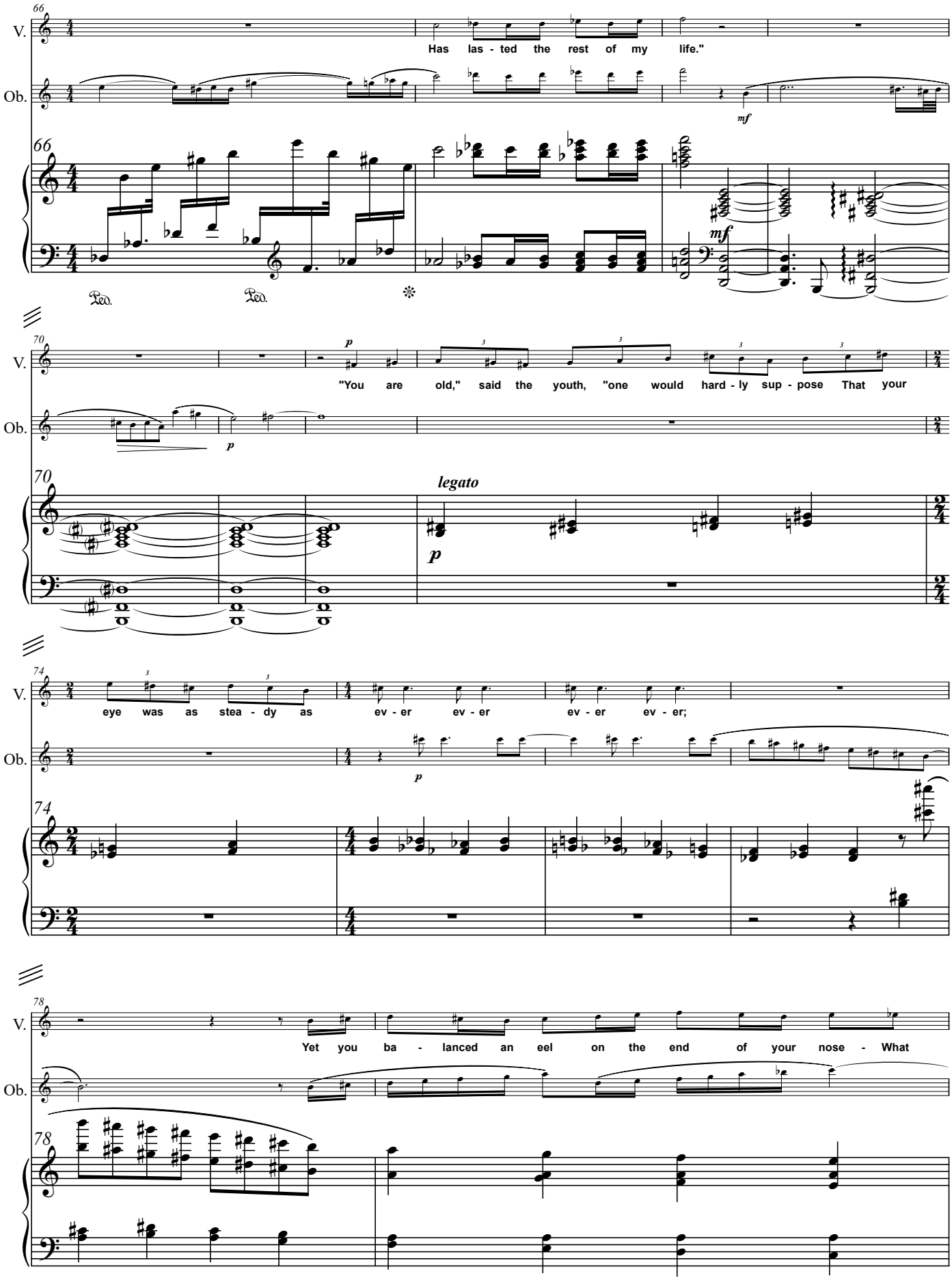

15
V.
Ob.
mp
"In my
p
Ped.
19
youth," fa - ther Wil - liam re - plied to his son, "I feared it might in - jure the brain; But
f
21
now that I'm per - fect - ly sure I have none, Why, I do it a - gain and a - gain. Why, I
ff
23
do it a - gain and a - gain. Why, I do it a - gain and a - gain. Why, I
sim.

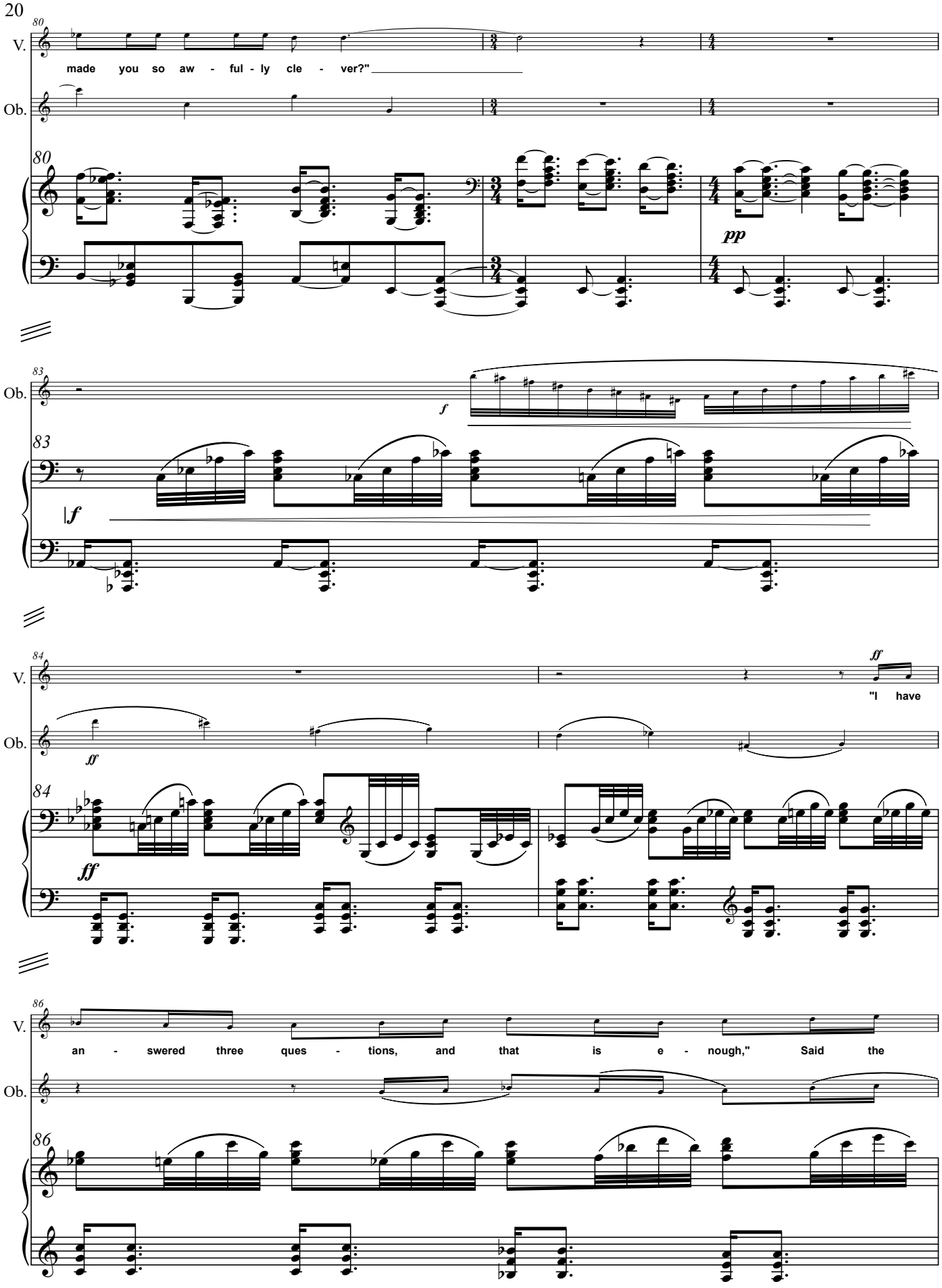

25
V.
do it a - gain and a - gain."
Ob.
25
ff
p
28
V.
"You are old," said the youth, "as I men - tioned be - fore, And have
Ob.
28
mp
mf
mf
Ped.
30
V.
grown most un - com - mon - ly fat;
Yet you
Ob.
30
f
p
Ped.
34
V.
turned a back - som - er - sault in at the door
Ob.
34
f

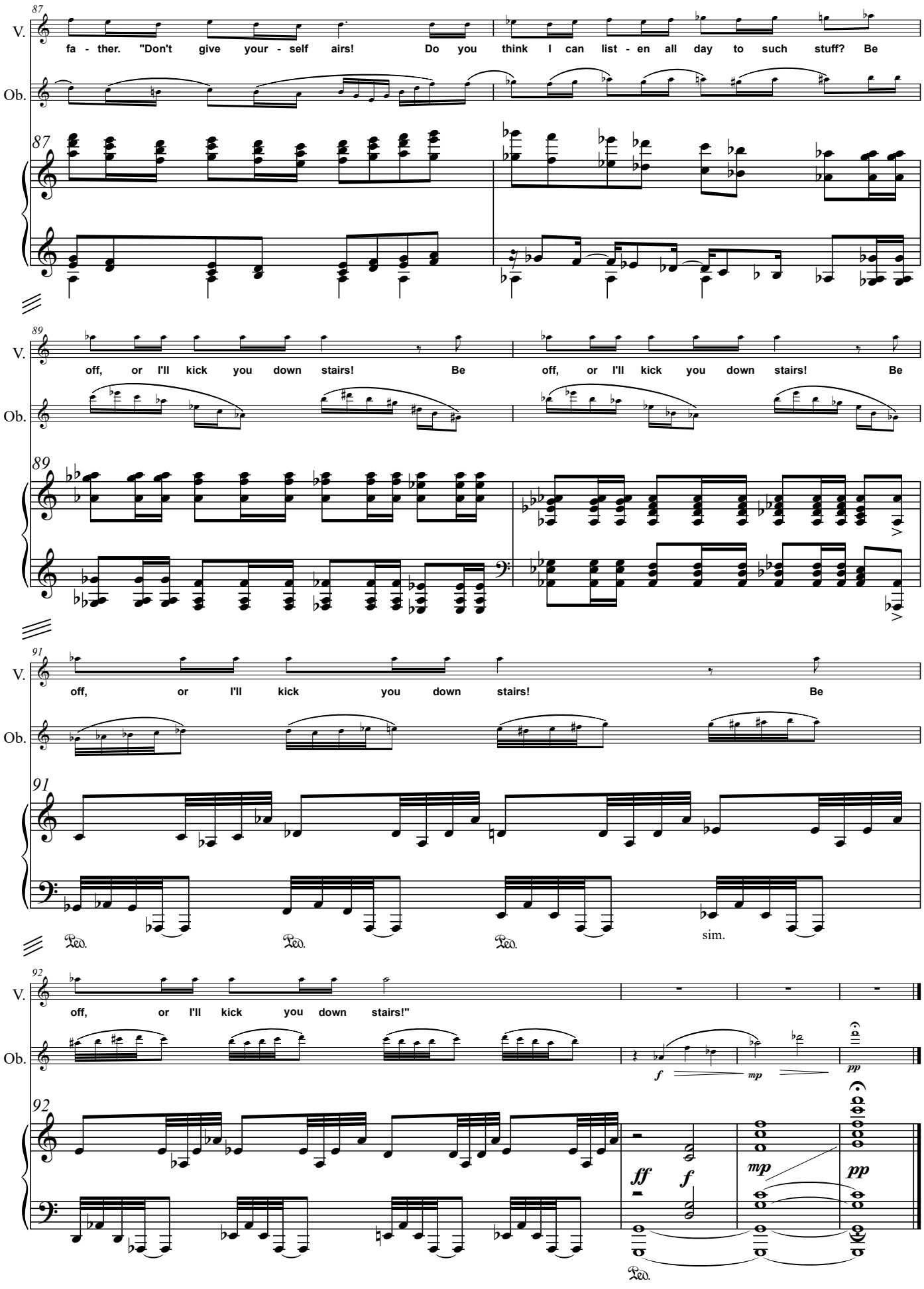

36
V.
Pray what is the rea - son of that?"
Ob.
36
39
Ob.
mf
p
39
mf
p
42
V.
p
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
"In my youth," said the sage, as he shook his grey locks, "I
Ob.
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
42
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
Ped.
46
V.
(mf)
kept all my limbs ve - ry sup - ple By the
Ob.
(mf)
46
(mf)


48
V.
use of this oint - ment - one shil - ling the box - Al -
Ob.
48
sim.
49
low me to sell you a cou - ple?"
53
"You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are too weak For
56
an - y - thing tough - er than su - et; Yet you


57
dim.
p
V.
fin - ished the goose, with the bones and the beak - Pray, how did you man - age to do it?"
Ob.
p
57
p
60
f
V.
"In my youth," said his fa - ther, "I took to the law, And
Ob.
60
mp
f
62
V.
ar - gued each case with my wife; And the
Ob.
f
62
64
ff
V.
mus - cu - lar strength, which it gave to my jaw,
Ob.
ff
64
ff
Ped.


66
V.
Has las - ted the rest of my life."
Ob.
mf
66
mf
Ped.
Ped.
70
V.
p
"You are old," said the youth, "one would hard - ly sup - pose That your
Ob.
p
70
legato
p
74
V.
eye was as stea - dy as ev - er ev - er ev - er ev - er;
Ob.
p
74
78
V.
Yet you ba - lanced an eel on the end of your nose - What
Ob.
78


80
V.
made you so aw - ful - ly cle - ver?"
Ob.
80
pp
83
Ob.
f
83
f
84
V.
ff
"I have
Ob.
ff
84
ff
86
V.
an - swered three ques - tions, and that is e - nough," Said the
Ob.
86


87
V.
fa - ther. "Don't give your - self airs! Do you think I can list - en all day to such stuff? Be
Ob.
87
89
V.
off, or I'll kick you down stairs! Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs! Be
Ob.
89
91
V.
off, or I'll kick you down stairs! Be
Ob.
91
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
sim.
92
V.
off, or I'll kick you down stairs!"
Ob.
f
mp
pp
92
ff
f
mp
pp
Ped.