FORM AND MEANING IN BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S SONNET CYCLES

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FORM AND MEANING IN BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S SONNET CYCLES

DISSERTATION

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This study examines the relationship between sonnet form and musical form in Benjamin Britten's sonnet cycles with a view toward identifying the musico-poetic form – how the musical form interprets the poetry. Several issues come to the fore: 1) articulation of the large-scale divisions of the poetic form in the music; 2) potential of the musical setting to make connections between lines of the text ; 3) potential of the musical setting to follow or imitate the thought processes of the poem; and 4) placement of the departure and return.

That Britten sought to interpret the sonnets through his musical form is evident from his variety of approaches to sonnet form: 1) the octave and sestet are articulated, with the octave further divided into two quatrains and the sestet divided into 4 + 2 (English model) or 3 + 3 (Italian model), or is not divided; 2) the octave and sestet are articulated with the octave not divided into two quatrains; 3) the octave and sestet are articulated with the sestet not divided according to traditional models; and 4) the octave and sestet division is not articulated. More important than adherence to the poetic model is the point of musical return, which has no poetic equivalent in the sonnet form. In the Michelangelo set, return generally constitutes a recall or a reversion to the emotions or thoughts from the beginning of the poem because the musical conflict remains unsolved. In the Donne cycle, return coincides with a resolution of a tonal conflict or only certain elements recur, having various effects upon an interpretation of the poetry. In sum, the musical form is not limited to following the poetic form exactly in order to interpret it, nor is it confined to an adversarial relationship with the poem in order to give it meaning. Rather, the resulting musico-poetic

form ultimately is the response of the composer to the emotional content of the poem, and therefore, follows his logic.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Study

Benjamin Britten's sensitivity to text and text setting is well-known; his inclination for highly-integrated formal structures has been proved as well, in particular with regard to his instrumental works and operas.[1] Little has been written, however, about Britten's songs concerning the relationship of textual or poetic form and musical form, and the results of the integration of the two.[2] In view of the highly sophisticated levels of formal integration in his instrumental works and operas, and the considerable number of texted works in his output, Britten's songs and song cycles are a particularly rich source for the study of the relationship of the musical form to the pre-existing poetic form, and the effect of musical form on the interpretation of the poetry in song. To this end, I have chosen two song cycles by Britten from different stylistic periods: the Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo and the Holy Sonnets of John Donne. The texts in both cycles comprise a series of poems that share the same basic poetic form – the sonnet, which allows for a comparison of Britten's treatment of the poetic form throughout both cycles. Also, because the cycles are in different languages – Italian and English, respectively, and have different themes – love and death, respectively, a comparison of Britten's approach to the text through the musical form in these two cycles is especially warranted: does the language or the theme of the song have an affect the musical form and hence, upon the interpretation of the poem?

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[1] Peter Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), passim. See also Patricia Howard, "Benjamin Britten's 'The Turn of the Screw': The Music. II Structures: An Overall View," in Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw, ed. Patricia Howard, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 71-72.

[2] Only one work attempts to address this issue, and it contains serious methodology flaws, as is discussed in this chapter: Robert Gene Brewster, "The Relationship Between Poetry and Music in the Original Solo-Vocal Works of Benjamin Britten Through 1965" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1967).

Before an investigation of the relationship between the poetic form and the musical form can take place, however, an understanding of the poems as separate from the music must be achieved, as well as an understanding of the musical style of the composer and the many influences upon him. For this reason, I include research concerning the lives of Michelangelo Buonarroti and John Donne and scholars' viewpoints about those poems of theirs that Britten set, along with pertinent information on Benjamin Britten during the time he composed the two works in question.

Britten, as many composers, saw the sonnet form as a particular challenge to his abilities.[3] According to Peter Pears, ". . . the tight restricted form of the sonnet. . . . is the kind of self-discipline which always fascinates him, to work in conditions which exact the quickest response in skill and concentration . . . ."[4] Indeed, the sonnet's rigid design does not correspond to traditional paradigms of musical form, nor does its open-ended structure accommodate such a musical concept as the return. To set a series of sonnets, then, Britten's technical abilities would have been tested by the need for variety within the cycle and by the sonnet form as presented by Donne and Michelangelo, both of whom rarely follow traditional models. But, the appeal to Britten also lies in autobiographical reasons: the Michelangelo Sonnets express his love for Peter Pears, while the Donne Sonnets express his horror over the Holocaust. The musical structure into which Britten organizes the poetic form, then, potentially reflects his attempt to define an interpretation of the poetry.

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[3] Jürgen Thym and Ann Clark Fehn discuss sonnet settings by Schubert, Mendelssohn and Brahms from this standpoint. "Sonnet Structure and the German Lied: Shackles or Spurs?" Journal of the American Liszt Society 32 (July/December 1992): 3-15.

[4] Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works from a Group of Specialists, ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London: Rockliff, 1952; reprint, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), 69.

Britten's Songs in the Literature about His Music

Despite the extensive literature devoted to the works of Britten, scholarly and otherwise, the nondramatic vocal music has been relatively neglected in favor of the operas. Although several of the cycles – viz., On This Island, Les Illuminations and the Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings – are widely performed, the secondary literature devoted to the works is surprisingly meagre, and falls into one of three categories: 1) historical information regarding Britten's life and output; 2) comprehensive discussions of the vocal music in generalized terms; 3) discussions of the vocal music within the context of Britten's entire *oeuvre*; and 4) reviews of scores and recordings and dissertations on specific works.[5] To date, there has been no systematic study of the relationship between poetic form and musical form in the song cycles that seeks to define an interpretation of the poem based on events and experiences in Britten's life at or prior to the time of composition. Indeed, literature concerning the song cycles as a corpus of works is scant. Other writings about Britten, however, have been particularly useful for the organization of biographical information and, in the case of the theoretical studies, for general guidelines regarding harmonic and melodic constructions that served as springboards for the analysis of the two song cycles.

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[5] In view of the subject of this study, I only present literature in this final category that treats the Donne and Michelangelo cycles.

Historical Information Regarding Britten's Life and Output

Three recent works have done much toward explaining the facts of Britten's life and their relationship to his compositions, including the song cycles. The Britten Source Book, edited and compiled under the auspices of the Britten-Pears Library, provides a chronology of key events in Britten's life juxtaposed with the dates of his compositions and their first performances.[6] This section of the work is invaluable for immediately identifying concurrent events, which allows for a comparison of Britten's creative activities with the musical and extra-musical events in his life. Although the section deals less with intimate details of Britten's personal life apart from music, it shows the patterns of his life. For the present study, the extent of Britten's work with Purcell's songs prior to the composition of the Donne cycle was made explicit. Unfortunately, the bibliography that commands most of the focus is less valuable. It is an excellent source for pre-Music Index articles, as well as specifically British publications and dissertations, etc., that Music Index and other article indexes do not include. The compilers, however, were not very discriminating in their arrangement of the bibliographic entries. While the sections limited to each individual work are helpful (save that most of the negative reviews of the works are not included in the reference lists), the rather lengthy section entitled "General" is less so. This section contains not only general-interest articles and appreciations (i.e., birthday tributes, obituaries and the like), but also recital and production reviews, score reviews, informative articles on large groups of his works, professional critiques (as opposed to popular "meet the composer" articles) and book reviews. Useful articles can only be determined through perusal of the actual article as titles are not always revealing. In addition to this problem, none of the entries contain page references, and many are often incomplete or incorrect regarding volume number and date published.

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[6] A Britten Source Book, comp. John Evans, Philip Reed and Paul Wilson (Aldeburgh, Suffolk: The Britten Estate Limited for the Britten-Pears Library, 1987).

Donald Mitchell's recently-published volumes of Britten's letters and diaries, covering the years 1923-1945, includes information regarding Britten's first letters about or first mention of setting a particular text, and his thoughts about a work's publication, recording or performances.[7] Also helpful are the inclusions of much of the text from critics' reviews of premiere performances, as well as reactions of his friends and family. Mitchell presents the letters in the order in which they were written, so that a chronology of a composition can be traced, although information is sometimes found in the most unlikely places.

Finally, Humphrey Carpenter's biography builds on Mitchell's work, with the addition of some unpublished diary entries, and presents Britten's life in chronological, thus fleshing out much of Mitchell's information.[8] The problem with Carpenter's work lies in its innuendos about Britten and Pears's relationship. In many of the passages that mention Pears, Carpenter presents a less than attractive portrayal of Pears's personality, insinuating that Britten's relationship with Pears was not good for Britten, and that many of the problems between Britten and others arose from Pears's manipulation of Britten. His evidence for this opinion comes from people who bore the brunt of both Britten's and

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[7] Benjamin Britten, Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976, 2 vols., ed. Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[8] Humphrey Carpenter, Benjamin Britten: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).

Pears's slights, and who were still angry over the affronts. For this reason, Carpenter is often reluctant to acknowledge the importance of certain of the songs in Britten and Pears's relationship, and in particular, the Michelangelo cycle; and he often discounts Pears's observations about events surrounding the composition of Britten's works. Taken with Mitchell's volumes of letters, Carpenter's work is valuable for relating the enormous amount of information about Britten into a whole. Christopher Headington's biography of Pears provides an antidote to the Carpenter viewpoint, but perhaps gives a picture of Pears that is too attractive.[9] Headington does, however, present an account of Britten's compositions as seen through Pears's eyes, and as many of the songs were written specifically for and to Pears, this knowledge proves useful. Chapter II of the present study seeks to resolve many of the issues raised by Carpenter's studies with regard to the Michelangelo cycle.

Overviews of the Vocal Music

Peter Pears's article, "The Vocal Music," appearing in the Mitchell-Keller *Festschrift* of 1952, is the seminal comprehensive overview of the vocal music.[10] Although post-1951 songs obviously are excluded because of the date of publication (1952), Pears's essay remains one of the most illuminating discussions of this genre. Many of the insights he offers are meritorious, due to the fact that both a private and professional relationship existed between Britten and Pears. Most of the songs composed after 1939 were written specifically for Pears's voice, so that his understanding of them comes from his intimate knowledge. He often captures the essence of a work, albeit in terms that are theoretically naïve. Unfortunately, the article is a cursory review, with only a few paragraphs devoted to each song cycle or group of songs. Technical information is eschewed in favor of a more descriptive (albeit objective) analysis. The information given, however, does provide a springboard for a more scholarly analysis, as in Pear's observations concerning the importance of the repetitive accompaniment figure in the Donne cycle. The vocal music article by Graham Johnson in the Britten Companion is intended to be an expansion of Pears's earlier work, and discusses not only the published songs but juvenalia as well.[11] It proves significantly less valuable than the aforementioned work, for Johnson tends to let his admiration of Britten (and hence, personal opinion) obstruct an objective analysis of the music. While there may be some valuable insights for the accompanist from the pedagogical standpoint since it is written from that point of view,[12] there are very few original observations.

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[9] Christopher Headington, Peter Pears: A Biography (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

[10] Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music."

Perhaps the most objective overview of the songs is found in Robert Brewster's 1967 dissertation, "The Relationship Between Poetry and Music in the Original Solo-Vocal Works of Benjamin Britten Through 1965."[13] The work categorizes the songs following the elements of music: melody and rhythm, harmony, formal structure (in which he uses only established formal paradigms) and accompaniment. What results is a very concise and highly-organized essay, but Brewster fails to achieve his main purpose. While he states that he is "concerned basically with the meaning of the poetry, the trends and development of the particular poet's thought and how Britten conceived it in his settings,"[14] his discussion of the poems (over eighty) and the poets are mere summaries in which he traces similarities of subject matter.[15] Moreover, the rigorous organization, which separates the musical elements from one another and the poetic analysis from the musical analysis, disallows well-supported comparisons. The songs are taken apart, but never put back together, with the result that an overview of text-music approaches across Britten's song *oeuvre* cannot be determined.

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[11] Graham Johnson, "Voice and Piano," in The Britten Companion, ed. Christopher Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 286-307.

[12] Ibid., 286.

[13] Brewster, "The Relationship Between Poetry and Music"

A more recent dissertation by George Tibbetts also examines the relationship between text and music, although within a more limited scope of ten of Britten's songs.[16] Tibbetts is concerned primarily with "the translation of the meter and rhythm of the text into musical meter and rhythm,"[17] and how this affects interpretation of the song. Unfortunately, his rhythmic reading is not supported by a examination of other parameters, particularly pitch, melody, tonal activity and form.

Arnold Whittall's article, "Tonality in Britten's Song Cycles with Piano," provides a summary of the tonal structure of each cycle, showing either "monotonal" concepts or unity, or progressive tonal concepts or disunity (i.e., a lack of organization based upon related tonal levels for each song of the cycle).[18] Although very short, the article is useful for its discussion of the importance of tonality in Britten's sensitivity to the words he set.

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[14] Ibid., iii.

[15] Only ten pages are devoted to an analysis of all the poems.

[16] George R. Tibbetts, "An Analysis of Text-Music Relationship in Selected Songs of Benjamin Britten and Its Implications for the Interpretation of his Solo Song Literature" (Ed.D diss., Columbia University, 1984).

[17] Ibid., ii.

In sum, the literature focusing specifically on the vocal music reveals a lack of analytical writing: both the Pears and Johnson articles were more descriptive than critical; the Brewster dissertation, while more detailed, examines various phenomena in isolation rather than offering an analysis that deals with a particular issue; and both Tibbetts and Whittall deal with specific agendas. Most disconcerting, however, is the dearth of literature specifically concerned with the form of the songs.

The Vocal Music within Britten's Output

The first comprehensive work covering Britten's entire corpus of compositions is Peter Evans's The Music of Benjamin Britten, which was published in 1979, just three years after Britten's death.[19] Britten's music is treated by genre and in chronological order. Evans's analyses are the first musically technical descriptions of the songs, making this a particularly helpful source. Because of space limitations, however, not every element is explored in detail. His analyses focus primarily on formal structures (limited predominantly to his discussions of the instrumental music and operas) and melodic/harmonic constructions (influenced by set theory). These are clearly *musical* analyses for their own sake, for when dealing with the songs, less emphasis is placed on musico-poetical concerns and more on harmonic progression and melodic design. Moreover, Evans shows a preference for the instrumental music and the operas, allotting these works more detailed analyses. It is in Evans's study, however, that Britten's preoccupation with form and structure in the instrumental music and operas is brought to the fore. The ideas presented in this context, particularly those found in his examination of the relationship between the melodic and harmonic design of a composition, warrant more exploration, particularly with regard to the songs.

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[18] Arnold Whittall, "Tonality in Britten's Song Cycles with Piano," Tempo 96 (Spring 1971): 2-11.

[19] Evans, Music of Benjamin Britten.

Arnold Whittall's 1982 monograph on Britten and Michael Tippett follows a chronological sequence as well, but compares the music of Britten and Tippett during the same time periods.[20] The periods are divided according to both composers' stylistic developments and to historical events. As in the Evans work, the analyses are musically technical, but the space devoted to each work is much more limited. Whittall's discussions neither negate nor affirm Evans because his focus is different. He presents more generalizations about the nature of the melodic line or the tonal activity, whereas Evans was drawn toward a microscopic viewpoint involving elements of set theory. In this regard, Whittall's comments are particularly useful because they capture the essence of a work without overdoing the amount of detail needed to support conclusions. When discussing text, however, Whittall, much like Evans, exhibits a tendency to lapse into descriptive phraseology concerning the general theme of the poem rather than relying on scholarly research and analysis, as is presented in Chapters IV and VI of the present study.

Because these works offer technical analyses of the music from different perspectives, these surveys of Britten's music should be used as the foundation of any study of Britten. Unfortunately, they have limitations in their discussions, in particular with regard to the fusion of text and music in the songs, and with regard to discussion of the forms of the songs. These limitations in themselves, however, do not detract from the value of these sources.

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[20] Arnold Whittall, The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Works Specifically About the Donne Cycle or Michelangelo Cycle

The literature which addresses the Holy Sonnets of John Donne or the Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo only, can be divided into two types: 1) score reviews, performance reviews, or program notes (including sleeve notes for recordings); and 2) dissertations. While the reviews and program notes are valuable in their own right for a study of the reception of these two works, space limitations and intended audience preclude any in-depth analysis of the songs.[21] Likewise, neither of the two dissertations that discuss the Donne cycle contains any in-depth discussion. No dissertation has been written that deals with the Michelangelo set. Rembert Herbert's 1974 work, "An Analysis of Nine Holy Sonnets of John Donne Set to Music by Benjamin Britten," is an attempt at a "musical" analysis by a non-musician.[22] He shows his lack of musical knowledge in some of the inaccurate and naïve observations that he makes, rendering this source almost entirely useless. Herbert's focus is upon the dramatic plan of the cycle, which he concludes ". . . is almost a mini-opera in its portrayal of [the] crisis and its resolution."[23] For the most part, Herbert does not adequately support his analyses or conclusions regarding the plan of the cycle: the study is only forty-five pages in length, including the bibliography.

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[21] At the beginnings of Chapters IV and VI, which treat Britten's Michelangelo Sonnets and Donne Sonnets, respectively, the critical reception of the premiere performance of each cycle is discussed in detail.

[22] Rembert Herbert, "An Analysis of Nine Holy Sonnets of John Donne Set to Music by Benjamin Britten" (Ph.D. diss., American University, 1974).

[23] Ibid., 34.

The focus of William White's more recent study is the interpretation of the poetry and music for the performer.[24] The main thrust of the study consists of biographical information concerning Donne and Britten, with scansions of the poems also making up a significant portion. A theoretical musical analysis, while attempted, is less central to the discussion. There appears to be no new significant conclusions beyond what may be found in other studies, including those by Whittall and Evans.

Summary

As the foregoing overview of the Britten literature indicates, the need for scholarly research in the area of Britten's song cycles is great. What little has been done only covers surface details and tends to be more descriptive than scholarly. Particularly lacking are works discussing the relationship of the music to the texts set. Works have tended to focus on purely musical examinations of a song rather than on the phenomenon of textual-musical fusion, or the song's "form". Only the Herbert dissertation presents any scholarly research on the poems, and that information is now out of date. One purpose of this study is to begin fulfilling the need of serious research in the area of Britten's musico-poetic formal concerns, although the present focus is limited to two of the song cycles.

The Analytical Issues

Two Wholes Unite: The Fusion of Music and Poetry

When two artistic media are fused, questions arise as to the ability of one medium to interpret or correspond to the other. Generally, it is contended that modifications are that required in order to form the new medium that results from the combination of the two, and the medium that is altered is the weaker. A consideration of the phenomenon of song as a combination of poetry on the one hand, and music on the other, has led to debate centering upon the true relationship of poetry and music. Concerning songs, it is logical to assume that the text would be subject to interpretation or change of its form, if any occurs, because it exists prior to the creation of the music. Two opposing philosophies, however, have come to the fore in the twentieth century which argue whether it is the music or the text that must undergo modification in the creation of song, each advocating a particular method of effecting an interpretation within the song. One viewpoint holds that musical concerns outweigh the constraints that the pre-existing poetic form brings to the setting, with the result that the poem loses its identity and is absorbed into the emotional content of the music.[25] Opponents of this point of view contend that the music functions solely as interpreter of the text, assuming purely poetic concerns take precedence over musical ones, which relegates music to a mimetic role in any interpretation.[26] These attitudes have significance in light of the interpretative relationship between poetic form and musical form. In a particularly revealing question, an anonymous author of program notes for the first recording of Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings captures the essence of the question of interpretation of the poem by the music:

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[24] William R. White, "A Performer's Analysis of Benjamin Britten's The Holy Sonnets of John Donne" (D.M.A. diss., University of Texas-Austin, 1988).

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[25] Although there are a number of proponents of this opinion, the main protagonists are Suzanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953) and Lawrence Kramer, Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After, California Studies in 19th Century Music, ed. Joseph Kerman, no. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)

[26] Donald Ivey, Song: Anatomy, Imagery, and Styles (New York: Free Press, 1970), ix.

> Now the sonnet is an exceedingly difficult form. Should the composer embody its unalterable shape or should he endeavour to catch something of the immortal spirit that shaped its symmetry?"[27]

This innocent question ultimately begs another that is central to the present study: how does the relationship between poetic form and musical form (i.e., the musico-poetic form) affect an interpretation of the text that the song expresses?

Philosophies of Text-Music Relationship

The De-creation of the Text

Although the idea that music absorbs poetry when the two are fused to create song was explored by composers prior to the 1950s, Suzanne K. Langer, writing in 1953, was among the first to formulate the concept into a philosophy of text-music relationship. Her "principle of assimilation" is based upon the definition of song as strictly music, which leads to the concept that the poem loses its independent identity when set to music:

> When words and music come together in song, music swallows words; not only mere words and literal sentences, but even literary word-structures, poetry. Song is not a compromise between poetry and music, though the text taken by itself be a great poem; song is music.[28]

Langer's philosophy arises largely from the belief that music and language, especially poetry, have few, if any, similarities:

> The simple belief that all arts do the same thing in the same way, only with different sensuous materials, has led most people to a serious misconception concerning the relationship of music to poetry and drama. The text, written in advance, certainly has literary form. If the procedures of the several arts were really analogous, a composer could only translate that form into its musical equivalent. Then it would make sense to say . . . that operatic music "is governed absolutely by the text." But a shadow-like

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[27] Program notes for Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings, in Benjamin Britten, Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings, op. 31, Peter Pears, Dennis Brian, and Benjamin Britten, K1151-3, Decca, 1944.

[28] Langer, Feeling and Form, 152.

> following of verse forms and literary concepts does not produce a musical organism. Music must grow from its own "commanding form."[29]

In other words, the music may be allowed to follow its different course of development, irrespective of the text. In Langer's view, the musical setting of a poem is not necessarily dictated by the limitations of the text, whether these be expressed through rhythmic, melodic or formal devices in the music, so that what results is not an imitation of the text, but a new creation. Certain words of the text may suggest the development of an idea to the composer, but the composer is not necessarily bound to express the the emotional content of the text or its form. She even goes so far to say that the composer ". . . annihilates the poem and makes a song."[30] Langer further asserts that so-called "perfect" poetry is not suited to expression in music:

> A poem that has perfect form, in which everything is said and nothing merely adumbrated, a work completely developed and closed, does not readily lend itself to composition. It will not give up its literary for. . . . A second-rate poem may serve this purpose better because it is easier for the music to assimilate its words and images and rhythms.[31]

The words, then, take on purely musical functions within the context of the song; in effect, the words cease to express their own meaning, but are necessarily bound to the meaning as expressed by the music, music itself being ". . . *formulation and representation* of emotions, moods, mental tensions and resolutions. . . ."[32] The immediate emotional impact of music, then, is stronger than that of language. Langer states, "Feelings revealed in music are . . . presented directly to our understanding, that we may grasp, realize, comprehend these feelings, without pretending to have them or imputing them to anyone else."[33] Thus, the interpretation of the text in the song, assuming that the song awakens an emotional response, is based on the experience of the listener.

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[29] Ibid., 159.

[30] Ibid., 153.

[31] Langer, Feeling and Form, 154.

[32] Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), 222.

Edward Cone holds an opposite view to Langer's when he considers that the composer chooses a particular interpretation of the poem and sets it. This attitude, however, asserts that at least a part of the poem is lost within the music:

> Indeed, poetry . . . offers to the interpreter what a musician would consider a bewildering infinity of choices. Not only that: in reading or listening to poetry, the mind can move backwards and forwards through the work; it can subconsciously accept or reject many possibilities of meaning and interpretation; it is constantly busy making comparisons and clarifying relationships. In a word, it is constantly trying to apprehend the poem under many of its possible forms. Not so in music, where the mind is so to speak chained to the vehicle of the moving sound. If it tries to struggle free of the present moment, it finds that it has lost the music in so doing. Hence it must follow the piece through from beginning to end, and it must perforce be satisfied with those relationships immediately perceptible during the one journey.
>
> What the composer does, then, when he sets a poem to music, is to choose one among all its forms – or, more accurately, since it is impossible, except by abstraction, to isolate one single form, he delimits one sub-set within the complete set of all possible forms.[34]

This "reading" of the poem is, of necessity, the composer's interpretation: "What we hear in a song, then, is not the poet's persona but the composer's."[35] The composer, then, not the listener, bears the responsibility for the interpretation of the poetry:

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[33] Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, 222.

[34] Edward T. Cone, "Words into Music: The Composer's Approach to the Text," in Sound and Poetry, English Institute Essays 1956, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia Press, 1957), 9.

[35] Cone, The Composer's Voice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 19. Cone has subsequently modified his views concerning the composer as person and the composer as persona, bringing the two closer together. See Cone, "Responses III," College Music Symposium 29 (1989): 77-78, for a brief discussion. For further clarification, however, see Fred Everett Maus, "Agency in Instrumental Music and Song," College Music Symposium 29 (1989): 31-43.

> . . . if a musical setting is able to vitalize and vivify one among the many aspects of the total form of a poem, by doing so, it presents a unique interpretation of the poem's meaning. Otherwise it would necessarily detract from our comprehension of the words, for by emphasizing purely sensuous enjoyment on the one hand or emotional stimulation on the other it would draw our attention away from the text. Ultimately there can be only one justification for the serious composition of a song: it must be an attempt to increase our understanding of the poem.[36]

This sentiment is echoed by Ned Rorem, who writes, "The form [of the song], of course, is whatever the composer feels the verse dictates. (The verse, so to speak, dictates its own execution order.)"[37] Although the poem contains many possible interpretations, only the composer's interpretation has validity in the fusion of poetry and music to create song.

Lawrence Kramer, in agreeing somewhat with Cone, takes issue with Langer's assumption that the poem becomes merely part of the "raw material" of the composition.[38] Instead, he sees song as an interpretation of the poetry, which ultimately:

> . . . *is* a reading, in the critical as well as the performative sense of the term: an activity of interpretation that works through a text without being bound by authorial intentions. In this view, the relationship between poetry and music in song is implicitly agonic; the song is a "new creation" only because it is also a de-creation. The music appropriates the poem by contending with it, phonetically, dramatically, and semantically; and the context is what most drives and shapes the song.[39]

And further,

> a song that masters a significant text, then, does so by suggesting a new interpretation – specifically a skeptical interpretation, one that rewrites the text in some essential way. In other words – slightly exaggerated but only slightly – the music becomes a deconstruction of the poem.[40]

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[36] Cone, "Words into Music," 15.

[37] Ned Rorem, Critical Affairs: A Composer's Journal (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 32.

[38] Kramer, Music and Poetry, 126.

[39] Ibid., 127.

[40] Ibid., 146.

Kramer's concept of deconstruction of the poem within the context of song has significance in view of the musico-poetic form. One of the means by which a poem is deconstructed is through the denial in the music of:

> . . . its expressive support in a crucial way or at a crucial moment. What this often details is a disparity in one of the obvious formal features that music and poetry have in common: closure, sectionalization, repetition, the differentiation and affiliation of material, and so on.[41]

An interpretation of the text in Kramer's opinion, then, exists in an adversarial relationship between musical articulation and poetic articulation, so that the interpretation of the poetry arises from the composer's own emotional response to the poem, even if the setting appears to be uninvolved with the text emotionally.[42] This viewpoint raises some significant questions: 1) does a musical setting that supports the formal structure of the text effect an interpretation; and 2) if the formal structure of the poem is closely reproduced in the music, is the song the composer's interpretation or the poet's?

Music as Mimesis

By contrast, the opposing viewpoint holds that the music in a song must have a mimetic relationship with the text in order to create an interpretation. Although Donald Ivey considers song to be a hybrid or amalgamation of poetry and music,[43] he sees the musical element as ". . . an aid to expression, to enhancing or heightening the emotional or connotative implications of the poetry."[44] This view assumes a high degree of correlation between the elements of poetry and the elements of music:

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[41] Ibid., 150.

[42] Many settings by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Berio, and later twentieth-century composers such as Robert Ashley are emotionally distant. Nevertheless, their distance reveals the emotional response of the composer.

[43] Donald Ivey, Song: Anatomy, Imagery, and Styles (New York: Free Press, 1970), vii.

> Melody, harmony, and rhythm serve a purely mechanical purpose in many songs. They are particularly useful in strengthening the declamation as well as in controlling the pace of delivery and the articulation of formal characteristics.[45]

These mechanical correspondences between poetry and music represent, according to Ivey, ". . . the ways in which music can reflect or reinforce the 'surface' of the poem."[46] Taken to its extreme, the rhythmic, inflectional, and formal aspects of the poem dictate the rhythmic, melodic, and formal aspects, respectively, of the music. As Ivey expresses it: ". . . music must submit at least to some extent to the harness of the text;" and further: "the limitations imposed upon the music must be those of the text, if the result is to be artistically justifiable."[47] In other words, the success of the song depends upon how closely the music corresponds to the physical form of the text, or represents the text through the creation of mood, or imagery (i.e., word painting). This assumes, that the composer's should fulfill the meaning of the poem as expressed by the poet.

Ivey, however, allows that the music must retain some of its independence in order to accomplish its goals, with the elements of music serving in the "expressive experience":[48]

> It must contribute something meaningful and compatible in the area of the poem's deeper, more expressive significance. Behind the impulse to create song, in fact, has been the continuing feeling and conviction that music *can* make such a contribution,

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[44] Ibid., ix.

[45] Ibid., 69.

[46] Ibid., ix.

[47] Ibid., 95.

[48] Ibid., 69.

> that its powers of expression can be brought to bear directly upon the emotional content of the words – that it can heighten that content to some extent.[49]

The origins of this particular idea can be found in the works of Ezra Pound, who wrote extensively about the connection between poetry and music. He identifies two ways by which music can create a relationship with poetry:

> . . . it may figure as an accompaniment to words, a means of giving them delineation and vitality; or it may provide an extension of communication, an attempt to get beyond or under verbal language. Its service is then mood painting, suggestive propaganda for the poetic idea.[50]

Thus, the purpose of the music is to express the emotional content of the poet's poem, with the song composer being driven to set the poem because of its beauty:

> It would seem therefore that music could have no more fit and congenial task than to heighten the emotion of some great poetic beauty, the direction of which is supplied by the words.[51]

When considered as inextricably bound to the text it sets, music becomes the vessel for the words:

> Music, for its part, achieves with words a profession of faith it cannot otherwise accomplish. It becomes responsible, it follows in outline the expressed spirit of Yes and No, it becomes political, sympathetic, participatory, and involves itself in our fate. It abandons its asceticism, assumes a limitation amongst other limited entities, becomes vulnerable and open to attack. Yet it need not feel itself the smaller for doing so. Its weakness constitutes its new worth. Together, and inspired by one another, music and the word are an irritation, a rebellion, a love, a confession. They keep the dead awake and disturb the living, they go beyond the demand for freedom and pursue

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[49] Ibid., 89. Interestingly, this statement shows that Ivey feels he has defend the ability of music to express the emotional content of the poem in the wake of considering music to be servant to the text's master.

[50] R. Murray Schafer, in Ezra Pound, Ezra Pound and Music: The Complete Criticism, ed. R. Murray Schafer (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1977), 4.

[51] Robert Bridges; quoted in Calvin Brown, Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1948), 49.

> the impertinent man even in his sleep. They have the strongest intention of producing an *effect*.[52]

Summary

In setting poetry, many composers in actuality combine the concepts of deconstruction and mimesis, unless their intent has been to explore one as a rejection of the other. The setting of a text can be produced in various ways that suggest or deny the various physical correlations between the text and the music.[53] The closest correlation between text and music is expressed through direct mimesis of aspects of the text by the music, known as word-painting, or on a higher level, mood-painting. This assumes a purely objective approach to the setting of the text. When the music is a displaced mimesis of the text, the composer isolates an aspect of the text and generates a morphological gesture in the music to accompany it, so that certain ideas of the text become associated with musical ideas, even though the musical ideas may not be a direct imitation of the images of the text. The morphological gesture may ultimately express the morphology of the feelings expressed in the text as experienced by the composer, so that while the poetry suggests the musical idea, the composer sets his emotional response to the poem. In a non-imitative relationship, the goal is the contrast of music and text, so that any correspondences are more powerful and open to greater interpretative possibilities.[54] The composer assumes total control over the direction of the poem, expressed by his musical choices. In any one song, several or all of these relationships may be at work, with the result that no one text-music correlation governs the setting.

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[52] Ingeborg Bachmann, "Music and Poetry," Contemporary Music Review 5 (1989): 140.

[53] This discussion is based on the work of Peter F. Stacey, "Towards Analysis of Music and Text," Contemporary Music Review 5 (1989): 22.

[54] Stacey also asserts that the correspondences may exist solely in the listener's experience of the work.

It is, however, the *composer* who ultimately makes the choice concerning the physical relationship between the poetry and the music, not the listener (Langer), or the poet (Ivey). If a composer uses a high degree of direct imitation or word-painting, one can assume that he is asserting the supremacy of the poet's text, whereas a low degree or the use of non-imitation indicates a deconstruction of the text and an appropriation of the poem into the music. Unfortunately, these broad generalizations do not always hold true because of the subtleties of the relationship between the various elements of music. For example, direct imitation in the form of mood-painting could be mistaken for non-imitation if the composer's style and own emotional response to the text do not correspond to pre-conceived notions of the poet's meaning. Conversely, non-imitation may be considered to negate the poem to such a degree that the interpretative elements are completely lost. Moreover, the meaning conveyed by the music and its relationship to the text only exists in the context of that song. In other words, techniques used to establish some form of relationship between text and music in one song do not necessarily produce the same result in another song: a composer's musical – hence, emotional – response to texts necessarily changes within his *oeuvre* as the result of changes in style or the changes in the circumstances, events, and people that shape his life, both musical and otherwise.

Benjamin Britten's philosophy of text-setting

Britten's own philosophy of text-setting falls somewhere in between the idea of the direct imitation of the text by the music and the deconstruction of the text by the music, and thus necessarily makes use of indirect mimesis, which he does in both his Michelangelo and Donne cycles. Although he has said that he ". . . wouldn't say the music is dictated by the words," he has also stated that text and music are very close,[55] and that any treatment of the words of the poem must be bound to the "emotional situation" of the text.[56] When asked how he chooses his texts, he responded:

> I think they're chosen by instinct more than anything else. I read a very great deal of poetry and, as I read something often attracts my attention as being suitable for setting. I have often been criticised adversely for setting great poetry and somehow spoiling it. But I think poetry can be enhanced by music and, in any case, the poem is still there to be read by itself, if someone doesn't like my music. I was accused of 'spoiling' the Keats sonnet in the Serenade – as if I'd deliberately torn up the only copy of the poem! (As if I had mutilated a great painting.)[57]

This seems to assert that he sets his own interpretation of the text, based on an emotional response to something within the poem itself.

Britten appears to respond to what Michael Tippett has called the situation of the text, which does not necessarily preclude an imitative response to the text, nor require a non-imitative setting:

> [The composer] seems to be much more successful when he pictures the general situation evoked by the poem, and does not attach himself too much to the literal meaning. I don't believe that the composer is really much moved by the words, but he is always deeply moved by the situation.[58]

His interpretations of texts are neither skeptical deconstructions, as Kramer would require, nor are they generated entirely by the poetic elements.

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[55] Britten, "No Ivory Tower: Benjamin Britten Talks to Opera News" Opera News 33 (April 1969): 8.

[56] Britten, "Introduction," in Peter Grimes, Sadler's Wells Opera Books, no. 3, ed. Eric Crozier (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1946), 8.

[57] Britten, "Benjamin Britten Talks to Alan Blyth," interview by Alan Blyth, Gramophone 48 (1970), 30.

[58] Michael Tippett, "Music and Poetry," Recorded Sound 17 (1965): 288.

Britten himself has said or written very little about his views of text-setting, which has left room for much exploration of this area in his output. Current studies of his text setting deal primarily with mechanical correspondences between pitches and text (i.e., rhythmic aspects) or focus on imitative techniques.[59] Until the present study, the effect of the relationship between musical form and poetic form on Britten's interpretation of the poetry has not been addressed.

Form in Poetry and Form in Music

When one considers the musical form of a song in relationship to the form of the poetry, two opposing views of the relationship of text and music are also evident. Either the musical form serves to articulate the design of the poem, or the musical form has a design in and of itself and does not follow the poetic structure. Both scenarios would seem to define the composer's attitude toward the poem and its role in the song. In the first case, the composer is attempting to express the exact structure of the poem, letting the poet's ideas unfold in the form he had intended. This method naturally assumes the supremacy of the poem. In the second method, the composer's musical form organizes the poetry into a structure that differs from the one that the poet constructed, assuming a supremacy of the musical material, or a deconstruction of the poem in light of an interpretation. There is another angle to the musico-poetic form, however, that needs to be explored, that of the composer's interpretation of the poem as seen in the musical structure, which does not necessarily have to be in an adversarial relationship with the poetic form, as in Kramer's "skeptical interpretations."[60] The composer, in following the large-scale poetic form closely, possibly realizes his interpretation of the poem in the lower level articulations of the individual sections of the music, which may or may not correspond to lower level aspects of poetic form (as in the phonetic, semantic and dramatic content); and in abandoning the overall poetic form, the composer potentially imposes an interpretation on the poetry through his means of delineating the structure of his music. The degree of relationship between the form of the poetry and the composer's musical form varies from song to song, and necessarily depends upon the composer's response to the poem. In other, words, the musico-poetic form does affect the interpretation of the poetry, whether the form is operative on micro- or macro-structural levels.

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[59] The latest works include Barbara Meister's study of The Songs and Proverbs of William Blake: "The Interaction of Music and Poetry: a Study of the Poems of Paul Verlaine as Set to Music by Claude Debussy and of the Song Cycle 'Songs and Proverbs of William Blake' by Benjamin Britten" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1987); Betty Lou Phillips's study of Les Illuminations: Relationships Between Text and Music in Benjamin Britten's Song Cycle, 'Les Illuminations,', opus 18" (D.M.A. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1989); Stephen Oosting's work on the Serenade: "Text-Music Relationships in Benjamin Britten's 'Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings'" (D.M.A. diss., Eastman School of Music, 1985); and Barbara Docherty's studies of Britten's rhythmic settings of text: "Sentence into Cadence: The Word-setting of Tippett and Britten," Tempo 166 (September 1988): 2-11; and "Syllogism and Symbol: Britten, Tippett and English Text," Contemporary Music Review 5 (1989): 37-63 (This is an expanded version of the first article).

The concept of return, absent in poetic form (except in refrain types) becomes an important element in the composer's response to the poem. Assuming that there is a return, the point at which it occurs, or does not occur, potentially indicates the composer's reading of the poem. On the micro-level of a musical form, the principles of return and contrast are at work in relationship between the melodic phrases, to cite but one example.[61] Britten's use of the same melodic gesture, with slight variation, to set the first four lines of

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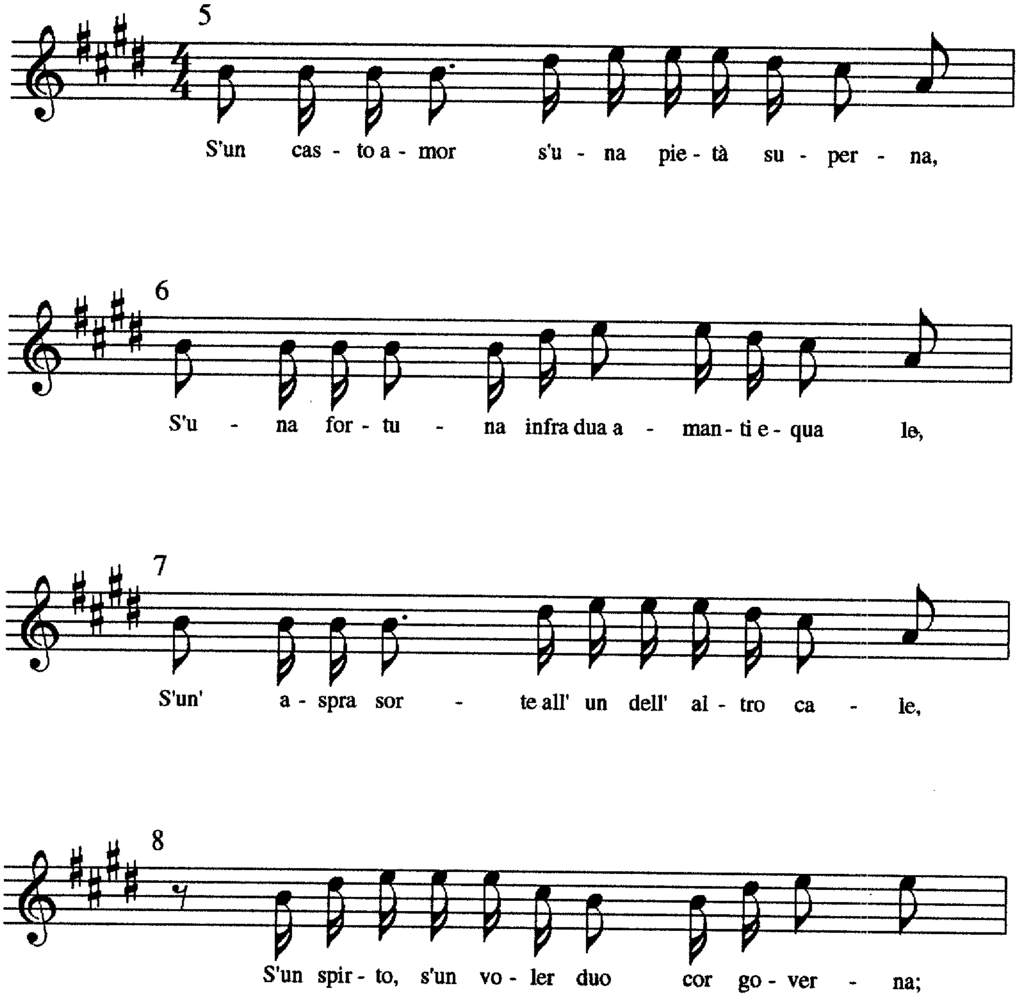
[60] Kramer, Music and Poetry, 127.

[61] Return need not be tied purely to pitch (harmonic and melodic, including motivic) concerns, but may be seen in rhythm, texture, and timbre as well, considered as having the same emotional effect as a melodic or harmonic return.

Michelangelo's Sonetto XXXII, gathers a series of four conditional clauses, furthering the connection that Michelangelo made through the use of similar grammatical constructions (see Example 1). In contrast, two motivically similar melodic gestures are used at the

Example 1: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, vocal line, mm. 5-8.[62]


5
S'un cas - to a - mor s'u - na pie - tà su - per - na,
6
S'u - na for - tu - na infra dua a - man - ti e - qua le,
7
S'un' a - spra sor - te all' un dell' al - tro ca - le,
8
S'un spir - to, s'un vo - ler duo cor go - ver - na;

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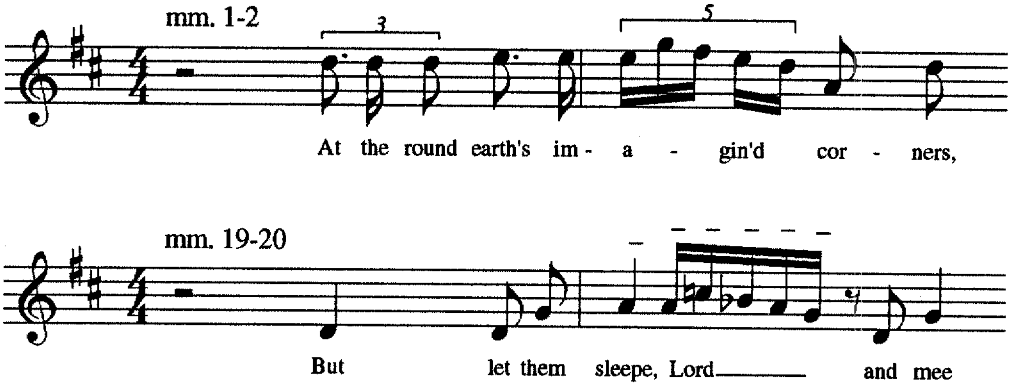
[62] Benjamin Britten, Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo Winthrop Rogers Edition (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1943). Copyright 1943 in U.S.A. by Boosey & Co., Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

beginning of the octave and the beginning of the sestet in the setting of Donne's "At the round earth's imagined corners," with very different results. The key quality is altered to effect a mood change at the sestet, and only certain of the motives recur to produce the emotional turn (see Example 2). The use of the same motivic gestures in the various sections of the poem cuts across traditional divisions of the poem and creates an association that the poem does not make. At the macro-level, concepts of departure and return can rearrange the structure of the poem. In his setting of Donne's "Oh my blacke Soule," Britten begins a contrasting section after lines 1 and 2 of the poem, and starts the return in the eleventh line, in direct opposition to traditional divisions of the sonnet form into octave and sestet. In this case, the placement of the return, in a deconstruction of the formal aspects of the text, effects a particular meaning relating lines from one section of the poem with lines from another. The poem, then, loses traditional notions regarding its structure, and assumes a new one that the composer extracts.

Example 2: "At the round earth's imagined corners" vocal line, mm. 1-2 and 19-20.[63]


mm. 1-2
3
5
At the round earth's im - a - gin'd cor - ners,
mm. 19-20
But let them sleepe, Lord and mee

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[63] Britten, The Holy Sonnets of John Donne (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1946). Copyright 1946 in U.S.A. by Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

In order to fully understand the interaction of the formal aspects of text and music in a song, the elements of the poetic form and the elements of musical form must be examined for correspondence or non-correspondence. To this end, I have chosen to concentrate on Britten's setting of sonnets by Michelangelo and John Donne, because the sonnet, here in both the Italian and English models, is considered to have a particular organization based pre-conceived notions. Therefore, how Britten reconciles his musical form with the form of the sonnet will have particular significance in his interpretation of the text.

Elements of Sonnet Form

The designs of both the Italian and English models sonnet form present challenges to both poets and composers in its development of a subject within fourteen lines. Further division of the structure into two unequal sections, the octave and sestet, functions to delineate the specifics of how the subject is to unfold: a statement in the octave and its counter-statement in the sestet. The Italian and English forms of the sonnet share this basic structure, but differences are to be found in the treatment of the subsections within the octave and those within the sestet.

The overall rhyme scheme first sets the octave and sestet apart, then delineates various subsections within each of these sections. The octave of both the English and Italian forms are divided into two subsections of four lines each – or quatrains – that have the same rhyme scheme. These quatrains serve to state the subject (first quatrain) and then elaborate on that subject (second quatrain), with greater tension expected in the second quatrain. The end rhymes for the quatrains vary between the English and Italian sonnets. The Italian form features the scheme *abba* for both quatrains, which shows the idea of the similarity of the subsections, whereas the English form stresses the individuality of each quatrain in the scheme *abab cdcd.*

The different attitudes toward the quatrains of the octave that are found in the two types of sonnet forms is magnified in the treatment of the remaining six lines, or sestet. In the Italian form, the counter-statement, or turn, occurs with the first line of the sestet. Traditionally, the sestet falls into two three-line subsections, or tercets, which expand the ideas presented in the counter-statement, thus the counter-statement, developed in six lines, is given almost as much weight as the subject which is developed in eight lines. The rhyme scheme for the Italian sestet details the tercets, highlighting their function and their relationship to each other. The schemes are various, with the most well-known being *cde cde*.[64]

The English sonnet form, on the other hand, extends the statement expressed in the octave into the first four lines of the sestet, placing the counter-statement at the final two lines of the poem. Through its structure of *efef*, the rhyme scheme of the first four lines of the sestet emphasizes both its individual nature, and relates it to the quatrains of the octave, so that it becomes, in effect, a third quatrain. The counter-statement, or turn, is held back until a final rhyming couplet (*gg*), which skews the balance of the form, but makes for a greater impact. In sum, the Italian sonnet form is more balanced and unified within the sections – *abba abba cde cde*, whereas the English form emphasizes the individuality of the subsections and the strength of the counter-statement: *abab cdcd efef gg*.

The turn, or *volta*, is the most important element of the sonnet form. The Italian and English structures reflect different attitudes toward this counter-statement in terms of the amount of space given to its development. In the Italian sonnet, the counter-statement unfolds in the sestet much like the statement in the octave. Two tercets are devoted to it, with the first tercet providing the turn and the second further elaboration. This results in a softening of the effect of the antithetical remarks of the sestet because it develops over several lines. The English sonnet, on the other hand, gives more development to the statement through the use of three quatrains that cut across the traditional division of octave and sestet. Sometimes at the third quatrain, or beginning of the sestet, the poet will make a slight turn toward darker elements of the statement in anticipation of the counter-statement in the final couplet and in an attempt to balance the form. Despite this, the summary or conclusive nature of the counter-statement in the final rhyming couplet remains, breaking the flow of thoughts in the three quatrains that precede it. Because of the small amount of space used to present the counter-statement, it is much stronger than in the Italian sonnet and uses only the essential elements with which to develop its point.

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[64] Other schemes include *cdc dcd* (or *rima alternata*), *cde dce*, *cde ced*, etc.

The sonnets of both Michelangelo and John Donne present a particular challenge to a composer because their poems rarely exhibit the traditional paradigms of the form. Enjambment abounds throughout the works of both poets, softening the impact of the end rhyme, and the meters used are all but regular. For this reason, settings of their poems are quite few.[65] Evelyn Hardy attributes this phenomenon in Donne's works to the lack of concentration on a single emotion in the poems, likening them to mini-dramas:

> Now the poetry of Donne seldom [speaks of a single emotion]. His lyrics, intensely emotional as well as highly intellectual, are on the whole metaphysical, with a quality of tension and relaxation, of contraction and dilation, of convergence and divergence, peculiarly marked. They are dialectical and dramatic in a repressed sense – by which I

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[65] Several of Donne's secular poems have been set individually by John Dowland, William Corkine, Alfonso Ferrabosco, Henry Lawes, and William Pitfield; his divine poems have been set by Ernst Krenek, Hubert Parry, William Bainton, Edmund Rubbra, William Wordsworth, and of course, Britten. Michelangelo's works have received less attention, with most settings dating from the Renaissance and the late nineteenth century, including those by Bartolomeo Tromboncino, Constanzo Festa, Jean de Conseil, Jacob Arcadelt, Hugo Wolf, and Richard Strauss.

> mean that they are disquisitions and dramas in miniature, little worlds of their own in which several individuals, or even several parts of one individual, plead or argue with one another indirectly. It is as if you condensed the whole of Hamlet or Othello into half a dozen stanzas, excluding plot, sequence and consequence, and dispensed with conversation.[66]

The same is equally true of Michelangelo's sonnets, many of which contain an abundance of imagery that develops along dramatic lines.

Because the sonnet form does not have a refrain, its ideas develop in a linear fashion, with the assumption of a progress of emotions or thoughts. In other words, the speaker in the sonnet does not return to the state of mind that he was in at the beginning, but develops toward an intensification of his emotional state or a completely new one. This creates a special problem when a sonnet is set to music because a central element in musical form is repetition, or varied repetition. Only a through-composed piece of music truly parallels the sense of growth or forward motion that the speaker experiences.

Elements of Musical Form

According to Carl Dahlhaus, the various elements of musical form operate under a complex set of criteria, including relation, proportion and level.[67] The two important governing concepts for the present study are relation and level. In terms of relation, musical form, rather than being an object that exists prior to composition, is more a process that develops as the specifics of content are worked out.[68] A discussion by Britten about his own approach to his works reveals that although he has a precompositional notion about the direction the piece will take, the content of the work arises during the act of composition.

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[66] Evelyn Hardy, "Donne's 'Songs and Sonets' and his 'Holy Sonnets' in Relation to Music," R.C.M. Magazine 42 no. 3 (1952): 71.

[67] Hugo Riemann, Musik-Lexikon, 12th ed, ed. Willibald Gurlitt (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1959-1967, 1972-1979), s.v. "Form and Formenlehre," by Carl Dahlhaus.

[68] Carl Dahlhaus, "Some Models of Unity in Musical Form," Journal of Music Theory 19 (1975): 14.

> I never start a work without having a clear conception of what that work is going to be. When I say conception, I don't necessarily mean tunes or specific rhythms or harmonies – or old-fashioned things like that! – but I mean the actual *shape* [emphasis mine] of the music – the *kind* [emphasis mine] of music its going to be rather than the actual notes, they come very much later.[69]

In Britten's view, then, the *shape*, or overall form is suggested by the *kind* of music, or general image that he intends to convey. As the composition unfolds, the various ideas expressed through melody, rhythm and harmony create a series of relationships that range from no connection to exact repetition and which ultimately determine the structure that the music takes by defining its content. Ian Bent has identified these relationships, or "form-building processes," as recurrence, which can be expressed in the model *AA*; contrast, or *AB*; and variation, or *AA'*.[70] While these models are necessarily simplistic and do not capture what may be an intricate correlation of formal elements, these formal processes by which musical ideas are developed hold true for the organization of the elements of music at every level of a composition.

The content of a musical composition can be viewed at two levels, the macro-structure and the micro-structure.[71] The macro-structure of a composition assumes a series of relationships operating between the sections or movements of a composition.[72] The notion of "section" within a musical work implies that a portion of the music is articulated in some fashion so as to be recognized as having a beginning and an end within the whole, based upon the interaction of melody, harmony and rhythm.[73] The sections that generate the macro-structure are defined, in turn, by the relationships which comprise the micro-structure, which function at two sublevels: 1) the relationships between phrases; and 2) the relationships within the phrases themselves. These sublevels necessarily involve the specifics of rhythm, melody and harmony in greater detail than in the macro-structure.

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[69] Britten, "Mapreading," interview by Donald Mitchell, in The Britten Companion, ed. Christopher Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 90.

[70] Stanley Sadie, ed. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 6th ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1980), s.v. "Analysis," by Ian Bent. Bent's models assume that a statement takes place which is then repeated, varied, or countered.

[71] I wish to avoid Heinrich Schenker's terminology of foreground, middle ground and background in describing these levels because of the controversy these words potentially arouse. Certainly, however, the levels I discuss could be organized according to Schenker's concepts.

In applying Bent's "formal models" at both the macro- and micro-structural levels, one finds that these relationships organize into the three broader principles of statement, departure, and return (this assumes varying degrees of return as expressed by repetition on the one hand and variation on the other).[74] The form of the composition, or the macro-structure, may arise from the use of both departure and return, or it may be constructed on one or the other principle, operating at both the macro- and micro-levels. These principles are, in turn, further defined by the concepts of repose, regression, conflict and resolution as applied to the emotional content of the work. The statement may be defined on the macro-level as the initial formal section, and on the micro-level as the phrase, or other lower-level articulation; and it can be considered as expressing the emotional context within which the composition will begin. By definition, it contains that idea by which all subsequent ideas presented in the composition will be judged, based upon the degree of physical (or aural) similarity. The idea may express repose (as in the concept of the tonic, for example) or it may present a musical problem or conflict that is to be resolved during the course of the work.

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[72] Because the present focus is on form in songs, I will limit my reference to the macro-structure to this context.

[73] Formal articulation occurs in many ways, particularly when the varying concepts of tonality and atonality are considered. Britten's approach to tonality is discussed subsequently in this chapter.

[74] Jürgen Thym and Ann Clark Fehn recognized the importance of the return and its incongruence with the sonnet form in two important articles: "Sonnet Structure"; and "Repetition as Structure in the German *Lied*: The Ghazal," Comparative Literature 41 (1989): 33-52.

Departure from the initial statement arises when a subsequent idea or section of a composition contrasts in any way with the first idea or first section. There are various degrees of departure, which include varying degrees of contrast or variation, as well as various means of effecting one (i.e., through one or all elements of melody, harmony and rhythm). In terms of purely musical concerns, the departure may include the development of an idea or of a tonality or pitch that was previously stated, or it may create a sense of contrast with the initial statement, sometimes in anticipation of the return of the initial statement in its original form, or it generates further conflict. The degree of departure ultimately depends on the amount of tension the composer feels is necessary to effectively present his return, if a return is desired, or it may be tied to the emotional content – both conscious and unconscious – of the work. In this regard, the departure is an important aspect of the form, for it potentially represents a change or conflict of emotion from that at the beginning of the work or section, or a sense of progression of emotion. A sense of emotional progress or conflict can arise from the degree of change in any element of the initial statement, including those of pitch, rhythm, harmonic direction, phrase construction, texture, and so forth. The main purpose of emotional conflict is to lead to a resolution of some sort, whether that resolution be through a return of the initial statement or selected portions of it or through further contrast, while the main purpose of a progression of emotion is to give a sense of growth over time, or lead back to the emotional content of the initial statement.

There can also be various degrees of return in a composition in response to the tension caused by the departure. The initial statement may be repeated in its entirety, or only parts of it may recur to effect its identification as a return. If the initial statement is strong enough in terms of its recognition factor, it is possible that only one or two elements of it would be needed to bring about the return. The return can mean several things within the emotional content of a composition. An exact repetition of the initial statement could potentially signify a return to the emotions of the start of the work. In other words, the composition regresses emotionally.[75] Other returns that vary the initial statement, depending upon the degree to which they depart from it, could represent a progress or development of emotion, although any sort of return implies a recall of the emotions of the beginning of a work, if only to dispute them.

The issue of resolution in a composition is tied to the concepts of departure and return, particularly when the music is connected to a text, as in song. A return to elements of the initial statement following a departure need not bring about a resolution of tensions caused by the departure. Nor does the lack of a return assume that resolution cannot take place within the concept of departure. With only a few notable exceptions, there is some general sense of return that occurs toward the end of a composition, even if that return is indescribable in purely musical terms because of our preconceived notions about repose and resolution. The relationship of the return, at any level, to that which it recapitulates must be examined for the capability to resolve the tensions of the composition or to create further tension. Similarly, the relationship of the departure to that with which it contrasts, must be examined in light of its ability to create tension as well as resolve it.

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[75] For an example, one need only to think of concerns about the emotional regression of the *da capo* aria addressed in Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera reforms.

Although the concepts of statement, departure and return, and hence, repose, regression, conflict and resolution, are most closely associated with those notions of tonality most commonly defined as "Common Practice Period," they are also applicable to music which extends these notions or even breaks out of that hierarchical organization of pitches, as Britten's works often do. Britten's approach to tonality in the Michelangelo and Donne cycles retains some of the concepts of the Common Practice Period hierarchy, particularly that of resolution. He explores dominant-to-tonic resolutions (with dominant including leading tone considerations) in several of the songs. For example, the opening song of the Donne cycle, "Oh my blacke soule," comprises a large-scale dominant-to-tonic resolution, and the third song of the Michelangelo set, Sonetto XXX (*Veggio co' bei*), explores the relationship between a triad and a second triad composed solely of leading tones to the first. The end of a phrase or section may also be punctuated by dominant-to-tonic resolutions in some fashion, including a descending perfect fifth/ascending perfect fourth gesture in the bass line, as in "O might those sighes and teares" of the Donne cycle; or a phrase may be generated by traditional tonic-dominant-tonic gestures, as in "At the round earth's imagined corners," but with a deterioration of usual tertian features associated with major/minor tonality.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Britten also employs sonorities that are constructed using principles of quartal harmony, as in Sonettos XVI and LV of the Michelangelo sonnets. He tends to treat these sonorities as a "tonic" in that their recurrence provides a sense of return. Britten is also fond of tritone relationships, often in the place of dominant-to-tonic ones (see Sonetto XXXVIII of the Michelangelo cycle, in particular), and step relationships, including both half- and whole-steps. Even when he does not use dominant-to-tonic gestures, there is still tonal or pitch reference (including the use of a sonority as a reference), so that a sense of departure and return is effected by its absence or presence, thus articulating both the macro- and micro-structures to a certain degree.

In articulating his musical form, Britten relies on traditional methods to mark the end of a section, including piano interludes, a sense of closure (generally marked by a tonal return), or a sense of cadence either in the vocal line or the accompaniment (assuming that a tonal change has occurred). In the Michelangelo sonnets, a more traditional approach to melodic construction, including question-answer phrases and closure-departure phrases also serves to define the form, so that the form is most closely tied to melodic concerns.[76] In the Donne sonnets generally, the accompaniment generally bears the responsibility of articulating the form because the melodic line is constructed from the natural rise and fall of the voice, and therefore, is less traditionally conceived.[77] Britten does, then, approach musical form from a tonal standpoint, in other words, using the concepts of statement, departure, and return, although the notion of "tonality" must be expanded in order to explain exactly how his musical materials effect a coherence.

The Musico-Poetic Form and The Sonnet

While music can express the rhythm and inflection of words, there are certain structural issues in a sonnet that cannot adequately be expressed in music, and vice versa.

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[76] This is not to say that the accompaniment or harmonic aspects of the songs are not important, for they do contribute to the sense of departure and return/resolution.

[77] Although the temptation here would be to compare Britten's melodic lines in the Donne sonnets to declamation, the analogy breaks down in the rhythm. Declamation assumes a rhythmic flow that does not break the poetic meter and with accents occurring on the strong beat of the musical measure; Britten infuses the line with long held notes that often skew the accentuation with regard to the measure. A discussion of Britten's accentuation of the text, however, is outside the scope of this study.

Particularly, sonnets display verbal intricacies of thought processes and a virtuosity of language that cannot be replicated in a musical setting. Paradox, pun, and other conceits, as found in John Donne's sonnets, have no musical equivalent. Music, on the other hand, expresses its thoughts in the way in which its elements relate and interact, but relies on the relationship of departure and return, the latter of which has no poetic equivalent in the sonnet.[78]

The sonnet form, in particular, weaves an intricate design from the initial image, and assumes a progress of emotion. Traditionally considered, the octave develops the image or idea of the sonnet, and the sestet either confirms or counters it. Each subsequent line or section of text in the octave is one more "turn of the screw" in developing the image. The sestet is either an intensification of that image – and hence, a further development of it, or a refusal of it, intimating contrast, so that the emotion at the outset has undergone a change by the final line. A musical response that articulates the form of the sonnet, modelling its interpretation on the poetic form, seems limited to a line-by-line setting that somehow expresses the relationship of one line of the sonnet with the preceding one through the development of a musical idea, with contrast or further development of the musical idea articulating the role of the sestet – in other words, a through-composed or cantata-like setting. Studies of the sonnet and Ghazal settings by German *Lied* composers conducted by Jürgen Thym and Ann Clark Fehn reveal that the predominate response was a through-composed setting, with the inner divisions of the sonnet being clearly articulated, sometimes through a cantata-like sectionalization.[79] The sonnet form, then, becomes the governing force and exercises constraint over the development of the music.[80]

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[78] In poems with refrains, the verses progress so that the recurrence of the refrain is read in light of the new emotion or information.

But what of the musical form that develops along different lines than the sonnet form? Jürgen Thym and Ann Clark Fehn, in their examination of sonnet settings by German *Lied* composers, discovered that repetitions (i.e., returns) "... underscore correspondences in the poetry or create correspondences in the music," and further, that "repetition used in this manner can indeed provide the settings with a network of relationships akin to the rich network of structural and conceptual correspondences that constitute the poetic form."[81] Their conclusions, however, consider the sonnet form as having control over the musical form, and seem to assume that the composer sought to articulate the form of the sonnet in his setting. This assumption may not be entirely true in each case. Although some aspects of the two forms may coincide with the result that the poetic form is articulated at some level in the music, either in the macro- or micro-structure, the concepts of return and departure at work in the musical elements which comprise the macro- or micro-structure may significantly alter the progression of the sonnet. In such a setting, the sonnet is decreated, and given a new organization of its ideas, or an interpretation. The present study examines the correlation between sonnet form and musical form in Benjamin Britten's sonnet cycles with a view toward identifying how Britten's musical form interprets the poetry it sets.

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[79] Thym and Fehn, "Sonnet Structure," 4.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 5.

CHAPTER II

"BEFORE LIFE AND AFTER": AN EXPLORATION OF THE EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES THAT SHAPED BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S SONNET CYCLES

In the study of any composer's *oeuvre*, the social and political milieu in which he wrote is intricately connected to the conscious or unconscious philosophical leanings of his works. The circumstances, music, events and people that a composer encounters or knows, whether from afar or through a close relationship, are inevitably influential in both his personal life and his compositions, and often fall into patterns or recurrent themes that can be seen throughout his life. Benjamin Britten's life was no exception to this phenomenon: the impact of world and personal events, and certain people can be traced in his compositions, as evident in his choice of texts, subject matter for operas, and occasionally, titles for instrumental pieces. Britten's song cycles, Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo and The Holy Sonnets of John Donne, were both written during periods in Britten's life when occurrences in both his private life and the public world in which he lived had a profound influence on his lifestyle and his musical output. These incidents form a complex web of impressions, the effect of which on Britten are both subtle and blatant. To understand Britten's choice of poetry for the sonnet cycles and the music and the interpretation that it brings to the poetry, these influences in his life must be examined.

Britten and Frank Bridge

Britten began studying with the English composer Frank Bridge in January 1928, just after he had heard Bridge's Enter Spring at the Norwich Music Festival on October 27th, 1927.[1] Britten met Bridge the day following the premiere and showed him several of his own works. Bridge was impressed by Britten's skill and suggested to his parents that he be started on a course of musical study at once, including composition with him and piano with Harold Samuel.[2] The Brittens agreed and Benjamin began a long association with Bridge and the circle surrounding his household.

Bridge's Compositional Influences

Britten's study with Bridge was influential in ways that include, but also extend beyond, compositional instruction. In the area of composition, Bridge demanded that Britten have a reason for each note in every piece, which, in the end, perfected Britten's technique, giving him the propensity for the careful attention to detail that characterizes his works. The lessons were somewhat intense, with Britten often leaving them in tears, although as Britten said, "...not that he was beastly to me, but the concentrated strain was too much for me."[3] Marjorie Fass, the Bridges' neighbor and closest friend, echoes these sentiments in a memoir:

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[1] Britten's first encounter with Bridge's music had been at the 1924 Norwich Triennial Festival at which Bridge conducted his suite, The Sea. Britten reports having been "knocked sideways." "Britten Looking Back," Musical America 84 (February 1964): 4.

[2] Humphrey Carpenter, Benjamin Britten: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 16. Bridge had actually wanted Britten to go and live with Samuel in London so that he might have lessons every day as another of Samuel's students was currently doing. The Brittens were, according to Beth Britten, rather reluctant about the idea, especially since Bridge "was the popular idea of the artist in those days. He had long hair, was very excitable, and talked alot. Our father was very conservative and could not stand anyone who talked as much, thinking it showed an empty mind." Beth Britten, My Brother Benjamin (Bourne End: Kensal Press, 1986), 54.

[3] "Britten Looking Back," 4.

> Mr Brit[4] came to give Benji a lesson on conducting his *Variations* (on a theme of Frank Bridge). We were all thoroughly tired except Mr Brit who was as fresh as a lark. His one-and-a-half-hour lesson to stiff, awkward little Benji nearly killed Benji with tiredness, but Frank with his wonderful arms like branches of trees in the wind full of power was as fresh when he stopped as when he began.[5]

Despite Bridge's rigorous treatment, Britten himself admitted that Bridge's approach with him was the proper one at the right time:

> The strictness was the product of nothing but professionalism. Bridge insisted on the absolutely clear relationship of what was in my mind to what was on the paper. I used to get sent to the other side of the room; Bridge would play what I'd written and demand if it was what I'd really meant. . . . I badly needed his kind of strictness: it was just the right treatment for me. His loathing of all sloppiness and amateurishness set me to standards to aim for that I've never forgotten.[6]

This attitude is not merely a mature expression toward the end of his life of his gratitude to Bridge, but something that he realized early on. In his 1946 article, "How to Become a Composer," Britten essentially asserts that all young composers should be so fortunate in having their teacher's attentions:

> Not only did he keep my nose to the grindstone, but he criticised my works relentlessly, and I, who had thought I was already on the verge of immortality, saw my illusions shattered and I felt I was very small fry. Now I can see that this period of my life which then seemed to be worrying and depressing was the best possible thing for me and a thing which every young composer must undergo.[7]

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[4] This was a term of endearment for Frank Bridge, as was the pet name, "Franco."

[5] Marjorie Fass, quoted in Britten, Letters from a Life: Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976, ed. by Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 102. Because of the complex nature of Mitchell's work, a clarification of the method of citation is needed. For Britten's and Pears's letters, the letter number and date are given, with the author listed as the first element of the citation; for Donald Mitchell's editorial remarks, page numbers are given without reference to footnote numbers because the length of the footnotes often makes such a reference meaningless; for quotation from others, page numbers are also used.

[6] Britten, "Britten Looking Back," 4.

[7] Britten, "How to Become a Composer," Listener, 7 November 1946, 624.

Early on, Bridge and Britten, who was Bridge's only composition student, enjoyed a very good working and personal relationship. Britten felt very much that the Bridge home was a second home to him, and it was there that he saw how stimulating the life of a musician could be.[8] But their sessions were not without some natural youthful rebellion on the part of Britten, owing, in part, to Britten's having begun composition lessons at the tender age of fourteen, to Bridge's strict and fatherly ways, and to their increasingly different approach to vocal writing.[9] Marjorie Fass was witness to some of the ensuing disagreements:

> As Franco got out of his car he muttered to me that never again wld [sic] he try to help Benjy over his work, as some of the things he pointed out, the boy simply wldn't alter, so why waste his time & energy? And as I drove home with Benjy & asked if he'd had a good afternoon he said he'd had to "stick up for himself" a thing he'd never done before with Mr Brit – so I said that was allright, but surely it was of value to him to have Mr Brit's criticism & he said, "Yes, but they're my songs" & I said "certainly, but since Mr Brit knows so infinitely more about music than you do I shld have thought his wisdom & experience were worth your accepting" which left spoilt young Benjy in a silent temper – & I had to have a quite light hand over everything at dinner & afterwards & didn't touch again on his work.[10]

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[8] According to Britten: ". . . it was not only in musical things that I learned much from Bridge. It was, of course, the first time I had seen how an artist lived. I heard conversations which centered round the arts; I heard the latest poems discussed, and the latest trends in painting and sculpture. Bridge was not intellectually oversophisticated, perhaps, although well-read and full of curiosity, but he had a circle of highly cultured friends, many of whom were artists and musicians, but most of them distinguished amateurs." Britten, "Britten Looking Back," 6.

[9] Britten was to summarize later much of the problem as having arisen from his admiration for the early English school: "There were sharp conflicts as I came to resist his influence over me. Also his approach was largely German, 18th- and 19th-century at that – and by then I'd discovered Purcell and the English madrigalists." Ibid., 4.

[10] Marjorie Fass, quoted in Letters from a Life, 25. According to Donald Mitchell, the songs that Britten was working on were from his 1937 cycle, On This Island, settings of poems by Auden. Mitchell, quoted in Letters from a Life, 26.

Britten's own memories of his resistance to Bridge's teaching show something of the drive for perfection, yet stubbornness in the face of criticism in both men: "When Bridge played questionable chords across the room to me and asked if that was what I meant, I would retort, 'Yes it is.' He'd grunt back, 'Well it oughtn't to be.'"[11] This type of interchange, while a product of Britten's rebellious nature of that time, helped him to focus upon each aspect of a composition in careful detail. Britten was later to state that he was ". . . enormously aware that [he hadn't] yet come up to the technical standard Bridge set [him]."[12] The result of Bridge's work with Britten, however, is manifest in his many compositions in which he gleans a whole song from a single melodic gesture or, in the case of some of the songs, from a gesture in the accompaniment.[13]

Bridge's work with Britten – the demand for clarity and technical facility – was possibly the cause of Britten's dissatisfaction with the instruction he received at the Royal College of Music from John Ireland. Britten had won a scholarship to the college in the summer of 1930 and began his study that fall. Ireland was not as attentive to Britten as Bridge had been, although years later he called Britten "the most highly talented and brilliant pupil I've ever had."[14] In the months before his entry into the RCM, Britten was excited about his impending lessons with Ireland and prepared for them by reading through many of Ireland's compositions. After the first lesson, however, he thought him to be much harsher than Bridge: "He is terribly critical and enough to take the heart out of any one!"[15] There were other problems as well, largely due to Ireland's habit of not showing up for lessons or cancelling them at the last minute in favor of his own professional advancement and not acknowledging Britten when Britten's works were played in concert.[16] Finally, in January 1933, Bridge took the liberty of addressing Ireland personally, and wrote of the interchange in a letter to Britten:

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[11] Britten, "Britten Looking Back," 4.

[12] Ibid., 6.

[13] Britten's pre-Bridge songs, which are now being issued by Faber Music, lack this degree of organization. See in particular Tit for Tat.

[14] John Ireland, "Interview with Arthur Jacobs," by Arthur Jacobs, BBC Radio, 11 August 1959; quoted in Letters from a Life, 191.

> Sundry cross-questioning & other quasi-diplomatic conversations eventually led to the point of my saying that: – had I been in your shoes at the Ballet Club Concert I should have been as much hurt as you at not being spoken to. This produced protestations of all kinds. Then having decided that this was hardly enough to produce the "air-balloon", I said that I had always thought it was objectionable for pupils at the R.C.M. being left for a whole fortnight whilst the prof. went off Ass. Boarding [examining for the Associated Board] but that this should be followed by another wk's lesson being thrown over for a rehearsal of a Violin Sonata was a fairly sickening experience.[17]

Things with Ireland got better, but Britten resented the influence of the RCM and Ireland for the early part of his life. One of the reasons for his abandoning English texts for a time grew out of his need to rid himself of the influences of the RCM. In a later interview with Joseph Cooper for the BBC, Britten relented his negative attitude toward Ireland: "They [Ireland and Arthur Benjamin] were both very kind to me and really nursed me very gently through a very, very difficult musical adolescence, which I was going through at that time."[18]

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[15] Britten, diary entry, 16 October 1930; quoted in Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 37.

[16] Ireland also had a penchant for alcohol and on several occasions was drunk during Britten's lesson. Carpenter implies that Ireland was jealous of Britten's abilities and successes, but this implication cannot be proved. In my opinion, it tends to discredit Britten more so than Ireland by furthering the notion that Britten was supposedly given "protection" by his group of admirers.

[17] Frank Bridge, letter to Britten, 4 January 1933; quoted in Letters from a Life, 146.

Bridge's Philosophical Influences

In other areas, Bridge's own political and philosophical tendencies and his expression of them in his music gave Britten a model for his politics and philosophies, and the affirmation to write them into his own compositions. Like Britten, Bridge was a pacifist with strong convictions against the government's handling of the war that he had witnessed, the First World War, and the actions of the government regarding the impending Second World War. Britten was later to claim that many of his pacifistic feelings had been brought to the surface by Bridge's personal musical expressions of that stand:

> I had been . . . already a pacifist at school, and a lot of my feeling about the First World War, which people seem to see in my "War Requiem," came from Bridge. He had written a piano sonata in memory of a friend killed in France; and though he didn't encourage me to take a stand for the sake of a stand, he did make me argue and argue and argue. His own pacifism was not aggressive, but typically gentle.[19]

Indeed, as Britten became more comfortable as a political composer, largely through the efforts of W. H. Auden, he also became bolder in his assertions of his ideas. In the 1955 edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Frank Howes comments: "Britten's convictions on social and non-party-political questions influence his acceptance of commissions and his choice of texts."[20] Works such as the War Requiem, The

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[18] Britten, The Composer Speaks, interview by Joseph Cooper, BBC broadcast, date unknown; quoted in Letters from a Life, 147.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Eric Blom, ed., Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (New York: St Martin's Press, Inc., 1955), s.v. "Benjamin Britten," by Frank Howes.

Children's Crusade, and Owen Wingrave are overt in their political statements; but there are a number of Britten's compositions which subtly express displeasure with past and contemporary situations, with the Holy Sonnets of John Donne counted among them.[21]

Bridge's Concern over Auden's Influence

Although their political opinions were very much the same, Bridge was to experience serious doubts about the good of the influence that the Auden circle had on Britten, which, in turn, caused some minor problems between the two men.[22] After Britten became associated with Auden, and as they prepared Britten's first non-film collaboration with the poet, the orchestral song cycle Our Hunting Fathers, Britten shared with Bridge the pointed and socially satirical text that Auden had written and compiled. Britten's diary entry following the meeting tells of Bridge's approval of the work in progress: "I show him Auden's stuff for me and he is impressed. Also find he is very sympathetic toward my socialistic inclinations."[23] This seems to be one of the last times that Bridge and Britten agreed with regard to Auden. As Britten was drawn more and more into the Auden circle, he asserted his independence from Bridge in both political and compositional matters, as in the case of Bridge's disapproval of passages in On This Island.[24] There were times when he argued passionately with Bridge and his wife about politics, although Britten himself felt remorseful over having alienated them.[25] The Bridges were protective of Britten, even to the point of having become surrogate parents after the death of Britten's mother in January of 1937, although Britten was well over the age of consent.[26] Their real distrust of the Auden circle is never overtly explained, although Marjorie Fass hinted at the reasons in several letters written in 1937. Britten was obviously overwhelmed by the group's intellectual discussions, as indicated by Fass's declaration:

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[21] Other works representative of this category include Winter Words, Who are These Children?, Peter Grimes and the Suite on English Folk Tunes, op. 90 ("A time there was . . .").

[22] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 114.

[23] Britten, quoted in Christopher Headington, Britten, The Composer as Contemporary, John Lade (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982), 36.

[24] See p. 43 above.

> I'm having a bit of fun with him by not being bowled over with everything that Auden & Christopher Isherwood do – I'm definitely bored with Christopher's adolescent 'smartness' & his unwise interest in prostitutes male & female – & Benjy so hoped I'd like his last book called 'Sally Bowles' that he insisted on giving it me – & I find it even more boring & not so good as 'Mr Norris' . . .[27]

The unspoken reason here, too, is that the Bridges were concerned about the promiscuity of certain homosexuals in the Auden circle and its influence on Britten and his commitment to his art. If a second statement by Fass can be equally applied to the Bridges, then they may have felt that Britten was not seeing his new friends' faults clearly, and that he was not being given as much in return as he was giving: "The thing that is bad for him is that he's meeting brilliant people who are not brilliant in his sphere, but their own, & so make a mutual admiration society – & if one pricks his bubble he bleeds –."[28]

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[25] "I curse myself for having done or said anything hurtful to the people who have helped & are helping me in every way possible." Britten's diary for 1 March 1937, quoted in Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 98.

[26] Ibid., 115. Britten's father had died in 1934.

[27] Fass, quoted in Letters from a Life, 19. Isherwood's book, Mr Norris Changes Trains, deals openly with homosexual promiscuity. In another statement, Fass wrote enigmatically, "He knows we know, & that he can't fake to take us in – & we love him so much some day he'll have to hear and bear exactly what we feel abt [sic] him but at the moment it's difficult." Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

Britten and W.H. Auden

As he did with Bridge, Britten gleaned much from his relationship with Auden and the Auden circle. Britten's association with Wystan Auden began in July 1935 as the result of their connections with the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit. Britten had been hired by the studio in April of that same year to furnish music and sound effects for films, largely due to an interview with the BBC in January. Auden, on the other hand, sought out the job of scriptwriter for the film unit by contacting Basil Wright, the producer and director and a friend of Cecil Day Lewis who was part of the Auden circle. Britten's second film with the GPO was Coal Face, to which Auden had been invited to contribute the poem for a women's chorus. Wright and Britten after several conferences on the script – for which Britten had the difficult task of providing words – went to visit Auden at the prep school at which he was teaching in Colwall in order to get his input.[29] Britten was at once in awe of him, as he wrote in his diary for 4 July 1935: "Auden is the most amazing man, a very brilliant & attractive personality. . . ."[30] For his part, Auden found Britten to have:

> extraordinary musical sensitivity in relation to the English language. One had always been told that English was an impossible tongue to set or sing . . . . Here at last was a composer who set the language without undue distortion.[31]

Their work together continued after the completion of Coal Face. Auden quit his job at the school and was employed full-time by the GPO.

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[29] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 68.

[30] Britten, diary entry, 5 July 1935, Letters from a Life, 380.

[31] Auden, quoted in Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 68.

Auden's Political Influences

Perhaps because of Auden and Basil Wright, who was on the fringes of the Auden group, the GPO Film Unit began to take on more political subjects, imbuing them with socialist viewpoints. Britten, too, seems to have been affected by Auden's political activism and his sense of a political and social obligation, particularly after being made aware of the composer's potential role in political statement by Frank Bridge. In early 1935, before he met Auden, he spent a day in his neighborhood in Lowestoft distributing Peace Ballot papers.[32] Instead of his eliciting the desired reaction in which people considered their stand on war, he ran up against "a road packed with die-hards – Indian Colonels, army widows, typical old spinsters etc!"[33] After meeting Auden, he took an interest in Communism and began to see such composers as Elgar and Walton as pawns of "Imperialistic England."[34] August of that same year found Britten trying to convince his mother into aligning with communism, but without avail as he described in his diary: ". . . try to talk communism with Mum, but it is impossible to say anything to anyone brought up in the old order without severe ruptions. The trouble is that fundamentally she agrees with me & won't admit it."[35] Donald Mitchell has observed that Britten's diaries were virtually devoid of political comment until this particular date and that afterwards his interest in political matters becomes increasingly more apparent. Mitchell ascribes this to "the influence of Britten's new politically minded and politically aware friends with whom he was working at the GPO Film Unit, Auden especially."[36]

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[32] The League of Nations conducted the National Peace Ballet after November 12, 1934, to restore public faith in the League's policy of international disarmament and the use of economic sanctions to control aggressions. This was not difficult, for the most part, because most of the populace was enjoying social reforms in the light of defense spending cuts.

[33] Britten, diary entry, 19 February 1935, quoted in Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 69.

[34] Ibid., 69-70.

[35] Britten, diary entry, 2 August 1935, Letters from a Life, 375.

Although Britten's boyhood friend, John Pounder, joined the Communist Party, neither he nor Auden ever did.[37] In his seminal work on the Auden-Britten collaborations, Mitchell asserts that the absence of a rigid dogma in the British Communist Party essentially

> . . . meant that basically independent spirits, independent-minded creators like Britten and Auden, were able to work within the general context of left-wing politics on projects, or for causes, with which they were undeniably in sympathy but without necessarily committing themselves to a party line – because for the arts at least, there was no party line, or at best only an exiguous one.[38]

Thus, Britten and Auden were able to express a variety of political viewpoints without being tied entirely to one faction.

In actuality, Britten was more closely aligned with socialism, both in his political opinion and his ideas about the artist's role in society. Initially, he and Auden both believed that art could influence society and that the artist should compose his works with this drive toward education of society in mind. Auden wrote in 1935: "There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love. . . ."[39] Britten held to this belief all of his life, as witnessed by his address to the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies in 1964: ". . . it is the composer's duty, as a member of society, to speak to or for his fellow human beings."[40] This viewpoint had a significant effect upon his choices of subject matter. Auden, on the other hand, later came to think "that art was powerless to change the world, to modify human behaviour. . . ."[41]

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[36] Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 376.

[37] Pounder explains his involvement as a reaction to the *Zeitgeist*: "This was the time of Hitler and the Spanish Civil War, and we were all very Left-wing." Quoted in Letters from a Life, 431.

[38] Mitchell, Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 26.

Auden seems to have been driven in the 1930s by his feelings of political and social responsibility. Not only do his texts reflect this, but so do his personal actions. For example, in January 1937, he went to Spain with the intention of fighting fascists in the Spanish Civil War. His first non-film collaboration with Britten, Our Hunting Fathers, was to explore the contemporary political scene through the metaphor of man and his relationship to animals which is particularly destructive on the part of man.[42] This more open and personal expression against society, while natural to Auden, was Britten's first public political statement.[43] Their intent seems to have been to wreak some havoc within accepted English societal traditions. Certainly its premiere performance at the Norwich Music Festival in September 1936 accomplished these aims, for the Festival's supporters made sure that their names were listed in the program with all their societal honors.[44] The day after the performance, Britten was gratified that reviews of the premiere were mostly unfavorable:

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[39] Auden, "Psychology and Art To-day," in The Arts To-day, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1935), 20; quoted in Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 25.

[40] Britten, "On Winning the First Aspen Award," Saturday Review, 22 August 1964, 37-39, 51.

[41] Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 25.

[42] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 79.

[43] Britten wrote his first politically-motivated work, the Pacifist March for the Peace Pledge Union in 1936, but it was not intended for performance at a musical venue.

> Notices of my work vary from flattering & slightly bewildered (D. Tel.) [Daily Telegraph] – to reprehension & disapproving (Times) – but I am pleased, because what could be the use of a work of this kind if the narrow-minded, prejudiced snobbish Colles (forinstance) [sic] approved?[45]

This summary of his feelings reads more as though the voice of Auden were speaking through him, especially since Britten had a tendency toward low self-esteem after reading an unflattering criticism of his music. Indeed, a letter from Frank Bridge some months later implies that Britten was initially hurt by the audience's reaction and the critics' opinions:

> The quintessence of disappointment on your face was so marked that had I a few minutes alone with you, I might have consoled you with the fact that many a good work has begun its public life much in the same indifferent way. It is extremely hard to bear, but one must & I suppose does anyway.[46]

Auden's Influence on Britten's Choice of Texts

For a time, it seems that Britten had absorbed so much of Auden's opinions that he lost some of his own personality, particularly when it came to choice of texts for his compositions, and his social affairs.[47] Musically, however, he continued on a straight course, fine-tuning many of the skills that Bridge had taught him and that the GPO Film Unit demands had required. After Our Hunting Fathers, Britten set several other Auden texts, including some only recently-published cabaret songs from 1936 and the song cycle, On This Island.[48] Each of the texts has a satirical tone that is relatively foreign to Britten's previous text choices and to those that he would make after his friendship with Auden abated. While Britten continued to make political and social statements with his works, particularly in the operas, the overtones of the texts were less overt than in his Auden compositions.

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[44] Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 35, 53 n. 28.

[45] Britten, diary entry, 26 September 1936, Letters from a Life, 447. H.C. Colles was the Times music critic from 1911-1943.

[46] Frank Bridge, letter to Britten, 3 May 1937, quoted in From Parry to Britten: British Music in Letters, 1900-1945 ed. Lewis Foreman (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1987), 202.

[47] In an interview in London Magazine with Charles Osborne, Britten summed up Auden's effect on him: ". . . I was certainly greatly influenced by Auden *personally*, but

Auden, however, led Britten to many of the poets whose texts he chose for his later song cycles. The first song cycle that Auden influenced was Britten's Les Illuminations, composed in March of 1939, with its partial premiere on a BBC Radio broadcast in April.[49] The texts were taken from the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud. According to Sophie Wyss, for whose voice the cycle was conceived, Britten was introduced to the poetry by Auden:

> We were travelling back by train after having given a recital together, when he came over to me very excitedly as we were unable to sit together, and said that he had just read the most wonderful poetry by Rimbaud and was so eager to set it to music; and asked me whether I might mind singing it in French, I naturally agreed as it was my first language. He was so full of this poetry he just could not stop talking about it, I

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never *musically*." "An Interview with Benjamin Britten," interview by Charles Osborne, London Magazine 3 (October 1963): 95.

[48] The cabaret songs were published posthumously in 1980 by Faber Music.

[49] Only two of the songs from the cycle were performed, "Being Beauteous" and "Marine." A Britten Source Book, comp. John Evans, Philip Reed and Paul Wilson (Aldeburgh, Suffolk: The Britten Estate Limited for the Britten-Pears Library, 1987), 41.

> suspect he must have seen a copy of Rimbaud's works while he was recently staying with Auden in Birmingham.[50]

Taking Wyss's assumption as fact, Humphrey Carpenter alludes to Auden's motives for introducing Britten to Rimbaud's poetry. As a young man, Rimbaud had had a homosexual affair with Paul Verlaine, whose poetry Britten had set in a very early song cycle, Quatre Chansons Françaises (1928).[51] Auden had a penchant for younger men – even young boys – and Carpenter, in a theme that dominates his biography of Britten, subtly implies at this point that Auden recognized a similar desire for young boys in Britten, before Britten saw and understood it himself.[52]

In a 1963 interview with R. Murray Schafer, Britten also admitted Auden's influence in his choice of John Donne as the source for a song cycle: "Auden got us to take Donne seriously. One didn't get much of him at school, or at least we didn't appreciate him properly there."[53] Evidence also exists that Auden possibly introduced Michelangelo to Britten as well, although Britten's source for the poetry came to him from Marjorie Fass. On a letter that Britten received from Auden dating from November 1937, Britten wrote the author, publisher, and short title of a biography of Michelangelo.[54] Donald Mitchell assumes that the recommendation of that particular biography came from Auden, hence Britten's notation on a letter from Auden. Marjorie Fass, however, gave Britten a copy of

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[50] Sophie Wyss, "Interview with John Skiba," by John Skiba, Composer 59 (Winter 1976-77): 34.

[51] This cycle was published posthumously in 1983 by Faber Music.

[52] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 126.

[53] Britten, "Benjamin Britten," interview by Murray Schafer, in British Composers in Interview (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 115.

[54] Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 801.

Michelangelo's sonnets before he and Pears left for America. That edition, by John Addington Symonds, was Britten's source for his Italian texts he set and the English translations on which he based his interpretations through the musical settings.[55] Although Mitchell leaves the question of Britten's initial contact with Michelanglo's poetry unexplained,[56] it seems likely that an introduction of the poetry to Britten would have come by way of Auden and that Fass could have provided him with the edition upon his request, or as the result of a conversation.[57]

The use of Addington Symonds's edition of the Michelangelo sonnets is curious given that there was another Italian/English editions of Michelangelo's poetry available that used a less Victorian approach to the English translations.[58] The reason, however, lies in Auden's homosexuality. Addington Symonds, translator and editor of the edition Britten used for the cycle, was one of the first scholars to question Michelangelo's relationship with Tommaso de' Cavalieri, to whom a significant number of love sonnets was addressed. According to James Saslow, Addington Symonds was a pioneer of homosexual studies, Michelangelo being the first legend he tackled.[59] This being the case, the Auden circle, including Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, and E.M. Forester, who were all very much concerned with the social problems of the contemporary homosexual, undoubtedly would have been familiar with Addington Symonds's work. Britten, who felt intellectually inferior to Auden and his group, would have absorbed their literary opinions and recommendations like a sponge, as he did with their political viewpoints.[60] This is not to say that Britten had no mind of his own, but that being as young as he was when he was associated with Auden, he was more open to being influenced by men with stronger personalities than himself, as in the case of the Auden circle.[61] Certainly Auden's overwhelming influence pervades Britten's life in more ways than one, and perhaps in more ways than Britten scholars will be able to uncover, owing to the fact that Auden destroyed all correspondence he received.

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[55] Michelangelo Buonarroti, The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti, trans. by John Addington Symonds (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1904).

[56] Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 930.

[57] As a close friend of the Bridges, Marjorie Fass enjoyed a very warm and intimate relationship with Britten. See Letters from a Life and Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, passim. Carpenter reports that Howard Ferguson, an acquaintance of Britten's and student of Harold Samuel, thought that Fass was Bridge's mistress. Ibid., 39-40.

[58] The other edition is by S. Elizabeth Hall: Sonnets of Michelangelo, trans. S. Elizabeth Hall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1905).

[59] James Saslow, The Poetry of Michelangelo, trans. James M. Saslow (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 54.

Auden and Britten's Homosexuality

One sphere of Britten's personal life that Auden affected to a great degree was his homosexuality, which he finally unveiled to the public with the premiere performance of the Michelangelo Sonnets. It was, of course, his association with the Auden circle, which consisted primarily – though not entirely – of homosexual men, that solidified his already suspected tendencies in that direction. After meeting Auden, who was unashamedly homosexual at a time when it was illegal in England, Britten was challenged to define his own sexuality. Auden and Christopher Isherwood seem to have noticed Britten's indecisiveness and naiveté early in their association. They also perceived that Britten was very much in awe of their intelligence and prowess in their media and was, therefore, capable of being molded to suit their image of him.[62] In a 1990 interview with Donald Mitchell, Stephen Spender, one of the Auden group, recalled a "puzzling remark" that Isherwood made regarding Britten: "Well, Ben is like water in our hands. Ben is a very weak character and Wystan and I can do anything we like with him."[63] Isherwood admits to having tried to draw Britten's homosexuality out with the help of Auden, commenting:

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[60] Britten wrote in his diary for 17 September 1935: "I always feel very young & stupid when with these brains – I mostly sit silent when they hold forth about subjects in general. What brains!" Letters from a Life, 380-381.

[61] Britten's mother had been the strongest influence in his life until he met Auden in late 1935. His diaries reflect a growing independence on his part, despite his very passionate feelings for her. It is generally accepted among Britten's friends and scholars that the death of his mother in January, 1937, though devastating to him, also freed him to pursue certain aspects of his personality that had surfaced under Auden's watchful eye. In many ways, Mrs. Britten's death gave him the strength to go his on way and make his own decisions without undue pressure from outside interests. For more about Mrs. Britten and her rather domineering personality, see Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 15-17.

> No doubt both of us tried to bring him out, if he seemed to us to need it. We were extraordinarily interfering in this respect – as bossy as a pair of self-assured young psychiatrists – he wasn't a doctor's son and I wasn't an ex-medical student for nothing.[64]

Despite their avid interest in Britten's sexual life, it appears that neither Auden nor Isherwood ever had a physical relationship with him.[65] Auden, with all certainty, tried, as he did with many of his friends, but was rejected.[66] The invitation was the subject of his

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[62] Auden had decided soon after his first meeting with Britten that he was "the composer" of the Auden group, a position that was previously unfilled. Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 79.

[63] Stephen Spender, interview by Donald Mitchell, 27 October 1990, Aldeburgh, Britten-Pears Library; quoted in Letters from a Life, 1338-1339.

[64] Christopher Isherwood, interview by Humphrey Carpenter; quoted in Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 107.

[65] In an interview with Humphrey Carpenter, Isherwood stated: "If there was sex between Auden and Britten, I remember nothing of it. My guess would be No. Nothing between Britten and me, either." Ibid.

[66] Carpenter states, "[Auden] sometimes invited his friends to go to bed with him but was not offended if they refused." Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 83. Carpenter was also the author of a biography of Auden.

March 1936 poem, "Underneath the Abject Willow" which he dedicated to Britten, and which Britten subsequently set to music. Mitchell comments that Britten's refusal of the invitation was less a rejection of Auden than caution on Britten's part in succumbing to his sexuality.[67] Still, the poem must have hit its mark, for in April of that same year, Britten talked about his homosexuality with his brother Robert, with whom he normally had many philosophical disagreements: "Actually on our evening walks we have had very intimate discussions & he hasn't been shocked by but even helped with sympathy & advice my 'queerness' [sic]."[68] Several months later in June, he wrote of his reluctance to embrace it: "Life is a pretty hefty struggle these days – sexually as well. Decisions are so hard to make, & its [sic] difficult to look unprejudiced on apparently abnormal things."[69] Britten's opinion of homosexuality as being abnormal, which most certainly grew out of his school-boy religious instruction, may have been one of the chief factors in his reluctance to accept his own feelings.

Perhaps the most damning barrier was that Britten found it impossible to commit himself completely to his homosexuality as long as his mother was living. Her death in January 1937 freed him from the benign relationships he was experiencing in the wake of his having met Auden. Mitchell observes that Britten set up his friendships according to the hierarchies of public school, in which he functioned as a senior boy's junior – as with Auden, or as the senior boy himself as with Piers Dunkerley.[70] This was the type of arrangement that he tried to set up with Lennox Berkeley shortly after their meeting in 1936:

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[67] Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 382.

[68] Britten, diary entry, 4 April 1936, Letters from a Life, 506.

[69] Britten, diary entry, 5 June 1936, Letters from a Life, 66 fn. 19.

[70] Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 402.

> He is an awful dear – very intelligent & kind – & I am very attached to him, even after this short time. In spite of his avowed sexual weakness for young men of my age & form – he is considerate & open, & we have come to an agreement on that subject.[71]

Gradually in 1937, however, Britten began to thaw to the idea of a physical relationship with another man. In March after lunch with an old friend and avowed homosexual, David Green, Britten wrote in his diary that Green ". . . emphasizes the point (very truly) that now is the time for me to decide something about my sexual life. O, for a little courage."[72] By April, Britten seems to have come to a decision regarding Lennox Berkeley, although the implications are unclear:

> . . . before bed – long & deep conversation with Lennox – he is a dear & I am very, very fond of him, neverthless [sic], it is a comfort that we can arrange sexual matters to at least my satisfaction.[73]

In light of a subsequent diary entry after an overnight visit with Christopher Isherwood to the Jermyn Street Turkish baths, a well-known homosexual meeting place in London, it appears that Britten was beginning to open up to this facet of his emotional needs, largely due to efforts on the part of members of the Auden circle:[74]

> After dinner I go out with Christopher Isherwood, sit for ages in Regent's Park & talk very pleasantly & then on to Oddeninos & Café Royal – get slightly drunk, & then at mid-night go to Jermyn St. & have a turkish Bath. Very pleasant sensations –

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[71] Britten, diary entry, 30 July 1936, Letters from a Life, 437.

[72] Britten, diary entry, 5 March 1937; quoted in Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 98.

[73] Britten, diary entry, 11 April 1937, Letters from a Life, 538.

[74] Basil Wright recalled a conversation between himself and Isherwood in which they asked themselves, "Well, have we convinced Ben he's queer, or haven't we?" Headington, Britten, 35.

> completely sensuous, but very healthy. It is extraordinary to find one's resistance to anything gradually weakening.[75]

Britten's and Berkeley's friendship grew to the point that in late 1937 they collaborated on a piece for orchestra, and in early 1938 Britten dedicated his piano concerto to Berkeley. When in January of 1938 he began a regular recital partnership with Peter Pears, the man who was to be his life-long companion, he seemed ready to accept his own homosexuality as well as some of the lifestyle that went with it. He was still disturbed, however, by overtly homosexual behavior (i.e., the "foppish"),[76] but in imitation of the promiscuity of Auden, began to pursue relationships beyond his unstable one with Berkeley, including one with a young man he had met in Italy, Wulff Scherchen.[77] Berkeley often made Britten feel uncomfortable by his endless adoration, but the real problem may have been Berkeley's timing, for Britten was just accepting his homosexuality and desired to go much slower in his consummation of it.[78] In September 1937, Britten admitted in his diary, "I always feel better towards L.B. when I am with him."[79]

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[75] Britten, diary entry, 3 July 1937, Letters from a Life, 18.

[76] Britten used this word to describe Brian Howard, a friend of Auden's. Britten was both amused and put off by Howard's "affected" mannerisms. This is also evident from Britten's musical portrayal of the Elderly Fop in Death in Venice, which requires falsetto singing and overstated feminine actions.

[77] There exists a very interesting letter written to Britten by Auden in which Auden gives Britten instructions on how to seduce someone. The object of the seduction is unclear, although it may have been Francis Barton, a companion of Britten's from his school days. Britten, Letters from a Life, 575. Also in summer 1938, Britten began pursuing Wulff (Wolfgang) Scherchen, son of Hermann Scherchen, the German conductor, whom he had met in 1934 while on holiday in Siena.

[78] In two revealing interviews – one with Peter Pears and another with Jackie Hewitt, a friend of Christopher Isherwood – Humphrey Carpenter found that although Britten and Berkeley were involved sexually, Britten was not particularly happy about it. Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 127.

[79] Britten, diary entry, 20 September 1937; quoted in Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 111.

Britten's relationship with Wulff Scherchen remains somewhat of a mystery, largely due to Scherchen's publication requirement of extensive editing of Britten's letters to him.[80] Donald Mitchell, Britten's official biographer and close friend in the last years of his life, offers little information on the relationship beyond the inconclusive letters. Carpenter, on the other hand, makes this relationship the focal point of his discussion of Britten's pre-American and early American years, asserting that the Michelangelo Sonnets, Britten's first love songs, were intended for Scherchen, not Pears. Britten first met Scherchen in 1934 when Scherchen was only fourteen. In 1938, when Britten invited him to come for a visit to the Old Mill at Snape, which he had turned into living quarters, Scherchen would have been eighteen, and no longer considered a minor, so that a physical relationship could have been pursued. Unlike his caution with Lennox Berkeley, Britten seems to have been genuinely taken with Wulff, if what remains of the letters Britten wrote to him are any indication. Whether or not their relationship ever progressed to a physical one, is of little consequence: Britten still maintained a certain distance with Scherchen, as he did with Berkeley.

The awkwardness between Berkeley and Britten was a factor in Britten's openness about his sexuality, which, in turn, influenced his relationship with Pears and his willingness to bring it out into the public eye. Enid Slater intimates that Pears brought him out of this attitude somewhat:

> Until Peter arrived on the scene [he held himself back]. Before that he didn't want to get involved. His work came before everything, and he felt that it would be detrimental if he got too involved with one sex or the other. He just didn't want to be

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[80] Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, xxiv.

> landed with this situation, you know what I mean. He didn't have a feeling strong enough to make him commit himself, which he was to do, to Peter.[81]

During 1938, Britten became more entrenched in the Auden circle and was included in many nights of "men only" parties, which were also attended by Pears. Although these were rather benign and secret affairs, a certain "campiness" was expected which Britten found repulsive years later.[82] Pears was certainly more open about his sexuality than Britten and more embracing of the lifestyle and expected behavior, just as Berkeley was; but where this caused problems in the Britten-Berkeley relationship, it did not as much between Britten and Pears. In March of 1939, less than two months before Britten and Pears were to leave for America, Britten wrote to Pears of difficulties with Berkeley:

> However, re. him we've had a bit of a crisis and I'm only too thankful to be going away. I had the most fearful feeling of revulsion the other day – conscience and all that – just like the old days. He's been very upset, poor dear – but that makes it worse! I wish you were here, old dear, because I want terribly to tell to someone.[83]

His "puritan streak," as Pears has called it, reared its ugly head and gave him cause to reject the physical aspects of the relationship once again.[84] This uncertain attitude toward his sexuality remained throughout his life, and plays an important role in his choice of subjects for his operas and songs.

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[81] Enid Slater, interview by Donald Mitchell, "Montagu Slater (1902-1956): Who was He?" in Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes, ed. Philip Brett, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 33.

[82] Peter Pears, Interview by Tony Palmer, in A Time There Was: A Profile of Benjamin Britten, produced by Nick Elliott, directed by Tony Palmer, 102 min., Kultur, 1980, videocassette.

[83] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 169, dated [16 March 1939].

[84] Pears, A Time There Was.

Britten in America, 1939-1941

Leaving England: A Complex Web of Reasons

Britten's reasons for going to America are quite complex and involve the interaction of several facets of his life, despite the many writings about Britten that focus primarily upon his pacifism. His association with Auden, his political beliefs, his perception of his acceptance as a composer in England – coupled with his belief that contemporary American composers received better treatment than their English counterparts, and his homosexuality all played a role in his decision to leave. Peter Pears summed up the matter when asked in a documentary about his and Britten's reasons for leaving:

> . . . somehow things weren't working awfully well in England – at least he didn't think they were. I think perhaps '38 was rather a lean year or something , I don't know. He was not very encouraged at that time, and we were both pacifists. And we didn't see much what we were going to do, short of going to prison or something for a long time,obviously which didn't terribly appeal to him. He wanted to write lots of music. And so we decided, as Auden had done earlier, that the only thing to do was to go to America.[85]

In an interview with Christopher Headington, however, he was more candid:

> Why we went to America, really, was partly of course the sort of problem – the dilemma – in front of one. Was one going to stay and be a pacifist, and face that? Or was one going to offer oneself to Friends' Relief, or whatever it might be, doing the sort of helpful things one could do? There seemed no point. Ben was browned off about things; and I had left the BBC, and there wasn't very much outlook for me either. He had, I think, a definite offer, which later fell through, of a film in Hollywood about King Arthur. When we arrived in America we still thought that he was going to have a film. But it must have been clear quite soon that it wasn't so.[86]

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Pears, Interview by Christopher Headington, December 1979; quoted in Headington, Britten, 43. Paramount had approached Britten about a score for a projected film, The Knights of the Round Table. The offer was up in the air when Britten and Pears left.

Britten's Pacifism and the War

The most obvious reason for Britten's and Pears's exodus to America lies in their unwillingness to serve in the war that was fast becoming unavoidable. Carpenter observes that when Britten and Pears first left for America they did not think of "themselves as irrevocably pacifist,"[87] yet Britten's increasing political awareness, coupled with his earlier pacifism eventually led him to the opinion that the war that was inevitable was not just. Enid Slater recounts that Britten felt " that the whole thing was useless, a waste of time, a waste of lives, a waste of everything,"[88] but this impression may have stemmed from his frustration with getting his works performed and the fear that the war would cause further problems for him in this area. Britten was deeply affected by the political situation nonetheless, and like many other Britons, questioned Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's ineffectual leadership and seeming blindness in the wake of Hitler's aggressions and Italy's attack on the Abyssinians. Britten's opinions of the prime minister are confusing since Chamberlain's views were influenced by several factors, not the least of which was the overwhelming public popularity of the policies of the League of Nations, which Britten and the Auden circle advocated as pacifists and supporters of the Peace Pledge Union.[89]

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[87] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 128.

[88] Enid Slater, Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes, 32.

[89] Auden's pacifistic attitude toward non-violence was not as strong as Britten's. In 1936 he made the decision to go to Spain and fight the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War. He left for the front in January 1937, but before he left, he abandoned his idea of being a soldier. He was denied his request to serve in the medical corps, but was used as a journalist instead. He returned in March of the same year. Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 461.

Auden had made it clear that he was leaving England to avoid service as well as the jail term he would be forced into for not doing so.[90] Britten, too, was aware of the consequences of refusing to serve. The war situation was so prevailing and certain that both Pears and Britten, as all able-bodied young men, would be called on to serve in some capacity. For Britten, the thought of having to do anything for the government's war effort – even something as benign as leading a musical group – was reprehensible insofar as it clashed with his pacifistic belief in non-violence.[91] His stand of passive resistance with regard to the war was born out of his opinion that Chamberlain had not pursued every possible non-violent means to end Hitler's aggressions, although his diaries and letters are unclear about what tactic he would have taken had Chamberlain launched a series of economic sanctions or other pacifistic strategies to stop Hitler. His refusal to serve, however, most certainly would have landed him in jail, and a petition for conscientious objector status at the outset of the war would have resulted in service to the armed forces in some capacity.

Not long after the meeting of the four powers of Germany, Italy, France, and Great Britain in Munich, Auden and Isherwood realized that war was fast becoming a reality, and that when it occurred, Britain would most certainly be a major figure and a target for hostilities. They made plans to emigrate to America, and eventually left in January 1939. As for Britten, he had the impression ". . . that Europe was more or less finished."[92]

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[90] Auden's statements are contradictory given his action with regard to the Spanish Civil War. Carpenter found Auden's motives for leaving "confused and largely indeterminate." Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 128.

[91] It is interesting to note that Britten, at least, possibly would not have been expected to fight because of his childhood heart problems.

[92] Britten, interview by Lord Harewood, People Today, BBC Radio (May/June 1960); quoted in Letters from a Life, 618.

When in March of 1939, Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia despite the agreements made in Munich, Chamberlain again refused to declare war, but also did not pursue sanctions. As news of the atrocities by the Nazis against Jews and persons with philosophical differences reached the British public, the calls for war became shriller. Britten's concern about the inevitability of war grew, so following Auden's and Isherwood's lead, he and Pears made their own decision to leave England and go to America, booking passage on a ship for May.[93] By the 1st of September 1939, when they were safely abroad, Hitler's troops marched into Poland. There was no turning back: war was imminent.

Dissatisfaction with England/Opportunities in America

There is little evidence, however, that Britten's primary reasons were pacifistic in origin. Indeed, the earliest letters in which he discusses going to America focus upon the potential Hollywood film score, perceived problems with artistic freedom and the BBC, and problems with his relationship with Lennox Berkeley.[94] The film score in Hollywood is clearly the initial reason for the visit, and although he does mention the political situation in a letter to Pears, written 16 March 1939, it seems to be of secondary consequence:

> Isn't everything bloody – just as one was allowing oneself to get hopeful too – however, I don't think anyone can really trust Hitler anymore: although N[eville] C[hamberlain] (I wish his initials were W[inston] C[hurchill]) will have a good shot at it before he's turned out of power. However, we're going away. Tho' still no news from Hollywood. I'll let you know as soon as ever I hear, of course.[95]

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[93] The ship, the SS *Ausonia*, left earlier than was expected, so Britten and Pears started their journey on April 29, 1939.

[94] This is discussed more fully on pp. 59-61 and 73-75 of this chapter. While their physical relationship abated, their friendship remained throughout Britten's life and after Berkeley's marriage.

[95] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 169, dated [16 March 1939].

By mid-April, Britten had convinced himself that he was leaving for other reasons as well – particularly so that he could seek out his own style and subjects – which he explained in a letter to Mary Behrend:

> This is only a scribbled note to tell you that Peter P. & I are sailing for Canada on Saturday week. We are both going to work – we may do occasional playing if the occasion arises – but the real reason is to do some really intensive thinking & for me personally to do somework [sic] to please myself and not necessarily the BBC or Basil Dean! Peter'll be back at the end of the summer, but I have other ideas & may stay on abit or go to U.S.A.[96]

Britten's willingness to leave England for only a potential commission, shows how deeply his feelings about the reception of his music was affecting him. As he wrote years later in his acceptance speech for the Aspen Foundation award, he was "muddled, fed up and looking for work," but somewhat confused about his direction in life.[97] His frustration over his perceived lack of performance opportunities was vented in a scathing indictment of the English musical scene, written after he arrived in America.[98] Britten was clearly angry at the BBC, as evident in his observance that the company insisted on a dichotomy between "music," on the one hand, and "contemporary music" on the other:

> This in part may have been caused by the B__ B__C__'s mistaken policy of giving a full-sized concert once a month by music of contemporary composers (generally of the most formidable and unattractive kind); and with this gesture, having done its duty to 'contemporary music,' it returns with a sigh of relief to the normal programs of 'music.'[99]

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[96] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 171, dated 17 [19] April 1939. Basil Dean, father of Winton Dean, a prominent Handel scholar, was a theatre and film producer. Britten had been commissioned for a score to a play by J.B. Priestley which Dean produced, Johnson over Jordan.

[97] Britten, "On Winning the First Aspen Award," 51.

[98] Britten, "An English Composer Sees America," Tempo 1 (American Series) (April 1940): 1-3.

[99] Ibid., 1.

But he was also upset with the "Old Guard" composers (presumably William Walton, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and John Ireland among them), who commanded the best performers in broadcasts and live concerts, and seemingly received more public attention:

> Generally speaking, unless one has become a national institution (a process which requires many white hairs and forty years of being snubbed and rejected), one is limited for performance of new works to the London branch of the I.S.C.M., with its few concerts a year and exclusively highbrow audience; to occasional semi-amateur performances organized by well-meaning but often inefficient enthusiasts, or to very infrequent and strangely timed radio performances, few of which reach the general concertgoing public.[100]

His observations were all perfectly true, but not necessarily warranted given the fact that he was still very young and that he enjoyed more exposure than other new composers were given. Certainly many of his own works were broadcast late at night, and many of his first performances did take place through the venue of the ISCM; but his works were being performed and published, which was more than several of his contemporary colleagues, such as Michael Tippett, could boast. Moreover, Britten seems to have had an unrealistic view of the situation for American composers. They very often suffered the same type of experiences. Although major American orchestras did (and still do) premiere their works, these new compositions were programmed with older works in order to attract the public. The audience could then endure the new work, and be rewarded with something more familiar.

Britten's acceptance as a composer in England was not burgeoning as well or as quickly as he would have liked. Athough the years 1936 and 1937 were fairly fruitful for him in terms of performances, broadcasts and commissions, and laudatory reviews, his dissatisfaction was growing. By summer 1938, his irritation with the BBC, perhaps resulting from earlier banal commissions,[101] was beginning to have an effect on his perception of that institution and his patience with their operations. While preparing incidental music for a new venture by the BBC called The World of Spirit, Britten found the lack of rehearsal time frustrating and made his unhappiness known:

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[100] Ibid., 2. Britten's comments may have been also about Bridge's lack of support among the "Old Guard," which may account for his reference to "years of being snubbed and rejected." It is interesting, too, that Britten's attitude toward amateur performers and performances completely changes. He did, however, write music strictly for amateurs, perhaps as a means of protecting the music he intended for professional performance.

> [2 June 1938] Spend most of day rehearsing at Maida Vale Studios & B. [Broadcasting] House. It goes fairly well considering lack of time – but a record is made of the last run through which is not good – & consequently the dramatic side complain about the quality of the music. [3 June 1938] The rest of the day is spent in hysterical crises at BBC. The production people won't see that the music sounds bad only because of no rehearsal – finally I threaten to withdraw it – which causes a little sobriety. Very, very disturbing.[102]

To add further to his frustrations as an artist, performances of his works began to be poorly received. In late June 1938 Britten's Bridge Variations were performed as part of the ISCM Festival which was held in London. After this hearing, only eight months after the well-received premiere, the critics leveled charges of "cleverness" at Britten, asking when he would "settle down again" and "start writing music as good as his earliest works were?"[103] In August, the negative reviews of his piano concerto bewildered him, as he expressed to Mary Behrend:

> I am so glad you 'got' the Concerto. So many of the beastly critics didn't, & it's so depressing. However the audience seemed to – for a wonder. I can't see anything problematic about the work. I should have thought that it was the kind of music that

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[101] Britten wrote in his diary for 12 January 1938: "Write some Brass music for BBC. programmes 'Lines across Map' – awful muck." Letters from a Life, 542.

[102] Britten, diary entry for 2-3 June 1938, Letters from a Life, 556-557.

[103] Alan Frank, Review of Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge by Benjamin Britten, Musical Times 29 (1938): 537.

> either one liked or disliked – it is so simple – & cannot make out why it is that they have to hunt for programmes & 'meanings' and all that rot![104]

The critics were not the only ones who felt that the work was vapid. Marjorie Fass indicated in a letter to a friend that Frank Bridge was unhappy with the composition:

> I expect you'll have been as disappointed in Benjy's work as we were & loving him so much made it difficult for us, as we cldn't hurt his feelings before the event, as the knowledge of our opinion would easily have done. In one way, because he has so many young friends who adore & flatter him for his brilliant talent & who only live on the superficial side of life, it won't hurt him at all, but pull him up, if the criticisms in the papers are harsh. The orchestra & Wood liked the work very much – as it's amusing to play – & every orchestral device is employed with brilliance. – but of music or [illegible: ? originality] there is no trace – And if Benjy develops some day later on, he will see the insignificance of this work as it must be to all real musicians.[105]

In a subsequent letter, she describes Bridge's displeasure further and a very tense evening in which he pointed out various problems with the concerto:

> . . . we all utterly agree with the drastic criticisms of The Times & Sunday Times & Observer & Telegraph which is all we've seen – Dear Benjy doesn't know how deeply disappointed we all are, but he will one day. . . . Benjy had brought records of the [Bridge] Variations & of his piano work – Last night we all sat with shut faces while he put on the piano work & Mr Brit followed the score & told him various things about it – & poor Toni [Brosa] & Bill [Mrs Bridge] both got the fidgets & Peggy [Brosa] sat like a statue – & when we had the variations at last we cld smile.[106]

Other of Britten's friends, including Wulff Scherchen, were also somewhat unimpressed by the work. Britten's reply to a letter from Scherchen reflects a defensive attitude about it, which must have been the result of his friends' disapproval as well as the negative press reviews: "I was pleased to hear that you listened-in to the Concerto, & sorry that it came over badly – as it must have done if the Finale sounded 'pompous' – which I can assure you it is not, whatever else may be!"[107]

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[104] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 145, dated 26 August 1938.

[105] Marjorie Fass, Letter to Daphne Oliver, dated 19 August 1938; quoted in Letters from a Life, 576-577. The editorial markings are Donald Mitchell's.

[106] Fass, letter to Daphne Oliver, dated 22 August 1938; quoted in Letters from a Life, 577.

Britten's final straw regarding the critics in 1938 came in the guise of incidental music for a play produced by Basil Dean. Johnson over Jordan, written by J.B. Priestley, received very poor notices and closed after only one week. Not one critic mentioned the music, which Priestley had deemed important to the conception of the work. When Britten was first approached by Hollywood in late January or early February 1939 for the film score, it must have seemed an opportunity to start anew, putting the last year behind him.[108] Just a few weeks prior to Britten's departure, however, his Ballad of Heroes, with poetry by Auden, was well received and cited as the highlight of the evening despite Auden's intense words. As well, only days before the ship sailed, Britten was honored by a broadcast performance which consisted entirely of his music.[109] Again his works received praise, but it came too late to prevent him from going and looking unfavorably upon the English musical scene.

Britten's letters during the time he spent in America reflect his hope that America would be different. In many ways, it was. Shortly after their arrival, Britten's Young Apollo had its premiere in Toronto. The first full year in America, 1940, brought many other performances of his works, including his violin concerto. As well, Britten and Pears were contacted for several performances together, and separately. The second year promised to be as active as the first, but disillusionment set in after largely unfavorable reviews of his and Auden's operetta, Paul Bunyan.

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[107] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 146, dated 29 August 1938.

[108] Britten first mentioned the film score in a letter to Wulff Scherchen dated 7 February 1939. Britten, Letters from a Life, 610. In a second letter dated the 17th, Britten tells Scherchen of a scheduled meeting with the producer, adding that he would send word as soon as he had signed a contract. Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 166, dated [17 February 1939]. The contract was not forthcoming before he and Pears left for America.

[109] The program consisted of two newly-composed songs which were to form part of Les Illuminations, several songs from On This Island, and a portion of Friday Afternoons, the Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge and Simple Symphony.

Britten's Relationship with Peter Pears

Whatever Britten's initial reasons for going to America, one of the most important results was the development of his relationship with Peter Pears. Their friendship from its inception was a close one, perhaps due to their sharing the tragic death in a plane crash of their mutual friend, Peter Burra, a music, art, and literature critic.[110] Although they had chastely shared a flat in London for a year before going to America and a berth on the ship on the passage over, the time they spent together in America and Canada began to have an effect on their feelings for one another. Moreover, Britten was now free of Lennox Berkeley and away from Wulff Scherchen.

Apparently, another of the reasons why Britten left for America had to do with a difficult relationship, but there is uncertainty as to whether the relationship in question was with Berkeley or Scherchen. Carpenter holds the opinion that the difficult relationship was between Britten and Scherchen, that "the need for a cooling-off period . . . was another motive for the American journey; possibly the strongest of all."[111] His main evidence comes from a vague statement by Enid Slater, wife of Montagu Slater with whom Britten corresponded while in America: "One relationship had got difficult before he went to America, and I used to go and try and sort things out a bit."[112] Carpenter's assumption, however, is not warranted by other evidence, for Britten repeatedly asked Slater in letters to go to the Old Mill at Snape which Berkeley was to take care of in Britten's absence. Given Britten's earlier remark to Pears about his problems with Berkeley, Slater must have been referring to Britten's relationship with Berkeley and not to the one with Scherchen. In fact, one letter to Slater from Britten written in November 1939, after he and Pears had already begun their relationship, refers clearly to Berkeley and shows that Britten was cutting his ties with him: "But re other little problems my mind is firmly made up. You cannot think what distance does! Things can be examined in the cold light of 3000 miles, & don't look so nice! Besides letters from the Mill have been so dreadful."[113] Although Berkeley had agreed to remain in residence at the Mill to take care of it while Britten was in America, he reneged on his promise after Britten left for the States, causing great difficulties for Britten. Several of Britten's letters to Slater express his frustration with Berkeley's behavior regarding the Mill, and with Berkeley's continued criticism of Britten's decision to leave England.

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[110] Like Britten, Burra at the time of their friendship was a reluctant and cautious homosexual, and at one point, Burra seems to have taken over the role of sexual mentor from Auden. Pears was very much taken with Burra, who was an old school friend. Although it is never made entirely explicit by Headington, Pears and Burra most certainly were involved prior to Burra's accident. Headington, Pears: A Biography, 52.

[111] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 128.

In favor of Carpenter's opinion, however, in the same November 1939 letter to Enid Slater, Britten thanks her for going to Cambridge to see Scherchen, saying that it was the first news he had had since the beginning of the war.[114] But this hardly bespeaks of great difficulties in a relationship that would warrant a cooling-off period, for his request seems to have arisen out of sheer worry for the young man, whom he was helping financially. In April 1940, Britten wrote to Slater again, telling her: "Don't bother anymore about Wulff. Thank you for being so sweet about it."[115] There is no clear evidence regarding to what this refers specifically, although it possibly concerns Britten's fears over Scherchen's sudden silence. Britten later discovered that Scherchen had been taken from his college in Cambridge to a German immigrant camp in Canada by the English government because he was a German national, and resumed contact with him shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, the question of with whom Britten was having difficulties will remain largely unanswerable because the nature of the relationship between Scherchen and Britten will not be fully understood until the entire contents of Britten's letters to him are made public. Suffice it to say that when Britten left England, he left his past relationships behind him, thus clearing the way for his life with Pears.

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[112] Enid Slater, Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes, 33.

[113] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 219, dated 7 November 1939.

[114] Ibid.

Very shortly after arriving in America, Britten and Pears began the relationship that was to sustain them for the rest of their lives. According to Donald Mitchell, Britten's official biographer, who was charged by Britten to ". . . tell the truth about Peter and me, " their love for each other was declared in a pledge, as Pears has referred to it, a few days before June 12th while they were in Toronto, and then finally consummated in Grand Rapids, Michigan, between the 12th and the 17th.[116] Their love was at once deep, lasting, and passionately physical, as is evident from the first letter Pears wrote to Britten when Britten was in Illinois on business:

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[115] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter No. 255, dated 7 April 1940.

[116] Donald Mitchell arrived at this conclusion through talks with both Pears and Britten. A letter written from Toronto in 1959 by Pears refers to the pledge, and a second letter from Pears to Britten in 1974 refers to the consummation: ". . . what your dear eyes do not see is that it is you who have given me everything, right from the beginning, from yourself in Grand Rapids! through Grimes & Serenade & Michelangelo & Canticles . . . ." Pears, quoted in Letters from a Life, 60.

> I was so sad that you were so depressed and cold – I wanted to hop into a plane and come and comfort you at once. I would have kissed you all over & then blown you all over there & then ________ & ________ & then you'd have been as warm as toast! . . . I don't care a brass farthing how long you stay away, because if you stay away a day longer than Wednesday I'm going to come & fetch you, wherever you may be, & as long as I'm with you, you can stay away till the moon turns blue. . . . I shall never forget a certain night in Grand Rapids. Ich liebe dich, io t'amo, jeg elske dyg (?), je t'aime, in fact, my little white-thighed beauty, I'm terribly in love with you.[117]

Although Britten's letters to Pears immediately after the experience were not as passionate as Pears's were to him, this is reflective more of Britten's previous caution with regard to relationships and less to his feelings about Wulff Scherchen as Carpenter suggests.[118] As their intimacy grew, his letters also became more intimate as well. Many years later, in speaking about their relationship, Pears noted, "it was established very early that we were passionately devoted and close and that that was it. It wasn't superhuman, no, but there was very, very little that disturbed our relationship."[119]

Shortly after their commitment to each other, Britten, in a foretaste of the love music he was to write, dedicated a portion of Les Illuminations, "Being Beauteous," to Pears, discreetly inscribing the music "To P.N.L.P." [Peter Neville Luard Pears].[120] His Seven

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[117] Pears, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 237, dated [9 January 1940].

[118] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 130-131.

[119] Pears, A Time There Was.

[120] Britten completed this particular song in the US. The text for this song is very sensuous and sexually suggestive. By comparison, the song dedicated to Wulff Scherchen, "Antique," although admiring of a lover, is more stilted in tone and distant. It was completed before he and Pears left for America, and speaks to his attitude toward Wulff. Obviously, his emotional feelings for Scherchen were not as strong as is thought because he was able to leave Scherchen behind when he went to America. Once he and Pears were steadfastly united, all thoughts of a relationship with Scherchen seem to have abated, but his care and concern for the young man did not. Again, it is difficult to

Sonnets of Michelangelo, the first of many song cycles written for and dedicated to Pears as a celebration of their love, were composed almost a year after his Grand Rapids experience with Pears, from April to October 1940. This time, Britten was more revealing about the dedication, "To Peter."

"To Peter": Britten's Michelangelo Sonnets

Wulff Scherchen remembers that in the late 1930s Britten was working on a Michelangelo sonnet, but put it away due to a "mental block," adding that he was certain he had seen the Italian text.[121] This was Britten's manner of working, as he often located a text he was interested in years prior to setting it.[122] Carpenter has let the supposed early work on the cycle lead him to the opinion that the original inspiration for the love music was Wulff Scherchen, stating also that the text of the cycle hardly portrays a satisfied lover.[123] While his statement about the text has truth in it, Pears's own analysis of the work suggests that the texts were arranged in order to resolve in the final sonnet, *Spirto ben nato*, in which the beloved's beauty is celebrated.[124] Britten's reticence about

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accurately assess Britten's relationship with him because of the extensive editing Scherchen required before Britten's letters to him were printed.

[121] Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 801. N.B., There is a discarded song from the cycle, which consists of a few measures of a setting of *Non più che'l foco*, Sonetto LIX. The date of the sketch is unclear, so it may be the sonnet and song to which Scherchen refers.

[122] One case in point is the text of the song cycle, Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente. Britten first expressed an interest in the poems in a letter dating from April 1940, but he was not to compose the cycle until 1958.

[123] Carpenter, Britten: A Biography, 158-159.

[124] Pears, "Vocal Music," 67.

performing the songs in public recital upon his return to England contradicts Carpenter's opinion as well. Britten believed that anyone present at such a concert would know that Britten and Pears were involved. His attitude toward allowing the public to know about their relationship – like his earlier feelings toward his homosexuality – wavered. Prior to the September 1942 premiere, he wrote to Pears, "I talked about you to Margot the other night for hours – I don't know what she thought of it! But I don't care neither – I don't care who knows. I am just going to write off to Basil to tell him I've done the songs for you."[125] After the premiere, in a letter to Elizabeth Mayer, he described it as ". . . rather like parading naked in public."[126] In sum, any feelings he may have had for Wulff Scherchen had been quelled in the dedication of the cycle to Pears and in their joint private and public performances of the songs.

The texts of Michelangelo that Britten chose to include in the cycle are predominantly taken from sonnets written to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, a young man for whom Michelangelo had very deep feelings. Evidence suggests that Britten's relationship with Pears had an effect on his choice of texts. In the sonnets, Michelangelo continually speaks of his frustrations at the beloved's inattentiveness, although he comments upon both the beloved's physical and spiritual beauty. Carpenter has taken this to apply to Britten's difficulties in his relations with Wulff Scherchen, but has not allowed the possibility that the texts spoke to Britten about his own reluctance to commit to an affair, and his final realization of love in Pears, as Enid Slater has suggested.[127] This is not to say that the texts were considered by Britten to be autobiographical, but that they awakened a response in him by appealing to his sensibilities as developed by his experiences. The final song resolves the conflict, as the lover comes to realize the perfection of the beloved and hence, of his love for the beloved, an appropriate ending for one who has struggled with the nature of the love.

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[125] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 385, dated 12 June 1942.

[126] Ibid., Letter no. 397, dated 30 September 1942.

[127] Slater, Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes, 33.

Britten's musical response for the expression of love in each sonnet is at times sensuous, at times robust and vigorous, depending upon his perception of the emotion of the lover. His formal designs, and the resulting manipulation of musical material, show an attempt to glean meaning from the text that might not be expressed in the words of the text itself. Pears has stated that Britten ". . . was really much more interested in the beauty, and therefore the danger that existed in any relationship between human beings: man and woman, man and man, the sex didn't really matter – the beauty that we call love."[128] The Michelangelo Sonnets pursue this concept of beauty in both the text and the music.

Both Pears's and Britten's public discussions of the work reveal little about its private meaning, but offer other reasons for the origins of the composition and the choice of texts. In a BBC documentary, Pears's comments centered on the musical challenge of the cycle:

> He wanted to write a cycle for me. With my various teachings and learnings, I had I think improved a good deal and I dare say he was aware of that, and wanted to write something that would test me out. And I think he chose the Michelangelo Sonnets, not because of their easiness or understandability, because they were very complicated poems, very intense, they're like the Shakespeare sonnets in that way. . . . And I think they did suit me very well. I certainly enjoyed singing them very much . . . .[129]

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[128] Pears, A Time There Was.

[129] Pears, Interview by Donald Mitchell, The Tenor Man's Story, directed by Barrie Gavin, produced by Donald Mitchell, Central Television, 1985; quoted in Headington, Pears: A Biography, 99.

Britten, on the other hand, considered the work, along with Les Illuminations, as fundamental to his development as a composer: "The Rimbaud and Michelangelo cycles were necessary for me in order to shed the bad influences of the Royal College. With both the French and Italian, I was perhaps responding to Nietzsche's call to 'mediterraneanise music.'"[130] Britten clearly felt that the work came at a turning point in his compositional style. Both Les Illuminations and the Michelangelo Sonnets break with the style of composition that he produced under Auden's influence. Their texts are neither satirical nor a social commentary on contemporary events or contemporary life, as most of the Auden texts that Britten set. In many ways, however, because the two cycles turn inward, having a private message, they paved the way for Britten's development of his own public voice in his first full-scale opera, Peter Grimes, which pits the individual against society.[131] Before he could write Peter Grimes, Britten had to shed the influence of Auden's brand of activism. Through these song cycles, Britten was able to find his own, non-Auden voice that was necessary for his success with the Peter Grimes story.

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[130] Britten, British Composers in Interview, 121. He discusses the problems with the approach that the Royal College of Music took toward English music in a scathing article against the use of folk music as a means of creating a national style of music. "England and the Folk-Art Problem," Modern Music 18 (1940-1941): 71-75.

[131] There was an earlier opera, Paul Bunyan, with a libretto by Auden. It was composed in 1941, while Britten was still in America. There were some problems in the working relationship between Britten and Auden – Auden would compose long stretches of verse for the libretto without consulting Britten. This led Britten to keep a tight rein on Montagu Slater, the librettist for Peter Grimes. The operetta received one performance and was withdrawn from Britten's composition list. In 1974, Donald Mitchell convinced Britten to revise the work, and it has since been published by Faber Music and recorded.

The Return to England

Britten's later statements about the trip reveal a myriad of influences in his decision, although some of them may have been the result of hindsight. Britten's indication to Behrend is that he and Pears were only going to Canada, with his American plans being only a possibility. This was not entirely true, as Beth Britten Welford remembers:

> [Ben] fully intended then to take out America citizenship, and of course we couldn't bear the thought of him going away for so long . . . nobody knew what was happening in the world . . . . Wystan Auden and Christopher Isherwood had gone ahead and they were fully intending to become citizens of the USA, and Ben . . . had that intention too . . . he had the feeling that Europe was not the place for artists to live in and they felt they'd . . . find more of a future . . . in the New World . . . .[132]

Unfortunately, Welford's memories are not as accurate either, for only in June after he had already arrived in Canada and America did Britten began to think about staying permanently. He first hinted about it in a letter to Wulff Scherchen, written while he was still in Canada: "I'm thinking hard about the future. This may be the Country. There's so much that is unknown about it – & it is tremendously large & beautiful. And it is enterprising & vital."[133] He then broke the news to his closest sister Beth:

> It looks as if I shall stay over here – unless there's a war. I might as well confess it now, that I am seriously considering staying over here permanently. I haven't decided yet of course and I'm terribly torn, but I admit that if a definite offer turned up (and there are several in the air) I might take it. Use your judgement as to whether you tell anyone. As it is so much in the air I suggest you don't.[134]

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[132] Beth Welford, Interview by Anthony Friese-Greene, 1977; quoted in Letters from a Life, 619.

[133] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 187, dated [?19 June 1939].

[134] Ibid., Letter no. 191, dated 25 June 1939. See also Letter no. 192, dated 27 June 1939. Britten's statement concerning the war refers to his fear that America would be drawn eventually be drawn into the war. He was very conscious of the fact that America was not involved in the killing that accompanies war, which appealed to him as a pacifist. He made several attempts to convince his family members to join him because of the safety that the States offered. Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 34.

The truth, however, as it is revealed in the letters, is that Britten was uncertain about staying in America. He vacillated between staying or returning for the duration of time he was there. In letters to his sisters, he would encourage them to come to America to escape the war, but would complain about missing England himself and express his desire to return.[135] His eventual disillusionment with his opportunities in America, coupled with acute homesickness and worry over his family who remained in England, gave him cause to think about returning home.

Britten and Pears's decision to return to England was solidified by Britten's discovery in the summer of 1941 of an essay on the poet George Crabbe of Aldeburgh by E.M. Forester, the source of inspiration for Peter Grimes. The feelings of nostalgia brought on by the essay caused Britten's intermittent bouts of homesickness to grow into a serious need to go back to the country roots that he had tried so hard to leave. They began to make plans to return, only to find it nearly impossible. They waited for several months for exit permits and for a place on a ship. In January 1942, Britten was certain that they would be leaving at any time, only to find that they were still in America at the end of February. Finally in March they were given a definite departure date and were soon underway on the journey back. Britten was extra-productive on the trip back, presumably making up for his lack of activity that had plagued him in the previous few months.

There was a certain amount of hostility awaiting them when they arrived, not the least of which came from the English patriots who had seen to it that their exit, as well as Auden and Isherwood's, was denounced as treasonous in major news sources and music journals.[136] Although the British government had advised them to stay in America after the war began, Britten's publisher, Ralph Hawkes, had been trying to put out the fires that erupted with every performance of one of his works.[137] He wrote to Britten shortly after they arrived in England:

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[135] Donald Mitchell has amusingly called it a "Hamlet-like debate – 'To stay or not to stay' . . ." Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 671.

> As I have only been back a few days, I have not yet seen anybody that you know but I have seen evidence of a situation which I think I must bring to your notice immediately. There is no doubt at all that we are going to have difficulty in getting performances of your works and caustic comment has been passed on your being away.[138]

Either this fact seems to have left Britten undeterred – Britten had known about it previously – or the public relations team for Boosey & Hawkes were doing their jobs properly, because Britten had premiered the Michelangelo cycle on the 23rd at Wigmore Hall, London, which engendered generally positive reviews in the newspapers the next day.[139] Nevertheless, it is reasonably certain that the negative press Britten was facing on his return also gave him cause to be reluctant about the cycle. The homosexual aspect would surely be discerned, which would add further to the anti-Britten sentiment in the press and among the war-torn public, and at worst, both Britten and Pears could be imprisoned for illegal sexual practices, effectively destroying both their careers. The reviewers, however, seemed not to have noticed that the text of the cycle was fundamentally about the love between two men. And although rumors were generated by the performance, the actual truth never came to the surface in public writings, until the first performances of Death in Venice, nor it was confirmed by Britten or Pears until Pears's public acknowledgement of his homosexuality after Britten's death.[140]

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[136] There was a heated exchange of letters in the Musical Times in which one reader lambasted the press and media for what he saw as special favor to Britten, even though he had refused to serve in the armed forces. A response came in the form of a statement on the role of artists in society and society's need to preserve them. The editor of the journal echoed the former author's sentiment, showing the extent of the problem that Britten and Hawkes were facing. E.R. Lewis, "Letter to the Editor: English Composer Goes West," Musical Times 32 (1941): 234; Gerald Cockshott, "Letter to the Editor: English Composer Goes West," Musical Times 32 (1941): 308, 344. Ernest Newman, the London Times critic in the 1940s, was championing Britten's cause through favorable reviews of his music. One review brought on an impassioned outcry against Britten. For more information, see Letters from a Life, 958-959.

[137] Britten and Pears had sought official advice on the matter of returning at the outset of the war, but were told ". . . stay where you are until called back; you can't do anything if you do go back; get on with your work as artistic ambassadors etc. etc." Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 292, dated 7 October 1940, to Ralph Hawkes.

[138] Ralph Hawkes, letter to Benjamin Britten, dated 26 September 1942; quoted in Letters from a Life, 870.

[139] Albert Goldberg wrote to Britten about a performance of the Bridge Variations which was badly received. Britten replied, "I am sorry the press was so bitter about the Variations – I thought that old piece was accepted by them now . . . ." Letters from a Life,

Conscientious Objectors

Once they had returned to England in April 1942, Britten and Pears had to begin the arduous task of obtaining conscientious objector status. Britten's hearing was on May 28th, and despite his efforts to be declared a conscientious objector with no conditions attached, his first attempt resulted in potential service in non-combatant duties.[141] He appealed the finding, asking that he ". . . be left free to follow that line of service to the community which [his] conscience approves and [his] training makes possible."[142] On the basis of his testimony and that of others regarding his hatred of war and all things

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Letter no. 310, dated 28 April 1941. For a discussion of the reviews of the Michelangelo Sonnets and their impact on the reception of Britten's music, see Chapter IV.

[140] Headington, Pears: A Biography, 287.

[141] For Britten's statement to the tribunal and an account of the hearing, see Letters from a Life, Letter no. 375, dated 4 May 1942.

[142] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 382, dated [June 1942].

concerned with it, Britten was finally granted his unconditional status. Pears received his in September on the first try. Britten's original statement and subsequent appeal to the Conscientious Objector Tribunal forced him to set down his feelings about the war on paper, an act that possibly affected his reaction to the horrors of the war that is manifest in The Holy Sonnets of John Donne. Particularly, he focused upon the fact that he was a creator, not a destroyer, and upon his belief of passivity and non-violence in the face of aggression. These thoughts must have weighed heavily on his mind as he encountered the Jews who had resisted death at the hands of the Nazis when he accompanied Yehudi Menuhin in a series of concerts at prisoner-of-war camps in Germany after the war.

Britten's Donne Sonnets

Menuhin had requested to visit the camps that were maintained by the British after the war, and had engaged the services of Gerald Moore as an accompanist. Approximately one week before he was to leave, he met Britten at a Boosey & Hawkes party in London. Britten asked Menuhin to take him, and Gerald Moore gracefully backed out. Menuhin later described Britten as ". . . casting about for some commitment to the human condition whose terrible depths had been so newly revealed . . . ."[143] They departed on the 23rd of July, returning on the 30th. This was no ordinary tour, as Britten's comments explain. The inmates of the camps, although liberated weeks before, were being detained for fear of the spread of disease. All things connected with their imprisonment had been burned and new clothes fashioned for them out of army blankets. Britten wrote to Pears on his return of the ". . . millions of D.P.s [displaced persons] in, some of them, appalling states, who could scarcely sit still & listen & yet were thrilled to be played to."[144] A nurse at the camp was struck by:

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[143] Yehudi Menuhin, Unfinished Journey (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 179.

> these two compassionate men clad simply in shirt and shorts creating glorious melody and moving amongst the people, people who were difficult to rouse with the deadly mental lethargy which was the result of the horrors and privations they had suffered.[145]

Britten wrote the Holy Sonnets of John Donne immediately after his return from the tour. A setting of Donne's sonnets had been on his mind for possibly as long as two years. In February 1943, Pears had written to Elizabeth Mayer, "Ben and I have been re-reading Donne lately – those wonderful holy sonnets, and especially the 'Hymn to God the Father.'"[146] A little over a year later, Pears wrote again to Mayer, "Now Ben talks of George Herbert & John Donne (the Sacred Sonnets perhaps) and also the St. Francis Mass from the Missal."[147] Although they were planned before the tour, the horrors that he witnessed colored his response to the black texts:

> I wrote my *John Donne Sonnets* in a week while in bed with a high fever, a delayed reaction from an inoculation. The inoculation had been in order to go on a tour of concentration camps with Yehudi Menuhin in 1945. We gave two or three short recitals a day – they couldn't take more. It was in many ways a terrifying experience. The theme of the *Donne Sonnets* is death, as you know. I think the connexion [sic] between personal experience and my feelings about the poetry was a strong one. It certainly characterized the music.[148]

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[144] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 505, dated 1 August 1945.

[145] unknown; quoted in Letters from a Life, 1274.

[146] Pears, Letter to Elizabeth Mayer, dated 13 February 1943; quoted in Letters from a Life, 1277.

[147] Pears, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 473, dated 6 August [1944].

[148] Britten, British Composers in Interview, 122.

Britten's recollection of the circumstances surrounding the time of composition is not entirely accurate. All but two of the songs were composed in the week between the 2nd and 9th August when he was extremely ill from the vaccinations. Two were written in the following week when he was still feeling the effects of the inoculations, but able to rise from his bed for short periods.

The chronology of the composition of the Holy Sonnets of John Donne is interesting in light of Britten's subsequent ordering of the songs, as shown in Table 1. Only the first and last songs composed retain their original places. The middle songs have been shuffled, which may lead us to believe that Britten did not have clear order in his mind before he started. Little has been written about Britten's manner of composing his song cycles, but if

TABLE 1

CHRONOLOGY AND ORDER OF BRITTEN'S DONNE CYCLE

Date in 1945	Song	Order in Score
2 August	*Oh my blacke Soule*	no. 1
3 August	*O might those sighes and teares*	no. 3
6 August	*Batter my heart*	no. 2
7 August	*Oh to vex me*	no. 4
8 August	*Since She whom I loved*	no. 6
8 August	*At the round earth's imagined corners*	no. 7
9 August	*Thou hast made me*	no. 8
14 August	*What if this present*	no. 5
19 August	*Death be not proud*	no. 9

his work on Peter Grimes can be applied, he sketched out plans for the songs and then composed from start to finish. This is difficult to determine in the case of the Donne Sonnets, because he was dealing with pre-existing texts for which there was no correct order.[149] As well, Britten often planned his compositions in his mind before composing them:

> Usually I have the music complete in my mind before putting pencil to paper. That doesn't mean that every note has been composed, perhaps not one has, but I have worked out questions of form, texture, character, and so forth, in a very precise way so that I know exactly what effects I want and how I am going to achieve them.[150]

In choosing and ordering the songs, Britten seems to have been affected most strongly by his experiences at the concentration camps. In many ways, the work functions as a challenge to God for both Britten and the inmates of the camp. Britten found himself confronted with a reality of the war that was very different from what he had experienced in England and in America. For the people who had been tortured because of their religious beliefs or their ethnic differences, Britten gives voice to their disillusionment with the faith that spurred their incarceration. His choice of poems to include in the Donne cycle reflect the darker side of a spiritual crisis. His order shows a sensitivity to the unfolding of such a crisis, in which the speaker alternately expresses fear of isolation from God and the need for God's action to save him from this isolation or sinfulness. And Britten's musical response to the bleak texts, founded on an economy of material and a somewhat expressionistic approach to the voice part, turns the vocal line into an impassioned cry for resolution of the crisis, both musically and textually. This search for a personal resolution of the text and its spiritual crisis drives Britten's formal decisions in his music, which, in turn, create a musical interpretation of the poetic text that may or may not follow the traditional sonnet divisions.

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[149] The order of Donne's Holy Sonnets has been the subject of a long debate that persists even to the present.

[150] Britten, British Composers in Interview, 123.

Conclusions

Britten's two sonnet cycles are intimately influenced by the people and events that shaped his life prior to their composition. Three figures loom in his early life: Frank Bridge, whose influence assured very tightly-constructed works that were well-designed and highly organized; Auden, the embracing and ultimate rejection of whom caused Britten to develop a sense of activism which eventually allowed him to put his own personality and opinions into his compositions; and Peter Pears, who gave Britten a vehicle of expression not only for his sexuality, but for his music as well. And three events influenced him immeasurably: the departure for America, which allowed him to reject mainstream English influences and develop a style of his own; the development of his relationship with Pears, which became the source of musical inspiration as he created works for Pears to perform; and his witnessing of the horrors of the war on both sides of the English channel, which solidified his pacifism and gave rise to many works that decried senseless destruction of human life. Both sonnet cycles represent Britten's voice in the face of influences on his life – his means of expressing love, as in the case of the Michelangelo Sonnets, and his means of expressing outrage at the horrors of the war witnessed in the faces of concentration camp inmates, as in the case of the Donne Sonnets.

CHAPTER III

MICHELANGELO AND HIS SONNETS: THE PURSUIT OF BEAUTY

The Florentine Heritage

Although Michelangelo (1475-1564) was born in the small village of Caprese in the Tiber Valley, most of his childhood and early adulthood years were spent in Florence. He was quite proud of his Florentine heritage, signing himself "Florentine Sculptor."[1] This self-identification led Giovanni Papini to draw the conclusion that Michelangelo's character was shaped by Florence, which, early on, fed him the aesthetic awareness and philosophies that he possessed:

> He had all the qualities which from time immemorial have been the distinguishing characteristics of all true Florentines: a love of beauty and freedom, a passion for worldly gain, a keen enjoyment of irony and humor, a sense of the magnificent, and a sense of sorrow.[2]

Many of these themes recur throughout the sonnets, particularly the love of beauty and the sense of sorrow, but it seems more likely that Michelangelo's aesthetics and philosophies were the result of his association with Lorenzo de' Medici and his circle of friends and followers.

In the mid-fourteenth century, Florence enjoyed status as the most powerful of the city-states. Following the precepts of Cicero on the dignity of man, the city's leaders persuaded Florence to adopt a policy of alliance with, rather than domination of, its neighboring cities. According to DeMolen, this policy convinced Florence that it was the heir to Rome's classical values, interesting the city's intellects in classical learning, philosophy, art and history, and paving the way for the acceptance of humanism.[3] Aiding in this was the introduction of the position of public lecturer, first held by the Greek scholar Manuel Chrysoloras (d. 1415). Florence's system of classical education, styled man as ". . . a fusion of intellect and body with obligations to self and society."[4] Emphasis was placed on the cultivation of gentlemanly breeding, including a desire for beauty, and the study of the liberal arts.

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[1] Papini, Giovanni. Michelangelo: His Life and His Era, trans. Loretta Murnane (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1952), 31.

[2] Ibid.

Following the advent of the poetry of Petrarch (1304-1374) and the writings of Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459),[5] humanism was at the forefront of Italian Renaissance thought. Florence became a leader in the movement through the widespread adoption of many of its ideals by the intelligentsia of the city and the influential Medici dynasty which came into power in 1417. The central precept of the movement lay in the preservation of classical antiquity as the model of the perfection of man. A humanist education, which resembled Florence's classical one, included the study of five interrelated disciplines: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and philosophy – each of which had its place in the creation of a desirable man. Grammar, primarily the study of Latin, was essential for the understanding of civil documents and for intellectual pursuits. Rhetoric, which could be studied only after grammar had been mastered, was important for expressing one's self eloquently in the service of the community. The study and cultivation of poetry sought to enhance man's desire for beauty and imbue his speech with variety and grace, while the study of history provided man with the solutions of the past for contemporary problems. The philosophical component of humanist education emphasized the dignity of man, manifest in the guise of civic obligation. Each man was to contribute to the social well-being of the state, whether it be through wealth or works of art.

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[3] Richard L. DeMolen, "The Age of Renaissance and Reformation," in The Meaning of the Renaissance and Reformation, ed. Richard L. DeMolen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), 6.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Manetti was famous for a treatise on the dignity of man, De Dignitate Hominis, dedicated to Alfonso V. Its role in history has been considered "a glorification of humanity foreshadowing later Renaissance theories," including the treatise on the same subject by Pico della Mirandola. Although the treatise predates the time of greatest interest in Platonic philosophy, "it sets out to demonstrate the uniqueness and superiority of man with respect first to the structure of his body, secondly to the achievement of his mind and thirdly to his position at the summit of creation." George Holmes, The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400-1450 (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 261.

This background set the stage for the Medicean rule of Florence, dating from 1417. Beginning with the rule of Cosimo in 1434, the Medici family aimed to instill in the citizens of Florence a sense of civic consciousness of art, learning, the past and the well-being of the populace. Acting as a model, the family donated large sums of money to charities, to the renovation of public buildings, to the preservation of antique architecture, sculpture and paintings, and to the creation of new architecture, sculpture, poetry, and paintings.[6] They surrounded themselves with the trappings of humanism, gathering the leading humanist philosophers, poets, artists and politicians of the day, including among them Marsilio Ficino, a leader in the revival of Platonism and the founder of the Neo-Platonist Florentine Academy, his student Pico della Mirandola, and other luminaries including Agnolo Poliziano, Donatello, Sangallo, and later, Michelangelo.

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[6] Jacob Burckhart, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), vol. 1, 100. A true humanist, Lorenzo himself wrote poetry under the guidance of Agnolo Poliziano.

Michelangelo's Life and Influences

There were several events in Michelangelo's life that affected the content of his poetry both philosophically and linguistically. As a young boy, Michelangelo was sent to study at the humanist school in Florence directed by Francesco da Urbino.[7] Much to his father's dismay, Michelangelo was completely uninterested in his lessons, preferring, as Condivi reports, to study art:

> Although he profited somewhat from the study of letters, at the same time nature and the heavens, which are difficult to withstand, were drawing him toward painting; so that he could not resist running off here and there to draw whenever he could steal some time and seeking the company of painters. Of these, he was very close to one Francesco Granacci, a pupil of Domenico del Ghirlandaio, who perceived the boy's inclination and burning desire and resolved to help him, and he urged him on continually in his undertaking, now providing him with drawings, now taking him along to the master's workshop or wherever there might be some work of art from which he could benefit. His effect was so strong, combined as it was with nature's constant stimulus, that Michelangelo completely abandoned the study of letters.[8]

Similarly, Varchi reported at Michelangelo's funeral:

> Those who know him say that even from his earliest childhood, he did not write the letters as the other children did but drew and traced them. . . . the child was more eager to run to the church to copy the paintings than to go to school and study grammar, in fact, he very often ran away from school to see the paintings and worked much more willingly among those who were painting than those who were studying.[9]

Most scholars take this observation to be an example of Michelangelo's "divine" vocation to be an artist, but it also has bearing upon his poetry. The fact that he refused to devote attention to grammar may be the reason for the poor syntactical structures found in his poetry and for what some have considered defects of style and form.[10]

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[7] The school was founded around 1400 by Roberto de' Rossi (ca. 1355-1417).

[8] Ascanio Condivi, The Life of Michelangelo, trans. Alice Sedgwick, ed. Helmut Wohl (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 9

[9] Papini, Michelangelo: Life and Era, 33. This anecdote is also quoted in Herbert von Einem's biography, Michelangelo, trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Methuen & Co., 1973), 9.

Michelangelo's father must have realized his son's devotion to art, for he removed him from the school in 1483, after only one year of study. Between the years 1485 and 1490, his artistic talent became more apparent. This early development was due in no small part to the influence in Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici. To accomplish his renovations of Florence and maintain the cultivation of art, Lorenzo employed the best artists in Italy: Michelozzo di Bartolommeo (1396-1472), Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), Giuliano da Sangallo (ca. 1443-1516), Antonio Pollaiuollo (ca. 1431-1498), Andrea del Verrochio (1435-1488), Donatello (ca. 1386-1466), Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494) and Bertoldo di Giovanni (ca. 1420-1491). Michelangelo was in constant contact with their works, absorbing their use of color, line, and space. In 1488, Michelangelo's father finally relented, allowing him to enter into a three-year apprenticeship at the workshop of Ghirlandaio. This proved, however, to be disastrous. Michelangelo was rarely given the attention or work he needed to develop his skills.[11] After two years and by mutual agreement, the apprenticeship was abandoned.

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[10] It is widely accepted that Michelangelo's poetry is grammatically awkward and difficult to interpret because of this. This fact, however, has become a measure by which his poetry is judged, generally placed in opposition to the perceived technical perfection of his artistic endeavors. For a survey of historical opinion about Michelangelo's poetry, see The Poetry of Michelangelo, trans. James M. Saslow (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 2-6.

[11] According to Condivi, Michelangelo retained his respect for Ghirlandaio, but felt he didn't learn anything from him: ". . . I am told that Domenico's son attributes the excellence and *divinità* of Michelangelo to a great extent to his father's teaching, whereas he gave him no help whatever, although Michelangelo does not complain of this; indeed he praises Domenico both for his art and for his manners." Life of Michelangelo, 10. Papini suggests that Ghirlandaio was envious of Michelangelo's talent. Papini, Michelangelo: Life and Era, 40-41.

Michelangelo's experience with Ghirlandaio led him to the workshop of Bertoldo di Giovanni, which was located in an old statuary at the Medici gardens, where Granacci had taken him to see the collection of ancient statues. It was here in 1490 that Lorenzo de' Medici purportedly discovered Michelangelo.[12] There is some disagreement among Michelangelo's biographers as to whether Bertoldo was under orders from Lorenzo to assemble the best sculptors in the country, or whether Michelangelo's attendance was mere fate. John Addington Symonds, writing on the authority of Vasari, proffers that:

> . . . it was Lorenzo's wish to raise the art of sculpture in Florence to the same level as that of painting; and for this reason he placed Bertoldo, a pupil and follower of Donatello, over his collections, with a special commission to aid and instruct the young men who used them. With the same intention of forming an academy or school of art, Lorenzo went to Ghirlandajo and begged him to select from his pupils those whom he considered the most promising. Ghirlandajo accordingly drafted off Francesco Granacci and Michelangelo Buonarroti.[13]

Once Michelangelo was allowed to work in the medium that he desired, his hidden talents came to the forefront. On a routine visit to the workshop, Lorenzo was so taken with Michelangelo's work that he summoned the boy's father, asking whether he might be allowed to have Michelangelo as his own son.[14] The father agreed, and Michelangelo went to live as a Medici.

Lorenzo de' Medici, a poet himself, was a fervent supporter of the liberal arts and surrounded himself with the eminent philosophers, artists, and men of letters of the day.[15]

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[12] Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 11-12.

[13] John Addington Symonds, The Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti (New York: Modern Library, Random House, n.d.), 13.

[14] Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 12-13.

[15] "The palace of the Medici formed a museum, at that period unique, considering the number and value of its art treasures – bas-reliefs, vases, coins, engraved stones, paintings by the best contemporary masters, statues in bronze and marble by Verocchio and Donatello. Its library contained the costliest manuscripts, collected from all quarters of

While a resident of the household, Michelangelo came into direct contact with these men, as well as influential politicians. The poet Agnolo Poliziano lived with the Medicis at roughly the same time and was called upon to read his poetry as well as that of others for entertainment. Also during the time that Michelangelo lived there, Marsilio Ficino and the humanist scholar Cristoforo Landini, who wrote commentaries on Dante's works, were in residence from time to time.[16] Many of Ficino's philosophical ideas creep into Michelangelo's poetry and art works; and it is quite possible that Landini helped spark his interest in Dante, whose works are also reflected in Michelangelo's output.

Lorenzo's death in April 1492 and the ascension of his son Piero de' Medici put Michelangelo into a precarious position: his patron was gone and the Medici family was in trouble politically. Piero had none of his father's appreciation for art or his political sense, and no desire to counteract the damage that Fra Savonarola had caused to his family's reputation by preaching against them. Savonarola had already won over Benivieni and Pico della Mirandola, two of the artists whom Lorenzo had promoted through his patronage and with whom Michelangelo would have come into contact in the Medici household. With Lorenzo gone and Piero in power, Michelangelo left the palace. The relationship between Michelangelo and Piero was revived in late 1493 or 1494 when Piero asked Michelangelo

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Europe and the Levant. The guests who assembled in its halls were leaders in that intellectual movement which was destined to spread a new type of culture far and wide over the globe. The young sculptor sat at the same board as Marsilio Ficino, interpreter of Plato; Pico della Mirandola, the phoenix of Oriental erudition; Angelo Poliziano, the unrivalled humanist and melodious Italian poet; Luigi Pulci, the humorous inventor of burlesque romance – with artists, scholars, students innumerable, all in their own departments capable of satisfying a youth's curiosity, by explaining to him the particular virtues of books discussed, or of antique works of art inspected." Symonds, Life of Michelangelo, 16.

[16] Papini, Michelangelo: Life and Era, 46.

to construct a sculpture made of snow. Although Michelangelo re-entered the Medici home at this time, Papini believes that this lack of true appreciation for his art began the long-seated hatred that Michelangelo came to feel and which tempered his dealings with Piero's side of the family for the rest of his life.[17] When Charles VIII entered Tuscany in September 1494, Piero was in no position to offer any resistance. He eventually ceded the fortress and the city. Michelangelo remained in Florence until October, when he left at the first sign of the fall of the Medici household. From Florence, Michelangelo travelled to Venice, where he met Giovan Francesco Aldrovandi, who had a great affection for poetry. Michelangelo left Venice with Aldrovandi, staying at his home in Bologna until 1495. Condivi reports that Michelangelo read the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio to Aldrovandi every night until the man fell asleep.[18] Once again, Michelangelo was in contact with the poetry on which his own poetry was modeled.

Between the years 1495 and 1532, Michelangelo divided his time between Florence and Rome. Apart from the commission of the tomb for Pope Julius II, the election of Lorenzo de' Medici's son Leo as Pope Clement VII brought many opportunities, including the painting of the Sistine ceiling. In 1532, Michelangelo was in Rome trying to resolve conflicts over the as yet unfinished tomb of Pope Julius II. It was late in autumn that Michelangelo met Tommaso de' Cavalieri, who approached Michelangelo about studying with him.[19] Michelangelo was at once captivated by his beauty, sending him a series of drawings on Ovidian subjects and numerous poems.[20] The possibility that Michelangelo may have felt emotional and physical love beyond friendship toward other men has been hotly debated by his biographers. Even in his own lifetime, Michelangelo stood accused of homosexuality, which may have prompted Condivi's defense in 1553:

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[17] Ibid., 63. Condivi has a very different opinion of this event in his Life of Michelangelo, 15-18. Other scholars as well have not indicated that relations were anything but cordial between Michelangelo and the Medicis (see in particular Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, passim).

[18] Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 19.

[19] Einem, Michelangelo, 130.

> He has also loved the beauty of the human body as one who knows it extremely well, and loved it in such a way as to inspire certain carnal men, who are incapable of understanding the love of beauty except as lascivious and indecent, to think and speak ill of him. It is as though Alcibiades, a very beautiful young man, had not been most chastely loved by Socrates, of whom he was wont to say that, when he lay down with him, he arose from his side as from the side of his father. I have often heard Michelangelo converse and discourse on the subject of love and have later heard from those who were present that what he said about love was no different than what we read in the writings of Plato. . . . I have never heard any but the most honorable words cross his lips, such as have the power to extinguish in the young any unseemly and unbridled desire which might spring up.[21]

Herbert von Einem, Giovanni Papini, and Charles Morgan, among others, have all taken Condivi's line of argument in the question of Michelangelo's homosexuality: that Michelangelo was expressing Platonic love of beauty. On the other side, John Addington Symonds, Glauco Cambon, and James Saslow base their line of reasoning on the semantics of the poetry and the nature of the drawings, both of which have homosexual themes: that Michelangelo clearly was expressing his physical and emotional love for Cavalieri whether or not the relationship itself was physical.[22] One of his early biographers, Giorgio Vasari, wrote that Michelangelo "had a host of friends, but above all the rest, he loved Messer Tommaso de' Cavalieri, a Roman gentleman, still young and much inclined to the arts."[23] Although the actual fact of Michelangelo's homosexuality cannot be established without direct statements from his own pen, it seems reasonable that his relationship with Cavalieri had homosexual overtones on his part, especially in evidence of his admiration for the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, who himself had a male lover.[24] The arguments of Einem et al. are largely emotional and reactionary, whereas Glauco and Saslow present convincing evidence in the choice of gender references in the poetry. Moreover, the language of Michelangelo's own extant letters to Cavalieri and of those written to Michelangelo by Cavalieri reveal an intimacy and an urgency that can only be found in relationships of great physical and emotional passion. For example, Michelangelo writes to Cavalieri:

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[20] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 16. The drawings sent were of Ganymede, Tityos and Phaeton.

[21] Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 105.

[22] Saslow concludes that, "There is no evidence of sexual activity on Michelangelo's part with either men or women, and as long as he refrained from physical acts he was not, legally or theologically, a sodomite. . . .Nevertheless, Michelangelo's statements about love and desire leave little doubt that he conceived of intimate relationships in what would now be considered fundamentally homosexual terms." Poetry of Michelangelo, 17.

> My dear lord – Had I not believed that I had convinced you of the immense, nay, boundless love I bear you, the grave apprehension shown by your letter that I might have forgotten you, as I haven't written to you would seem to me neither strange nor surprising. . . . I realize now that I could [as soon] forget your name as forget the food on which I live – nay, I could sooner forget the food on which I live, which nourishes body and soul, filling both with such delight that I am insensible to sorrow or fear of death, while my memory of you endures.[25]

In a letter to Michelangelo from Pierantonio Angelini, who was acting as messenger between Cavalieri and Michelangelo, the urgency of their relationship is confirmed:

> Yours makes me understand how great is the love you bear him; and in truth, so far as I have seen, he does not love you less than you love him. . . . I gave your letter to M. Thomao, who sends you his kindest remembrances, and shows the very strongest

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[23] Giorgio Vasari, Vasari's Lives of the Artists, ed. Betty Burroughs (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 292.

[24] Glauco Cambon, Michelangelo's Poetry: Fury of Form (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 27.

[25] Michelangelo Buonarroti, The Letters of Michelangelo, trans. and ed. E.H. Ramsden (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1963), Letter no. 193, dated 28 July 1533. Hereafter letters will be referred by their number in Ramsden's translation.

> desire for your return, saying that when he is with you, then he is really happy, because he possesses all that he wishes for upon this world. So then, it seems to me that, while you are fretting to return, he is burning with desire for you to do so.[26]

Even if the love between the men was chaste, their feelings expressed in these letters tell of the nature of their relationship. Several of the aforementioned authors conclude because Cavalieri married later in life, a marriage which produced children, that he did not return Michelangelo's feelings; the relationship therefore, was purely Platonic.[27] Saslow, on the other hand, maintains that although Cavalieri was quite possibly heterosexual, Cavalieri's sexuality has no effect on Michelangelo's sexual orientation.[28] Indeed, there were several other male love interests for Michelangelo, including Gherardo Perini (ca. 1522-1524) and Febo di Poggio (ca. 1535), who also received poetry, the benefit of Michelangelo's attraction.

These facts of Michelangelo's life: 1) his lack of a formal education; 2) his deep reverence and cultivation of sculpture; 3) his close association with the Medici family and the literati they attracted; and 4) his meeting of Tommaso de' Cavalieri, influenced both the language and the themes of his poetry. His syntax and metaphors are often twisted and confusing; because he often fails to follow the prescripts of the forms he chooses, his poetry seems chiselled out of stone: i.e., the form is altered to fit his ideas and not vice versa;[29] one can find traces of the humanism and Platonism that he came into contact with at the Medici palace; and one of his predominant themes is the effect of the beloved on the lover. Of these influences, the impact of humanism and Platonism and the counterattack by Fra Savonarola need further explanation before a discussion of the pertinent poems.

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[26] Quoted in Symonds, Life of Michelangelo, 394.

[27] The product of the union was the Baroque composer Emilio de' Cavalieri.

[28] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 16.

[29] Chandler B. Beall, "The Literary Figure of Michelangelo," Italica 41 (1964): 236.

The Conflict Between Neo-Platonism and the Church

Michelangelo's experiences with the Medici family put him in contact with many of the philosophical and artistic ideas that he adopted as his own. Through Lorenzo's patronage of the arts in Florence, he found himself surrounded by the work of the most revered artists of the period, observing in them the technical details (or their lack thereof) that he needed to study for the success of his own works. As well, Lorenzo's patronage gave him the opportunity to formulate his own theories of art and philosophy by exposing him to a wide circle of philosophers and artists, including Marsilio Ficino, Sandro Botticelli, Luca Signorelli and Giuliano da Sangallo. These illustrious men also created in him a desire to study the literature of Dante and Petrarch, which became models both formally and philosophically for Michelangelo's own poetry. Ever present as well, was the voice of Savonarola, which Michelangelo reported that he could still hear fifty years after the monk's death.[30] Although Savonarola's Bonfire of the Vanities (1497) took place after Michelangelo had left Florence for Rome, he nevertheless was affected by the burning of art and literature which had non-religious themes. The conflict in Michelangelo's life between Classical and Christian themes dominated both his artistic and poetic works, as well as his lifestyle.

Scholars have identified several influences both literary and philosophical in Michelangelo's poetry. Most of these influences can be traced directly to Michelangelo's involvement with the Medici and the men with whom he came into contact at the palace. In residence at the Medici household at the same time as Michelangelo were Marsilio Ficino and Agnolo Poliziano.

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[30] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 10; also Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 103.

Both Ficino and Poliziano were tutors in Platonic philosophy, and it has been assumed that they, along with Pico della Mirandola and Cristoforo Landini, instructed Michelangelo in the new learning.[31] Poliziano's influence appears to have been minimal, restricted to a single incident involving the subject for a work of sculpture.[32] Poliziano was, however, the scholar hired to teach the Medici sons, which under Lorenzo's direction would have included Platonic philosophy. Symonds referred to Poliziano as ". . . the chief scholar of his age in the new learning."[33] Robert Clements has commented: "Poliziano, who befriended [Michelangelo] when [he] was an apprentice in the Giardino Mediceo, never influenced him so much as Savonarola."[34] Clements, however, does acknowledge Poliziano's influence on Michelangelo's poetry in the form of modelling, but he is mistaken when he refers to Poliziano as "the sole poet on whom he directly drew."[35] Saslow has found quotations and reworkings of lines from Dante and Petrarch throughout Michelangelo's poetry.[36]

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[31] Cambon, Fury of Form, 6.

[32] Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 14-15. This anecdotal evidence may account for Condivi choosing to mention Poliziano and not Ficino.

[33] Symonds, Life of Michelangelo, 18. This claim is made for Ficino as well, probably with greater merit.

[34] Robert J. Clements, Michelangelo's Theory of Art (New York: Gramercy Publishing Co., 1961), 72.

[35] Ibid., 161.

[36] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, passim.

That Ficino's interpretations of Plato and Plotinus had a profound effect on Michelangelo's theories of art and upon the images and ideas he used in his poetry is widely accepted by scholars of his poetry and art. There are no direct quotations from Ficino in Michelangelo's poetry, but Saslow considers that

> Ficino and the other Neoplatonic philosophers influenced Michelangelo more on the level of fundamental concepts and themes than on the level of specific language, particularly since they tended to express their beliefs in prose, usually in Latin.[37]

The struggle of Neoplatonic philosophers such as Ficino was the resolution of Christian ideals about love with those of antiquity. For Ficino and other Platonic philosophers, love is born of beauty and of the contemplation of beauty. At the beginning of his treatise on love, De amore, Ficino declared, "When we say love one must understand the desire for beauty, for this is the definition of love among all philosophers."[38] Elsewhere in the essay, Ficino also related the concepts of love and beauty: "Love has the enjoyment of beauty at its end."[39] Ficino satisfied his own conflict between spiritual and corporeal love through his allegory of two loves: an earthly love that always reaches heavenward and a spiritual love.[40] Earthly beauty, a mirror of the divine image, must reach the inner eye (heart) and awaken passion in order to create true love. Once the beauty reaches the inner vision, earthly love is transmuted into a spiritual one.[41] Divine beauty can be seen in art –

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[37] Ibid., 45.

[38] Marsilio Ficino, De amore; quoted in Paul Oskar Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, trans. Virginia Conant (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), 263.

[39] Ibid., 263.

[40] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 31. Ficino's spiritual love was not necessarily equal to Christian love, but was more the acknowledging of a divine beauty.

[41] Clements, Theory of Art, 8.

as a reproduction of beauty, in nature, and in the human body. The contemplation of beauty transforms the soul into Beauty, which ultimately leads to God:

> The splendor of the highest Good itself shines in individual things, and where it shines more fittingly, there it especially allures him who contemplates it, excites him who looks at it, enraptures and takes possession of him who approaches it. . . . There it is apparent that the Soul is inflamed by the divine splendor, glowing in the beautiful person as in a mirror, and secretly lifted up by it as by a hook in order to become God.[42]

Ficino's concept of love nullified the sensual aspects of love because true love had its origins in God:

> Hence, the impulse of the lover is not extinguished by the sight or touch of any body. For he does not desire this or that body, but admires, yearns for, and wonders at the splendor of the higher light shining all over the bodies. The lovers do not know what they wish or desire, because they do not know God Himself, whose secret flavor infused some sweet odor of Himself in His works.[43]

This non-sensual concept of love allowed for the ennobling of love that occurs between two men or two women, as well as persons of the opposite sex.[44] Ficino's philosophy and his actions were contradictory, however. It is known that Ficino had a male lover to whom he composed suggestive letters and erotic love poetry.[45]

Michelangelo seems to have been particularly struck by Ficino's description of the ecstasy of love and its origins in the legend of Ganymede. The image of the beloved as someone whose beauty shines above all else or burns as the sun, and the total abandonment of the lover to the effects of the beloved's beauty on him is quite prevalent throughout his poems written to Cavalieri. For Michelangelo, the transcendence of beauty and love is ". . . an ecstatic force that draws him upward as wings or winged flight. . . ."[46] The images of winged flight and of eyes, representing the inner vision which leads to the transformation of beauty, appear frequently in the poetry and especially in those poems addressed to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, as well as the idea of corporeal manifestation of divine beauty. Clements notes that Neoplatonism figures most prominently in the poems written after Michelangelo met Cavalieri, but Saslow recognizes the philosophy in many of the early poems as well.[47] Ficino's influence in specific poems will be discussed more fully in the ensuing discussion of the individual poems chosen for the song cycle by Britten.

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[42] Ficino, Theologia; quoted in Kristeller, Philosophy of Ficino, 264.

[43] Ficino, De amore; quoted in Kristeller, Philosophy of Ficino, 268.

[44] Kristeller, Philosophy of Ficino, 277.

[45] Cambon, Fury of Form, 27. Michelangelo took several ideas for his poems to Tommaso de' Cavalieri and others from Ficino's many poems to Giovanni Cavalcanti.

Fra Girolamo Savonarola was, in Michelangelo's life, the force in opposition to the influence of Ficino. Whereas Ficino represented more Classical ideas, Savonarola was the voice of Christian thought in and about Florence at that time. Michelangelo was so taken with Savonarola's ideas about Christianity and art that he contemplated joining the monk's order.[48] The basis of Savonarola's theory of art was the idea that art was a prayerbook for the illiterate.[49] Because beauty to him was a form resulting from the harmonious convergence of all the parts of the form, which could, in turn, instruct in religion, only the most technically-accomplished artists should serve the church.[50] Michelangelo was caught between the desire to capture Beauty for the sake of Beauty and one's own perfection and the Christian suspicion of beauty that was not a reflection of God.[51] Hand in hand with this conflict in his approach to his art was a suspicion of poetry which did not engender Christian philosophies.[52] As a result of Savonarola's influence, Michelangelo cultivated a restraint in pursuing physical relationships with the men he admired, as well as a chronic sense of guilt over his own feelings, as reflected in his poetry.[53]

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[46] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 31. This image is in many ways similar to those described by the Christian mystics. It is also a Ficinian image.

[47] Clements, Theory of Art, 9; Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 31.

[48] Clements, Theory of Art, 72.

[49] Ibid., 241.

The Influence of Petrarch and Dante on Michelangelo's Poetry

The influence of Francesco Petrarca and Dante Alighieri on Michelangelo's poetry was less philosophical and more structural and thematic. Michelangelo knew the poetry of both men intimately, as reported by Condivi:

> And just as he has greatly delighted in the conversation of learned men, so he has also derived great pleasure from reading the writer of both prose and poetry, amongst whom he has especially admired Dante, delighted by the remarkable genius of that man, whose work he knows almost entirely by heart, although he knows the work of Petrarch no less well. And he not only has enjoyed reading verse, but sometimes has liked to compose it, as we may see by certain sonnets of his which give a fine example of his great powers of invention and discrimination.[54]

Michelangelo was also in the habit of scribbling lines of Petrarch, Dante, and others on his notes and sketches.[55] The works of Petrarch provided both the physical model for the sonnets and the thematic model for the love poetry. From the works of both men, Michelangelo copied lines exactly into his own poetry or adapted them, preserving the sense of the phrase.[56]

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[50] Ibid., 388.

[51] Although most of Michelangelo's subjects were from Biblical history, his theory of art reveals a decidedly Neoplatonic view of Beauty.

[52] Clements, Theory of Art, 242.

[53] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 29.

[54] Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 103. The last line of this passage alludes to the fact that Michelangelo borrowed lines from Dante and Petrarch in his own poems.

Michelangelo's Sonnets

Dating

Michelangelo's poems were not published during his lifetime, which is not astonishing given that they were clearly written for his own pleasure and for presentation to those he admired or loved.[57] Michelangelo himself had planned an edition of some of his poetry, but this never came to fruition, owing to the death of one of the editors.[58] He began writing poetry around 1503 or 1504, presumably after the completion of David, with only a few fragments of poetry or sketches for ideas existing from ca. 1501-1502. Since very little of his early poetry is extant, it has been difficult for scholars to pinpoint an exact beginning. Dating of the poetry in recent studies has been based largely on the scraps of paper and canvas on which they were composed, as well as by contemporary events alluded to in the poems themselves. The poetry is heavily autobiographical, often referring to paintings or sculpture that was being created concurrently or that had just been completed. Not as prominent, however, are references to specific events in Michelangelo's personal life. Although he expresses his feelings and thoughts concerning things that happen, he seldom reveals the exact event that inspired his creativity. Formal considerations have proved unhelpful, as he exploited many forms at all times. The sonnet form is the most dominant, but throughout his life, Michelangelo also cultivated the madrigal, the *sestina*, *capitolo* (*terza rima*), and *ottava rima* forms, placing no particular emphasis during any period.

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[55] Clements, Theory of Art, xxvi.

[56] Saslow has identified many such lines and phrases in the poetry. Poetry of Michelangelo, passim. Although lines and images from Dante can be found in the love poetry, Dante's most profound influence was in the Michelangelo's later religious poetry.

[57] Condivi reports: "He remained for some time doing almost nothing in these arts [sculpture, painting], dedicating himself to the reading of poets and vernacular orators and to writing sonnets for his own pleasure . . . ." Life of Michelangelo, 28.

[58] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 53. Work on the edition began in 1542 and was abandoned in 1546 with the death of Luigi del Ricco.

James Saslow, the most recent and most thorough of the scholars of the poetry, has divided the poems into three periods, based on shifts in theme and emphasis.[59] The first, extending from 1503-1532, contains two phases, from 1503-1523 and 1524-1532. This early period is crucial in the present study, for two of the poems set by Britten come from this set; but more important, there was within this time frame a shift in Michelangelo's views on love. Saslow believes that the first hints of homosexual love occur in a few of these poems. For example, Michelangelo met Gherardo Perini in 1520. An exchange of letters occurred, building to a climax in July of 1522, when Perini wrote to Michelangelo, "It seems that I have no other desire but to be with you . . . ."[60] In several poems dating from 1522-1524, and which Saslow believes were addressed to Perini, Michelangelo began using masculine references (i.e., the word "*colui*" or "he" in Italian). As well, there enters into these love poems a sense of sin and fear of retribution regarding the feelings of love being displayed, which Saslow concludes accompanies homosexual love, prohibited both by law and by church at that time.[61]

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[59] Ibid., 11-23.

[60] Papini, Michelangelo: Life and Era, 210.

The second period of poetic activity identified by Saslow, extends from 1532 to 1548, the years in which Michelangelo was most active, producing some 224 poems. Also during this time, Michelangelo developed the most significant personal relationships of his life, first with Tommaso de' Cavalieri and second with Vittoria Colonna, resulting in his most passionate love poetry. These two represent a central conflict in Michelangelo's life and art: the conflict between the sensual and the Christian. Most of the poems that Britten chose date from this period and were addressed specifically to Tommaso de' Cavalieri. In the third phase of poetic creativity, from 1548-1560, Michelangelo's emphasis shifted from love to Christian guilt, focusing on death and the hope for salvation through the love and suffering of Christ.[62]

Editions

There have been several Italian editions of Michelangelo's poetry. The earliest was published in Florence in 1623 by his grand-nephew, Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger.[63] Unfortunately for the sake of preservation of the original poetry, this edition did more harm than good. Michelangelo the Younger was overly sensitive to the matter of his great uncle's personal and artistic reputations. He found in the poetry grammatical and syntactical awkwardness as well as ambiguous statements and themes which could be taken to refer to his great uncle's homosexual tendencies. Because there had been suspicion and controversy during Michelangelo's life about his homosexuality or bisexuality, the younger Michelangelo wished to avoid any such innuendos.[64] In addition, a great artist should be great in all things, meaning that the problems of grammar and form in the poetry had to be corrected, if Michelangelo was to be portrayed in the best light possible. To rectify these "problems," Michelangelo the Younger essentially rewrote his great uncle's works, often changing the entire meaning of the poem if it seemed likely to cause controversy. Ann Hallock describes the results of the editing as the most damaging attitude toward the poems:

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[61] "Whether these poems allude to Perini or someone else, they indicate a subtle but important change in the artist's feelings about love, which seems due in part to a shift from a traditional female to a male object: for the first time Michelangelo links love with a sense of sin and fear of vengeance . . . , concepts more suitable to homosexual passion, which was officially and theologically proscribed." Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 13.

[62] Saslow concludes that Michelangelo must have experienced physical desire for men because of the tone of these later poems, which speak of "sin" and "wicked, depraved desires". Ibid., 17.

[63] Rime de Michelangelo Buonarroti, ed. Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovani (Florence, 1623).

> from their first publication his poems were not treated as inviolable works of art, but as trivial byproducts of his explosive creativity which could be twisted to embellish and perpetuate the myth of Michelangelo the artist.[65]

This edition tempered the critical views of Michelangelo's poetry during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, most of which were based on the opinions of Ugo Foscolo. Foscolo cautions against considering the poems to be great simply because they are the work of a great man:

> Whoever is over-anxious to regard as extraordinary all that may proceed from the pen of a distinguished man, pushes his admiration to the extent of superstition, which, while it adds nothing to the glory of the author, greatly diminishes our respect for the critic.[66]

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[64] To Michelangelo the Younger's defense, Condivi addresses the same problem, dismissing it. Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 105.

[65] Ann Hayes Hallock, Michelangelo the Poet: The Man Behind the Myth (Palo Alto, California: Page-Ficklin Publications, 1978), 4.

[66] Ugo Foscolo, "The Poems of Michel Angelo Buonarroti," in Saggi e Discorsi Critici, ed. Cesare Foligno, vol. 10 of Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Ugo Foscolo (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1953), 453.

He contended that because the poems were written for pleasure they were inferior expressions of Michelangelo's feelings:

> a compound of thought and sentiment, which always excites to meditation, and sometimes touches the heart; but neither describes, nor paints, nor works powerfully on the imagination . . . he does not express himself, at all times, with that perspicuity which can only be attained from the constant habitude of writing, nor with that poetical diction which imparts warmth and brilliancy even to the coldest reasonings. Their versification betrays the same want of exercise in composition . . . . He had not . . . the same right to be an innovator in literature as he had in the fine arts.[67]

While these observations are true for the most part, the impetus behind them led scholars to dismiss the poems as the work of a dilettante, ignoring their individualistic style.[68] Most of the editions were undertaken in order to dispel this myth and restore the intrinsic value of the poetry. In general, the editors saw the poems as awkward and obscure, yet praised them for their intensity.

Cesare Guasti's edition of 1863 sought to restore the original language and meanings of the poems by comparing the original version with the "corrected" version by Michelangelo the Younger, but did not attempt to gather all versions of the poems nor present a unified chronology since it is organized by poetic form.[69] This edition was the basis for the first English translation by John Addington Symonds.[70] According to Saslow, Symonds was a homosexual who was interested in gathering records of homosexual literature, leading him to Michelangelo.[71] After the publication of the edition of the sonnets, Symonds wrote a two-volume biography of Michelangelo in which he chastised others for failing to come to terms with the homosexual tendencies found in the poetry and the relationships that Michelangelo had or desired with various men (Tommaso de' Cavalieri included).[72] Symonds attempted in his translations to preserve the rhyme scheme, which quite often destroyed the phrasing. They are superseded by a translation from 1905 by S. Elizabeth Hall, also based upon Guasti's edition.[73] Hall's translations also preserve the rhyme scheme, but are generally judged as following the original meaning much closer than those by Symonds. Both translations use very stilted language, further adding to the perceptions problems in style and comprehensibility that have besieged the poems.

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[67] Ibid., 456-457.

[68] Hallock, Michelangelo the Poet, 6.

[69] Le rime di Michelangelo Buonarroti, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence, 1863).

[70] Sonnets of Michael Angelo, trans. John Addington Symonds (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1904).

[71] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 54.

A third Italian language edition, published in Berlin in 1897,[74] became the standard scholarly edition and the basis of several Italian editions[75] until it was eventually surpassed by Enzo Girardi's 1960 edition.[76] Frey's edition exceeded Guasti's 1863 edition in many ways. It was more complete and also attempted a chronology, including locations of manuscripts and detailed watermark and handwriting studies. The Girardi edition exceeds it only in that it presents new information and poems which had come to light in the intervening sixty years. Moreover, an attempt is made to show Michelangelo's serious vocation as a writer, dispelling many of the views that the poetry is inferior or of less importance than his works of art. Girardi published two companion volumes to the poems in 1964 and 1974, which include updated and detailed commentary and his own interpretations of the poetry.[77]

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[72] Benjamin Britten approached his settings of the poetry via Symonds's translations, an edition of which was given to Britten before he left for America by Marjorie Fass. Donald Mitchell, in Britten, Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976, ed. Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 930. The edition contains the Italian version of the poetry, based on Guasti's edition with parallel translations by Symonds. There is some evidence, however, that Britten was introduced to the poetry in the late 1930s through Auden and his possible recommendation of a biography of Michelangelo. Mitchell, in Letters from a Life, 801. It is possible, however, that Britten knew of Symonds's edition from Auden, for at that time, Britten was heavily entrenched in W. H. Auden's circle of friends, which included E. M. Forester and Christopher Isherwood, both of whom, along with Auden, were producing literature that concerned the homosexual lifestyle. The edition was from 1904, and published in London by Smith, Elder & Company. Marjorie Fass was an artist who was living with the Bridges during Britten's study with Frank Bridge.

[73] Sonnets of Michelangelo, trans. S. Elizabeth Hall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1905).

[74] Die Dichtungen des Michelangniolo Buonarroti, ed. Carl Frey (Berlin, 1897).

[75] Michelangelo: Le Rime, ed. Valentino Piccoli (Turin: Einaudi, 1930); Michelangelo Buonarroti: Le rime, ed. Ausonio Dobelli (Milan: Signorelli, 1933); and Rime di Michelangelo, ed. G. R. Ceriello (Milan: Rizzoli, 1954).

There have been three English translations since those by Hall and Symonds. The first, by Joseph Tusiani, is based on Frey's edition, and therefore is outdated.[78] Additionally, it is widely recognized that he sought, much like Michelangelo's grand-nephew, to improve "problems" in the text, improving metaphors and images. The second translation by Creighton Gilbert is based on Girardi's text, preserving the numbering and chronology, with the exception of the omission of two early poems.[79] Gilbert chose to translate the texts literally, often with the result of making the poetic images even more confusing and obscure than the original. The most recent English translation by James M. Saslow dates from 1991.[80] It is based on Girardi's edition and seeks to preserve clarity of meaning rather than formal constraints placed by the original Italian.[81]

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[76] Michelangelo Buonarroti: Rime, ed. Enzo Noè Girardi, Scrittori d'Italia, no. 217 (Bari: Laterza, 1960). A 1975 edition edited by Ettore Barelli is essentially a condensed version of the Girardi text. Michelangelo Buonarroti: Rime, ed. Ettore Barelli (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975)

[77] Enzo Noè Girardi, Studi sulle rime di Michelangiolo (Milan: L'Eroica, 1964); Studi su Michelangiolo scrittore (Florence: Olschki, 1974).

[78] The Complete Poems of Michelangelo, trans. Joseph Tusiani (New York: Noonday Press, 1960).

[79] Complete Poems and Selected Letters of Michelangelo, trans. Creighton Gilbert, ed. Robert N. Linscott (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963; reprint, 1980).

The Critical Studies

Many of the critical studies, as well as many of the editions, have been undertaken in order to prove the worth of Michelangelo's poetry against the attack leveled by Ugo Foscolo and his followers. In light of Michelangelo's own opinion of his writing, this has been a difficult task. Condivi has reported that Michelangelo wrote poetry for his own pleasure and always denegrated his attempts.[82] In a letters to Vasari (ca. 1554-1555, 1557), Michelangelo refers to the sonnets as "silly things", complaining that he found writing "irksome."[83] Despite this, the numerous revisions and versions of the poems, along with innumerable fragments indicate that while he may have found the writing difficult, he still took it very seriously.[84] Moreover, the fact that he routinely sent poetry to those he admired the most, although he was not an accomplished grammarian, shows his interest in poetry as both an art form and as a means of self-expression. In his art, Michelangelo often used self-images, appearing as St. Bartholomew in The Last Judgment and as Nicodemus in the Florence Pietà. The poetry is self-portraying as well, revealing his feelings for his friends as well as his theories of art.[85] It is perhaps this aspect, the sincerity shown in the poetry, that drew Britten to them.

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[80] Poetry of Michelangelo, trans. James M. Saslow.

[81] This edition's value for this study has been precisely that: many of the other translations have been unnecessarily obscure and confusing. As well, the critical notes by Saslow have proved invaluable, as has his ability to relate information succinctly and precisely.

[82] "But Michelangelo has applied himself to poetry more for his own pleasure than as a profession, and he has always belittled himself and asserted his ignorance in these matters." Michelangelo also depreciated his artistic endeavors." Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 103, 105.

[83] Michelangelo Buonarroti, Letters of Michelangelo, Letter no. 399 and Letter no. 434 respectively.

[84] Cambon, Fury of Form.

The concern in the study of Michelangelo's poetry has been to produce better editions and English translations rather than focus too heavily on poetic content. Several explications of the poems are available, but only one deals with the entire corpus of the poetry. Most are concerned with one particular aspect and address individual poems in an effort to convey their observations. Enzo Noè Girardi includes prose paraphrases of the poetry in his edition from 1960.[86] He relies heavily on Michelangelo's own words, placing them into a more grammatical and comprehensible form. While these interpretations are valuable in their own right, Girardi ignores any connections between the poems and Michelangelo's life. Ann Hallock's discussion is born out of her desire to combat the negative criticisms levelled at them by previous, predominantly Italian scholars from the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Centuries.[87] Her ideas about the relationship of the form of the poetry to Michelangelo's thought processes are well-founded and thought-provoking, as is her explanation of Michelangelo's feelings about Cavalieri. In her proof of these opinions, however, she does not touch upon any of the poems that Britten set.

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[85] Robert Clements considered the poetry to be an important source of information on Michelangelo's theories of art, finding them, as well as the letters, to be a sincere effort to explain himself. Clements, Theory of Art, passim.

[86] Girardi, in Michelangelo Buonarroti: Rime.

[87] Hallock, Michelangelo the Poet.

Glauco Cambon's discussion of the poetry centers on the identification of various themes within the corpus of the poems, including comic modes, the concept of Protean Eros, and the religious elements found in the later poems.[88] Since he touches upon only those poems that most clearly reflect the themes that he examines, many are ignored. Several of the poems that Britten used in the song cycle are discussed, but not in any great detail. Robert Clements had taken this approach in 1965, some twenty years before the publication of Cambon's study, but focused on a different set of themes.[89] Clements explores Michelangelo's style and language as well as incidences of allegory, iconography, and self-portraiture that occur in the poems. Like Cambon's study, however, this one contains only cursory statements about individual poems. Although James Saslow's translations are not considered explications, his ease of language and masterful manipulation of grammar serve to clarify the poems in a manner that no other scholar has achieved.[90] For this reason, many of the ideas set forth in the ensuing discussion of the sonnets that Britten choose for his song cycle are based upon Saslow's commentary, with an infusion of my own thoughts about the subjects.

A Literary Analysis of the Michelangelo Sonnets Set by Benjamin Britten

Michelangelo's sonnets have long been criticized for their lack of adherence to the formal expectations of the sonnet form. He struggled to place his ideas within a rigid structure, with the result that his ideas often flow past the end rhyme of one line and into the next, thus destroying the impact of the end rhyme. Michelangelo particularly experimented with the design of the sestet, both in the rhyme scheme of the final vowel sound and in the traditional division of the sestet into two closed tercets.

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[88] Cambon, Fury of Form.

[89] Robert J. Clements, The Poetry of Michelangelo (New York: New York University Press, 1965).

[90] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo.

The sonnet structure, as established by Giovanni Cavalcanti, Dante, and Petrarch, whose poems became the model for the century in which Michelangelo was writing, displayed a very definite formal scheme. The octave and sestet functioned as observation or statement and conclusion or counter-statement, respectively. The octave subsequently is divided into two quatrains, each of which had a particular goal in the unfolding of the subject of the poem. The first quatrain states the proposition or subject, and the second sets out to prove or elaborate on that statement. The rhyme scheme for the quatrains is generally closed – *abba abba* – so that the shift in the sestet for the conclusion is reflected also in the rhyme. The sestet falls into two tercets, the first of which confirms the ideas of the second quatrain, or provides the key to the subject, and the second of which draws the conclusions. The rhyme scheme for the sestet can vary greatly from poem to poem, although an interlaced rhyme of *cde cde* predominates.[91]

Sì come nella penna e nell'inchiostro (G. 84; Sonetto XVI)[92]

Sì come nella penna e nell'inchiostro	Just as within pen and ink there exist
È l'alto e 'l basso e 'l mediocre stile,	The lofty and the low and the middling style,
E ne' marmi l'immagin ricca e vile,	And within marbles are images rich or worthless,
Secondo che 'l sa trar l'ingegno nostro;	Depending on what our talents can draw out of them,

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[91] Other possibilities include: *rima alternata*, or *cdc dcd*; *cde dce*; *cde ced*; *ccd ede*; and *ccd ccd*. For more general information on the sonnet form, see John Fuller, The Sonnet (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1972).

[92] The numbering system reflects both Girardi's (G.) and Guasti/Symonds (Roman numerals), the system used by Britten in the titles of the songs. The order in which the sonnets are discussed reflects that which Britten used in the song cycle.

Così, signor mie car, nel petto vostro,
Quante l'orgoglio è forse ogni atto umile,
Ma io sol quel c'a me propio è e simile
Ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro.

Chi semina sospir, lacrime e doglie,
(L'umor dal ciel terreste, schietto e solo,
A vari semi vario si converte),

Però pianto e dolor ne miete e coglie;
Chi mira alta beltà con sì gran duolo,
Ne ritrá doglie e pene acerbe e certe.[93]

Thus, my dear lord, there may be in your breast
As much pride as acts of humility;
But I only draw out of it what's suitable
And similar to me, as my face shows.

As earthly rain from heaven, single and pure,
Is turned into various forms by various seeds,
One who sows sighs and tears and pains

Harvests and reaps from them sorrow and weeping;
And one who looks on high beauty from great sadness
Is sure to draw from it harsh pain and suffering.[94]

This poem dates from 1534 and was written for Tommaso de' Cavalieri.[95] It is in traditional sonnet form of fourteen lines with an octave and a sestet. The rhyme scheme is very economical, with the same vowels serving in both the octave and sestet: the quatrains of the octave both rhyme *abba*, and the tercets of the sestet, *cde*. This follows the traditional Petrarchan rhyme scheme, particularly in the lack of the final rhyming couplet used in the English sonnet since the writings of Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey. The punctuation of the sestet divides it into four lines and two lines, despite the threefold nature of the rhyme scheme. There are two enjambments, from line 1 to line 2 and from line 7 to line 8. The theme revolves around Michelangelo's idea of the *concetto* in sculpture, which has Neo-Platonic origins. Simply put, ". . . every Idea of the Higher Soul has a reflection here on earth,"[96] which is contained within the raw material of the art, such as the block of marble. The action of the artist on the raw material reveals the *concetto*, whether the resulting shapes are good or bad. Clements believes that this poem takes the idea one step further, including the ink with which words are written.[97] The *concetto*, then is the inevitable result of the artist's own disposition. According to the poem, tears, and pain in the artist result in sorrow in the creation; sorrow upon beholding beauty results in pain and suffering.

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[93] The Italian text is taken from Girardi's 1960 edition, Michelangelo Buonarroti: Rime, on which Saslow based his English translations. The Guasti texts, which Britten used for the song cycle may be found in Chapter IV of this study, with the translations by Symonds that Britten had available located in Appendix A. The English translations that are found in Chapter IV are by Peter Pears and Elizabeth Mayer, and were published in the program notes of the premiere performance of the cycle and subsequently in the score itself.

[94] The English translations are by Saslow, taken from Poetry of Michelangelo. This edition is favored in this discussion over the Symonds translations because of the clarity that Saslow achieves. Symonds's English versions are steeped in the language of the Victorian era, rendering them unnecessarily ornate and difficult to follow. They may be found in Appendix A.

[95] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo.

Michelangelo relates the beloved to the block of marble or the ink. The beloved, in this case Cavalieri, has within him different qualities, both good and bad. The lover sees only what is suitable to him or like him, so that the reference to the face of the lover here can be seen as a projection of the lover's own qualities or feelings onto the beloved. This argument is taken from Ficino's De amore, in which he states that love has its foundations in the similarities of the lover and the beloved.[98] Like the seeds which turn the rain into different forms as they grow, the lover can see the different aspects of the beloved and reaps from those aspects that which is most gratifying to himself. Hence, the lover who sees in the beloved only tears and pain feels only sorrow.[99] The lover who, when looking upon the beauty of the beloved feels only sadness, must endure pain and suffering.

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[96] Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 64.

[97] Ibid., 22. Cambon echoes this idea, concluding that all styles, low, middle, and lofty, are contained in the ink as well. Cambon, Fury of Form, 61.

[98] Kristeller, Philosophy of Ficino, 277.

[99] This is an example of the twisted metaphor in Michelangelo's poetry. Clements asserts that he may have sacrificed syntax and meaning to achieve rhyme, which was not one of his talents. Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 32.

This poem may have been a rebuke of Cavalieri, for the sestet is not a resolution of a conflict as in traditional sonnet form, but more of an example of the ideas set forth in the octave. Michelangelo's love poetry does not describe the beloved physically, but does give a glimpse of the difficulties that the relationship may have gone through. In this poem, Michelangelo may have been responding to a perceived affront. To explain his feelings in the octave, he borrows a metaphor from sculpture in which the creation by the sculptor is a reflection of the artist himself. Implied in this image is a reproach of the beloved, which he develops further in the sestet. The sestet, related to the octave, also deals with another idea gleaned from his association with Platonism, and particularly with Ficino, Michelangelo believed that love is the result of the perception of beauty. Since beauty comes from God, the contemplation of Beauty leads to a spiritualized image of that object in the mind of the lover. In the sestet, Michelangelo is telling Cavalieri that the images Michelangelo sees in him are only the good ones, but this goodness (i.e., Beauty) brings only sorrow for him because the love is unrequited. In other words, Michelangelo reveals to Cavalieri how his inattentiveness makes him feel, especially when Michelangelo has only seen the good in him.[100] The beauty that Cavalieri possesses and the love that Michelangelo feels for him are flawed, then, because they bring pain and sadness, not spiritual perfection, to the beholder.

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[100] Most scholars of Michelangelo believe that Cavalieri, though he had deep feelings for Michelangelo, was somewhat embarrassed or alarmed by the attention that Michelangelo paid him. He did not wish to relinquish his friendship with Michelangelo, but was uncomfortable at the passion that he displayed. This cannot be proved, because any documents that may support this line of arguing are non-extant. Several of the poems to Cavalieri, do seem to be trying to convince him of the pureness of his love (see no. 58, "*Se l'immortal desio, c'alza e corregge*"). Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 16.

A che più debb'i' omai l'intensa voglia (G. 98; Sonetto XXXI)

A che più debb'i' omai l'intensa voglia	Why should I still pour out my intense desire
Sfogar con pianti o con parole meste,	In weeping or in mournful words,
Se di tal sorte 'l ciel, che l'alma veste,	If heaven, which clothes all souls with such a fate,
Tard' o per tempo alcun mai non ne spoglia?	Strips no one of it, either early or late?
A che 'l cor lass' a più languir m'invoglia,	Why does my tired heart still make me long to languish
S'altri pur dee morir? Dunche per queste	If others must also die? Therefore let my
Luci l'ore del fin fian men moleste;	Final hours be made less wearisome for these eyes,
C'ogni altro ben val men c'ogni mia doglia.	Since all other good is worth less than all my pain.
Però se 'l colpo ch'io ne rub' e 'nvolo	Yet at least, if I cannot dodge the blow
Schifar non posso, almen, s'è destinato	I steal and rob from him -- if it's ordained --
Chi entrerà 'nfra la dolcezza e 'l duolo?	Then who will win out between sweetness and sorrow?
Se vint' e preso i' debb'esser beato,	If, to be happy, I must be conquered and chained,
Maraviglia non è se nudo e solo	It is no wonder that, naked and alone,
Resto prigion d'un cavalier armato.	An armed cavalier's prisoner I remain.

This sonnet in traditional form was written for Tommaso de' Cavalieri. The precise year of composition is unknown. Certain correspondences between images found in the poem and in the drawing The Punishment of Tityos for Cavalieri places it between the years 1532 and 1533.[101] The rhyme scheme differs from the previous poem: the scheme of *abba* remains for the octave, but the sestet consists of only one vowel sound for each ending.[102] Apart from being very unusual in poetry of this time, this type of vowel rhyme is very difficult to achieve, and may have led to its being labelled among his ". . . most elliptical and obscure."[103] There are numerous enjambments as well: from line 1 to 2; line 5 to 6 and 6 to 7; line 9 to 10; and line 13 to 14.

This particular sonnet is famous for the Petrarchan-like pun on the name of Cavalieri in the last line ("*Resto prigion d'un cavalier armato*"), which disturbed Michelangelo the

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[101] Girardi dates it between 1534 and 1535, while Frey places it much later, from 1542. Ibid., 226.

[102] The punctuation of the sestet divides it clearly into two tercets, and with the consideration of the preceding consonant, the rhyme scheme is *cdc dcd* for the tercets.

[103] Ibid., 227.

Younger greatly when he was preparing his edition. According to Clements, Michelangelo's great-nephew "... wished to change the wording to '*Resto prigion d'un cor di virtù armato.*' For this and a similar sonnet the great-nephew apologised, 'Keep in mind that this sonnet, with the preceding and others, concerns, as is clearly shown, virile Platonic love.'"[104]

The poem contains two metaphorical protagonists, love and death. The theme refers to the futility of love because of inevitable death[105] and derives from passages in Dante and Petrarch.[106] The first quatrain introduces the theme: why should the lover keep on burning with desire if there is no relief in sight? The second quatrain expands on the theme, asking why the lover should long for death if death is the ultimate end, asking too that the lover be allowed to continue loving the beloved so that his final hours will be better than his life has been up to that point. There is also a reference to the fact that his love for the beloved has caused great pain, but that the pain of loving satisfies him more than any good.

The second tercet of the sestet provides a resolution from the conflict of the octave, unlike the previous poem (G. 84). The first tercet drives the conflict between love and death to a climax, questioning whether death or love will ultimately provide relief from the pain he has been experiencing. The final three lines provide the resolution of the pain in the mind of the lover: what makes the lover happy is being bound to the beloved, even though it causes him pain.

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[104] Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 150.

[105] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 227. Saslow is the only scholar who attempts to find a clear meaning for the poem.

[106] Dante: Purgatorio 31:52-57, Paradiso 11:1-12; and Petrarch: Trionfo della morte 1:82-90. Ibid.

As in *Sì come nella penna e nell'inchiostro*, Michelangelo seems to be chastising Cavalieri for not returning his passionate love to the same degree. A common theme is the pain and sorrow that the love or beauty of Cavalieri causes Michelangelo because it is not mutual or is unrequited, or so we are led to believe in these poems. According to the Ficinian concept of love and the pursuit of God in beauty, mutual love was needed to attain true spiritual perfection. Indeed, in his tract, De amore, Ficino asserted that the beloved had a moral obligation to return the lover's feelings because mutual love was the purest form of love.[107] Michelangelo is willing to martyr himself for the privilege of loving, because the love of the beauty, in this case, Cavalieri, initiates a desire for perfection in himself and thus leads him closer to God.[108]

Hallock concludes that Michelangelo believed that completely abandoning himself in love destroyed him and brought on damnation from God.[109] This view, however, is inconsistent with the thoughts contained within this poem, particularly in view of the final tercet. Michelangelo does seem to be struggling with the problem of love in his life in the poem, as he examines the futility of love in the face of inevitable death. He reaches the conclusion, however, that despite his own sure demise, he is on earth to seek beauty and love, so he will continue to love.

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[107] Kristeller, Philosophy of Ficino, 277.

[108] Clements, Theory of Art, 4.

[109] Hallock, Michelangelo the Poet, 264.

Veggio co' be' vostr'occhi un dolce lume (G. 89; Sonetto XXX)

Veggio co' be' vostr'occhi un dolce lume	I see, with your beautiful eyes, a sweet light
Che co' mie ciechi già veder non posso;	That with my blind ones I could never see;
Porto co' vostri piedi un pondo addosso,	I bear, with your feet, a burden upon me
Che de' mie zoppi non è già costume.	To which my lame ones are no longer accustomed.
Volo con le vostr'ale senza piume;	I fly, though lacking feathers, with your wings;
Col vostro ingegno al ciel sempre son mosso;	With your mind I'm constantly impelled toward heaven;
Dal vostro arbitrio son pallido e rosso,	Depending on your whim, I'm pale or red,
Freddo al sol, caldo alle più fredde brume.	Cold in the sun, hot in winter's coldest depths.
Nel voler volstro è sol la voglia mia,	Within your will alone is my desire,
I miei pensier nel vostro cor si fanno,	My thoughts are created in your heart,
Nel vostro fiato son le mie parole.	And within your breath are my own words.
Come luna da sé sol par ch'io sia,	Alone, I seem as the moon is by itself:
Ché gli occhi nostri in ciel veder non sanno	For our eyes are only able to see in heaven
Se non quel tanto che n'accende il sole.	As much of it as the sun illuminates.

This sonnet, another of the corpus written for Tommaso de' Cavalieri, was composed around the year 1534, and was included in Benedetto Varchi's lecture on Michelangelo's poetry in 1547 (published 1550).[110] The rhyme scheme follows a typical sonnet design, with the quatrains of the octave rhyming *abba* and the tercets of the sestet, which are clearly marked by punctuation, rhyming *cde*. The poem also contains enjambment, from lines 1 to 2 and lines 13 to 14.

Unlike the two previous poems, this one is more positive in its statements to the beloved, containing no thought of the lack of attentiveness on Cavalieri's part. John Arthos contends that the poem expresses "something much more like peace, as if there were at least a sight of fulfillment."[111] In this poem, the lover sees only the good of the beloved and the effect of this good on himself. The theme, taken from Petrarch, discusses the incompleteness of the lover and the completeness that the beloved gives to him. With the beloved, the lover sees only good, can bear all burdens, and can ascend toward God, the aim of beauty and love. The beloved has the power to control the lover physically and mentally, because every wish of the beloved is the desire of the lover. In the final lines of the poem, the lover compares himself to the moon and the beloved to the sun, saying that the lover exists only because of the beloved. This final statement in the poem alludes to a Neoplatonic concept that the lover becomes the beloved, which is somewhat paradoxical given the philosophers' emphases on searching for the beautiful (or God) in the inner self.[112] The poem implies that Michelangelo was so consumed by his passion and love for Cavalieri that he abandoned his own self-fulfillment in order to satisfy any desire for truth and beauty that Cavalieri might have. Hence, in seeing with Cavalieri's eyes and his assuming of other physical actions by Cavalieri, he is able to understand more fully Cavalieri's needs and thus be able to gratify him more completely.

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[110] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 211.

[111] John Arthos, Dante, Michelangelo and Milton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 65.

The poem also contains a Ficinian image in the reference to winged flight toward heaven.[113] The winged flight signifies the force of love, which, in turn, takes the lover closer to God.[114] This image also appears in a drawing that Michelangelo made for Cavalieri, which features Ganymede being lifted upward by a giant eagle. The myth of Ganymede includes the story of the youth being borne up to Jupiter to become his cupbearer and sexual companion. To Christianize the myth, it was interpreted by the Neo-Platonists as an example of the soul being lifted by divine love.[115] Michelangelo would have been aware of both views of the myth from his Platonist background. The metaphor of spiritual ascent abounds in Ficino's works. In De amore, in particular, this concept is expressed in erotic language:

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[112] Ibid., 66.

[113] Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 211.

[114] Ibid., 31.

[115] Ibid.

> What penetrates my innermost being? What elevates my highest being? Certainly it is the admirable rays of Thy admirable goodness and beauty diffused everywhere in an admirable way throughout minds, throughout Souls, and throughout bodies. With them reachest Thou me even without my knowing, with them Thou allurest, forcest, and inflamest me . . . oh Thou unique beauty.[116]

Union of mind, soul and body with another person that possesses the beauty of God, would lead upwards to God. Michelangelo alludes to this sort of all-consuming union in this poem, and makes reference to the results of that union in line 6: "*Col vostro ingegno al ciel sempre son mosso.*"

The use of eyes in the first two lines, and again in line 13, is also taken from Ficinian ideas. The eyes are the only organ which can perceive the beauty that leads to God. When the lover becomes the beloved through the sharing of vision, then the beauty of the union is realized and spiritual perfection is achieved. By using this image, Michelangelo is saying that only through his love for Cavalieri can he realize his highest spiritual goals. The poem thus operates on two levels – the physical union of the lovers on the one hand and spiritual on the other – and only at the fulfillment of both levels can true beauty be found.

Tu sa' ch'i' so, signor mie, che tu sai (G. 60; Sonetto LV)

Tu sa' ch'i' so, signor mie, che tu sai
Ch'i' vengo per goderti più da presso,
E sai ch'i' so che tu sa' ch'i' son desso:
A che più indugio a salutarci omai?

Se vera è la speranza che mi dai,
Se vero è 'l gran desio che m'è concesso,
Rompasi il mur fra l'uno e l'altra messo,
Ché doppia forza hann' i celati guai.

You know that I know, my lord, that you know
That I come closer to take delight in you,
And you know I know you know just who I am:
Why then delay our meeting any longer?

If the hope that you give to me is real,
If the great desire I've been granted is real,
Let the wall raised between them be broken down,
For troubles left concealed have double strength.

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[116] Ficino, De amore; quoted in Kristeller, Philosophy of Ficino, 268.

S'i' amo sol di te, signor mie caro,
Quel che di te più ami, non ti sdegni,
Ché l'un dell'altro spirto s'innamora.

If I love in you, my dear lord, only what
You love most in yourself, do not be angry,
For it's one spirit falling in love with the other.

Quel che nel tuo bel volto bramo e 'mparo,
E mal compres' è dagli umani ingegni,
Che 'l vuol saper convien che prima mora.

What I yearn for and learn from your fair face
Is poorly understood by mortal minds;
Whoever wants to know it must die first.

This sonnet for Tommaso de' Cavalieri was written in 1532, and is, much like *A che più debb'i' omai l'intensa voglia*, an attempt to clarify some misunderstanding about the relationship on Cavalieri's part. The poem is full of innuendos ("You know that I know, my lord, that you know"), giving a very personal and private nature to the poem. The tone of the poem has been thought by most to be defensive, with the understanding that outsiders might draw the wrong conclusions about his feelings for Cavalieri and may assume that Michelangelo was homosexual.[117]

The poem contains at least one reference to the works of Dante: the opening line may be taken from his Inferno 13:25, "*Cred' ïo ch'ei credette ch'io credesse.*"[118] The octave and sestet have a regular rhyme scheme of *abba* for the quatrains and *cde* for the tercets. The punctuation clearly divides the sestet into two tercets. Unlike many of the other poems, this one only has one enjambment, from line 1 to 2.

The theme of the poem is actually very straightforward, despite the concealing construction of the language. In the octave, the lover implores the beloved to break down the wall that exists between them (essentially the hope that the beloved has given in to the lover's desire, and the desire itself), so that the love between them can be realized. He first tells the beloved that his feelings about him cannot be a secret, thus he should not delay in acknowledging the love. In the sestet, the lover tries to quell the unease of the beloved over his love for him, stating that his love for him was inevitable because of their pure spirits. This is a reference to Ficino's idea that lovers are drawn to one another because of similarities.[119] He then compares the love to the ecstasy that one feels upon death when the soul reaches heaven, saying that such a spiritual and pure love cannot be comprehended by those who are still bound by earth, an image which finds its origins in Ficino's concept of spiritual ascent after the achieving of perfection in love.[120]

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[117] Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 207. See also Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 154.

[118] "I believe that he believed that I believed." Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 155.

Rendete agli occhi mei, o fonte o fiume (G. 95; Sonetto XXXVIII)

Rendete agli occhi mei, o fonte o fiume,
L'onde della non vostra e salda vena,
Che più v'innalza e cresce, e con più lena
Che non è 'l vostro natural costume.

E tu, folt'aïr, che 'l celeste lume
Tempri a' trist'occhi, de' sospir mie piena,
Rendigli al cor mie lasso e rasserena
Tua scura faccia al mie visivo acume.

Renda la terra i passi alle mie piante,
C'ancor l'erba germugli che gli è tolta,
E 'l suono eco, già sorda a' mie lamenti;

Gli sguardi agli occhi mie tuo luce sante,
Ch'i' possa altra bellezza un'altra volta
Amar, po' che di non ti contenti.

Give back to my eyes, O fountain and stream,
The waves from that spring, perpetual but not yours,
Which swells and lifts you higher, with stronger flow
Than you possess in your natural course.

And you, dense air, who shade the heavenly light
From my sad eyes, and are full of my sighs,
Give them back to my weary heart, and clear
Your darkened face for my penetrating sight.

Let the earth give back to my feet their footsteps,
So the grass taken from it may sprout again;
And Echo, now deaf to my plaints, return my sound,

And your blessed lights the glances to my eyes,
So I may love another beauty once again
Now that you are not satisfied with me.

This poem is one of the rare examples in Michelangelo's poetry of the use of pastoral images, which were popular in Italian poetry at the time. The poem was written for Cavalieri between 1534 and 1538, during the time Michelangelo began cultivating a relationship with Febo di Poggio, a liaison that disintegrated rather quickly.[121] The rhyme scheme is typical: the quatrains rhyme *abba* and the tercets *cde*. The sestet is broken into two tercets by the punctuation. The poem contains several enjambments, from lines 3 to 4, lines 5 to 6, lines 7 to 8 and lines 13 to 14.

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[119] Kristeller, Philosophy of Ficino, 277.

[120] Ibid., 268.

[121] Ibid., 222.

The poem relates to G. 89, *Veggio co' be' vostr'occhi un dolce lume*, through the use of many of the same images. In G. 89, the lover claims that only because of the beloved's eyes and feet can his own eyes and feet function, and because he illuminates him, like the sun lights up the moon, does he exist. This sonnet asks for his own eyes, feet, and light back so that he may give them to another. The beloved can be found in the metaphors of Nature. He is the fountains and streams, but not those that flow eternally toward a Higher course; he is the air, but not the clear air that allows the light to shine through; and he is the earth which no longer bears green grass. In line 11, Michelangelo recalls the myth of Echo, who was condemned by Juno to repeat other's words. Because of his giving himself entirely to his beloved, the lover no longer has his own voice.

Michelangelo was clearly influenced by the Neoplatonists in the composition of this poem. First is the implied all-consumptive union between the lover and the beloved. The lover had given so completely of himself that he had, in effect, become the beloved, and now in his disillusionment with the lack of love from the beloved, he tries to regain control of his mind, soul, and body. In accordance with Ficino's reconciliation between Platonic concepts of love and Christian love, the pursuit of God in beauty required the total devotion of the lover to the object of beauty in order to realize the Higher Good, from which all beauty derives. In the case of two persons seeing the beauty in each other, mutual love was necessary for the attainment of spiritual perfection. In this poem, Michelangelo asserts that, like Echo, he gave himself so completely to the beloved, that he lost himself in the beloved, but the beloved did not reciprocate by giving completely of himself. The lover realizes, then, that the union will not lead to God – the ultimate goal of the relationship – because the beloved has rejected him and mutual love has not occurred. In his rejection of the lover's admiration, the beloved becomes the opposite of beauty, which Michelangelo expresses by comparing the beloved to things in Nature that go against the beauty of God.

S'un casto amor, s'una pietà superna (G. 59; Sonetto XXXII)

S'un casto amor, s'una pietà superna,	If one chaste love, if one sublime compassion,
S'una fortuna infra dua amanti equale,	If one fate are equally shared between two lovers;
S'un'aspra sorte all'un dell'altro cale,	If the hard lot of one troubles the other;
S'un spirto, s'un voler duo cor governa;	If one spirit; if one will governs two hearts;
S'un'anima in duo corpi è fatta etterna,	If one soul in two bodies is made eternal,
Ambo levando al cielo e con pari ale;	Raising both to heaven with similar wings;
S'Amor d'un colpo e d'un dorato strale	If Love with one blow and one gilded dart
Le viscer di duo petti arda e discerna;	Can burn and rend the vitals in two breasts;
S'aman l'un l'altro e nessun se medesmo,	If neither loves himself, and they love each other
D'un gusto e d'un diletto, a tal mercede	With one joy and one zeal, to such a degree
C'a un fin voglia l'uno e l'altro porre:	That both might wish to come to a single end:
Se mille e mille, non sarien centesmo	Thousands and thousands would not make a fraction
A tal nodo d'amore, a tanta fede;	Of such a love-knot, such fidelity,
E sol l'isdegno il può rompere e sciorre.	And only anger could untie and break it.

This poem was written in 1532, around the same time as G. 60, "*Tu sa' ch'i' so, signor mie, che tu sai.*" It follows the traditional sonnet form in design: an octave with two quatrains and a sestet with two tercets, but the rhyme scheme of the sestet is unusual. The octave follows the traditional form of *abba*; the tercets of the sestet, on the other hand, rhyme *cdd*, if one does not consider the consonants. It is unusual in Michelanglo's sonnets for the last two lines of the sonnet to rhyme. This occurred in only one other sonnet discussed, G. 98, "*A che più debb'i' omai l'intensa voglia*". The poem begins by having stops at the end of every line. Such end stops break down in the second quatrain, however, as he slips back into a pattern of enjambment. The enjambments occur from line 7 to 8, line 10 to 11 and line 12 to 13.

The theme of the poem is that the lover and the beloved should be of one mind, one body and one soul, an obvious Ficinian idea. Indeed, Michelangelo may have been thinking of the relationship which existed between Giovanni Cavalcanti and Marsilio Ficino and which was the subject of many of Ficino's poems. The language of the poem, though, is in the conditional. It contains ten conditional clauses, more than any other poem in his output.[122] The assertion, then, that the lovers should be completely one, depends on several factors. The conditions are as follows: 1) the love must be chaste; 2) the love must have compassion; 3) one fate must be shared; 4) the troubles of one must trouble the other for one will to govern both hearts; 5) one will must govern both hearts for the soul to become one; 6) the lovers must love only the other, not themselves; and 7) the lovers must wish to come to a single end. In other words, the lovers must become one and the same. Only when these conditions are met can the love be complete and eternal. It is interesting that Michelangelo ties the lovers together by so many threads, only to allow for anger breaking the bonds. Given this approach, the poem may have been written to chastise Cavalieri for some anger on his part. It is clear that Michelangelo wished for the relationship to be as he has described here and that Cavalieri was resisting his desires. That anger could break the relationship points to Michelangelo's lack of hope in realizing the relationship as he desired it.

The poem contains several references to Ganymede. The image of winged flight, which had appeared in G. 89 (*Veggio co' be' vostr'occhi un dolce lume*), occurs again in line 6, recalling the drawing that Michelangelo made for Cavalieri. The second reference has to do with the idea of spiritual union.[123] In the legend, as Jupiter disguised as an eagle carries Ganymede toward the heavens, he engulfs Ganymede and they become one.

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[122] Ibid., 152. The poem is modelled after Petrarch sonnet no. 224, *S'una fede amorosa.*

[123] Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 119.

Spirto ben nato, in cu' si specchia e vede (G. 41; Sonetto XXIV)

Spirto ben nato, in cu' si specchia e vede	High-born spirit, in whose pure and precious limbs
Nelle tuo belle membra oneste e care	There can be seen, as if within a mirror,
Quante natura e 'l ciel tra no' può fare,	How heaven and nature can create among us
Quand'a null'altra suo bell'opra cede:	A work which yields in beauty to no other;
Spirto leggiadro, in cu' si spera e crede	Fair spirit, within whom one has hope and faith
Dentro, come di fuor nel viso appare,	Of finding, as there appears on your outward face,
Amor, pietà, mercè, cose sì rare,	Love and pity and kindness, things so rare
Che ma' furn'in beltà con tanta fede:	That they've never been found with beauty to such a degree:
L'amor mi prende e la beltà mi lega;	Love takes me captive and beauty binds me fast,
La pietà, la mercè con dolci sguardi	While pity and kindness, with your sweet glances,
Ferma speranz'al cor par che ne doni.	Seem to give some firm hope to my heart.
Qual uso o qual governo al mondo niega,	What custom or earthly law, what cruelty
Qual crudeltà per tempo o qual più tardi,	Either now or later, could wish to prevent
C'a sì bell'opra morte non perdoni?	Death from sparing such a beautiful piece of work?

This poem, written in or after 1530, is the only one in Britten's song cycle that was not written for Cavalieri. It is not known exactly for whom it was intended, if indeed anyone at all. The structure of the octave and sestet is traditional, but the rhyme scheme is not. In the octave, the *abba* form of the quatrains is maintained, but in the sestet, the rhyme scheme is *cdd* (discounting the consonants), which has the final two lines rhyming, much like G. 59 and G. 98. Enjambment occurs several times: from line 1 to 2; from line 5 to 6; and from line 10 to 11.

The work contains several Platonic ideas obviously gleaned from Ficino and a reference to Petrarch.[124] In the first quatrain, the Platonic idea of beauty descending from a divine creator is explored in the idea of the mirror. The beauty of the beloved is explained as being a reflection of nature, which is in turn a reflection of heaven. This relates to the first poem, *Sì come nella penna e nell'inchiostro*, and the idea of the *concetto* in the artist's material. As the work of the artist is reflective of the artist himself, the most beautiful person is the most reflective of God, his Creator. In the second quatrain, the persona expresses the hope that the beauty of the beloved contains the love that can lead him spiritually to heaven, because the beloved is the most beautiful he has seen. The first tercet of the sestet explores this concept further, describing how the beloved's beauty has ensnared him and how the beloved's kindness has given him hope for a further relationship. In the final tercet, the lover tells the beloved that he cannot imagine that any earthly thing could stop him from saving the beloved from destruction and that even Death would spare the beloved because of his great beauty.

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[124] Petrarch sonnet no. 53:1-4, 248. Saslow, in Poetry of Michelangelo, 121.

Although the poem is not addressed to Cavalieri, it explores many of the desires that Michelangelo had for that relationship. He essentially describes in this poem the foundation for the frustration and turmoil that he feels when Cavalieri does not return his love with the same passion with which he has given him his. As the lover first sees the beloved, the beloved's beauty becomes apparent to him, as does the possibility of spiritual fulfillment through their union. Because the beloved is so pleasing to the lover, the lover expresses to him the hope that a union will occur and that the union will lead to God. Unlike the previous poems in which the beloved is frequently chastised for inattentiveness, the beloved, in acts of kindness and consideration, has given the lover encouragement to hope for the union.

Conclusions

Michelangelo's poems, like his sculpture and paintings, are in many ways a self-portrait. The love poetry represented here reveal Michelangelo's feelings about the beloved, or the effect that the beloved has had upon him. In several, the tone is so obscure, yet so personal, that the poem can only be addressing a specific event in an attempt to appease Cavalieri or correct some problem, real or imagined. These poems are full of Neo-Platonic concepts about beauty and love, but they break the limitations of these ideas by using a very personal and tormented language.

The formal structures also show a lack of convention in an attempt to break out of the bounds of the sonnet form to express his tormented thoughts. The constant use of enjambment shows his lack of comfort with the constraints of the form.[125] Instead of paring the words to fit the form, Michelangelo twists the form to fit the words, much in the same way that he would have chiselled out a form from a block of marble. Moreover, though the sestet of a Petrarchan sonnet can have varying rhyme schemes, convention dictates that the final two lines should not form a rhyming couplet. In these seven poems alone, he rhymes the vowel sounds of the final two lines in three poems. Several of the poems, also, use the same vowels for both octave and sestet, which shows Michelangelo's concern for the sound of the poem. Despite his lack of study in grammar and rhetoric, in which he would have learned the conventions of sonnet form, Michelangelo was well acquainted with the sonnets of Petrarch. His abandoning of the "rules" suggests two possibilities: 1) that content was more important than form; and 2) that poetry as a whole was moving away from the old strict forms. An examination of these ideas is warranted, but it is beyond the scope of the present study.

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[125] Clements asserts that Michelangelo's use of enjambment was reflective of his attitude toward form in art: "These overflows did not bother Michelangelo, any more than did his painting across the guide lines plotted out in advance on the Sistine ceiling." Poetry of Michelangelo, 33.

CHAPTER IV

BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S MICHELANGELO SONNETS: THE MEANING BEHIND THE FORM

Premiere and Reception

The premiere of Britten's second song cycle, the Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, op. 22, took place on the 23rd of September 1942, at Wigmore Hall in London during a concert sponsored by Britten's publishing firm, Boosey & Hawkes. The cycle, performed by Britten at the piano and Pears, shared the concert with compositions by John Ireland, Béla Bartók, and Arthur Bliss, and was the first new Britten work heard in public since he had returned from America.[1] The reviews of the cycle were overwhelmingly favorable, with the Bartók receiving mild approval.[2] For Britten, the adulatory reviews of the Michelangelo Sonnets provided a welcome respite from the negative and sometimes spiteful reviews which had plagued his early works. Edward Sackville-West, music critic for the New Statesman and Nation, embraced the sonnets with an abundance of enthusiasm:

> After the interval came the first performance of Benjamin Britten's *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* for tenor and piano. I suggest that these are the finest chamber songs England has had to show since the seventeenth century, and the best any country has

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[1] The program was as follows: 1) "Sonata No. 2 in A minor for violin and piano" by Ireland; 2) "Contrasts" for violin, clarinet and piano by Bartók; 3) the Britten; and 4) "Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet" by Bliss. Britten, Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976, ed. Donald Mitchell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1079. N.B., There is a typographical error in the caption under a reproduction of the program. The date should read 23 September 1942, not 1943.

[2] Only the Britten and Bartók works were entirely new to the audience and thus of interest to the reviewers.

> produced since the death of Wolf. It was high time the long, sinuous, rhetorical Italian line reappeared in English vocal music, which was dying of a surfeit of Brahms, on the one hand, and of folk tunes on the other. One could take a phrase from one of these sonnets and refer it to Puccini; but the point really is that that phrase is an echo of another in *Falstaff*, and that one again an echo of still another in, say, *l'Incoronazione di Poppaea.* By sheer sense of style, working in close harmony with profound emotion, Britten has revived a whole tradition in these songs. The experience was indescribably moving – the more so as the means are extremely economical; the accompaniment is often a mere outline, never more than a simply followed figure. To have attempted to set these sonnets, which equal Shakespeare's in subtlety of thought and feeling, was a courageous act; it could only succeed supremely or fail completely. The enthusiasm of a numerous audience made clear which was the case. More, much more, could profitably be written about these superbly beautiful songs; here I have only the space to add that the singer, Peter Pears, is something of a portent, too. It is long since we heard an English tenor with a voice at once so strong, so pure and so sweet.[3]

If Sackville-West's reception comes across as overly warm or suspect, it is important to note that he and Britten possibly knew one another before Britten left for America. His letters to Britten suggest that he was very deeply attached to him, and may have wished to pursue a romantic relationship with him as well. In 1943, the two collaborated on a play, The Rescue, with Britten providing the incidental music. During this time, Sackville-West wrote in a letter to Britten that he was "a heavenly genius and potentially the greatest composer of the new era" – no small praise.[4]

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Gerald Abraham was less complimentary in the Observer, but did not dismiss the work altogether. The review, however, is filled with back-handed compliments:

> Bartók's corpus of work gives us a standard by which to judge everything new he writes: the trouble with Britten is that he seems to have no standards even for his own guidance. "Nella penna e nell' inchiostro è'l alto e'l basso e'l mediocre stile,' [sic] sang Peter Pears – a little too rumbustiously – in the first sonnet, and the composer kept on reminding us of this truism, aiming at (and sometimes achieving) the lofty

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[3] Edward Sackville-West, Review of Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, New Statesman and Nation, 3 October 1942.

[4] Mitchell, Letters from a Life, 1126. For further information, see page 1125 as well.

> style, collapsing into banality, but (thank Heaven) avoiding the rolled golden mean of competent mediocrity. As in "Les Illuminations", he has set himself a difficult problem though not quite so difficult this time, and solved it by using a crib.[5]

Other reviews of the Sonnets fall in between the sentiments expressed by Sackville-West and Abraham, but are complimentary and positive. Ferruccio Bonavia, critic for the Musical Times and Daily Telegraph, declared,

> The composer's attitude towards his text is neither that of the melodist (which is comparable to a dictator) nor that of the writer of dramatic recitative, which makes music subservient to poetry. In every one of these sonnets the heart is essentially musical; they interest us not only because they enhance the poet's emotion but because of the unconventional but wholly attractive nature of the musical elements.[6]

Ernest Newman, chief music critic of the Sunday Times (1920-1958), also noticed the treatment of the text: "I was particularly struck by the way in which the words and the sense and the emotional impulse of three or four lines of a poem at a time would be caught up and fused into a single ardent musical phrase."[7]

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[5] Gerald Abraham, "This Week's Concerts," review of Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo by Benjamin Britten, Observer (London), 27 September 1942. Mitchell thinks the last line of the review is a reference to a striking resemblance between "Le paon" from Histoires Naturelles by Ravel. Letters from a Life, 1077. I think that he could be referring to the fact that Britten was again composing in a foreign language, and that the sonnet form provided a rigid poetic framework with definite metrical considerations withing which to compose.

[6] Ferruccio Bonavia, "London Concerts: Boosey & Hawkes Concerts," review of Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo by Benjamin Britten, Musical Times 83 (1942): 318. In the Daily Telegraph, Bonavia expressed a similar view: "Britten's sonnets made a much deeper impression [than Bartók's work], for even at this first hearing some rare and valuable aspects of the work were evident. The writing is lyrical and, at the same time, utterly conventional. Every sonnet has an essentially musical core which is yet a true reflection of the poet's emotion." "Britten's Sonnet Settings: Notable New Work," review of Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo by Benjamin Britten, Daily Telegraph (London), 24 September 1942.

[7] Ernest Newman, review of Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo by Benjamin Britten, Sunday Times (London), 27 September 1942. Newman had been invited to attend the recital by Britten himself, in a letter written on the 18th of September 1942: "I do hope it will be possible for you to hear my new Michelangelo Sonnets at the Wigmore next Wednesday. But if you cannot get there, I would be only too happy to arrange a performance for you someother time at your convenience. I am so keen for you to hear

Gerald Abraham's lone negativism must be explained. First, his response is typical of his demeanor toward Britten throughout the composer's career. In his monograph, A Hundred Years of Music, Abraham describes Britten as:

> The most successful English practitioner of yet another form of *Gebrauchsmusik* – music for radio plays and features – is Benjamin Britten, who possesses clever, facile technique and a remarkable gift for evoking mood or atmosphere with a very few notes . . . .[8]

He goes on to write:

> His creativeness is obviously stimulated by . . . technical problems. When he lacks their stimulus or the stimulus of some particular virtuoso performer, when he has no atmosphere to evoke or dramatic characters to create, when (in short) he has to write an extended piece of pure music, . . . he is less successful.[9]

Second, Abraham's sentiments were undoubtedly colored by the views of Britten which predated the war and may have influenced Britten's decision to go to America. Many of the "old guard" composers and critics felt that Britten had achieved success too early and easily, thinking his prodigious output a product of facile technique and little hard work, as evidenced by Norman Demuth's comment:

> Britten has been spoilt by the ease with which he has obtained success. . . . An objective assessment suggests that while Britten is a notable figure in English music, he is not as outstanding as might be thought in any respect save that of fecundity. Cleverness is a trait which marred the 1920's; it does not yet seem to have been altogether eradicated.[10]

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them, as I am pleased with them myself – a very rare occurrence with me!" Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 390, dated 18 September 1942.

[8] Gerald Abraham, A Hundred Years of Music, 4th ed. (London: Duckworth, 1974), 293.

[9] Ibid. See also Abraham's review of Hymn to St Cecilia, Observer (London), 6 December 1942.

[10] Norman Demuth, Musical Trends in the 20th Century (London: Rockliff Publishing, 1952), 324 and 327.

The attitude adopted by Abraham seems to have been championed first by William McNaught in his review of a BBC live broadcast of Britten's Sinfonietta which took place on 29th of June, 1934.[11] McNaught's charge of Britten's being clever, a pejorative term at the time, was to follow Britten all of his life.[12] In 1952, weighed down by the accusations of the critics that he did not labor hard enough over his scores, Britten wrote back: "I can say with honesty that in every piece I have written, in spite of hard work, there are still passages where I have not quite solved problems,"[13] and followed this statement with a vicious attack on the character of critics.

For the time following the premiere of the Michelangelo Sonnets, however, Britten was basking in the fruits of success – offers of a recording contract and calls for future performances, including a return engagement at the Wigmore. In a letter to Ursula Nettleship after the recital, Britten declared: "Wednesday night was a grand success. Peter sang wonderfully & everyone was quite astounded. We were booked to record it for HMV immediately after the show!!!"[14] The success seems to have quelled the doubts that Britten felt about unveiling the work, and to a certain extent, his relationship with Pears, to the public eye, and abated the much of the negative press he had received as the result of his trip to America. A letter to Elizabeth Mayer, with whom he was quite candid, addresses his mental state preceding and following the concert:

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[11] Humphrey Carpenter writes that the broadcast took place on the 20th of June, which is in error. Benjamin Britten: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 59. See Mitchell, Letters from a Life, 343.

[12] McNaught wrote: "Benjamin Britten's Sinfonietta brought the concert to an end . . . with comedy. This young spark is good company for as long as his persiflage remains fresh, which is not very long. To do him justice his Sinfonietta closed down in good time. One hopes earnestly that he is aware of the nature of his present phase – a kind of programme-music phase, of which the programme is 'See how knowing I am, how much wiser than my years' – and that he intends sooner or later to use his exceptional talent for the working out of a different story, the gist of which is, 'You will like this.'" Musical Times (August 1934).

[13] Britten, "Variations on a Critical Theme," Opera 3 (1952): 144.

[14] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 391, undated.

> . . . [Peter] is singing better than ever and caused really a great sensation with the first performance of the Michelangelo last Wednesday! I sent you a cable about it – which I hope you got. It was very exciting, but how I wish you'd been there. I was dreadfully nervous – after all the wonderful times we had with it – with Mrs. Mahler & Werfel & the Wolfs, do you remember? – it was rather like parading naked in public.But the best happened & it was most warmly received & we have at once been engaged to repeat it in several places – at the National Gallery & also P. was signed to record it for H.M.V. (our Victor). . . .[15]

Subsequent performances proved just as successful as the first, and the recording, made on November 20th 1942 – was Britten and Pears's first together. Likewise the score was published as soon as possible, early in 1943. Both were well received – the score sold out twice[16] – with the exception of a review by Britten's fellow composer and supposed friend, Colin McPhee:

> The *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, for tenor and piano, say nothing at all to me. They are baroque and pompous show-pieces, pastiches that hold little interest. The Pucciniesque vocal line is brilliantly written, the Italian text admirably set. But there is little if anything personal in this music, and I am always amazed at the apparently great urge in Britten, a man of real musical gifts, to turn out one more genre-piece. Where the satisfaction lies I cannot understand.[17]

Britten was understandably hurt by McPhee's spite, writing to Elizabeth Mayer that he was ". . . a bit grieved by Colin's attack on the Michelangelo Sonnets."[18] McPhee's review had little effect on the success of the work thereafter, however, for audiences continued to request them both in England and on the continent, and as late as 1949, Britten and Pears performed them during a recital tour of the United States and Canada.[19] Today they are curiously neglected by singers in favor of the Serenade and Les Illuminations: only one other recording besides that of Britten and Pears's exists, and unfortunately, it is relatively unknown.[20]

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[15] Ibid., Letter no. 397, dated 30 September 1942.

[16] Ibid., Letter no. 443, to Elizabeth Mayer, dated 8 December 1943.

[17] Colin McPhee, "Scores and Records," review of score to Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo by Benjamin Britten, Modern Music 21 (1943-44): 48-49. Interestingly enough, this citation is not included in the Britten Source Book under the heading for this work, or in any other category, nor are any of the other reviews quoted in this document. These omissions are, in my opinion, a grievous offense.

[18] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 463, dated 13 May 1944.

Critical Studies

In writings about Britten's music, the Michelangelo Sonnets are given scant attention. Although there are many reviews of early performances by Britten and Pears and score and recording reviews, these are only valuable insofar as they trace a critical history of the work. The first scholarly work to include a discussion of the sonnets is the Mitchell/Keller *Festschrift* from 1952, in which Peter Pears described the various songs and song cycles to date.[21] The book as a whole was not well received, but Pears's article was mentioned as being of value.[22] When studying the article, it is tempting to consider that Pears's thoughts on the cycle may have been influenced by discussions of the work with Britten. Unfortunately, Pears makes no such acknowledgement, so the descriptions of the individual songs can be taken as reflective only of Pears's opinion. For the present study, however, Pears's comments have been invaluable. He often sees the essence of the song but expresses it in a less technical fashion. Robert Gene Brewster's 1967 dissertation provides a different view of the cycle.[23] Brewster is concerned with classifying each song according to traditional paradigms of melody, harmony, rhythm, and form, but many of his labels are unsubstantiated. Moreover, the Michelangelo Sonnets receive only cursory attention.

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[19] A review of this performance by Robert Sabin is very complimentary, describing the songs as "superbly written." Sabin also mentions the connection between Ravel's "Le Paon" and "one of the set," though generously he allows that it may have been unconscious. "Peter Pears, Tenor; Benjamin Britten, Composer-Pianist, Town Hall, Oct. 23," review of Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo by Benjamin Britten, Musical America 69 (15 November 1949): 18.

[20] Britten, Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, Michael Sells, tenor and Evan Solomon, piano, TRC-117, TR Records, 1984.

[21] Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists, ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London: Rockliff, 1952), 59-73.

[22] See "Mr. Britten's Admirers," World Review 48 (February 1953): 59-60; Robin Mayhead, "The Cult of Benjamin Britten," Scrutiny 19 (1952-1953): 231-239; and Peter Tranchell, "Britten and Brittenites," Music and Letters 34 (1953): 124-132.

Both Peter Evans and Arnold Whittall include an analysis of the cycle in their works, but the individual songs do not receive equal attention.[24] Evans focuses his energies on the first sonnet, while Whittall places his on the second and seventh.[25] The work of each author complements the other because of their particular biases. Although he comments generally on the form of the songs, Whittall is largely concerned with their harmonic structure. He appears, however, to be biased by a concept of linear prolongation that he wants to prove in Britten's instrumental music.[26] Evans, on the other hand, centers on the melody, but includes some rather general statements about form.

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[23] Robert Gene Brewster, "The Relationship Between Poetry and Music in the Original Solo-Vocal Works of Benjamin Britten Through 1965" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1967).

[24] Peter Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979). Arnold Whittall, The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[25] Whittall had published an article including a detailed analysis of Sonetto XXXI in 1980, two years prior to the release of his book. The comments in the book are a truncated version of the analysis in that article: "The Study of Britten: Triadic Harmony and Tonal Structure," PRMA 106 (1980-81): 27-41.

Three more recent commentaries, by Graham Johnson, Stephen Banfield, and Humphrey Carpenter, do little to add to the body of knowledge concerning the cycle.[27] Johnson's remarks seldom reach beyond metaphorical descriptions, while Banfield writes sweeping generalizations concerning Britten's state of mind without benefit of Britten's letters and diaries. Carpenter relies heavily on the poetic text in his descriptive analysis, and is tempered overmuch by his belief that the cycle was intended to be a frustrated declaration of love for Wulff Scherchen rather than for Pears.[28]

Analytical Procedures

In studying Britten's Michelangelo cycle with a view toward identifying the effect of the musical form upon the poetic form, several issues come to the fore: 1) the articulation of the large-scale divisions of the poetic form (i.e., octave, sestet, quatrain, tercet) in the music, or the lack thereof; 2) the potential of the musical setting to make connections between lines of the text that might not otherwise have existed; 3) the potential of the musical setting to follow or imitate the thought processes of the poem or to highlight a particular aspect of the poem; and 4) the placement of the return in the music, when one occurs. These issues form the basis of the analytical procedures that I undertake in the ensuing discussion of Britten's musical settings of the sonnets.

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[26] "The individual songs sharpen the focus on fundamental harmonic procedures which, in symphonic music, will be spread out on a considerably larger scale. . . ." Whittall, Music of Britten and Tippett, 66.

[27] Graham Johnson, "Voice and Piano," in The Britten Companion, ed. Christopher Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 308-328; Stephen Banfield, Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Humphrey Carpenter, Britten: A Biography.

[28] Carpenter's assertions are discussed at length in Chapter II of the present study.

Although each song in the cycle has its own textual and musical problems to solve, the issues of coincidence between musical form and poetic form as outlined are common to all. In the discussion of each song, therefore, I present only the findings that are pertinent to the uncovering of the musico-poetic form. Thus, where appropriate, the analyses are conducted on various levels of the form-defining musical elements, including melody, harmony, pitch, timbre, and dynamics: 1) the macro-level, or the large-scale musical form, and 2) the micro-level, or the phrase and motivic structures.

General Techniques in Britten's Michelangelo Sonnets

With the musically-dramatic opening of the first of the Michelangelo Sonnets, Britten sets the tone for the entire cycle. Peter Pears has described it as setting ". . . a high Renaissance tone of tremendous athleticism and confidence."[29] Similarly Graham Johnson has said: "The first sonnet (XVI) is a proud and powerful declaration: the opening gesture in the piano part sounds like the flourish of a quill pen certain of what it is going to write and far mightier than a sword."[30] The opening is indeed striking, owing much to the rhythmic drive of the bare octaves (*x*) toward the downbeat chord (*y*) and the economy of material (see Example 3).[31]

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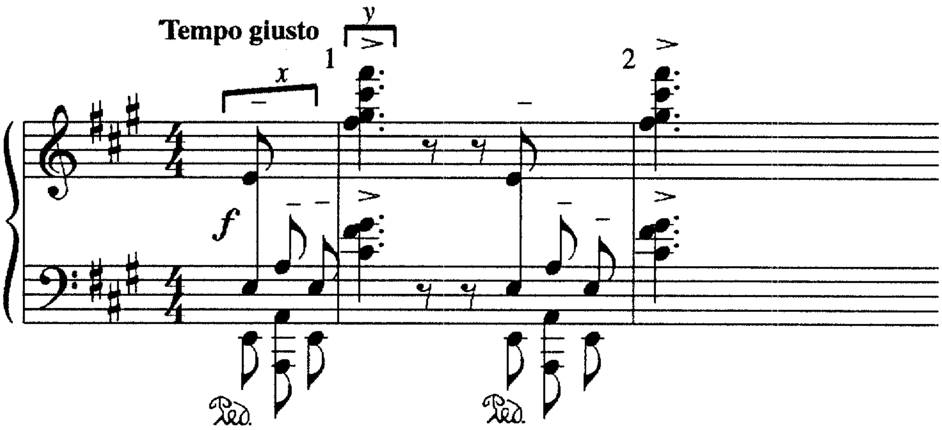
[29] Pears, "Vocal Music," 66.

[30] Johnson, "Voice and Piano," 290.

[31] The published score contains a number of word hyphenation inaccuracies in the Italian text. With a view toward editing a new edition of Britten's vocal works, I have corrected the errors when they occur.

Example 3: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 1-2.[32]



The sense of drama created here, however, is not unlike what Britten had done and was to do in the opening of several other song cycles, as Examples 4a-d illustrate. Although the function of the openings in terms of their relationship to the rest of the song vary within the context of the song from which they are taken, the dramatic intent of each is apparent. The first song of On This Island, "Let the Florid Music Praise" (1937), begins with a downward flourish, a D-major arpeggio, which then generates through various musical devices, almost the entire accompaniment (see Example 4a).[33] The gesture foreshadows a reference to the trumpet from the text, as well as imbuing the introduction with a sense of celebration that is appropriate to the text. As in the opening of "Sì come

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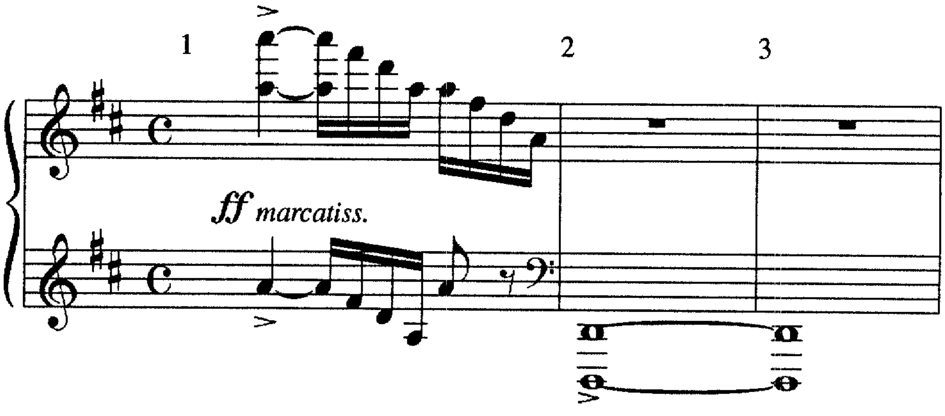
[32] Britten, Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, Winthrop Rogers Edition (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1943). Copyright 1943 in U.S.A. by Boosey & Co., Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

[33] It is interesting to note here that Britten changed the opening at the request of Frank Bridge. Britten wrote: "He also got me to change the opening of 'Let the florid music praise,' the first song in my Auden cycle, 'On This Island.' Originally it began with a downward glissando on the piano. Bridge hated that, and said I was trying to make a side drum or something monotonal out of the instrument: on the piano, the gesture ought to be a musical one. So I rewrote it as the present downward D-major arpeggio." "Britten Looking Back," Musical America 84 (February 1964): 4, 6.

Example 4a: On This Island, "Let the florid music praise," mm. 1-3.[34]



nella penna", the downbeat is clearly set, but this is not true for the "Oh my blacke Soule" (1945), the first of the Donne Sonnets (see Example 4b). Here, the downbeat is obscured by the anacrusis-like rhythm, which is defined only after the entrance of the voice. The bare octaves are reminiscent of the Michelangelo cycle, and again, the opening gesture generates the accompaniment for the rest of the song. The drama here, however, is not in flourish, but in sparseness, which suggests the blackness of the soul. Britten approaches this economy of material in the opening of *Sì come nella penna*, but with a very different result. Two other examples should be cited as well: the first of the Thomas Hardy cycle, Winter Words (1952), "At day-close in November" (Example 4c) begins with an upward rush, the counterpart to the flourish in On This Island; and *Menschenbeifall* from Sechs Hölderlin Fragmente (1960) begins with bare octaves (Example 4d).

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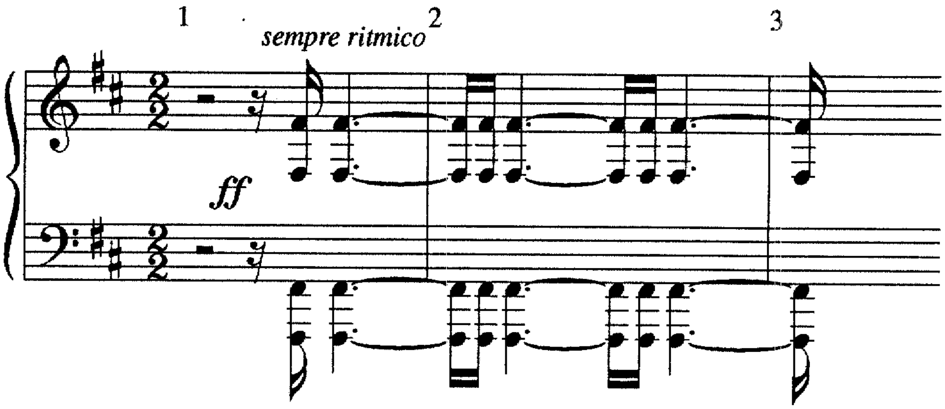
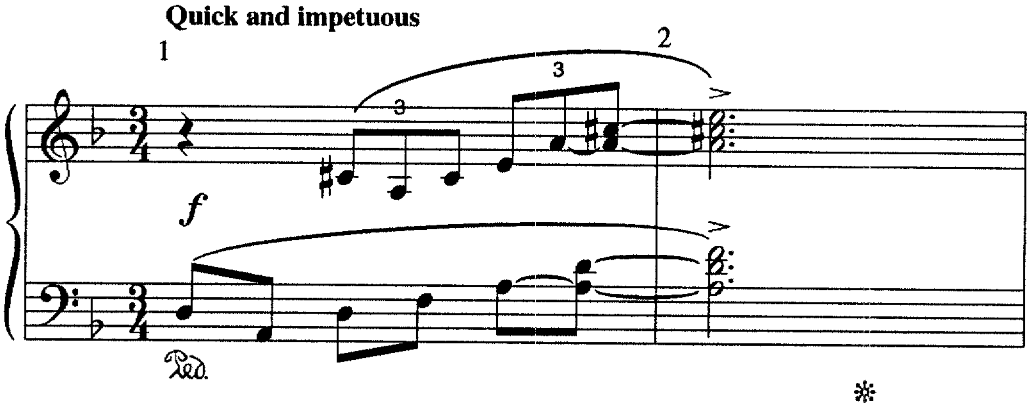
[34] Britten, On This Island, Winthrop Rogers Edition (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1938). Copyright 1938 by Boosey & Co. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

Example 4b: The Holy Sonnets of John Donne, "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 1-3.[35]


1
2
3
sempre ritmico
ff

Example 4c: Winter Words, "At day-close in November," mm. 1-2.[36]


Quick and impetuous
1
2
3
3
f
Ped.
*

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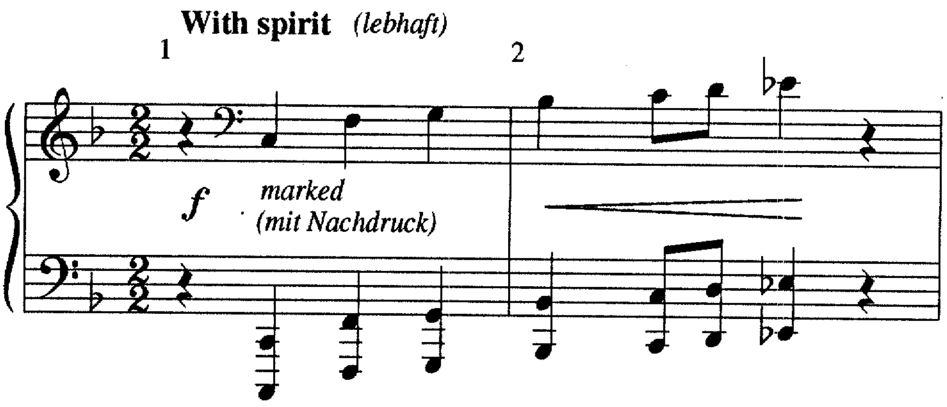
[35] Britten, The Holy Sonnets of John Donne (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1946). Copyright 1946 in U.S.A. by Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

[36] Britten, Winter Words (London: Boosey & Co., Ltd., 1954). Copyright 1954 by Boosey & Co., Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

Example 4d: Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente, *Menschenbeifall*, mm. 1-2.[37]



By setting up a recurrent pattern in the accompaniment of the first song, Britten also establishes a procedure that he explores in the songs that follow and in several of his later cycles. The opening gesture in Sonetto XVI functions as both a rhythmic and melodic motive which repeats throughout the accompaniment at various pitch levels and with only a few changes in the intervallic content of the chord. In the remaining songs of the cycle, the pattern established at the outset in the accompaniment is much more persistent, functioning almost as a dominant *Affekt,* as Peter Pears referred to the accompaniments of the Donne Sonnets.[38]

Britten also sets up in the melody a pattern which he follows for several of the sonnets: he states a phrase, then repeats it exactly or with changes to the ending that allow it to progress to the next different phrase, implying a rhyming couplet effect, as in *aa bb cc*, etc. This is an interesting approach in comparison with the rhyme schemes of the sonnets, which feature two quatrains with palindromic rhymes, and two tercets with individual lines that do not rhyme, generally in the form *abba abba cde cde*. Michelangelo's sonnets are considered as reflecting the traditional divisions of the octave and sestet into two quatrains and two tercets, respectively. He also makes extensive use of enjambment, which serves to destroy the impact of the end rhyme. The lines consist of eleven syllables, although much elision is required in some, as in line 6 of Sonetto XVI, "*Quante l'orgoglio, è forse ogni atto umile,*" which, without elision, comprises fifteen syllables. Britten alternately does and does not set required elisions, which indicates that his melodic line was inspired more by the flow of the poetic line than the surface connections between syllables. Since Britten's approach to the construction of the melody of these settings establishes a pattern that conflicts with the rhyme schemes of the sonnets, one might wonder how Britten reconciles the musical form that results from his melodic process with the form of the sonnet he is setting.

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[37] Britten, Sechs Hölderlin Fragmente (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1962). Copyright 1962 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

[38] Pears, "Vocal Music," 70.

An Analysis of the Musico-Poetic Form in Britten's Michelangelo Sonnets

Sonetto XVI

Sì come nella penna e nell' inchiostro

Sì come nella penna e nell' inchiostro	Just as there is a high, a low, and a middle style in pen
È l'alto e 'l basso e 'l mediocre stile,	and ink,
E ne' marmi l'imagin ricca e vile,	and as within the marble are images rich and poor,
Secondo che 'l sa trar l'ingegnio nostro;	according as our fancy knows how to draw them forth:
Cosi, signior mie car, nel petto vostro	so within your heart, dear love, there are perhaps, as well as
Quante l'orgoglio, è forse ogni atto umile:	pride, some humble feelings:
Ma io sol quel c'a me propio è e simile	but I draw thence only what is my des[s]ert and
Ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro.	like to what I show outside on my face.
Chi semina sospir, lacrime e doglie,	Whoever sows sighs, tears and lamentations
(L'umor dal ciel terreste, scietto e solo,	(Heaven's moisture on earth, simple and pure,
A' vari semi vario si converte),	adapts itself differently to different seeds)

Però pianto e dolor ne miete e coglie:	reaps and gathers grief and sadness:
Chi mira altà beltà con si gran duolo,	whoever looks on high beauty with so great a grief reaps
Dubbie speranze, e pene acerbe e certe.	doubtful hopes and sure and bitter pain.[39]

The formal concepts of departure and return, combined with a conflict between two diatonic scales, are at work at various levels in the musical structure of Sonetto XVI, and serve to impose a new form on the existing poetry. The two-measure introduction presents the material for a tonal conflict between A major and F# Aeolian that persists throughout the song and that influences the points of harmonic departure and return, thus generating the form (refer to Example 3).[40] The *x* motive, consisting of bare octaves, suggests A major through a dominant-to-tonic-to-dominant gesture. The reference to A is short-lived, owing to the C#-F#-G# chord that appears on the downbeat. While the function of this essentially quartal chord is not clearly established in the introduction, its meaning becomes apparent after the entrance of the voice. The fact that its highest note is an F#, and its lowest note is a C#, the dominant of F#, indicates that it makes tonal reference to F#, the diatonic scale of which becomes the basis of the melodic line that follows. Moreover, the three pitches of the C#-F#-G# chord are all highlighted in some fashion during the course of the song.

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[39] The English translations are by Elizabeth Mayer and Peter Pears and can be found in the front of the score, Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1943). For the sake of clarity, I have not used the form in which Mayer and Pears presented their translations, but have placed the English in juxtaposition with the line of Italian to which it corresponds. The Italian words are taken from the score, but are based on Guasti's edition from 1863 which were included in the John Addington Symonds translations that Britten used while composing the cycle. Symonds's translations may be found in Appendix A. There are several changes or misprints in the Italian text as it appears in the score: in line 5, "*signior*" should be "*signor*," and there should be a comma at the end of that line; in line 11, the word "*si*" should be "*se*;" and in line 13, the word "*alta*" was given an accent that does not appear in Guasti's edition.

[40] Arnold Whittall has identified the scale of the first phrase as F# Dorian. The key signature and lack of a D# in the melody supports F# natural minor, or Aeolian, instead. Whittall, "Britten's Song Cycles," 4.

In the setting of the first quatrain of the sonnet, the first melodic phrase, which corresponds to the first two lines of the poem, is doubled in octaves in the accompaniment, and starts out from F# (see Example 5).[41] It ascends through both C# and E to F# an octave higher to form an antecedent or head (mm. 2-4), and descends from an A down to the original F# to form the consequent or tail (mm. 4-6). The high point of the phrase occurs at the reiteration of the pitch A in mm. 4 and 5, one of the protagonists in the tonal conflict. The juxtaposition of this pitch with its dominant note E, conforms with the A major suggestion of motive *x*; this A-major reference is immediately modified by means of interval expansion, so that A refers successively to D and C#, and is thereby reconciled with the F# suggestion of motive *y*. Indeed, the first three pitches of the consequent, A to E to A, answers the dominant-tonic-domimant gesture of motive *x* in the introduction (refer to Example 1). The phrase then turns back toward F# in a cadential pattern that mirrors the one found at mm. 3-4.

Britten's setting of these first two lines of the poem is interesting with regard to his treatment of the accents, the number of syllables in each line, and the rhyme. The contrasting rhyme of *ab* is ignored because he places both final syllables on an F#, although an octave apart. In treating the elisions, Britten sets the elision between "*penna*" and "*e*" in the first line, but skews the accent of the word "*inchiostro*" by giving the final syllable agogic, and tonic, and metric accents. He lessens the number of syllables in the second line to ten through extensive use of elision, and accents the unaccented syllables, until he reaches the word "*mediocre*" as in "***E l'al-to e'l bas-so e'l me-dio-cre sti-le.***" It is interesting that the misaccented words in this melodic phrase correspond to the reference to A major. Furthermore, the accent on the final syllable of "*inchiostro*" from the first line, occurs on an F#. Britten may have been deliberately creating a metric disturbance in connection with these pitches to highlight the conflict between them.

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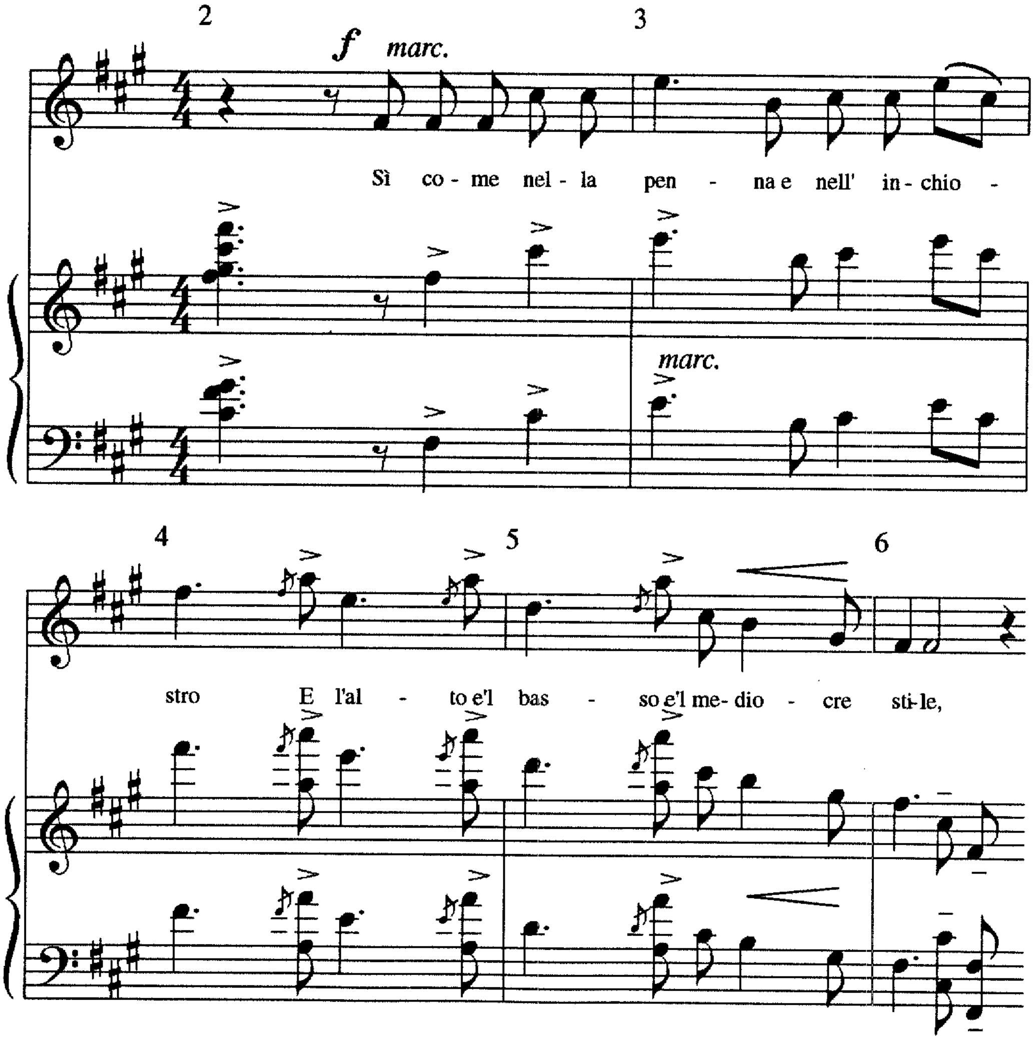
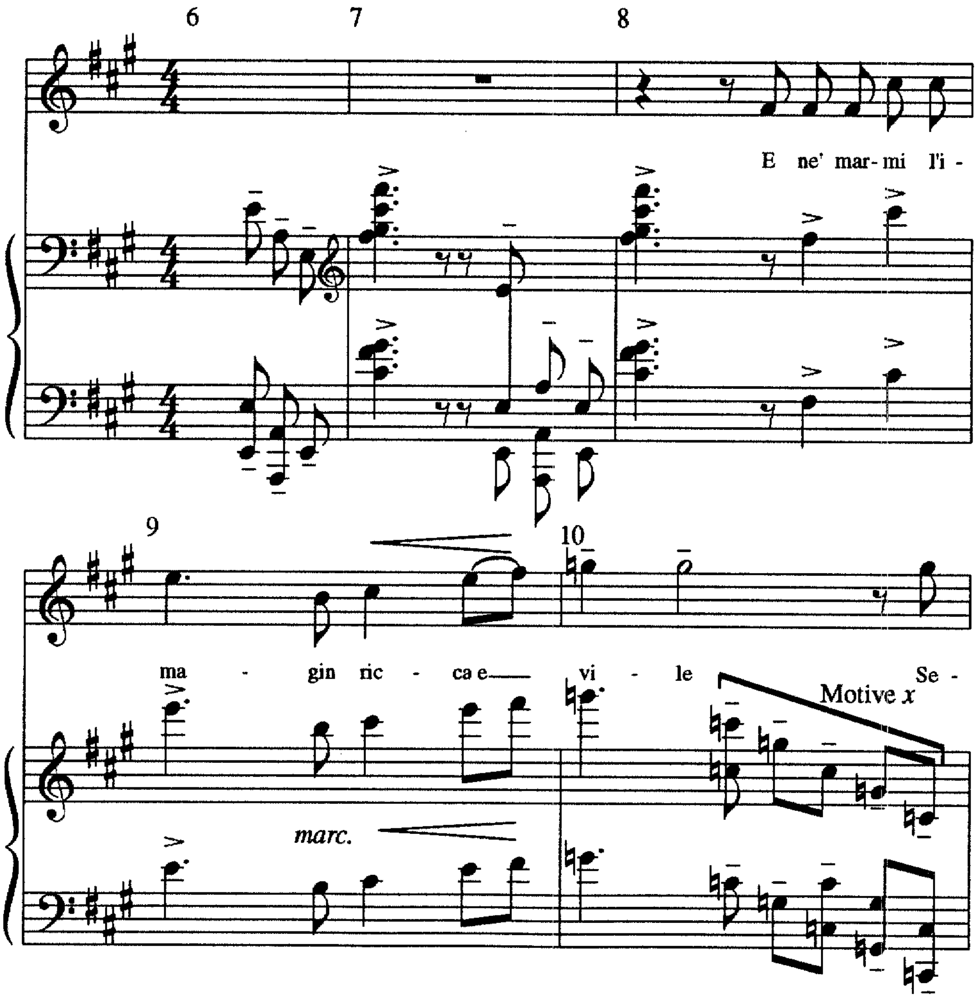
[41] The accompaniment follows the voice here for a reason: throughout the piece, the opening gesture returns as filler between phrases or fragments. In these first two phrases, however, there is no space for the gesture to fill so the accompaniment parallels the voice. Moreover, Britten is highlighting the conflict of A/F# minor by emphasizing the melodic line over the accompaniment.

Example 5: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 2-6.

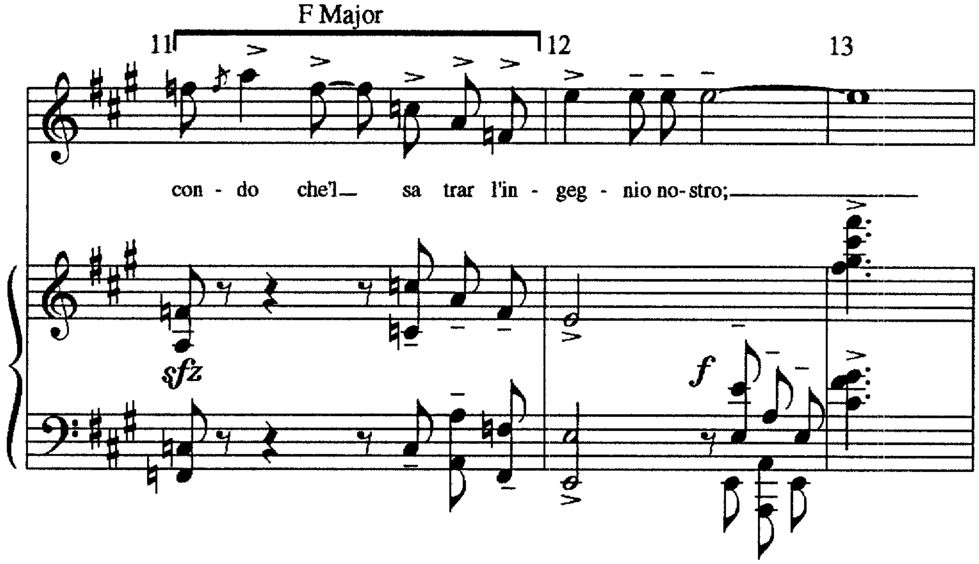

2
3
f marc.
Sì co - me nel - la pen - na e nell' in - chio -
marc.
4
5
6
stro E l'al - to e'l bas - so e'l me - dio - cre sti - le,

After an interlude which returns to the two-measure introduction, the second melodic phrase begins as a repetition of the first, complete with doubling in the accompaniment (see Example 6). A last-minute change before the expected cadence, however, from E-C#-F# to E-F#-G♮, sends the melodic line briefly toward C, which is confirmed by the use of C and G in imitation of motive *x* from the introduction (m. 10). Again, the two halves of the phrase, this time set apart by a rest to express the punctuation, have the relationship of antecedent and consequent. The first half ascends from F# through C# and E to a G♮, and

Example 6: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 7-13.



Example 6: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 7-13, cont.



the second half, in a related gesture to the second half of the first phrase, answers that with a descent from G♮ to E, the dominant of A, outlining a tertian harmony (F) with a typical "functional" resolution, ♭VI to V. The final upward leap to the E at the end of the phrase emphasizes the importance of that pitch, and suggests pairing it with the tonically accented A in m. 11. Britten rounds out this first section with a return to the introduction and a return to the first tonal reference to A.

Again, Britten uses interesting accentuation of pitches through misaccentuation of syllables. He emphasizes the rhyming relationship between lines 2 and 3 by using the same rhythmic cadence to set the feminine ending. In line 4, however, he skews the accents while the melodic line takes a turn toward C, and highlights both the A and the E: "*Se-con-**do*** (A) ***che'l** sa trar l'in-**ge*** (E)-*gnio no-**stro*** (E)."

In his setting of the first quatrain, which corresponds to the first musical section, Britten's accentuation of the words deals primarily with establishing the pitch regions that drive the composition, the A and the F#. In his construction of phrases, however, and their similarity to one another, he expresses the relationship between the two images that the text contains. The high, low and middle styles in writing of lines 1-2 of the poem, are similar to, but not exact copies of, those same styles in marble, from lines 3-4 (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

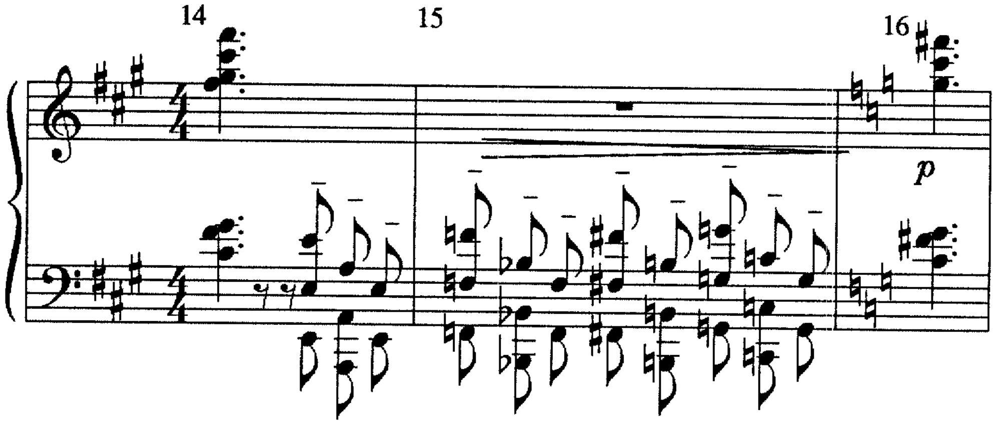
PHRASE AND TEXT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FIRST QUATRAIN OF SONETTO XVI

Image of the Line	Rhyme Scheme	Phrase Relationship
1-2: the high, low and	*a*	*a (beginning)* F# to F#
middle style of writing;	*b*	*a (ending)* A to F#
3-4: the images of marble	*b*	*a' (beginning)* F# to C
which we make happen	*a*	*a' (ending)* C/A to A

Before beginning his setting of the second quatrain, Britten departs from the tonal conflict of A and F# and makes a move toward C, using the *x* motive from the introduction in a chromatic ascent to G as dominant of C (see Example 7). He follows this with a C-level transposition of motive *x* combined with an intervallic adjustment of motive *y* at the original pitch level, F#, with C# and G# becoming C♮ and G♮, respectively. So, although the melodic line and accompaniment center around elements of C, the F# area is still very important.

Britten changes both the length and character of the melodic line in the second section by moving from using essentially four-measure phrases to two-and-a-half-measure phrases, which correspond roughly to the length of half of the first two phrases (see Example 8). Lines 5-7 are set to variations of the same gesture, with changes that make an

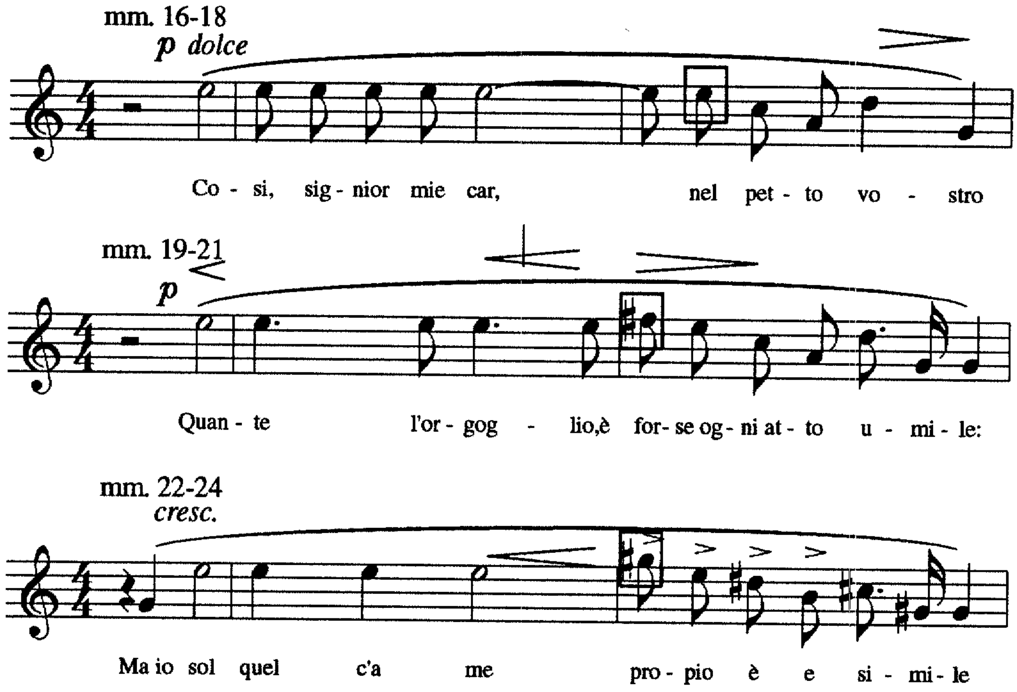
Example 7: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna,* piano accompaniment, mm. 14-16.



ascent from E to F# to G# occurring in the same place in the phrase. Because of the repeated notes in the first part of the phrase, the line has a recitative-like quality, which ends with a half-cadence gesture that suggests G as dominant of C. For each of the three lines of text, Britten gradually slows the rhythm of the repeated notes: from steady eighth-notes, to a dotted quarter followed by an eighth-note, to quarter and half notes. The three lines are also set apart by rests, with the result that Britten does not set the enjambment that occurs between lines 5 and 6 ("*Cosi, signior mie car, nel petto vostro / Quante l'orgoglio,*"). The lengthening of the phrases and the gradual deceleration of rhythm places stress upon the third phrase of the section.

At the change to G# in the third phrase, Britten returns to the original *y* motive (C#-F#-G#) to both harmonize that note and remind the listener of its connection to the F# tonal area (see Example 9). The chord punctuates the melodic setting of line 8, which returns to the cadence of the previous phrase (refer to Example 9), varies it through interval expansion, and then moves to a new cadential figure that descends toward F# with a tonic-dominant motion recalling the introduction. Britten follows this phrase with a transition in the accompaniment that imitates the vocal line, eventually giving way to the *x* motive from the introduction at the pitch level of C#, and the *y* motive in a new configuration, indicating the start of something new.

Example 8: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, vocal line, mm. 16-18; mm. 19-21; mm. 22-24.

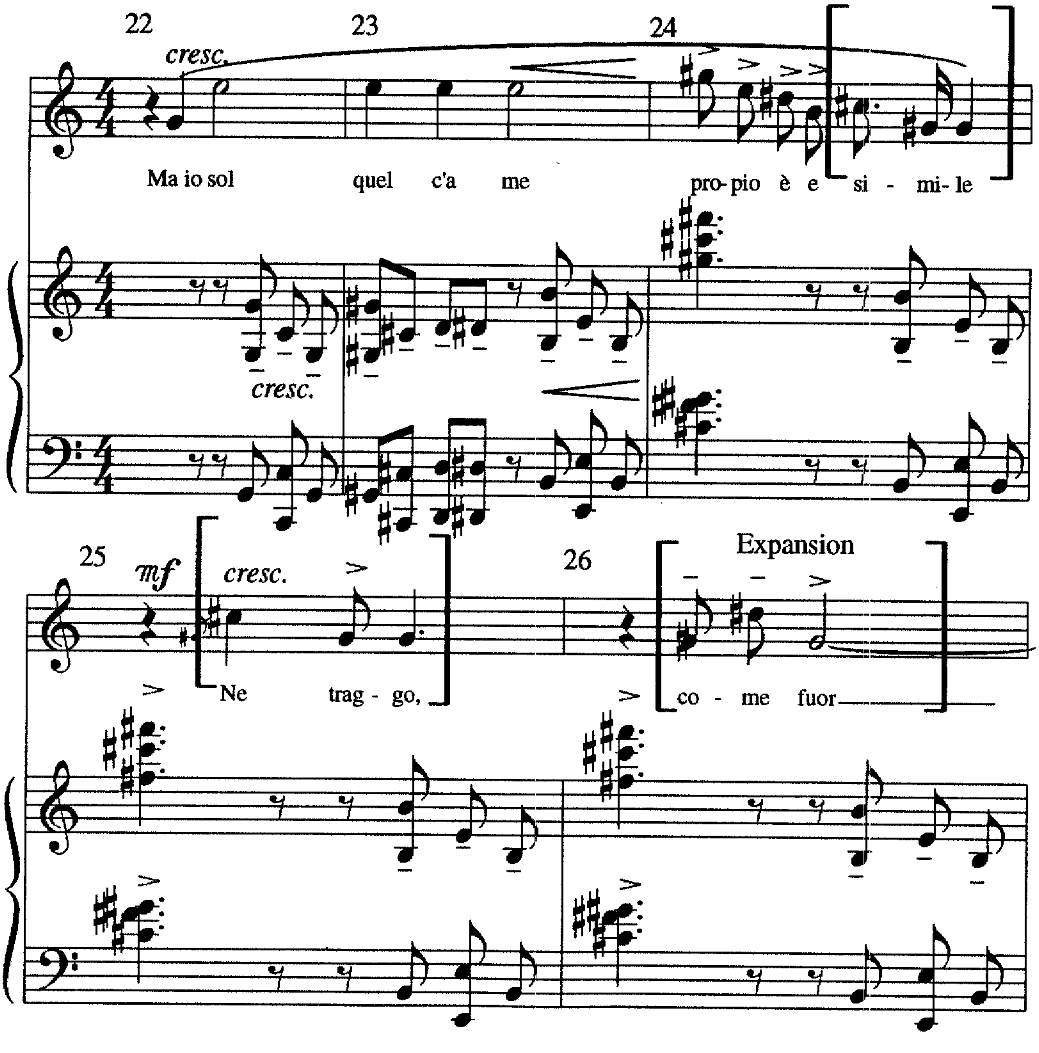

mm. 16-18
p dolce
Co - si, sig - nior mie car, nel pet - to vo - stro
mm. 19-21
p
Quan - te l'or - gog - lio,è for- se og- ni at - to u - mi - le:
mm. 22-24
cresc.
Ma io sol quel c'a me pro - pio è e si - mi - le

The concepts of departure and return work in several elements in this setting of the second quatrain. First, the pitch reference undergoes a radical change in the beginning, starting from C, but elements of F#, the focal point of the first section, remain in the *y* motive. Through chromatic motion under the third phrase, the emphasis shifts to A again with the *x* motive now at the level of the dominant of A, E. This gesture is followed by the *y* motive from the introduction, marking a varied return to the introduction and the tonal conflict that it expressed. After the conflict is established, the vocal line leads to a return of

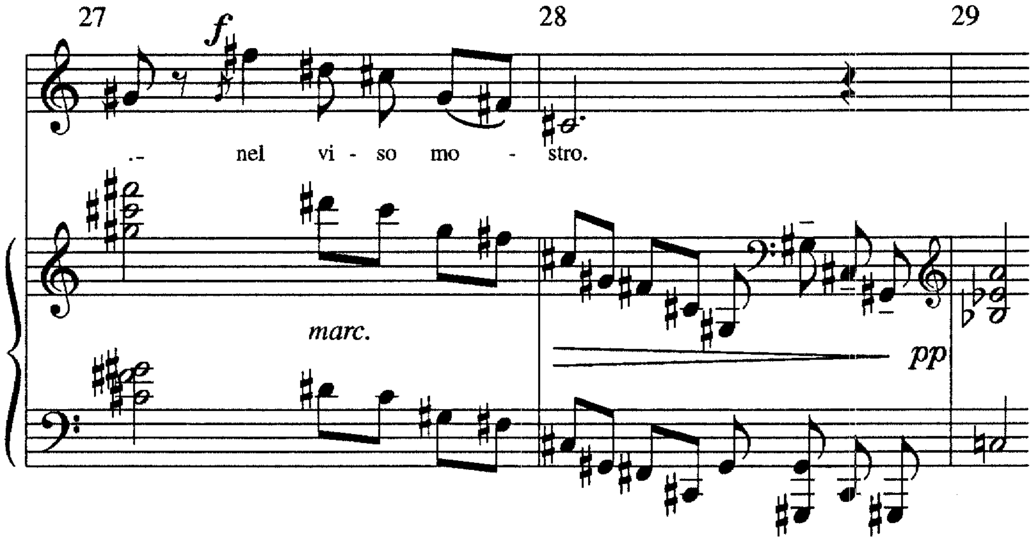
F# via its dominant C# for the start of the setting of the first tercet. Thus, although the section initially began with a departure from the tonal areas of the first section, it makes its way back to both A and F# through their dominants, E and C#, respectively.

The melodic line in the second section is constructed on the principles of departure and return. Departure results from interval expansion (E-F#-G#); return, on the other hand, comes from the reiteration of the *y* motive and the transposition of *x* to reinforce tonal reorientation on F#. The construction of the text, however, conflicts with this particular

Example 9: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 22-29.


22
23
24
cresc.
Ma io sol
quel
c'a
me
pro-pio
è
e
si
-
mi-le
cresc.
25
mf
cresc.
Ne
trag
-
go,
26
Expansion
co
-
me
fuor

Example 9: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 22-29, cont..



treatment of the vocal line.[42] In other words, there is no series of images that connect the first three lines of the second quatrain. Britten does, however, seem to be making a statement with regard to the meaning of the text (see Table 3). Through the interrelatedness of the four melodic phrases, he expresses the dependency of the lover on the beloved, for the lover obtains his qualities (*ll.* 7-8) from the beloved (*ll.* 5-6). The gradual deceleration at the beginning of the first three phrases places an emphasis on the lover's disclosure of his dependence in the seventh line.

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[42] As in the first quatrain, Britten sets the internal rhyme of this quatrain, lines 6-7, with the same rhythm. In the seventh line, he ignores some of the elisions in the second half of the line to increase the number of syllables to twelve, presumably to express adequately the change to the sharp side that occurs with that text.

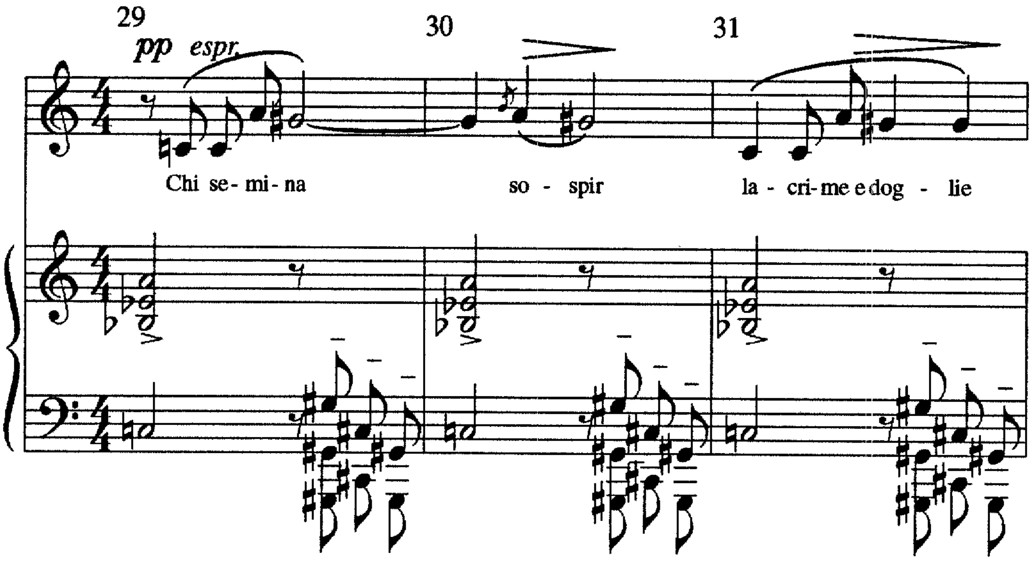
TABLE 3

PHRASE AND TEXT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SECOND QUATRAIN OF SONETTO XVI

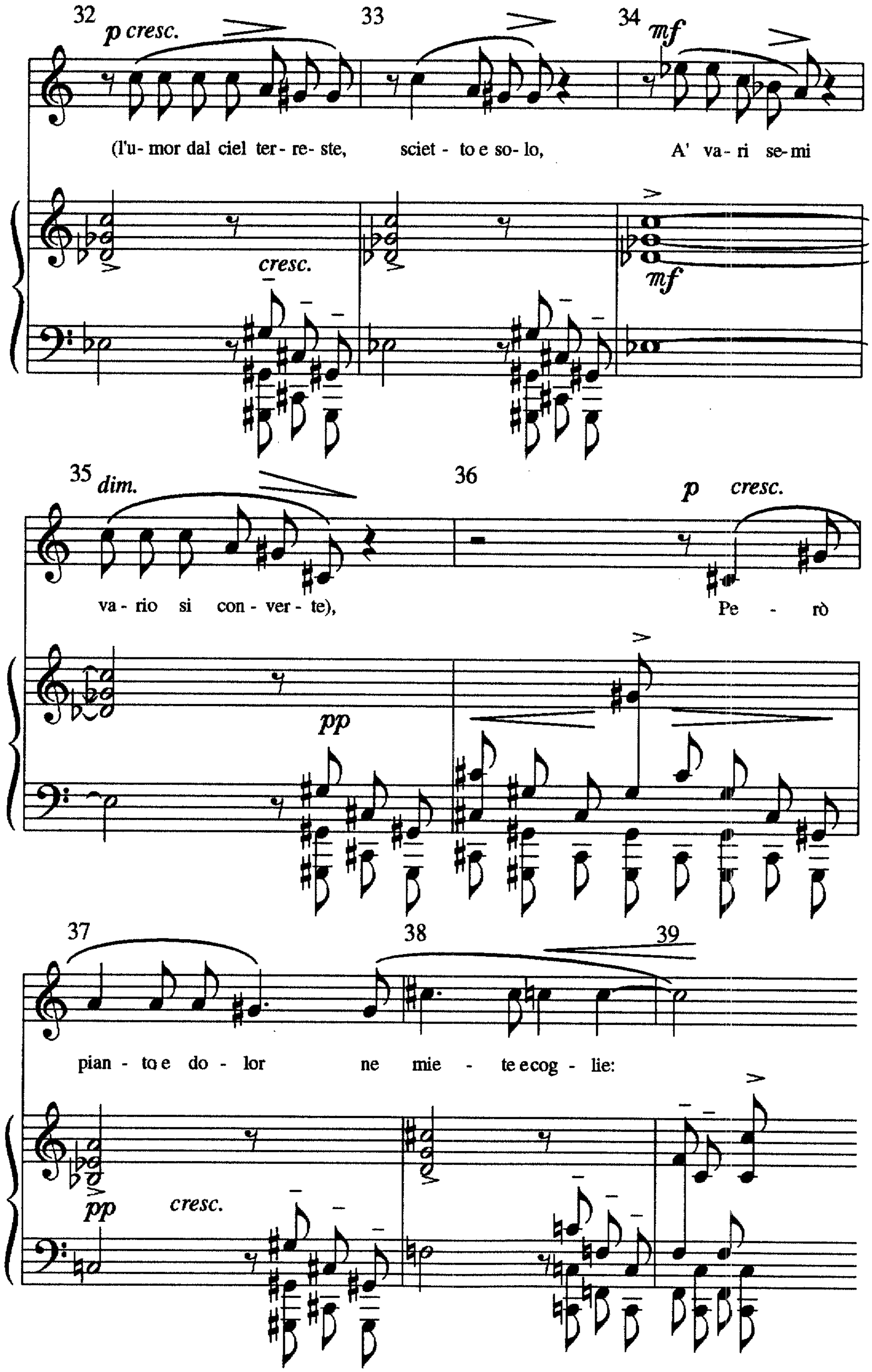
Italian Text	English Translation	Phrase Relationship
Cosi, signior mie car, nel petto vostro	So within your hear, dear love,	*b* (qualities of beloved)
Quante l'orgoglio, è forse ogni atto umile:	There are perhaps, as well as pride, some humble feelings:	*b* '
Ma io sol quel c'a me propio è e simile	But I draw thence only what is my des[s]ert	*b*" (dependency of lover)
Ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro.	And like to what I show outside on my face.	*b* '''

The third section of the song, which sets the first five lines of the sestet, departs from several elements of the two previous sections (see Example 10). The *y* motive occurs in several new guises, which include tonal references on the high pitches, including A, C, and

Example 10: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 29-39.



Example 10: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 29-39, cont.


32
p cresc.
33
34
mf
(l'u- mor dal ciel ter- re- ste, sciet - to e so- lo, A' va- ri se- mi
cresc.
mf
35
dim.
36
p cresc.
va - rio si con - ver - te), Pe - rò
pp
37
38
39
pian - to e do - lor ne mie - te e cog - lie:
pp cresc.

E, all of which have received focus previously.[43] The vocal line becomes more fragmented in response to the punctuation of lines 9-11, and Britten constructs the phrases out of a single three-note motive, as seen in Example 11. The pitch reference throughout centers around G♯ in the melodic line and C♯ in the reiteration of motive *x* that punctuates the held notes and rests. These two pitches outline the dominant of F♯, which parallels the reference to E, dominant of A, at the end of the second section.

One particular element of the motive that generates the melodic setting of lines 9-11 is a "sigh," seen in the descending half-step from A to G♯. The gesture gathers several images of the text for comparison and correspondence. From line 9, the words "*semina*" ("sows"), "*sospir*" ("sighs"), and "*lacrime e doglie*" ("tears and lamentations") are linked through the half-step. These words are connected to "*terreste*" ("earth") and "*scietto e solo*" ("simple and pure", or for "*solo,*" "alone") from line 10. These are very interesting connections in light of the Neo-platonic bent of the poetry. In the Neo-platonic concept of love, the love of beauty leads one to heaven, or to a spiritual goal. In other words, the sadness that the lover "sows" over the beloved leaves him on earth because his love is unrequited.

To mark the end of the first tercet of the sestet, Britten repeats the *x* motive at the level of C♯ as though a transition were occurring. The melodic setting of line 12, the first of the second tercet, begins with the three-note motive, with C♯ instead of C♮, and then transposes the half-step of the motive, A-G♯ to C♯-C♮ (refer to Example 10). The half-step, in turn, generates the melodic phrase that sets line 13, which consists essentially of

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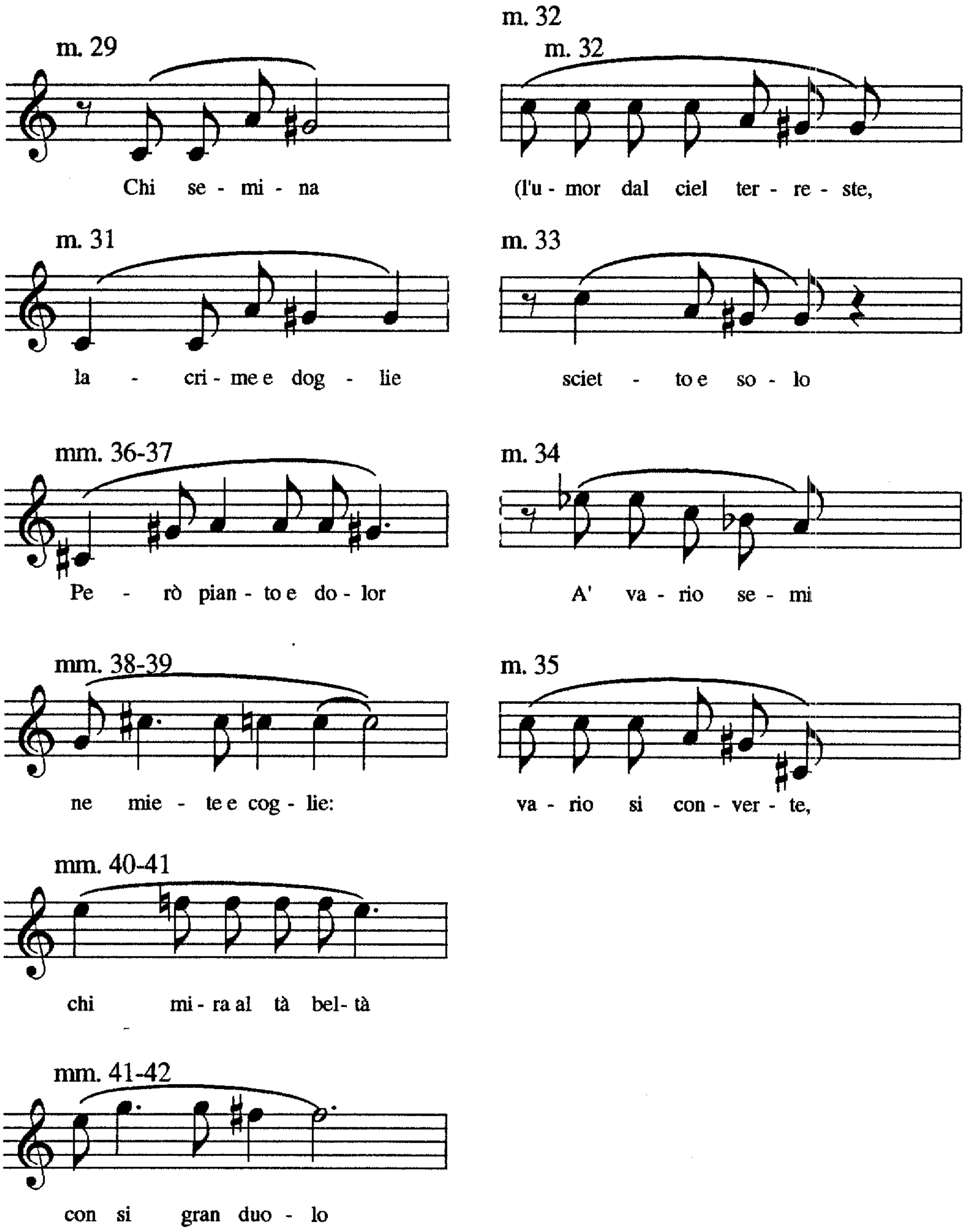
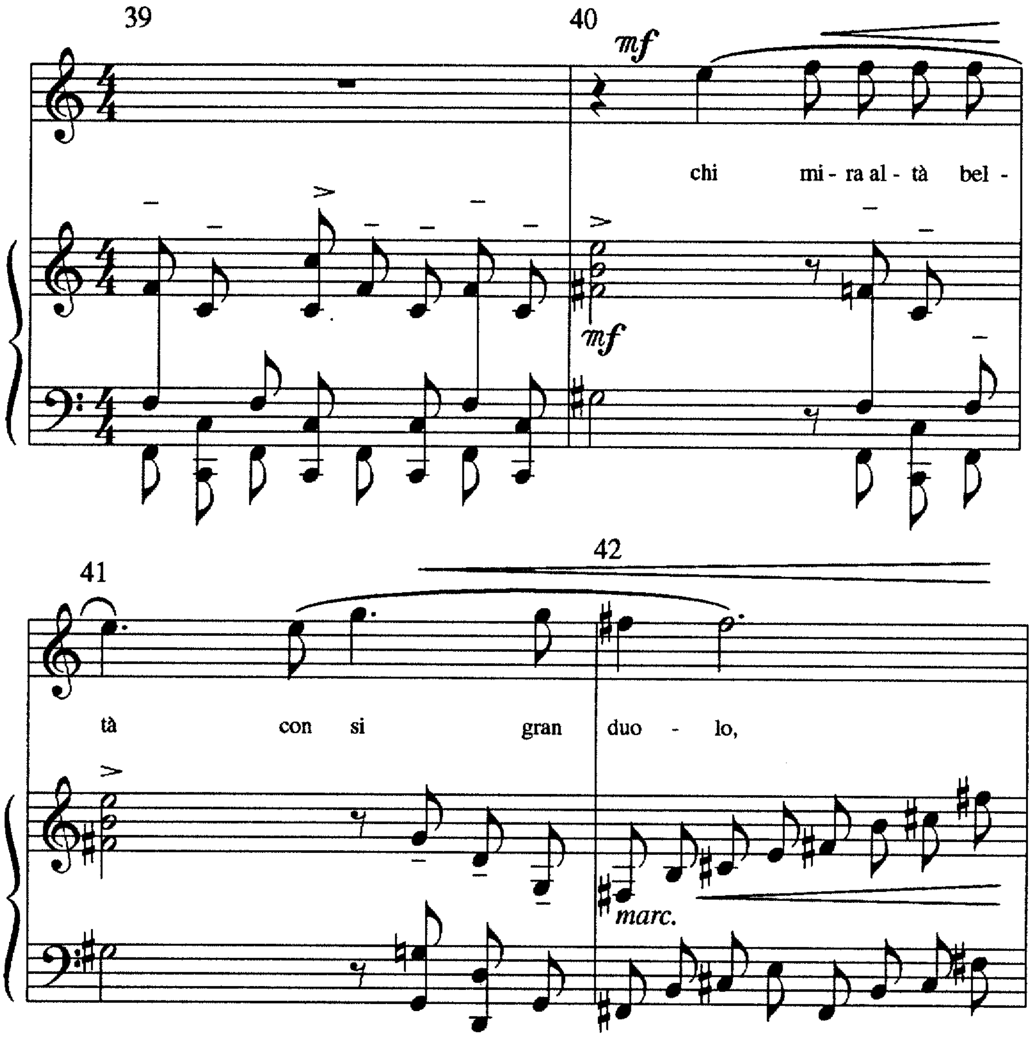
[43] The chords that appear on the downbeat throughout the song have been described in much rhetorical detail, with little attention paid to how they actually fit into the harmonic scheme. Most writers simply attempt to describe them intervallically and not harmonically. They also have been referred to as the reflection of "the poet's successive states of mind." Evans, Music of Britten, 82.

Example 11: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, motivic construction of Section *C*.


m. 29
Chi se - mi - na
m. 32
m. 32
(l'u - mor dal ciel ter - re - ste,
m. 31
la - cri - me e dog - lie
m. 33
sciet - to e so - lo
mm. 36-37
Pe - rò pian - to e do - lor
m. 34
A' va - rio se - mi
mm. 38-39
ne mie - te e cog - lie:
m. 35
va - rio si con - ver - te,
mm. 40-41
chi mi - ra al tà bel - tà
mm. 41-42
con si gran duo - lo

two descending half-steps at the relationship of a step apart, F♮-E and G♮-F♯,[44] and which puts F♯ and the dominant of A in prominent positions in the line (see Example 12). This

Example 12: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 39-42.



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[44] This particular arrangement of half-steps is a transposition of B-A-C-H (B♭-A-C-B♮). Whether Britten used this motive consciously to refer to the "high beauty" or the "great grief" remains undiscovered. Peter Pears, however, has commented that small details such as this can be found in Britten's music. Pears, Interview by Tony Palmer, in A Time There Was: A Profile of Benjamin Britten, produced by Nick Elliott, directed by Tony Palmer, 102 min., Kultur, 1980, videocassette.

phrase is given the smallest range of all the melodic lines, so it can be assumed that Britten meant for this line of text to be highlighted. Moreover, he includes his first touch of word painting by circling around the word "*altà*" or "high." Through the same rhythm of the feminine cadences from the first section, this phrase returns the pitch focus to F♯, initiating a transition back to melodic material of the opening.

Without benefit of the two-measure introduction, the first half of the *a* phrase from the first section recurs, doubled in octaves in the accompaniment (see Example 13). Britten accents the half-phrase through a long held note on the final syllable of the line, destroying the feminine cadence.[45] The *x* motive returns at the original pitch of A, and is followed by the *y* motive in its original manifestation. The voice repeats a portion of line 5, "*Signior mie car*," using a repetition of the first two notes of the continuation of the *a* phrase that emphasized A through a tonic to dominant motion, this time repeating the A-E motion in place of the interval expansion of mm. 4-5.[46] A repetition of motive *y* follows, ending with a dominant note to tonic cadence on A.

Britten's use of motivic construction in the third section helps to organize the text into a coherent scheme, placing the parenthetical remark of lines 10 and 11 into a context (see Table 4). The "sighs, tears and lamentations" of line 9 are united by the same configuration of the motive, featuring the C and A as an ascending major sixth. The parenthetical remark, which explains the unfinished statement, is set to a new version of the motive in which the ascending major sixth becomes a descending minor third, and which is subsequently transposed. The remainder of the statement begun in line 9, which occurs in

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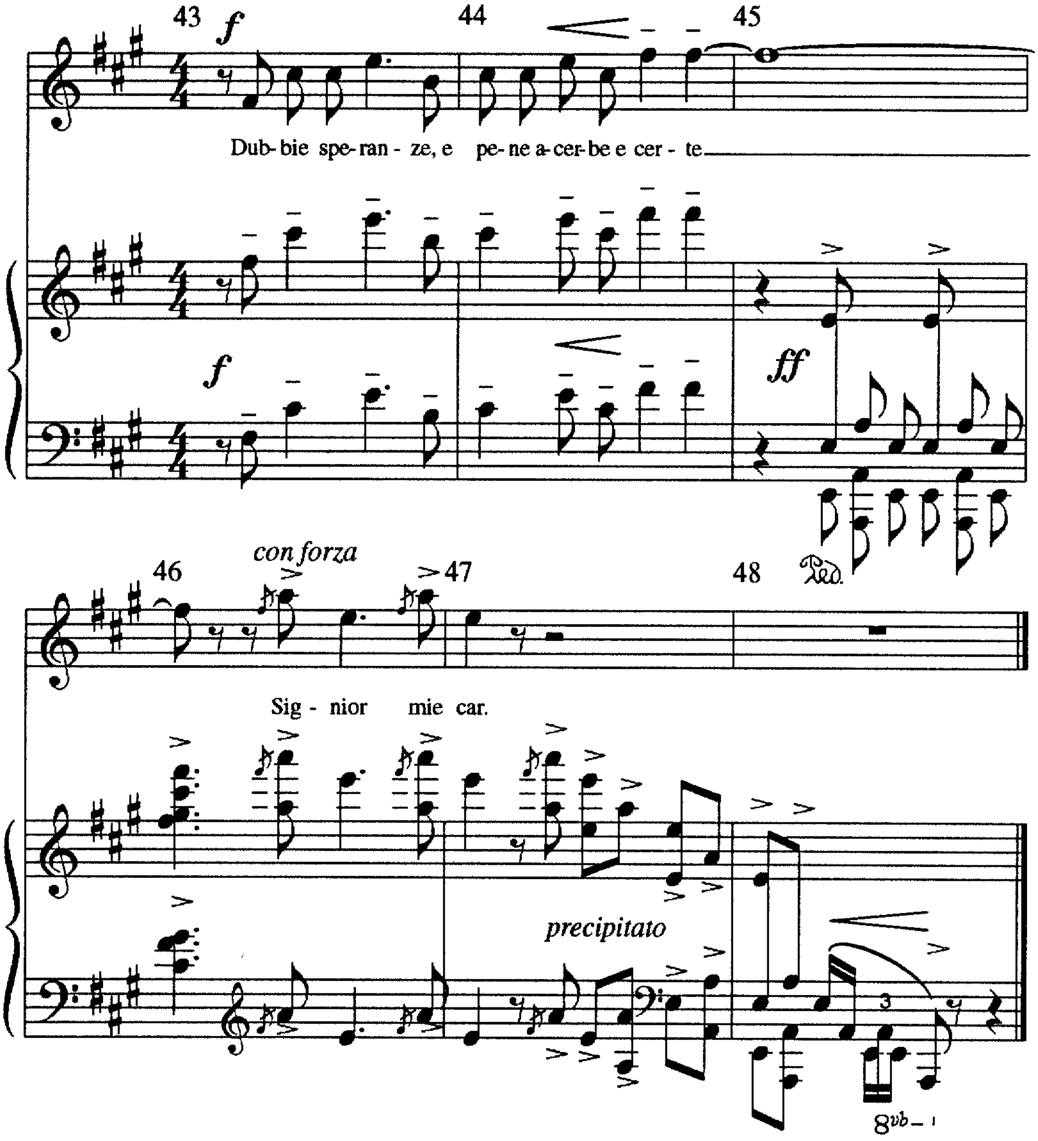
[45] In a revealing remark, Peter Pears said, "The eternal feminine ending of the Italian lines must have been a problem throughout, ..." Pears, "Vocal Music, 67."

[46] It is interesting that the grace notes occur on the pitch F♯.

Example 13: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, mm. 43-48.


43
44
45
46
47
48
f
ff
con forza
precipitato
Dub- bie spe- ran - ze, e pe- ne a- cer- be e cer - te
Sig - nior mie car.
8vb

line 12, is set using the original motive with a few changes, and builds on the half-step element. The thirteenth line, which begins similarly to line 9, is related to the rest of the section by the half-step that was extracted from the motive. The cadence of this phrase on F# at the word "*duolo*" or "sorrow," foreshadows the "doubtful hopes and sure and bitter pain" of the final line.

TABLE 4

MOTIVE AND TEXT RELATIONSHIPS IN LINES 9-13 OF SONETTO XVI

Italian Text	English Translation	Motive
Chi semina sospir	Whoever sows sighs,	*c* (sixth)
lacrime e doglie	tears and lamentations	*c* (sixth)
(L'umor dal ciel terreste,	(Heaven's moisture on earth	*c'* (third)
scietto e solo,	simple and pure	*c'* (third)
A' vari semi	To various seeds	*c'* (third) transposed
vario si converte),	adapts itself differently)	*c'* (third) original pitch
Però pianto e dolor ne miete coglie:	reaps and gathers grief and sadness	*c* (sixth) + 1/2 step expansion (*x*)
Chi mira altà beltà con si gran duolo	Whoever looks on high beauty with so great a grief reaps	*x* transposed

The purely musical form, as distinct from its combination with the poetic form, is defined by the three factors of melody, harmony and accompaniment. As has been seen, there are essentially three distinct sections with a short return to the *A* section at the very end (see Table 5). The sections are roughly the same length, with the exception of the final return which is considerably shorter. Each section has its own melodic identity, but certain melodic elements combine to generate the melodic material for the whole of the song (see Example 14a-c).[47] The lack of a balanced form in which the lengths of its respective

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[47] Peter Evans considers the song to be through-composed despite the clear return of a portion of the *A* section. Music of Britten, 81. Although the shortness of the return does not allow the form to be placed neatly into a category of musical forms, the song clearly cannot be termed through-composed because the very fact of a return, however brief, destroys this concept.

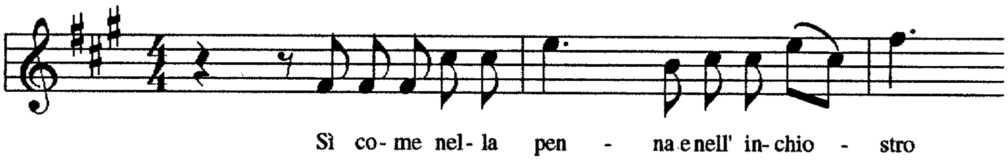
TABLE 5

MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF SONETTO XVI

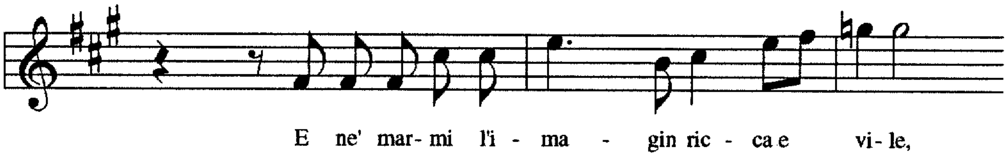
Measure nos.	Musical Form	Phrases	Poetic Form	Tonal Areas
1-13	*A*	*a; a'*	Octave *ll.* 1-2; 3-4	F#-C-A
13-15	transition			F-F#-G(C)
15-28	*B*	*b; b'; b''; bfrag*	Octave *ll.* 5; 6; 7; 8	C/E(A)/F#
28-42	*C* (climax)	fragments (*cde*)	Sestet *ll.* 9-13	C#(F#)
38-42	(transition)			F - G - F#
43-48	*A '*	return of 1/2 of *a*	Sestet *l.* 14	F#-A

Example 14a: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, motive *a* and its variants.

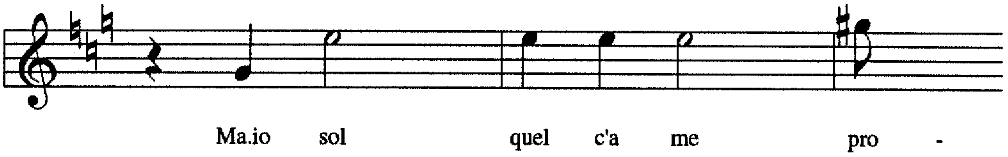
motive *a*, mm. 2-4


Sì co- me nel- la pen - na e nell' in- chio - stro

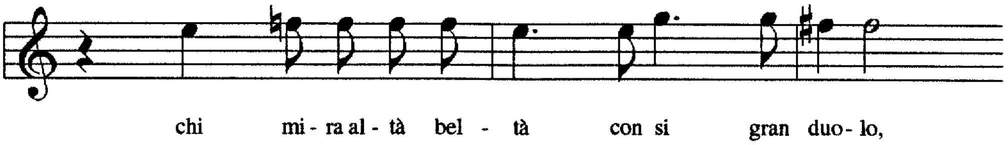
motive *a 1*, mm. 8-10


E ne' mar- mi l'i - ma - gin ric - ca e vi- le,

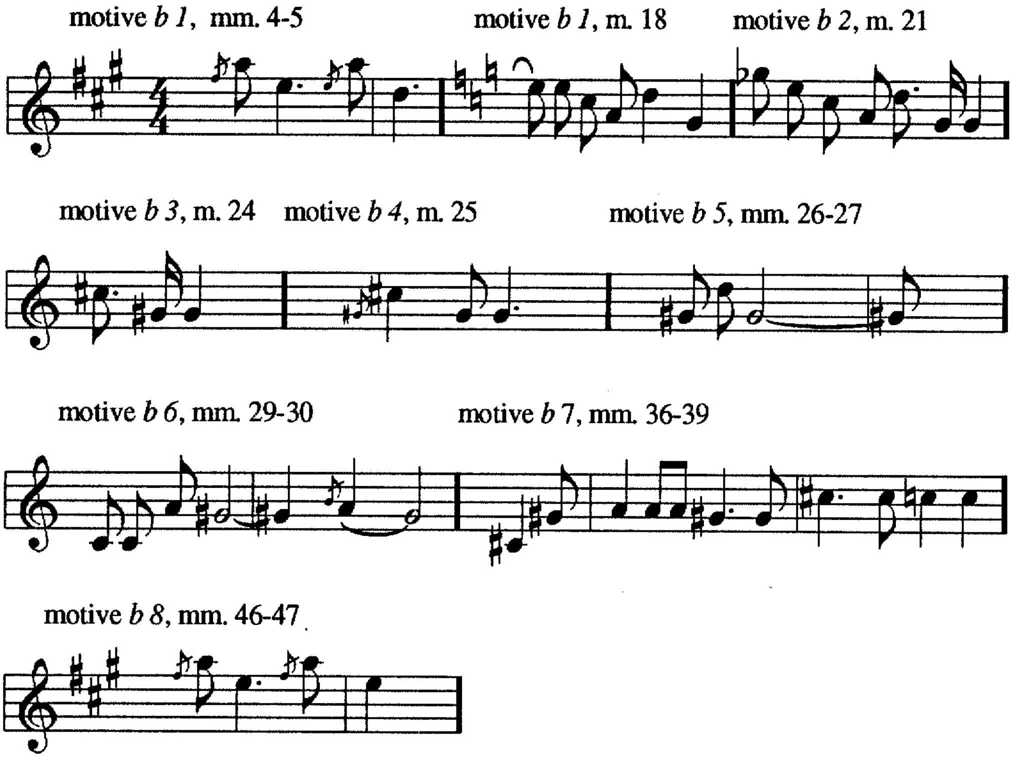
motive *a 2*, mm. 22-24


Ma.io sol quel c'a me pro -

motive *a 3* , (contraction of *a*), mm. 40-42


chi mi - ra al - tà bel - tà con si gran duo- lo,

Example 14b: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, motive *b* and its variants.



motive *b 1*, mm. 4-5

motive *b 1*, m. 18

motive *b 2*, m. 21

motive *b 3*, m. 24

motive *b 4*, m. 25

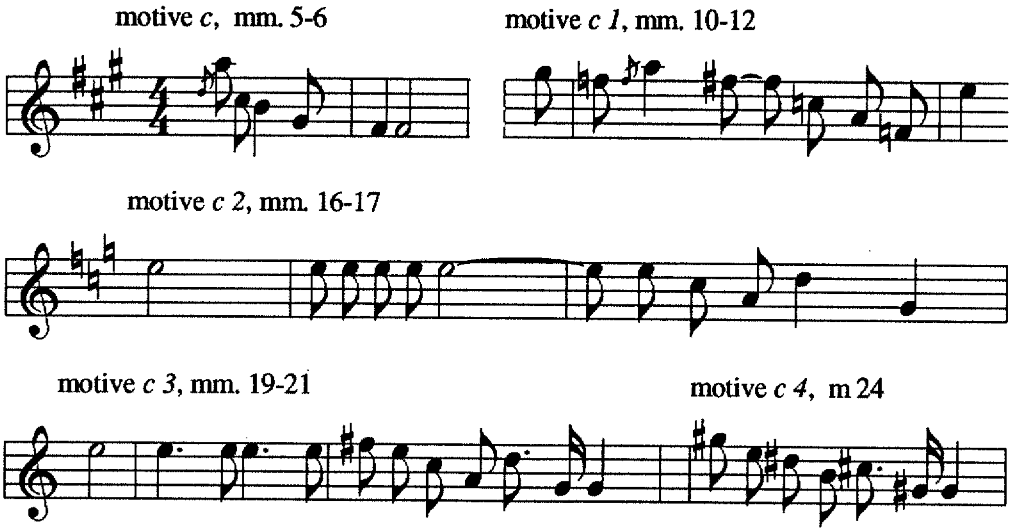
motive *b 5*, mm. 26-27

motive *b 6*, mm. 29-30

motive *b* 7, mm. 36-39

motive *b 8*, mm. 46-47

Example 14c: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, motive *c* and its variants.



motive *c*, mm. 5-6

motive *c 1*, mm. 10-12

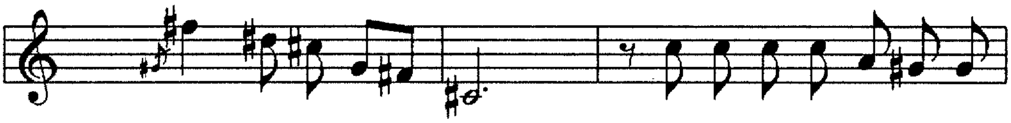
motive *c 2*, mm. 16-17

motive *c 3*, mm. 19-21

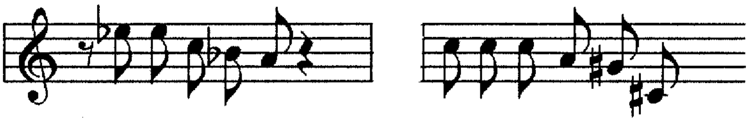
motive *c 4*, m 24

Example 14c: Sonetto XVI, *Sì come nella penna*, motive *c* and its variants, cont.

motive *c 5*, mm. 27-28 motive *c 6*, m. 32



motive *c 7*, m. 34 motive *c 8*, m. 35



sections are disproportionate, provides a clue about Britten's attitude toward the text: although he pays attention to the musical results, he may be concerned foremost with poetic interpretation through the musical form.

In this setting, Britten's octave is relatively stable, but the sestet contains both the melodic climax and the most intense harmonic conflict. The melodic and harmonic return, which serves as the musical resolution, seemingly does not agree with the traditional poetic form. The musical form, then, reinterprets the poetic form, giving it a new meaning (refer to Table 6).

Britten is careful to set the two quatrains of the octave as two sections, corresponding to the *A* and *B* sections of the form, but not without elements of the other in each, as seen in Britten's motivic construction of the melodic lines. In this song, motives are a by-product of a melodic line that was conceived by phrases and by the way in which these phrases connect and lead to one another in order to express the poetic content.[48]

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[48] Interestingly, Peter Evans has identified no less than eight motives which comprise the melodic line by breaking down each phrase into the smallest possible units. Music of Britten, 82. Britten's melodies are often conceived motivically, through combination, inversion, retrograde, expansion and/or diminution of intervals, and reordering of pitches. Evans's approach, however, a deconstructionist one, identifies more motives than is

TABLE 6

TEXT OF SONETTO XVI AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Musical Scheme
Sì come nella penna e nell' inchiostro È l'alto e 'l basso e 'l mediocre stile, E ne' marmi l'imagin ricca e vile, Secondo che 'l sa trar l'ingegnio nostro;	*A*: The medium in which we create our art holds all of the images that we project on to them in the act of creation; all we have to do is draw them out
Cosi, signior mie car, nel petto vostro Quante l'orgoglio, è forse ogni atto umile: Ma io sol quel c'a me propio è e simile Ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro.	*B*: In your heart there are many contradictory qualities, but I only see in you what I would like to see in myself
Chi semina sospir, lacrime e doglie, (L'umor dal ciel terreste, scietto e solo, A' vari semi vario si converte), Però pianto e dolor ne miete e coglie: Chi mira altà beltà con si gran duolo,	*C*: Whatever you sow on earth is what you reap, hence if you sow sighs and tears, then you reap sadness and grief; however, if one looks upon beauty with grief . . .
Dubbie speranze, e pene acerbe e certe.	*A'*: he reaps doubtful hopes and sure and bitter pain, because he can see only sadness in the beloved's beauty.

Typically the last line of each verse leads to the next through the changes made in the melody: line 4 leads to the *B* section with references to C; line 8 to the *C* section with the G#s; and line 13 leads to the return of *A* with an ending on F#. Britten's concept of the poetic form is more integrated than sectional, just as his musical form is highly integrated. One reason for this may be that Britten chooses not to set the rhyme scheme, focusing instead on the grammatical structures. For example, in lines 9 and 10 the ideas are fragmented and set off by commas. Britten sets the commas into the musical line by using fragments which occur every measure, making it the climax of the song. His phrases follow complete sentences or ideas, thus setting any enjambments that occur between the

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necessary to reach an understanding of the form and the way in which it interacts with the poetry.

lines of the poem. Each line of the poetry is set in its relationship to the next line, rather than in its position in the verse. The poem is not set line by line, but in the groups of related ideas presented in the lines. This is also evident in the fact that Britten repeats a portion of line 5 of the poem, "Signor mie car," at the very end as an impassioned cry, destroying the rhyme of the last line.

The physical, or sonnet form of the poem has another form superimposed upon it which holds the meaning. The form of the interpretation of the poem may be considered an inverted pyramid: the broad concept of the *concetto* (that the material of the art already holds the form or meaning of the art that the artist will reveal) is introduced in the first quatrain; the second quatrain presents a further refinement of the metaphor; and the sestet is pared down to only one facet of the broad concept. This is the form that Britten approaches in the musical form: the melody of the *B* section, which is the second quatrain, grows out of ideas found in the *A* section. Likewise, the *C* section, which consists essentially of melodic fragments, is based on ideas found in the *A* and *B* sections. As well, references to A and F#, the two protagonists of the *A* section abound in both the *B* and *C* sections (see Table 7), expressing further that the musical structure is unified and that the sonnet form develops through a progression of ideas.

The return to the *A* section at the final line of the poem, in addition to the repetition of words, may be seen as linking the words at the end to the broad concept of the first quatrain. The musical return, however, implies a return to the writer's feelings at the start of the poem, which is not found in the poetry by itself. Moreover, Britten returns to the opening melodic line even though he could have set the poem as through-composed, or in two contrasting sections delineating the octave and sestet.

Michelangelo's poem, which takes a dark turn at the sestet, holds the key. The sentences become fragmented and speak of sorrow and pain. By contrast, the octave

TABLE 7

THE RECURRENCE OF REFERENCES TO THE PITCHES A AND F# IN SONETTO XVI

Text	Musical Form	Pitch Reference
	Introduction	A → F#
Sì come nella penna e nell' inchiostro	*A: a*	F# - F#
È l'alto e 'l basso e 'l mediocre stile,		A - F#
E ne' marmi l'imagin ricca e vile,	*A: a'*	F# - C
Secondo che 'l sa trar l'ingegnio nostro;		C - A
Cosi, signior mie car, nel petto vostro	*B: b*	F# in downbeat
Quante l'orgoglio, è forse ogni atto umile:	*b'*	F# at change
Ma io sol quel c'a me propio è e simile	*b"*	dominant of A in acc.
Ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro.	*b" expanded*	F# cadence (1-5)
Chi semina sospir, lacrime e doglie,	*C: c + c*	dominant of F# in acc./ A in chord and melody
(L'umor dal ciel terreste, scietto e solo,	*c' + c'*	same
A' vari semi vario si converte),	*c' trans. + c'*	same
Però pianto e dolor ne miete e coglie:	*c expanded*	same
Chi mira altà beltà con si gran duolo,	*c expanded'*	dominant of A in melody/F# cadence
Dubbie speranze, e pene acerbe e certe.	*A' a beg. + 2 notes*	F# - F#; A - E in melody; E - A cadence

leaves room for the image (or *concetto*) of the beloved to be a positive one. The sestet destroys that image, particularly in the final line, with the emphasis on "doubtful hopes and sure and bitter pain." To highlight this, Britten sets the final two lines apart from the rest of the sestet. The thirteenth line is set with a phrase that serves to return the harmony to the key of F# minor, the key of the first melodic phrase of the song. The return of the opening melodic idea for the last line, coupled with the impassioned cry at the end which addresses the beloved, reveals that, in Britten's view, the lover has doubts about his meriting of the beloved's love, and therefore can only see the sadness in the beauty of the beloved because he can never truly possess the beloved. The lover's life, then, will be full of unfruitful hopes and the pain of sadness.

Sonetto XXXI

A che più debb' io mai l'intensa voglia

A che più debb' io mai l' intensa voglia	Why must I go on venting my ardent desire in tears and
Sfogar con pianti o con parole meste,	melancholy words,
Se di tal sorte 'l ciel, che l' alma veste,	if Heaven that dresses the soul in grief
Tard' o per tempo, alcun mai non ne spoglia?	never, soon or late, allows relief?
A che 'l cor lass' a più languir m'invoglia,	Why should my weary heart long for death
S'altri pur dee morir? Dunque per queste	since all must die? So to these
Luci l' ore del fin fian men moleste;	eyes my last hours will be less painful,
Ch' ogn' altro ben val men ch' ogni mia doglia.	all my grief being greater than any joy.
Però se 'l colpo, ch' io ne rub' e 'nvolo,	If, therefore, I cannot avoid these blows,
Schifar non poss'; almen, s' è destinato,	nay even seek them, since it is my fate,
Chi entreran fra la dolcezza e 'l duolo?	who is the one that stands always between joy and grief?
Se vint' e pres' i' debb' esser beato,	If to be happy I must be conquered and held captive,
Maraviglia non è se', nud' e solo,	no wonder then that I, unarmed and alone,
Resto prigion d' un Cavalier armato.[49]	remain the prisoner of a Cavalier in arms.

The style of the second of the Michelangelo Sonnets, Sonetto XXXI, is reminiscent of nineteenth-century Italian opera composers such as Verdi and Rossini with a staid and steady rhythm in the accompaniment and the *cabaletta*-like rhythm and upward leap of a sixth in the vocal line. Britten's use of duple meter and the 6/8 feel of the vocal line contribute to this character, which perhaps led Graham Johnson to claim that the vocal line represents "an Italianate sob." Whether or not Britten intended to effect a "sob" is a debatable point, but the song clearly reflects the Italian opera heritage with which he was well acquainted.[50]

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[49] There are several misprints or changes in the text as it appears in the score in comparison to Guasti's edition: in line 5, the word "*languir*" is "*morir*" in the text edition; in line 9, the word "*se*" should have an accent – "*sé*;" and in line 12, the "*i'*" is an "*l'*".

Britten's musical setting of Sonetto XXXI is governed by two overriding principles, each of which has a significant impact upon the other and upon the musico-poetic form: 1) an economy of melodic and accompanimental material; and 2) tonal conflict. In terms of economy of material, Britten uses some of the same structural ideas to generate phrase relationships as in Sonetto XVI. A phrase (or two phrases) may be followed by a repetition with changes to progress to the next melodic idea, as in a rhyming couplet effect. Also similar to Sonetto XVI, the first phrase provides much of the material for the content of the whole melody. The main difference here is that melody and accompaniment are more highly integrated, with motivic ideas from each element generating the material for the entire song. This degree of integration was not seen in the first song, where melody and accompaniment were essentially distinct components.

There are four motives, manipulated by means of transposition, inversion, recombination and rotation, that generate the substance of the song (see Example 15). Melodic motive *x* consists essentially of an upward sixth leap followed by a descending C-minor scale fragment, while motive *y* is cadential. Accompaniment motive *x* consists of an ascending three-note step pattern followed by the downward leap of a third that returns to the initial pitch. The second accompaniment motive, *y*, suggests dominant-to-tonic motion, being essentially an upward leap of a fourth. Although two of the motives are from the

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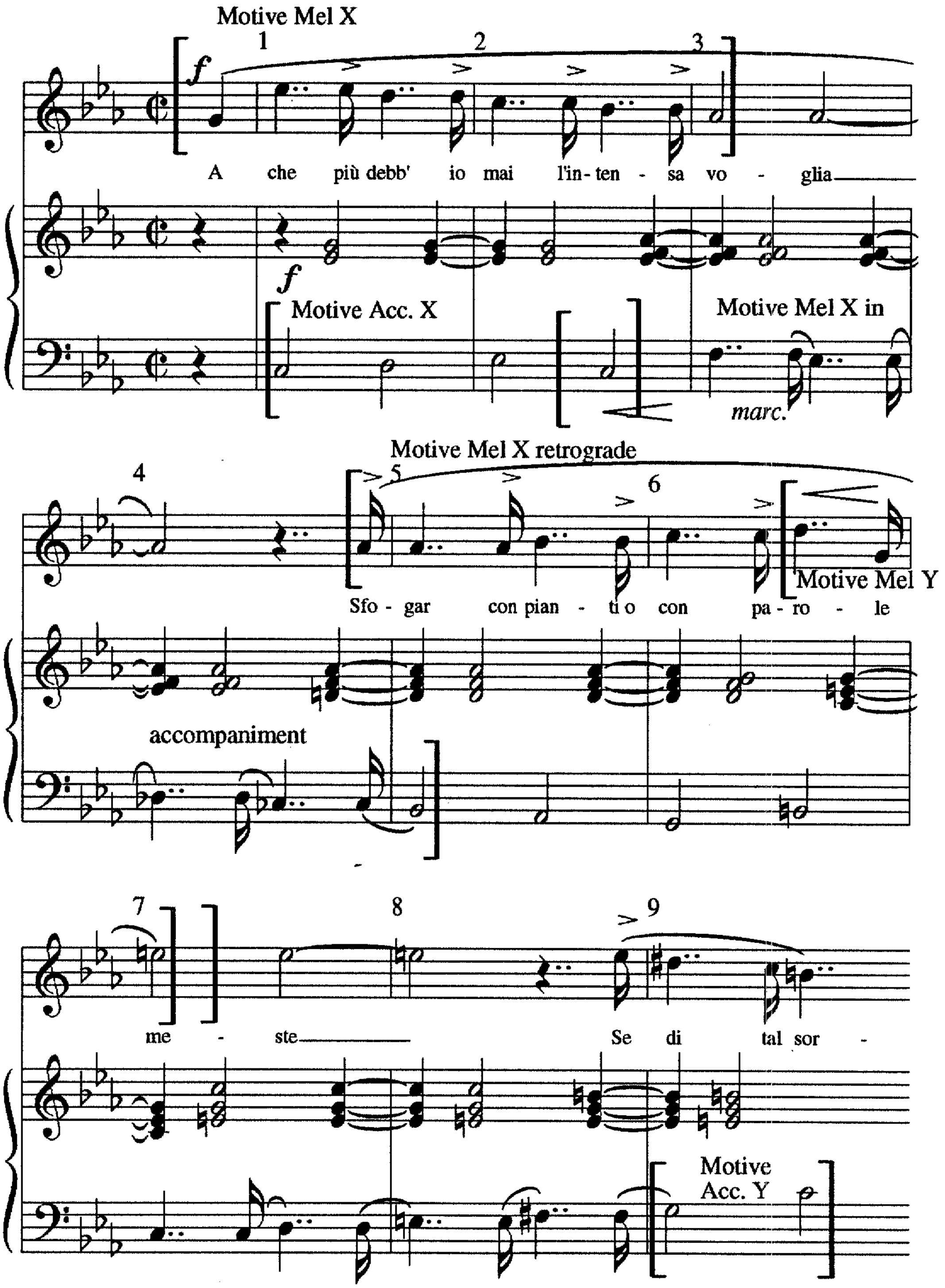
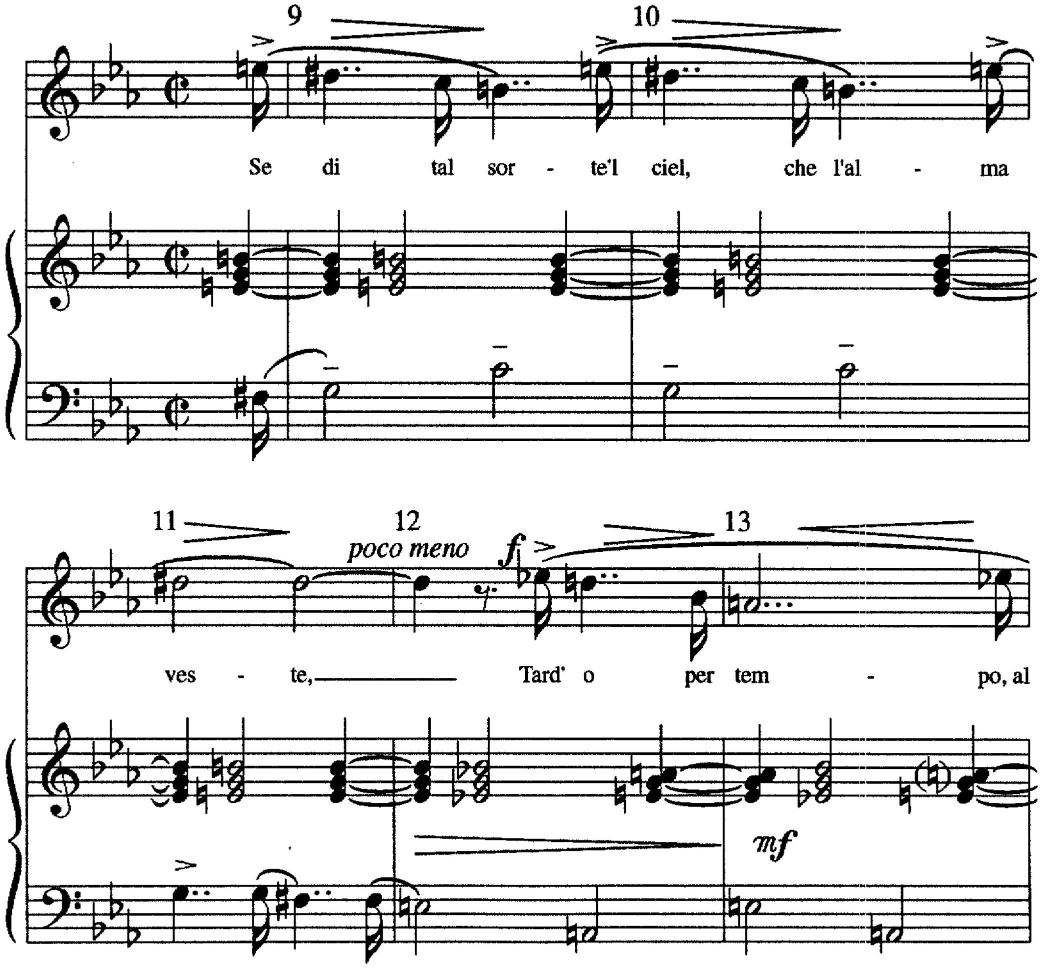
[50] To comment further on Britten's knowledge of Italian opera, it is well known that Britten admired Verdi very much, even to the point of using some of Verdi's more successful effects in his own operas, particularly in the choral portions. Britten also contributed to a Verdi discussion in Opera. "Verdi: A Symposium," Opera 2 (1951):113-115.. He was also familiar with the music of Rossini through his own arrangements of Rossini melodies in two suites, *Soirées Musicales*, Op. 9 (1936) and *Matinées Musicales*, Op. 24 (1941).

Example 15: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 1-9.

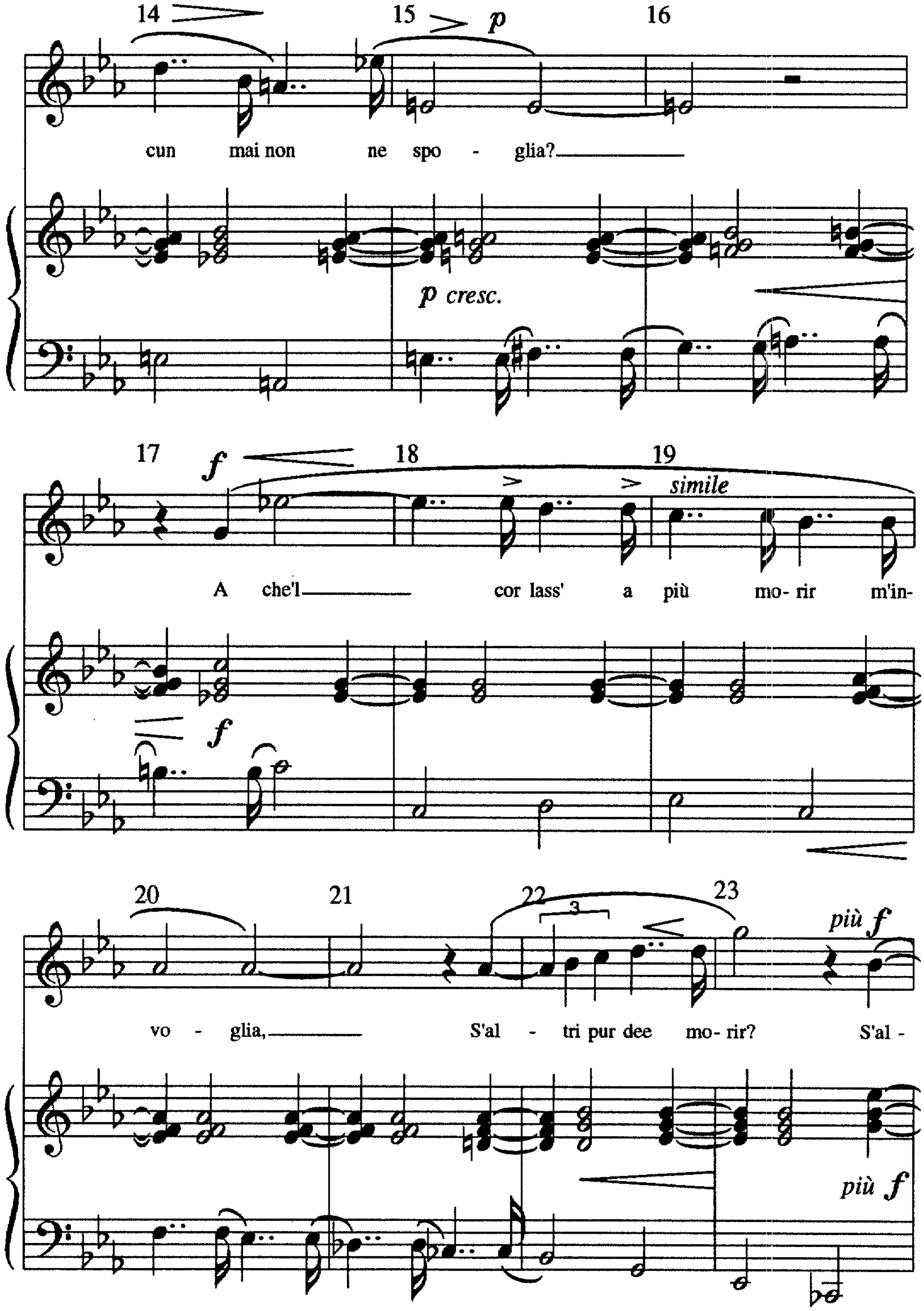

Motive Mel X
A che più debb' io mai l'in-ten - sa vo - glia
Motive Acc. X
Motive Mel X in
marc.
accompaniment
Motive Mel X retrograde
Sfo - gar con pian - ti o con pa - ro - le
Motive Mel Y
me - ste
Se di tal sor -
Motive Acc. Y

melody, and two are from the accompaniment, none is limited to the component whence it originates, because the vocal line and bass line are often in dialogue, as can be seen in Examples 15 and 16. In other words, melodic motives generate both melodic and accompanimental ideas, and vice versa. Further, the appearance of melodic motives in the accompaniment allow for the possibility of contrapuntal interplay between these two components of the song. Britten explores this procedure between the vocal line and bass line, using it as a form-defining element.

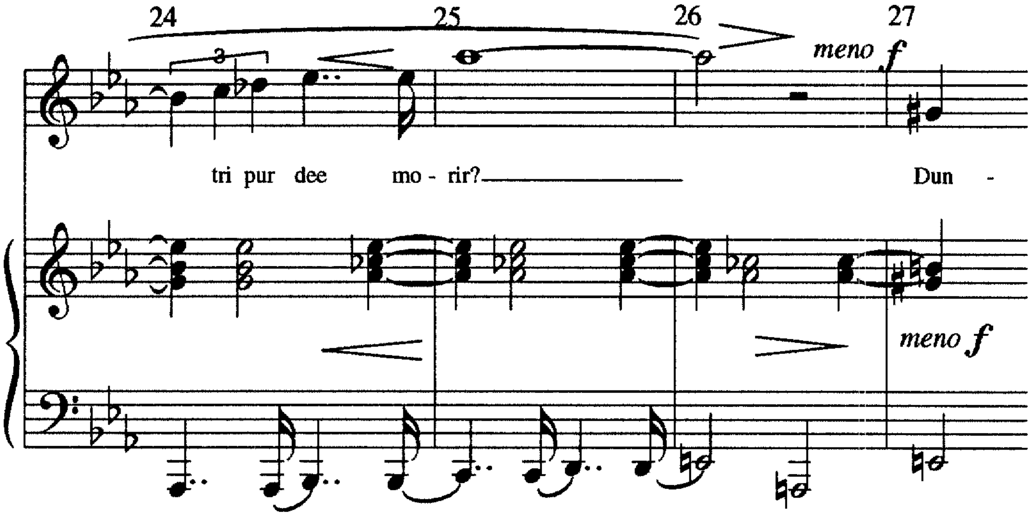
Example 16: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 9-27.


9
10
Se di tal sor - te'l ciel, che l'al - ma
11
12
poco meno
f
13
ves - te,
Tard' o per tem - po, al
mf

Example 16: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 9-27, cont.


14
15
p
16
cun mai non ne spo - glia?
p cresc.
17
f
18
19
simile
A che'l cor lass' a più mo- rir m'in-
f
20
21
22
3
23
più f
vo - glia, S'al - tri pur dee mo- rir? S'al -
più f

Example 16: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 9-27, cont.



Despite this economy of material, the form of the song is dependent upon melodic contrast for definition. Each section has its own well-defined melody, but each melodic phrase essentially originates from the first phrase and is a logical consequence of the melodic material which precedes it. Quite often, as well, the answering phrase overlaps the initial one by means of elision. This produces a sense of continuous motion in which no one idea stands out in the texture, but in which each idea is recognized as being distinct. Britten, again, seems to be considering the presentation of the thought-processes that generate the ideas expressed by the poetry. Each line of poetry is a logical consequence of the previous line, which Britten imitates in constructing the melodic phrases. The motivic construction of the melody relates the various images and ideas of the poem across the traditional divisions of the sonnet form. In Britten's approach to the melody, a high degree of contrast is eschewed in favor of unity and logic, confirmed also by the persistent pattern in the accompaniment and the use of material from the melody to link sections.

The unstable nature of the harmony stands in direct opposition to the integrated melody and accompaniment, and indeed, the arrival of a new section in the melody often does not synchronize with a cadence in the harmony, particularly at crucial moments in the form.[51] The impetus for the instability comes from the rhythm of the accompaniment in which the bass note and chord do not coincide on the beat. This creates a situation in which the bass line sometimes sounds non-harmonic against the chords in the right hand. Quite often, too, the chord in the right hand changes before the bass, or the bass note prefigures the chord of the right hand, as seen in Example 16, mm. 15-17. This condition creates a sense of instability under the vocal line, which, in turn, affects an interpretation of the text. The sense of urgency in the music gives insight into Britten's own feelings about the message of the text. The lack of coincidence between the harmony and melody at the beginnings and endings of sections of the music, implies that Britten was attempting to blur perception of the sections of the musical form, and thus, the form of the poem as well.

The tension in this song further arises from the simultaneous and/or successive employment of conflicting diatonic sets: a C-major set of pitches including E♮ and A♮, and a C-minor set of pitches including E♭ and A♭. Although there are a few identifiable dominant-to-tonic cadences, harmonic instability prevails, and is played out predominantly through the contrapuntal presentation of scale fragments that operate within the realm of C major or C minor, or their third-relation satellites (see Example 17). A change of accidental for a pitch can lead the scale fragments toward C major or C minor references, setting up a polarity between the two pitch sets. In addition, an attention to resolution – however weak – within these tonal references confirms their importance in the polarity between C major and C minor that permeates the song.[52] Most of the scalar fragments in the vocal line and bass line allude to this conflict, which raises two questions: 1) which force, bass line or vocal line, governs the harmony; or 2) are the instances in which bass line and chord concur structural harmonic pillars?

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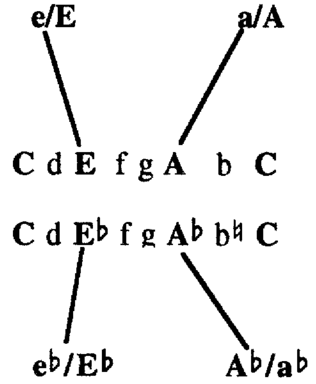
[51] Peter Evans applauds ". . . Britten's dexterity in introducing the return in a basically ternary structure at differing points in the melodic and the harmonic fields." Music of Britten, 83.

Example 17: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, the protagonists in the tonal conflict between C major and C minor.



The instability of the harmony can be seen in several factors: 1) the chords in the right hand are not supported forcibly by roots in the bass line;[53] 2) the use of the bass line as a counterpoint to the melody usurps its role as the harmonic foundation, with the result that it redefines the chord with each new tone; 3) resolutions sometimes occur in the middle of melodic phrases (refer to Example 16, mm. 23-24); 4) the quality and tonal reference of the scale fragments used in contrapuntal relationship often conflict;[54] and most important, 5) the chords in the right hand change in a linear fashion that often destroys or obscures tertian function (see Example 18). The C major/minor struggle continues throughout the entire song. No section of the form, however, can be labelled properly as having a single tonal reference because of the harmonic instability, but in each section, the conflict between C major and C minor is reflected in the choice of scale fragments to generate the melody and accompaniment.

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[52] Whittall identifies this conflict as "... the principal source of melodic development, both in the vocal line and in the upper voice of the accompaniment." "Triadic Harmony," 32. Although the upper voice of the accompaniment is important, the bass line appears to have the greater role.

[53] Tonic and dominant chords in C minor/major can be found in root position throughout the song, but most chords are in inversion. Arnold Whittall noticed, "The potential instability of the fundamental shift from minor to major and back is ... reinforced by the blurring of what traditionally counts as clear cadential motion. But there is quite enough dominant flavour to these cadences to provide a degree of stability for the tonic chords which they prepare." "Triadic Harmony," 31.

In the first section of the song, which corresponds to the first quatrain plus the first two lines of the second quatrain of the sonnet, Britten treats the subject of the lover's realization of the inevitability of death. The lover expresses his frustration with the beloved's inattentiveness in a sequence of rhetorical questions that reveal his grief over the situation and his subsequent longing for death. Through the melodic construction and subtle word painting, Britten's setting attempts to convey the lover's thoughts and feelings.

The first melodic phrase, which sets the first line of the poem, descends through a C-minor scale fragment that gives a tonal accent to E♭, one of the protagonists in the C major/C minor conflict (refer to Example 15). This descent is imitated by melodic motive *x* in the bass line at the level of E♭ minor. Thus, within the first five measures, Britten establishes the importance of the pitch E♭ in the tonal conflict, first through a tonal accent that results from the opening leap of a sixth, and second through the unfolding of the E♭-minor scale fragment in the bass line.

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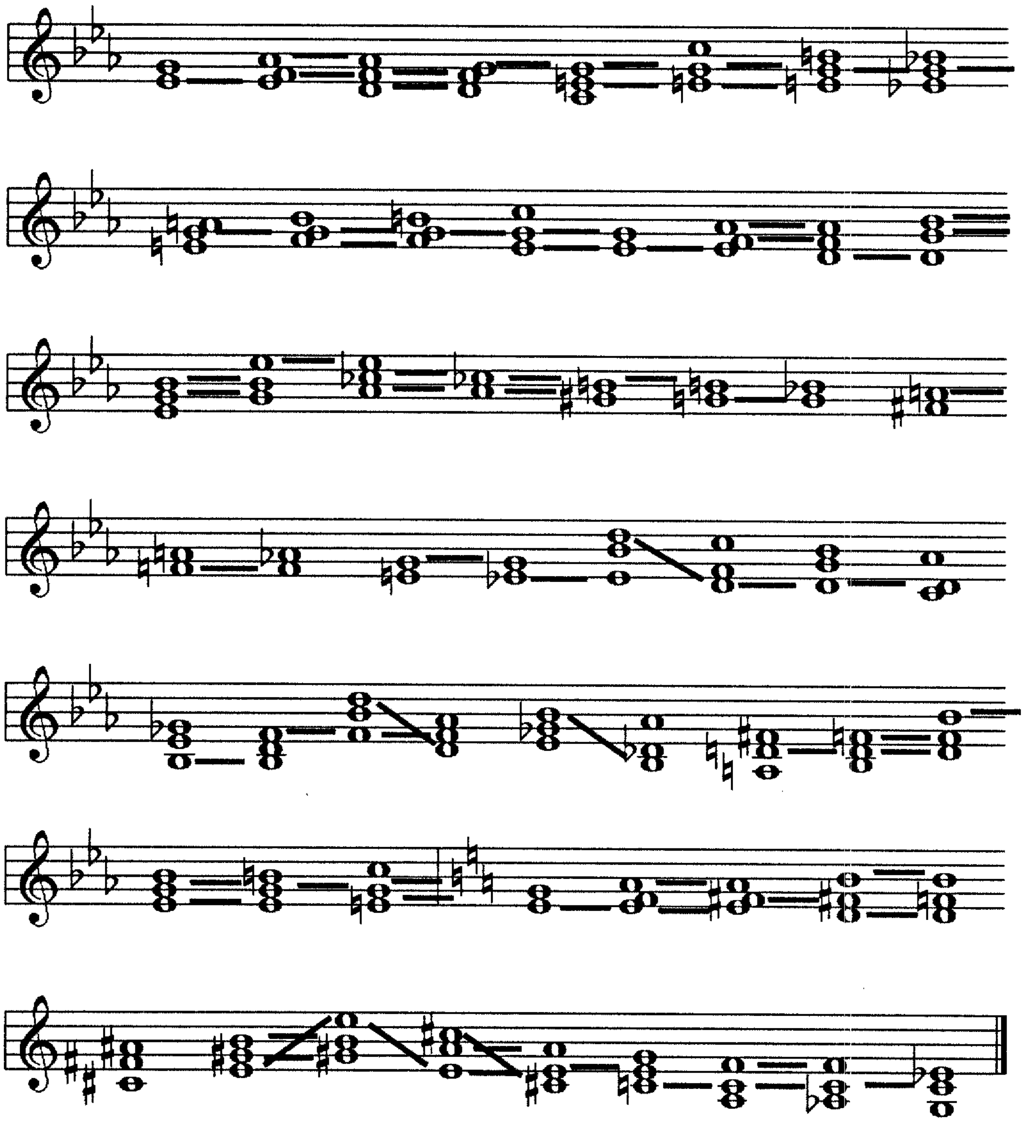
[54] Brewster grouped all the scalar passages into one category, labelling them whole-tone scales. "Relationship Between Poetry and Music," 102. This is not the case, however, as scale fragments from the major/minor tonal system are to be found (see mm. 15-17 in particular). As well, this material consists of three whole tones and a half step, with the order rotating according to the needs of the tonal area being explored.

Example 18: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, piano right hand, linear motion of chord changes.



The *a* vocal phrase is answered by an ascending line that is essentially its retrograde, but with a few important changes (refer to Example 15). The *b* phrase, which sets line two of the poem, begins from A♭, the ending pitch of phrase *a*, and reaches E♮ as the highest pitch, the chief protagonist of the C major side of the tonal conflict. This pitch is given the same tonic accent as the E♭ through an ascending leap from G, but also receives an agogic accent that, in turn, destroys the feminine cadence. Britten prefigures the C major turn in the phrase with motion suggesting a cadence in the accompaniment (mm. 6-7). The bass line and the chords of the right hand do not coincide, however: the dominant note G precedes the dominant-seventh chord by one beat, and the C-major triad precedes the bass line and melodic line resolutions by one beat. Britten, thus, purposely blurs the effect that the cadence would have if its elements lined up. He emphasizes the vocal line in the governance of the harmonic direction by imitating this phrase with an ascending C-major scale fragment in the bass, with the F♯ leading to the ending on the dominant note G.

For the third melodic phrase, Britten extracts the half-step from the beginning of the *a* phrase (E♭ to D), and transposes it up a half-step so that E♮ and E♭ are juxtaposed, then follows that with a half-step, C to B♮ (refer to Example 16).[55] This fragment, which is a microcosm of the tonal conflict, repeats, then starts a second repetition, but ends on the E♭ (spelled D♯). Although the metric emphasis is placed on the E♭, the accompaniment stresses E♮, both in the chords of the right hand and the E-minor scale fragment in the bass line that answers the voice (mm. 11-12). The melodic line in mm. 12-13 (phrase four), by sequential association, suggests the B♭-major diatonic set, but the E to A motion in the bass line, coupled with E♭ and E♮ juxtaposed in the chords of the right hand, contradicts this impression. The E♮-E♭ vocal cadence of the third phrase is presented in retrograde at the end of this phrase, and is answered by a scale fragment that seems to begin in E minor, but is a C major scale fragment instead, leading to a repetition of the *a* phrase in C minor.

The setting of the fifth line of the text, the start of the second question of the octave, is initiated by a cadence in C minor that is reminiscent of the cadence in the middle of the *b* phrase (compare Example 15, mm. 6-7 to Example 16, mm. 16-17). In this repetition of the *a* phrase, E♭ is given both a tonic and an agogic accent to counterbalance the E♮ of the preceding phrase, and the vocal descent is again imitated by a descending E♭ minor scale fragment in the bass line. The final phrase starts from the same pitch as the *b* phrase, but continues in a different rhythm and with a different goal note. The ascending scale fragment of C minor ends with an upward leap to G, dominant of C minor; it is then repeated a step higher to end on A♭, which is solidified by a cadential motion E♭ to A♭ minor in the accompaniment that precedes the vocal cadence (refer to Example 16, mm. 24-25).

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[55] It must be stated foremost that Britten wrote notes for their ease of performance, not for their harmonic definition. Hence, he uses D♯ instead of E♭ in mm. 9-12.

The textual impact of the C major/C minor tonal conflict as presented in this first section is significant (see Table 8). The two lines that express the beginning of a question

TABLE 8

MICHELANGELO'S TEXT AND THE C MAJOR/C MINOR TONAL CONFLICT IN SECTION *A* OF SONETTO XXXI

Italian Text	English Translation	Melodic Phrase and Bass Line Answer
A che più debb' io mai l'intensa voglia	Why must I go on venting my ardent	C m - E♭ m
Sfogar con pianti o con parole meste,	desire in tears and melancholy words	Cm to M - C M
Se di tal sorte 'l ciel, che l'alma veste,	if Heaven that dresses the soul in grief	Cm/M - C M/E m
Tard' o per tempo, alcun mai non ne spoglia ?	never, soon or late, allows relief?	Cm/M - C M
A che 'l cor lass' a più languir m' involgia,	Why should my weary heart long	C m - E♭ m
S'altri pur dee morir? (repeated)	for death, since all must die?	Cm/A♭ - A♭-A

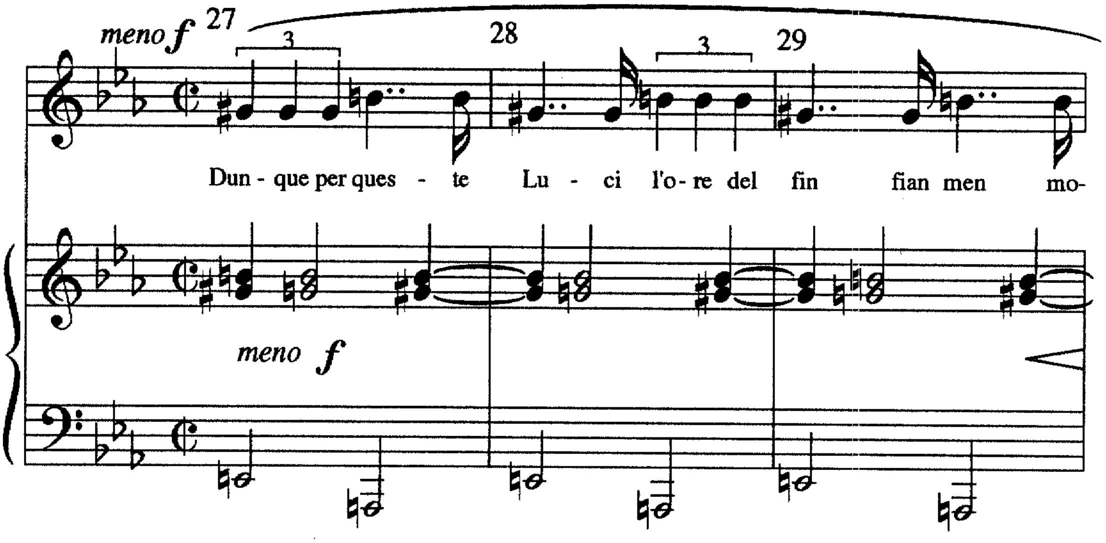
and contain the lover's reference to his frustrations at the beloved's inattentiveness, lines 1 and 5, are set to the same C-minor phrase (*a* and *a'*, respectively) and answered in the bass line by E♭ minor. The height of the conflict between C major and C minor comes in the setting of the third and fourth lines of the poem, in which E♭ and E♮ are juxtaposed. In the conditional clause that spans these two lines, the lover assumes because his grief over his unreturned desire for the beloved is so great, that he will not die or reach a spiritual conclusion, but be eternally damned to suffer his unrequited love. Britten keeps hammering at both E♭ and E♮ in the vocal line and in the accompaniment, so that, in effect, the lover's lack of relief is portrayed in the content of the musical material.

Although the lover contradicts himself in the sixth line of text, the beginning of this thought in line 5 refers again to his love of the beloved. After having said that he is not allowed to die or reach a spiritual end in lines 3 and 4, the lover comes to the conclusion that all things die, so he should not long for death. Because the sixth line is broken into two separate grammatical units, Britten repeats the first half of the line to balance his phrase, using the repetition to move to A♭, a protagonist in the C minor set of pitches.

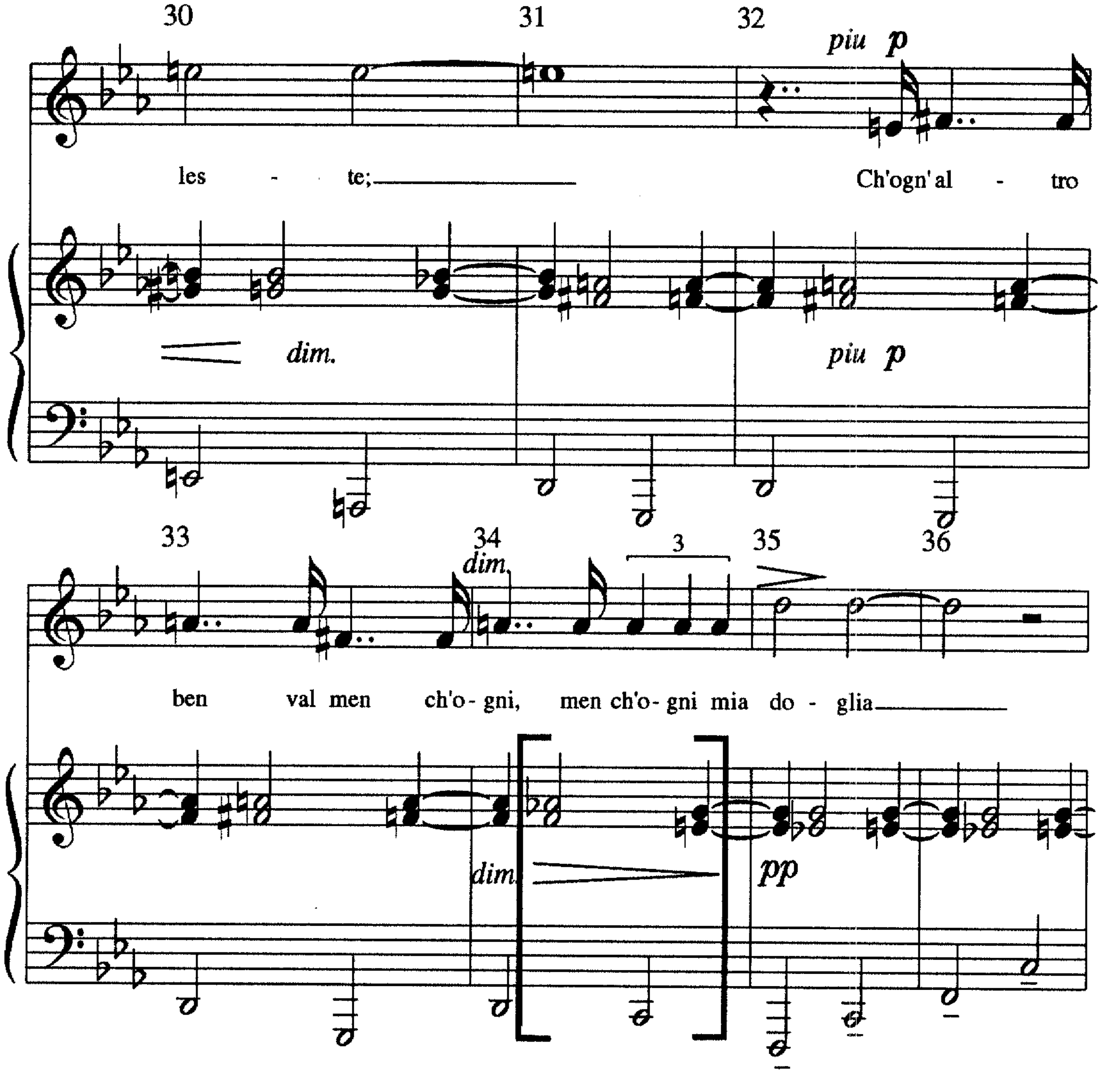
The tonal conflict as presented in the first musical section is rooted in the lover's grasp of reality. The first two lines of text, in which the lover explores his initial thoughts about the beloved's inattentiveness, are essentially concerned with C minor, although Britten makes his way toward C major by the end of the second. This journey to C major is more a preparation of the conflict of C major/C minor that occurs with the next two lines of text, than a reflection of the second line of the poem. The third and fourth lines of the poem find the lover in a depressed state of mind, in which he does not have a clear view of the resolution of his anguish. Although the fifth and sixth lines of the text, which center around C minor, offer a dark resolution – death – it is a resolution nonetheless, that is rooted in reality.

The second musical section, which sets the second half of the second quatrain and the first tercet, explores another facet of the C-major/C-minor conflict. Britten provides a transition between this section and the previous with an ascending scale fragment in the bass line that begins on A♭, the ending point of the first section (refer to Example 16, mm. 25-27). The fragment at first appears to be a transposition of the C-major scale fragment at mm. 7-9, but here the raised fourth scale degree, D♮, continues on to a raised fifth, E♮, effecting a turn to the tonal level of A. The first melodic phrase, which sets the enjambment from line 6 to line 7, emphasizes E major as the dominant of A through the oscillation of G♯ and B♮, and a final ascent to E♮ (see Example 19). The bass line consists solely of E♮ moving to A♮ in a cadential gesture. The right hand contains the remaining two pitches of the dominant triad, but with G♯ and G♮ interchangeable for the third, in a transposition of the tonal conflict to the level of E/A.

Example 19: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 27-36.

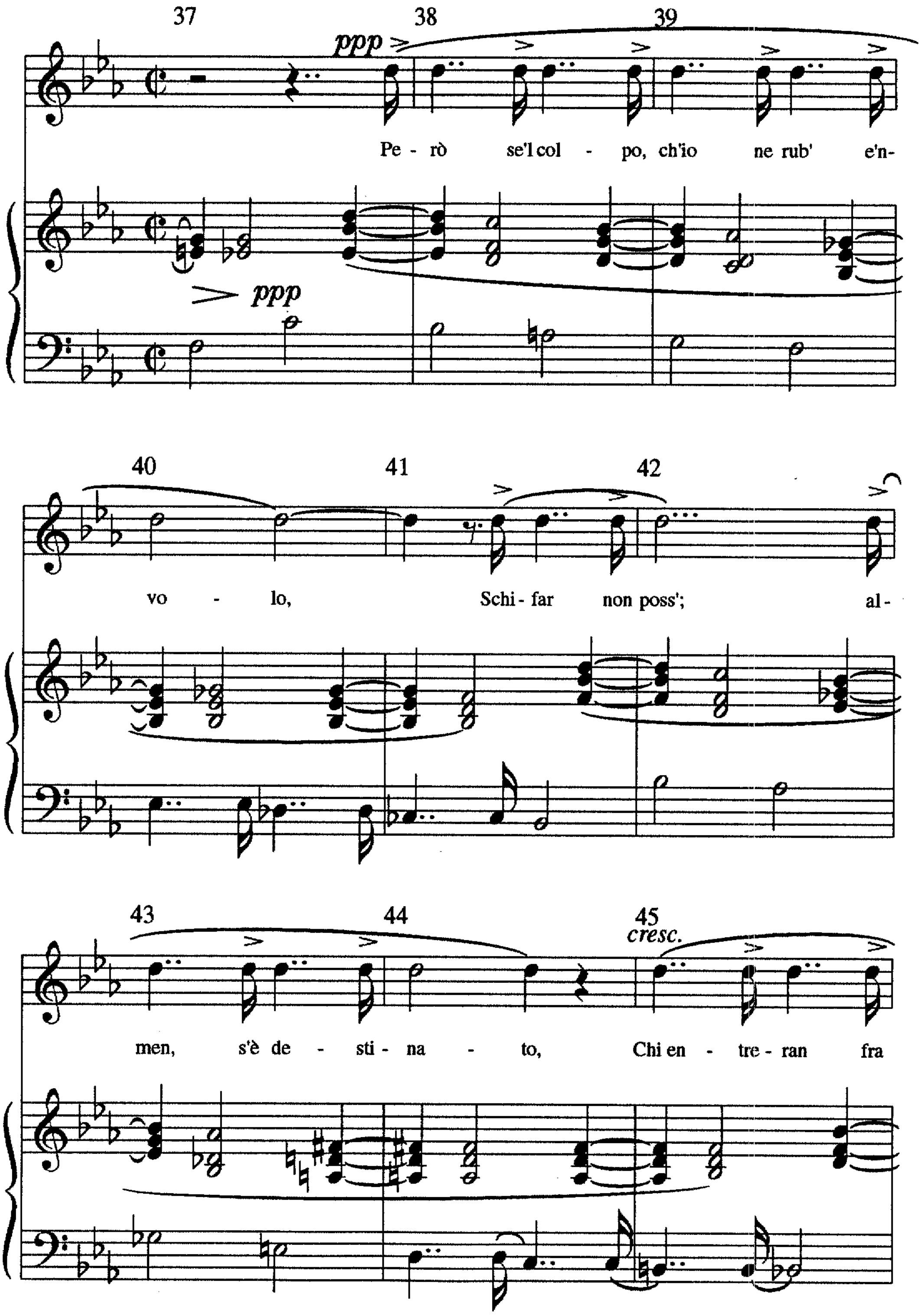

meno *f*
27
3
28
3
29
Dun - que per ques - te Lu - ci l'o- re del fin fian men mo-
meno *f*

Example 19: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 27-36, cont.

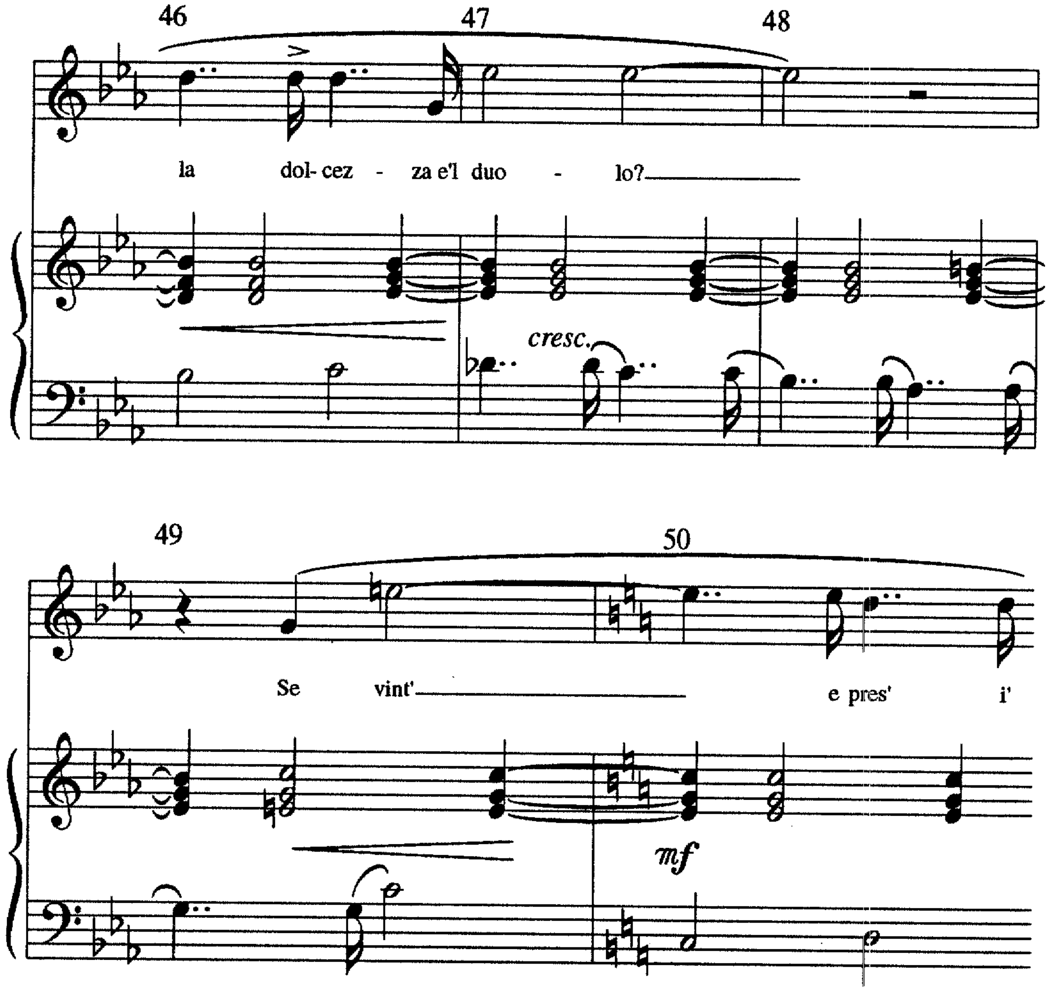

30
31
32
piu p
les - te;
Ch'ogn'al - tro
dim.
piu p
33
34
dim.
3
35
36
ben val men ch'o- gni, men ch'o- gni mia do - glia
dim
pp

For the eighth line of text, Britten repeats the E/A material at the level of D/G, with rhythmic changes in the vocal line to accommodate the shorter text (mm. 32-36). To continue the descending step progression, Britten transposes the accompaniment material to the level of C/F, reiterating the E♭/E♮ conflict in the right hand (m. 36). This short interlude initiates the setting of the ninth line of text with a descending scale fragment beginning on C (see Example 20). The scale fragment, over which the vocal line has a repeated note D, begins by unfolding a C major scale, or, perhaps, is grafted onto the E♭

Example 20: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 37-50.


37
38
39
ppp
Pe - rò se'l col - po, ch'io ne rub' e'n-
ppp
40
41
42
vo - lo, Schi - far non poss'; al-
43
44
45
cresc.
men, s'è de - sti - na - to, Chi en - tre - ran fra

Example 20: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 37-50, cont.



minor set, as suggested first by the chords of the right hand and the extended ambitus (m. 39-40). The E♭ minor portion of the scale fragment is taken from mm. 3-5 and 20-21 of section *A*, but begins in a different part of the measure. The end of the melodic phrase at mm. 39-41 is given a half cadence in the accompaniment in E♭ minor in which the bass line and the chords in the right hand do not coincide.

The setting of the tenth line of the poem, also on a repeated D, begins as the quasi-half cadence on B♭ concludes. A second bass line scale fragment starting at m. 42 continues the E♭ minor tonal level, but turns abruptly toward C major with an E♮ in m. 43. This ends on a B♭, however, returning briefly to E♭ minor in a resolution in the right-hand chords (mm. 45-46). The bass line, however, resumes a C emphasis, this time in minor (mm. 47-50). The vocal line stays with the repeated D for the eleventh line of text, but brings back the cadential motive D-G-E♭ for the final four syllables to agree with the C minor scale fragment in the bass line (mm. 46-48) and to suggest closure.

The descending step progression, A to G to F, that generates the *B* section is framed by references to A and E♭ as tonal centers, members of the C major and C minor sets, respectively. In the sequence at the levels of G and F, A and E♭ are reinterpreted as members of their dominants. The note A, as part of the vocal line in the G phrase, becomes the fifth of the dominant chord that has an interchangeable major/minor third. The note E♭, on the other hand, becomes the third of a C chord, which suggests the dominant of F, and is interchangeable with E♮, thus reiterating the C major/C minor conflict.

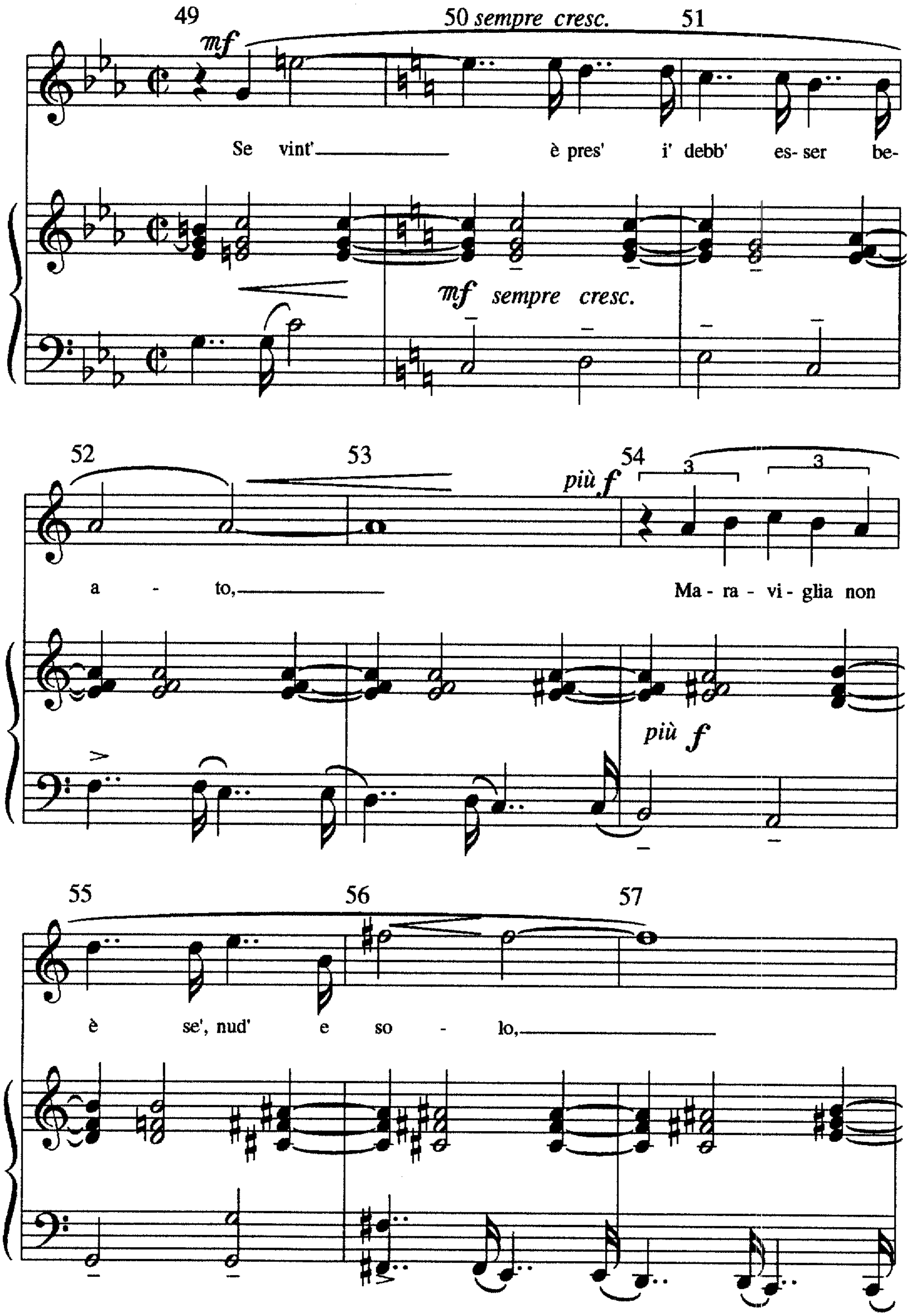
Textually, the section corresponds to another set of contradictions. In the remainder of the second quatrain, the second half of line 6 through line 8, the lover resolves his conflict with death, stating that even though he feels grief over his unrequited love for the beloved, his hours before death will not be painful because his love of the beloved gives him joy. Thus, his capacity to love is worth more than not loving at all, even if his love goes unreturned. Britten sets this statement to the first half of the step progression, which emphasizes the C major side of the conflict through the use of A as a tonal center and member of the dominant chord of G. His treatment of the lover's words in which A remains unchallenged by elements of C minor, give the impression that the lover is self-assured in his conclusions.

The short interlude between the end of the second quatrain and the beginning of the first tercet of the sestet, however, returns to the C major/C minor conflict as E♭ and E♮ are interchangeable as the third of the dominant of F. With this, Britten sets the stage for the lover's contradiction of his statement that he has reached peace in having loved without benefit of its return. The lover realizes that death will come despite his efforts to either repel or hasten it; but, the grief he resigned himself to at the end of the second quatrain, could also be the joy that he rejected earlier. It is the beloved that controls his feelings of grief or joy through his actions toward the lover. So, having renounced his need for the beloved's love, the lover now turns back to his feelings of need. Britten sets this with E♭ minor, but with elements of C major that challenge it. Moreover, the vocal line, on a repeated D, weaves in and out of the conflict, becoming the leading tone to E♭ and thus, increasing the need for resolution, or being somewhat neutral in references to C major. When the D does resolve to E♭, a cadential motive from the *A* section is used that associates the E♭ with C minor instead of as a tonal center in its own right. Britten again uses tension between elements of C major and C minor to show the lover's vacillating state of mind.

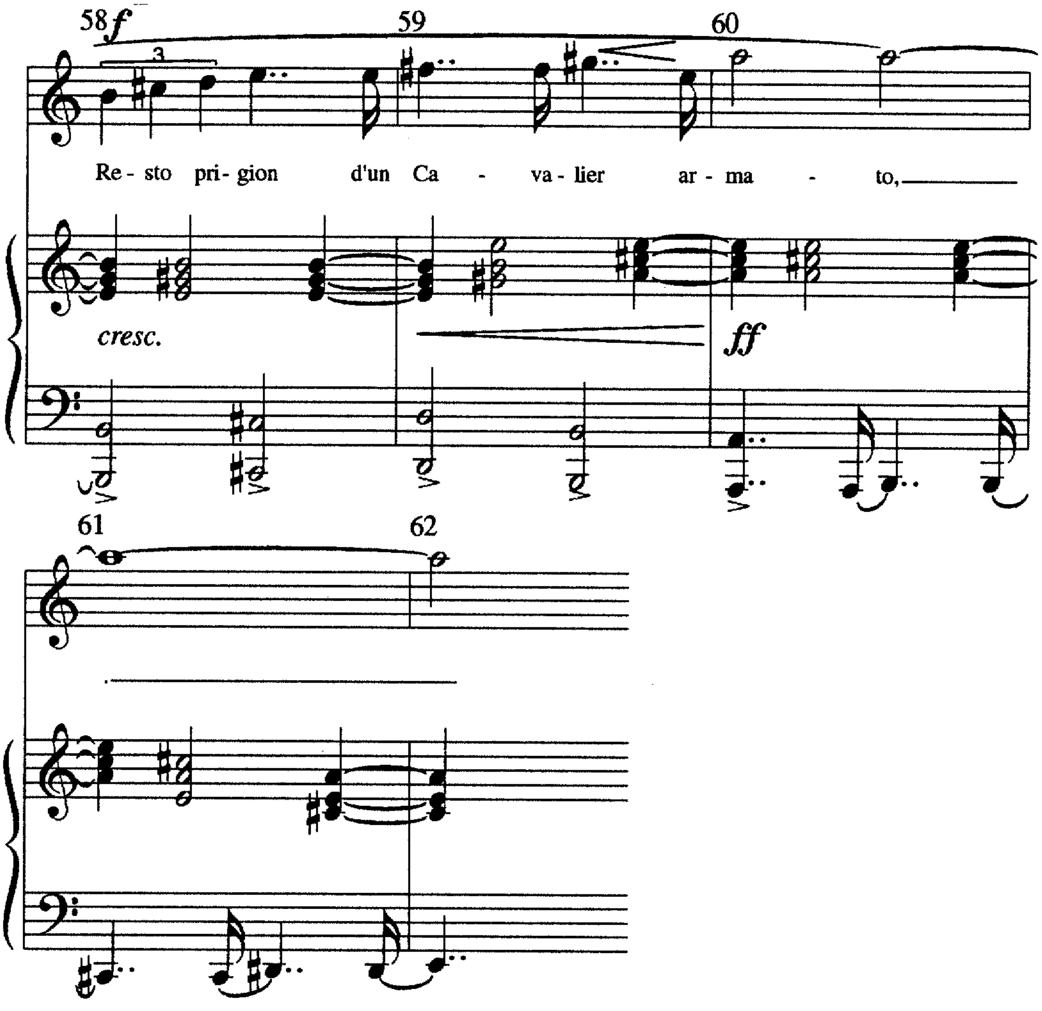
The return of the *A* section at m. 49 occurs at the level of C major, and is approached by a descending C-minor scale fragment that ends on the dominant, G (see Example 21). The E♭ in the right hand chord becomes E♮, prefiguring its use in the melodic line. Britten imitates the C-major scale fragment of the *a* phrase return with a descending C-major scale fragment in the bass line, which corresponds to the E♭-minor scale fragment from the first *A* section. The start of the return, then, is much more stable tonally than the beginning of the song.

The second phrase of the return begins from the note A, as is expected, but it continues in a different rhythm and with a different goal note than the *b* phrase of the first *A* section. Although the notes of the phrase emphasize C major, the introduction of F# at the cadence points toward A as the tonal reference. The third phrase, which sets the final line of the poem, begins essentially from the dominant area of A, and finally cadences E to A in the last two pitches, confirmed by a weak dominant to tonic cadence in the accompaniment

Example 21: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 49-62.

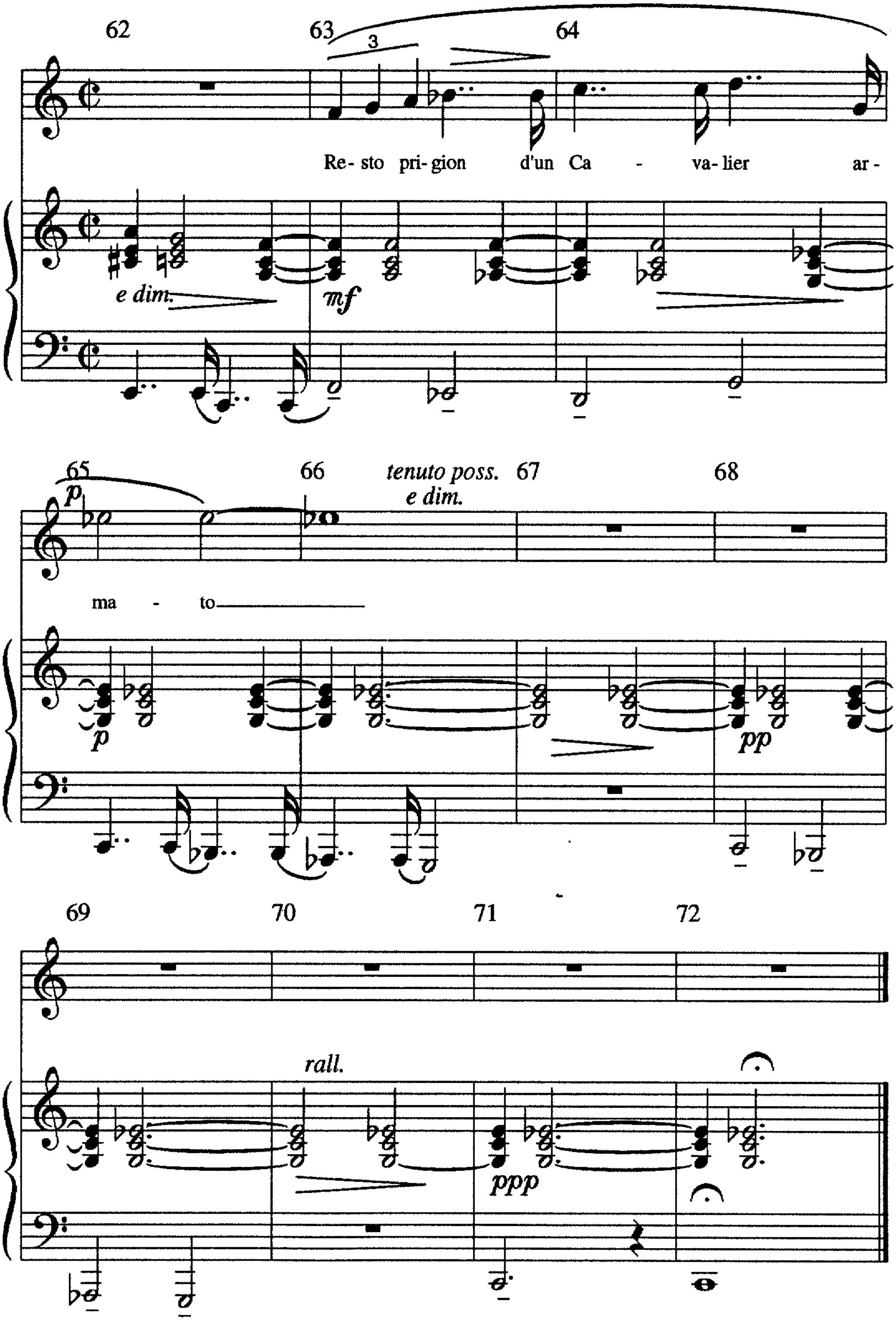

49
mf
50 sempre cresc.
51
Se vint' è pres' i' debb' es- ser be-
mf sempre cresc.
52
53
54
più f
3
3
a - to,
Ma - ra - vi - glia non
più f
55
56
57
è se', nud' e so - lo,

Example 21: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 49-62.



(mm. 59-60). The bass line answers this phrase with an ascending A-major scale fragment that is a transposition of the C-major scale fragment from mm. 7-9, complete with the raised fourth scale degree, placing importance on the arrival on the dominant note, E (mm. 60-62). After the arrival on E in the bass line, the C♯ in the right-hand chord becomes C♮, followed by a movement from E to C♮ in the bass line (see Example 22, m. 62). A repetition of the last line of the poem starts out from F major, but an E♭ in the bass line

Example 22: Sonetto XXXI, *A che più debb'io mai*, mm. 62-72.


62
63
3
64
Re- sto pri- gion d'un Ca - va- lier ar -
e dim.
mf
65
p
66
tenuto poss.
e dim.
67
68
ma - to
p
pp
69
70
71
72
rall.
ppp

initiates a return to the C minor tonal area in the A♭s in the right hand chords. The melodic line reaches a D, which signals the start of the cadential motive, D-G-E♭. The melodic return to C minor coincides with a descending C-minor tetrachord – from C to G – in the bass line and C-minor triads in the right hand, effectively returning to the tonal area of the opening.

The correspondence between the tonal references used in the *A'* section and the text reveals an interesting twist regarding the final line of the poetry. In the previous musical and textual section, the lover realized that his beloved controlled whether he felt joy or grief solely by returning or not returning his love for him. The final tercet explores that idea further, but the lover reaches the resolution that if he is to be happy, he must remain under the spell of the beloved, even if he is vulnerable to rejection by the beloved. In other words, he returns to the idea that the act of loving is more important than being loved. The use of C major and its satellite tonal area A to set the final tercet, temporarily resolved the tonal conflict between C major and C minor, and gives weight to the lover's assurance in his resolution of his conflict. The repetition of the final line of text, "*Resto prigion d'un cavalier armato*,"[56] which takes the song back to C minor, returns to the tonal conflict and invalidates the lover's positive solution to his problem of the beloved's inattentiveness. The lover remains a prisoner of the beloved, not because he is comfortable with loving without thought of its return, but because he still hopes that the beloved will someday return his love.

Britten's musical form does not follow the traditional divisions of the sonnet into octave and sestet and into quatrains and tercets, respectively within the larger sections. His grouping of the lines is not a result of the grammatical structure of the poetry, or of the rhyme scheme; in other words, there is no enjambment across the traditional divisions of the quatrains and tercets. He deliberately defies the structure that Michelangelo accentuated through the use of the same words to start the quatrains (*A che* = why), and the use of words with the same function as a conditional to start the tercets (*Però* and *Se* = but and if). Britten, then, tampers with the structure of the poem in order to convey a particular interpretation (see Table 9).

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[56] "I remain a prisoner of a Cavalier in arms."

TABLE 9

TEXT OF SONETTO XXXI AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Musical Scheme
A che più debb'io mai l'intensa voglia Sfogar con pianti o con parole meste, Se di tal sorte 'l ciel, che l'alma veste, Tard' o per tempo, alcun mai non ne spoglia? A che'l cor lass' a più languir m'invoglia, S'altri pur dee morir?	*A*: Why must I long for my love in sadness since I know that Heaven will not give me relief because I grieve so? And why must I long for death since I know that we all must die?
Dunque per queste Luci l'ore del fin fian men moleste; Ch'ogn' altro ben val men ch'ogni mia doglia.	*B*: In my last hours, even longing for my love with sadness brings me joy; I cannot seek my death because it is my fate; but who is it that is able to cause me to feel joy or pain?
Però se 'l colpo, ch'io ne rub' e 'nvolo, Schifar non poss'; almen, s'è destinato Chi entreran fra la dolcezza e 'l duolo?	
Se vint' e pres' i' debb' esser beato, Maraviglia non è se', nud' e solo, Resto prigion d'un cavalier armato, Resto prigion d'un cavalier armato.	*A'*: If I am to be happy, then I must be conquered and captured, and be unashamedly the prisoner of my beloved. I remain a prisoner of my beloved.

The rapid change of tonal areas, at the beginning and end of most phrases, creates the sense of instability and restlessness that characterizes the song. Through this, Britten captures the essence of the text of the poem. In the octave, the lover is beginning to feel unable to endure the pain of the unrequited love he feels for the beloved. He contemplates the futility of longing for love and for death in the face of the inevitability of death of both the lover and his beloved. Despite this, however, the lover still wants to experience love, even if it is not returned, a thought which he explores in the second quatrain. Britten's *A* section gathers the lines of the poem that speak of the lover's unfruitful longings for the beloved and for death, which are in vain because of the inevitability of death. The lover's thoughts of death are carried over into the next section, which Britten expresses through the use of melodic and accompanimental motives from the first section to generate the material of the second.

Britten's setting also proves to have a different view of the resolution of the conflict than traditional divisions would allow. Normally, the climax would occur at the end of the octave, so that the sestet resolves it. The climax of the song corresponds with the first tercet, which Britten places within the second musical section. The sentences of the first tercet of the sestet, *ll.* 9-11 are very fragmented and short, piling up as they lead toward the first line of the second tercet. Britten sets these as pseudo-recitative, reiterating the pitch D until the D finally resolves to an E♭ in m. 47 (refer to Example 20). The text here is significant: as he contemplates the inevitability of death, the lover expresses his frustration over the beloved's inattentiveness since the beloved allows him neither joy nor sadness. Britten captures this sense of frustration in the use of the repeated pitch D, and in the tension caused by the C major/C minor tonal conflict, here between C major elements and E♭ minor.

The resolution of the lover's discontent occurs in the second tercet, which is set to elements of the C major set of pitches: the lover can only find happiness by being conquered and bound by his beloved, giving all his love to him, because unrequited love is better than not having any part of the beloved. To correspond with the lover's decision to keep loving the beloved, Britten resolves the conflict between C major and C minor, but his manner of doing so implies a different interpretation. The return of the *A* section at m. 49

in C major gives the impression that the conflict of the previous measures, with the single D in the vocal line and the allusions to E♭ minor, has been solved. Even the negative "minor" tone of the song is overthrown: C major has triumphed over C minor. The problem, however, is not resolved, musically or textually. The first signal is the appearance of F♯ in the vocal line at m. 56,[57] which is a tritone away from the tonal focus of the composition. This F♯ leads away from C major toward A major through a linear progression. At the return, with the problem defined in the text now identified and the musical conflict between C major and C minor resolved through the return of the *A* section, one would expect that the C major tonal area would remain until the end of the composition. The fact that it does not, leads to the crux of the text according to Britten, mm. 58-62. Line 14, "*Resto prigion d'un Cavalier armato*," ascends from a B♮ to the highest note in the vocal line, an A natural. This ascending line, related to mm. 21-23, 23-26 and somewhat to 54-57, renders the statement, one of resolution in the poem, a desperate plea in the musical setting. The repetition of the line a tritone lower at mm. 63-66 takes the speaker back to the beginning area of C minor, the tonal focus of the opening, and hence, the emotional state from which he started. The song ends with the resignation that the lover will always remain a prisoner, not of the beloved per se, but of the futile, unrequited love he feels for the beloved.

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[57] There is interesting word painting at this point in the vocal line, at m. 55-56. The text at this point is "*nud' e solo*," meaning "naked and alone." The word "*solo*," occurs on the F♯, the only appearance of this note in the vocal line.

Sonetto XXX

Veggio co' bei vostri occhi un dolce lume

Veggio co' bei vostri occhi un dolce lume,	With your lovely eyes I see a sweet light that yet with my
Che co' miei ciechi già veder non posso;	blind ones I cannot see;
Porto co' vostri piedi un pondo a dosso,	with your feet I carry a weight on my back which with
Che de' mie' zoppi non è già costume;	my lame ones I cannot;
Volo con le vostr' ale senza piume;	with your wings I, wingless, fly;
Col vostr' ingegno al ciel sempre son mosso;	with your spirit I move forever heavenward;
Dal vostr' arbitrio son pallido e rosso;	at your wish I blush or turn pale,
Freddo al sol, caldo alle più fredde brume.	cold in the sunshine, or hot in the coldest midwinter.
Nel voler vostro è sol la voglia mia,	My will is in your will alone,
I mié pensier nel vostro cor si fanno,	my thoughts are born in your heart,
Nel vostro fiato son le mie parole.	my words are on your breath.
Come luna da sè sol par chi' io sia;	Alone, I am like the moon in the sky
Chè gli occhi nostri in ciel veder non sanno	which our eyes cannot see
Se non quel tanto che n' accende il sole.[58]	save that part which the sun illumines.

The third of the Michelangelo Sonnets is the only true love song of the entire cycle. Graham Johnson has called it "sensuous and chaste," which he claims is typical of Britten's sensibility.[59] Britten creates an atmosphere of sensuousness in several ways: first is the expansiveness of the melodic line which ascends and descends through sweeping arpeggiated triads; second is the use of non-harmonic tones in the melodic line a half step above or below the notes of the key center triad, which creates a sense of tension and release in every phrase;[60] and third is the lute-like repeated chords in the left hand, conjuring up the notion of the serenade sung to court one's beloved.[61]

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[58] There are several misprints regarding the text as it appears in the score. In line 10, "*mié*" should be "*mie'*" and in line 12, "*chi' io*" should be "*ch' io*." In line 11, an accent was added to the word "*Che*" that does not appear in the text edition.

[59] Johnson, "Voice and Piano," 290.

The model for this setting, as Peter Pears has discussed,[62] can be found in the 1936 cycle based on poems of W. H. Auden, On This Island. In "Nocturne" (*Now Thro' Night's Caressing Grip*), the melody consists of arpeggiated triads and the accompaniment of reiterated chords (see Example 23). The Michelangelo setting extends beyond this – the accompaniment and melody line interact more – the melodic line is balanced not by itself as in the Auden song, but by the right hand of the accompaniment, and the harmonic rhythm is slower, changing only at the next key center rather than as the melody requires (see Example 24).

Britten creates a conflict in the melodic line between the tonic triad of a tonal area and its *major* leading tone triad, with each new phrase finding these two triads (at various tonal levels) interacting differently with new twists and turns.[63] Although the melodic line is fashioned so that it appears to be through-composed, the two triads are manipulated through arpeggiation of the elements to generate the melodic phrases so that each phrase contains gestures that are similar to those in others. Despite this melodic ambiguity, the form of the song is much more readily accessible than those of the first two songs. There are three easily-perceived contrasting sections followed by a return of the first section, a

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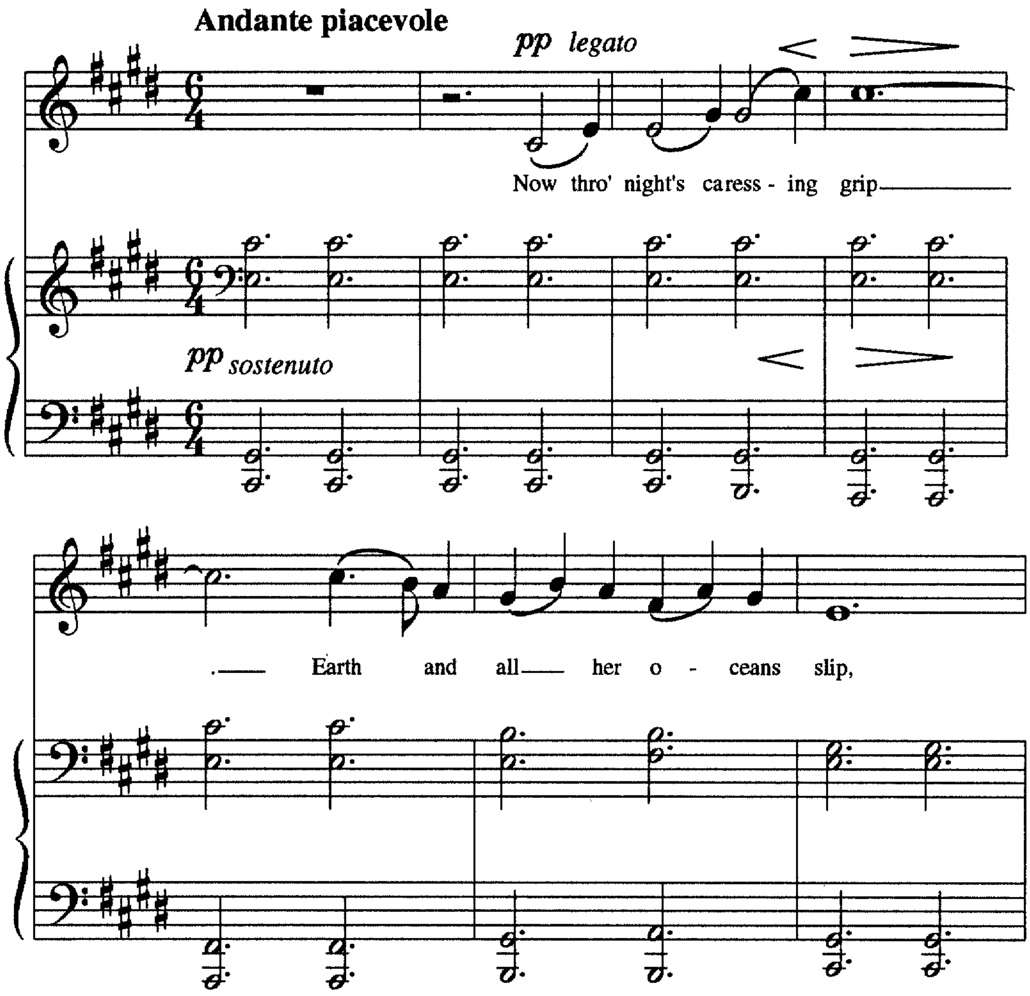
[60] Peter Evans found that the whole composition was based on the use of the major leading tone triad, but did not discover the use of upper leading tones. Music of Britten, 82.

[61] He explores the serenade idea more fully in Sonetto XXXVIII, which receives the tempo marking *Allegretto quasi una serenata.*.

[62] Pears, "Vocal Music," 66.

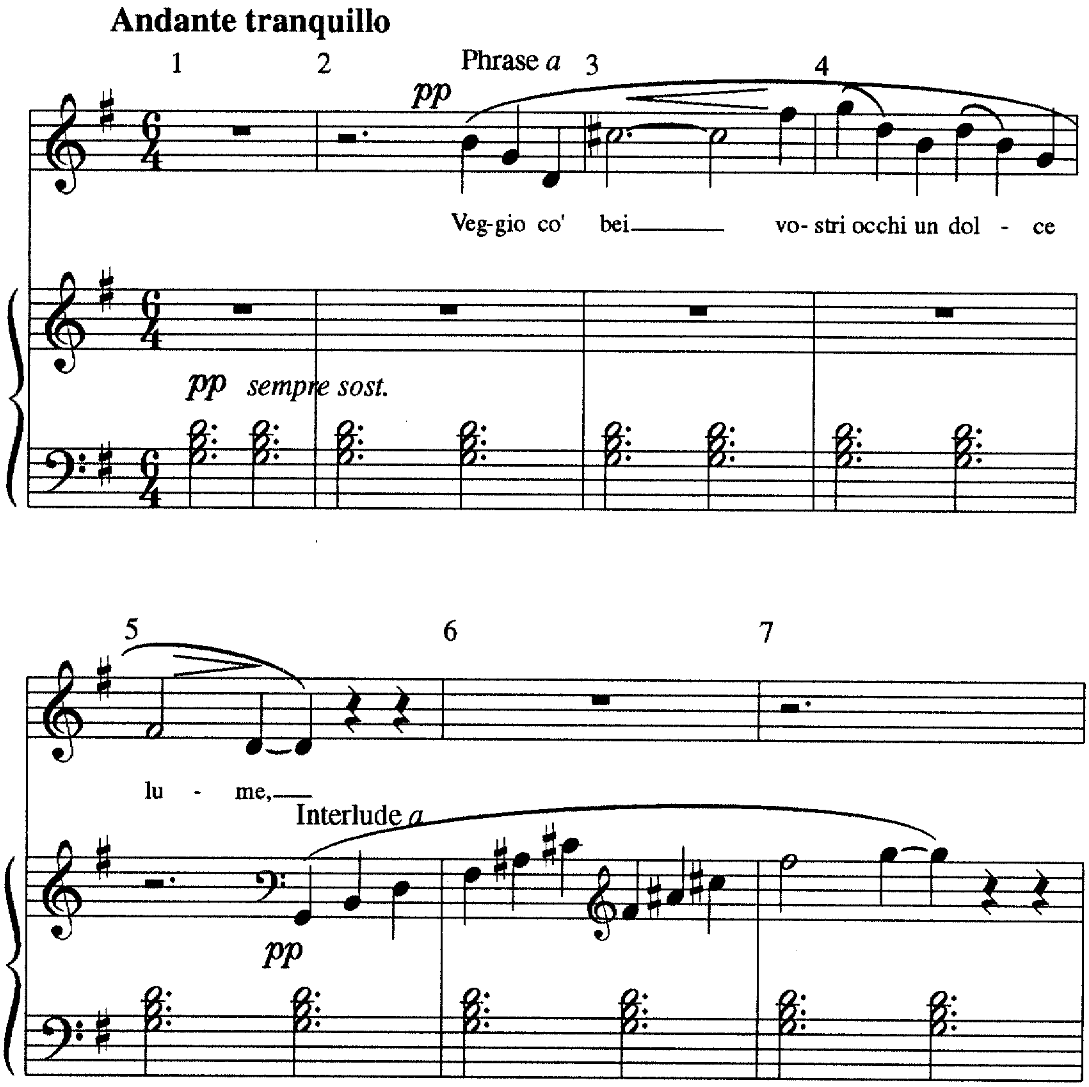
[63] The scale in mm. 25-27 is the one exception to the use of triads in the melodic line.

Example 23: On This Island, "Nocturne," mm. 1-7.


Andante piacevole
pp legato
Now thro' night's caress - ing grip
Earth and all her o - ceans slip,
pp sostenuto

typical expanded ternary design, which in turn sets the traditional delineation of the sonnet form into two quatrains and two tercets (see Table 10) The clarity of the form disintegrates on closer examination of the return, however. Melody, harmony and text do not correspond, obscuring the point of return. The ambiguity is effected by a careful manipulation of the melodic and harmonic return. This blurs the seams of the form, and affects Britten's division of the text.

Example 24: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 1-7.


Andante tranquillo
1
2
Phrase *a*
3
4
pp
Veg-gio co' bei vo- stri occhi un dol - ce
pp sempre sost.
5
6
7
lu - me,
Interlude *a*
pp

Two cadential motives also return at key places, functioning as links between the contrasting sections or as a confirmation of the return. To explain further, motive *x*, the cadential gesture of the first phrase, recurs within several different tonal levels in three sections, and is approached by several similar, but different, gestures (see Example 25). Motive *y*, on the other hand, which undergoes slight changes, serves to aid the return of the *A* section and then closes the song by setting a repetition of the final two words (see

Example 26). The referencing of previous material through the use of motives, also causes further melodic ambiguity, particularly at the return of the *A* section.

TABLE 10

MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF SONETTO XXX

Measure nos.	Musical Form	Phrase Form	Poetic Form	Tonal Areas
1-20	*A*	*a b c d(=c')*	Oct. *ll.* 1-4	G to A to C
20-21	*Transition a*			C
22-36	*B*	*e f c g g g'*	Oct. *ll.* 5-8	C to E to E♭
36-39	*Transition b*			E♭ to B
39-50	*C*	*h h' h'' + a*	Ses. *ll.* 9-11	B to G
51-62	*A '*	*a + b, a+ b'*	Ses. *ll.* 12-14	G (E♭-B) G
63-68		*motive y*	Ses. *l.* 14b	G

The first musical section corresponds to the first quatrain of the octave. In the first three beats, the left hand of the piano establishes both the atmosphere of the song and the tonal center with reiterated root-position G-major triads. The voice enters above these triads, on the second half of the 6/4 measure (refer to Example 24).[64] The melodic line weaves in and out of consonance with the triads as it explores various ways of configuring a G-major triad, interspersed with elements of the major leading-tone triad, F#-A#-C#. Britten prolongs the dissonances through agogic and metric accents, as with the C# in m. 3

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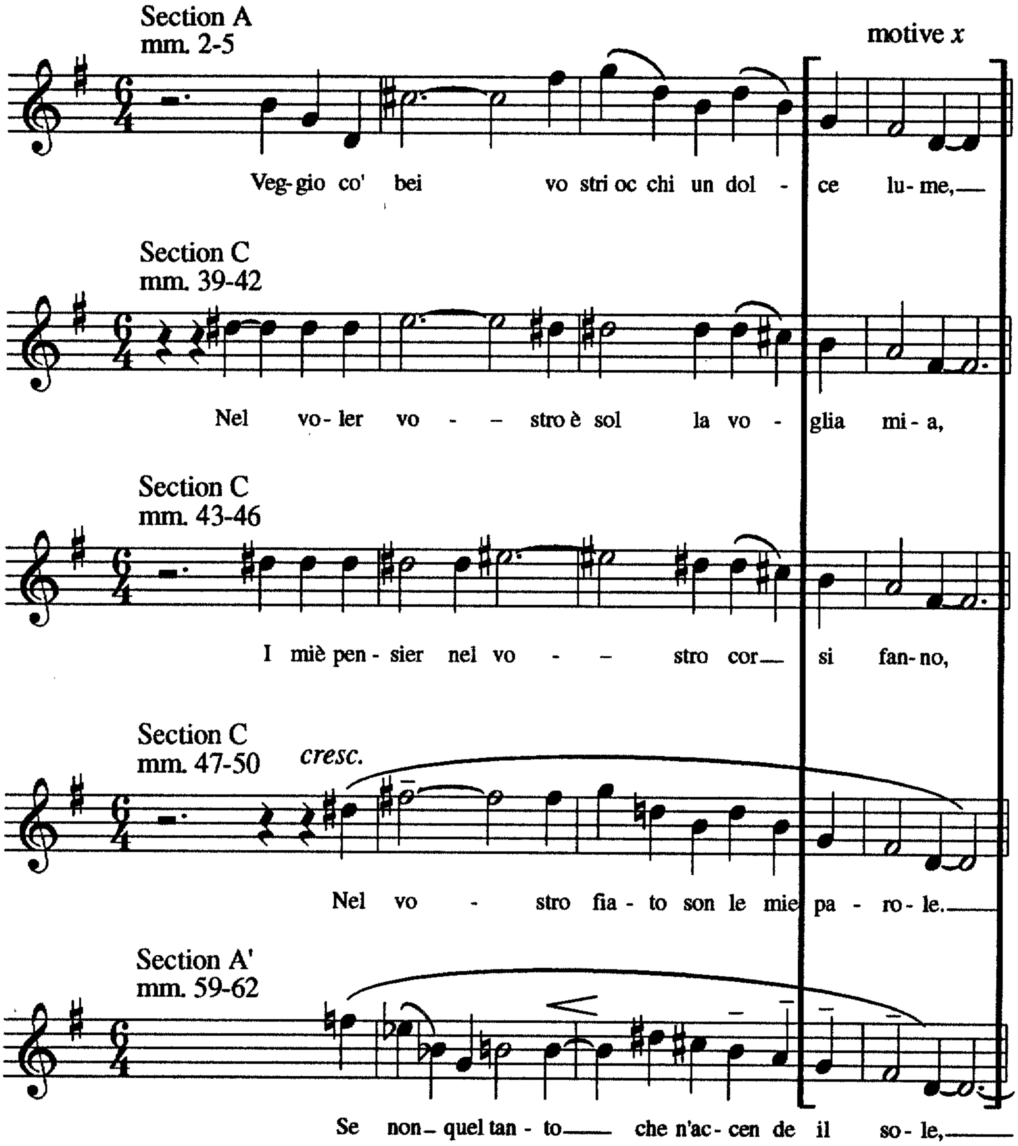
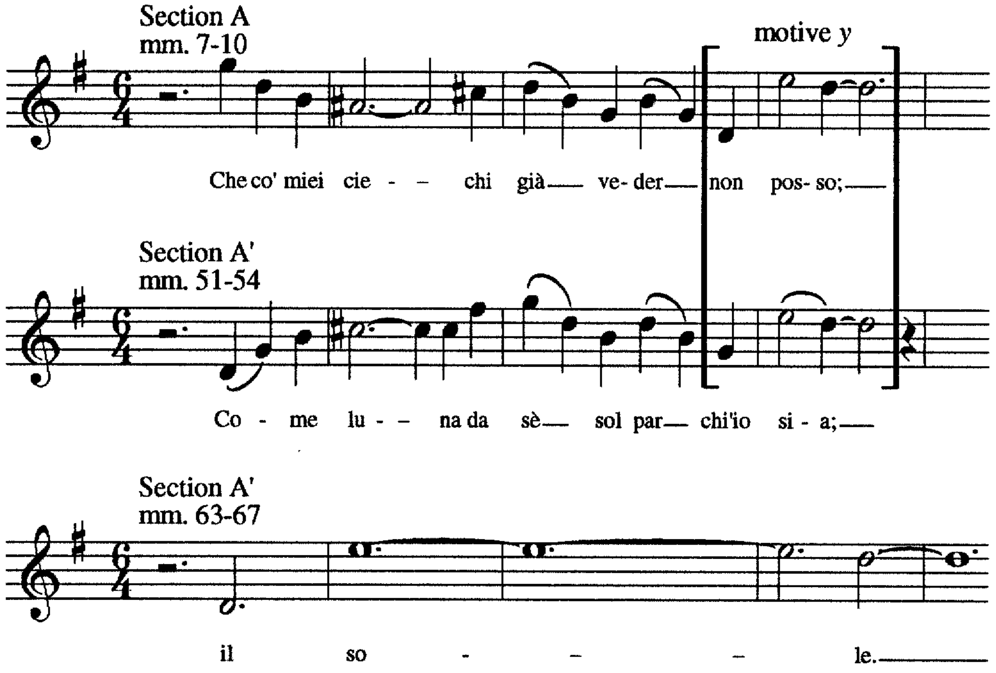
[64] Apart from tempo considerations, Britten also creates a feeling of expansiveness through the meter. Rather than using 6/8, he uses 6/4, the note values of which look more open and expansive.

Example 25: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, vocal line, mm. 2-5; mm. 39-42; mm. 43-46; mm. 47-50; mm. 59-62.


Section A
mm. 2-5
motive *x*
Veg-gio co' bei vo stri oc chi un dol - ce lu-me,
Section C
mm. 39-42
Nel vo-ler vo - - stro è sol la vo - glia mi-a,
Section C
mm. 43-46
I miè pen-sier nel vo - - stro cor si fan-no,
Section C
mm. 47-50
cresc.
Nel vo - stro fia-to son le mie pa - ro-le.
Section A'
mm. 59-62
Se non quel tan-to che n'ac-cen de il so-le,

and the F# in m. 5, giving emphasis to tension within the line. The dissonances receiving the longest values do not resolve according to their natural tendency. The C# moves to an F# which resolves to G, and the final F# resolves to D (cadential motive *x*), so that the tension does not fully dissipate. This first phrase, which is constructed on an arch design, is answered by an ascending phrase in the right hand of the accompaniment that also exploits root-position G-major and F#-major triads.[65] In the accompaniment, the emphasis is placed on the dissonant F#-major triad, but the tension resolves in the cadence, F# to G. Thus, the *a* phrase finds its sure resolution in the answer given by the accompaniment.

Example 26: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, vocal line, mm. 7-10; mm. 51-54; mm. 63-67.


Section A
mm. 7-10
motive *y*
Che co' miei cie - - chi già ve- der non pos- so;
Section A'
mm. 51-54
Co - me lu - - na da sè sol par chi'io si - a;
Section A'
mm. 63-67
il so - - - le.

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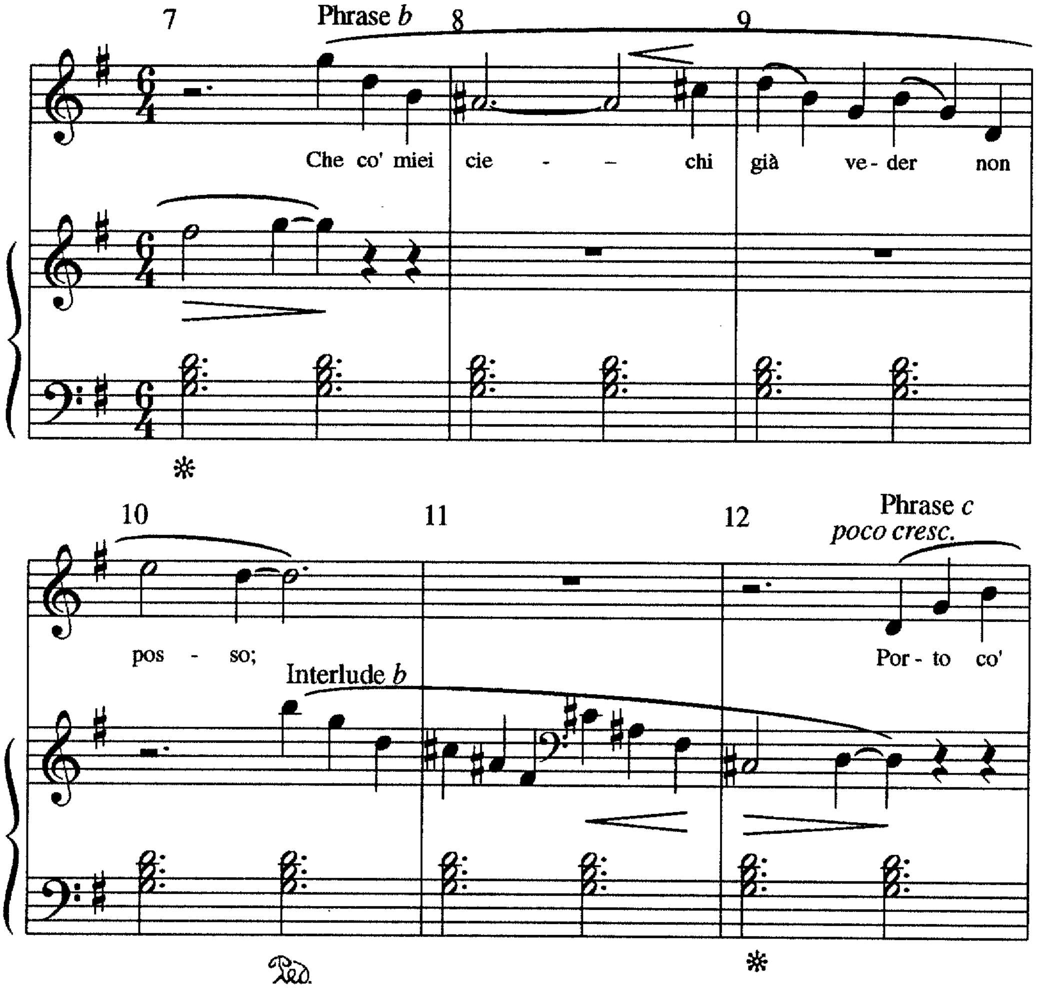
[65] Pears makes a puzzling statement in his article in the Mitchell/Keller *Festschrift* regarding the role of the feminine ending of the text lines in this song: ". . . Britten uses it as part of his melodic line, balancing this softness with the same phrases echoed on the piano *without* the trochee; hence a strong sweetness." "Vocal Music," 67. In the first musical section, which sets the pattern for the relationship between the piano and voice, the piano lines do include the trochaic cadence, although the remaining do not.

The second phrase, in an inverted arch design, also uses the G-major and F♯-major triads, again accenting the dissonances through metric and agogic means (see Example 27).[66] Britten tampers with the patterns of tension that he set up in the *a* phrase, first by not resolving the leading tone in m. 8 to the tonic, and second by adding a seventh to the

Example 27: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 7-22.


7
Phrase *b*
8
9
Che co' miei
cie - - chi
già ve - der non
10
11
12
Phrase *c*
poco cresc.
pos - so;
Interlude *b*
Por - to co'

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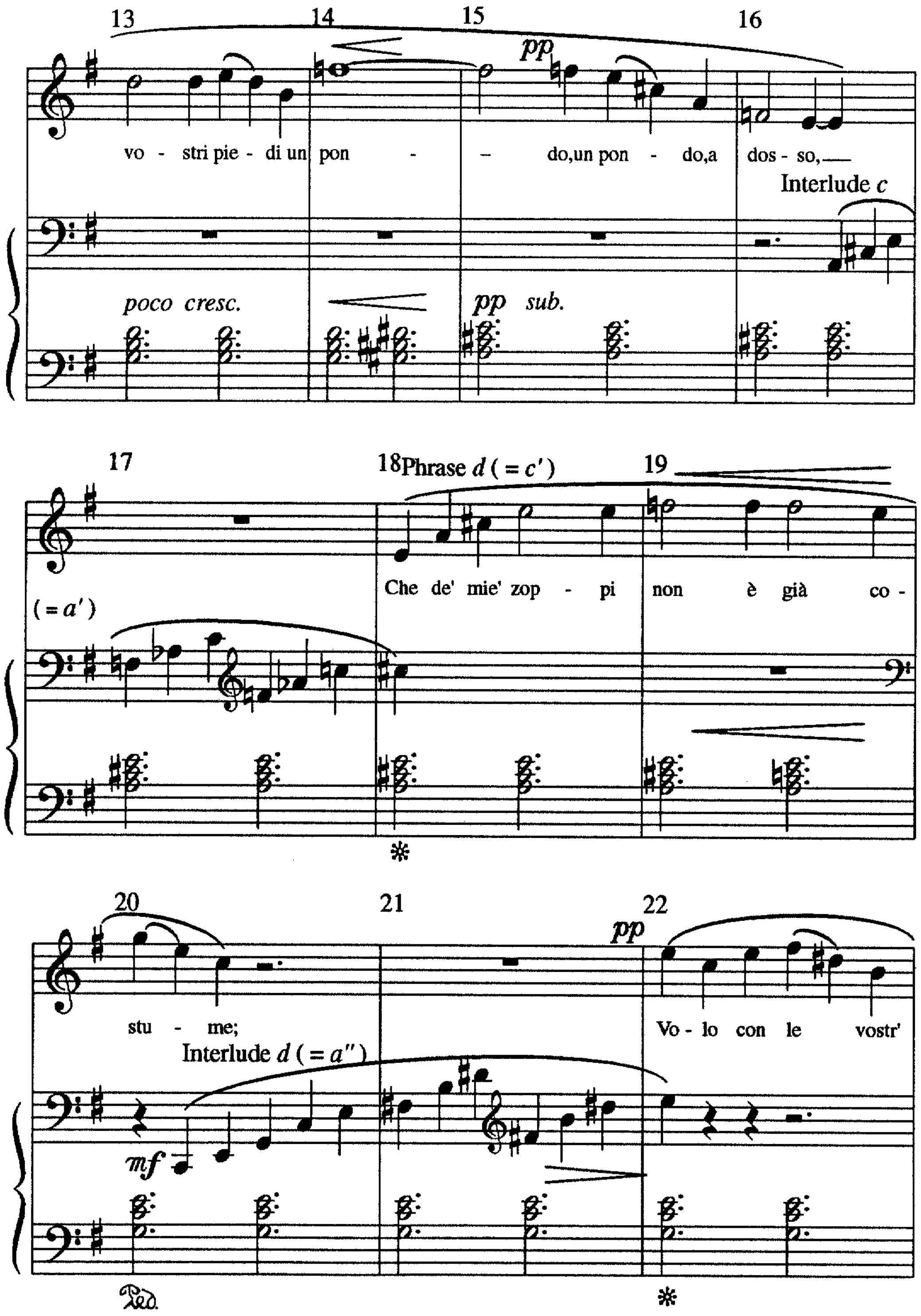
[66] This phrase begins as an imitation of the middle of the first phrase, but continues in a different direction.

Example 27: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 7-22, cont.


13
14
15
pp
16
vo - stri pie - di un pon - - do,un pon - do,a dos - so,—
Interlude c
poco cresc.
pp sub.
17
18Phrase d (= c')
19
(= a')
Che de' mie' zop - pi non è già co -
20
21
22
pp
stu - me;
Interlude d (= a'')
mf
Vo - lo con le vostr'
Ped.

F♯-triad, E, which resolves to D in the cadential motive *y* (m. 10). The phrase is answered again by the right hand, this time in a descending phrase that cadences C♯ to D, again resolving the tensions of the preceding phrase.

While the first two phrases were fairly stable, beginning and ending in the area of G, the remaining phrases of this section are transitional and lead to the next section. The third phrase, which sets the third line of text with an arch design, signals a move to another tonal level with the continuation of the G-major triad into the second beat of the phrase.[67] Britten had established a pattern in the two previous phrases of one beat of a G triad followed by two beats of an F♯ triad, then two beats of G again, and a cadence. In this phrase, there are two beats of G, and then a break from the triadic construction, effected by the E introduced in the previous phrase (refer to Example 27, mm. 12-13). After the break, the voice moves to an F♮, which concludes a strong motion from D through E and precipitates a linear move from G through G♯ then A in the left-hand lute chords. Once the bass arrives on A major, the voice outlines an A-major triad, followed with a half-step cadence from F♮ to E, a contraction of the *y* cadential motive. The accompaniment answers it with a descending exploration of an A-major triad and an F-minor triad, resolving C♮ to C♯ over a C♯ in the left-hand chord. The F-triad contains both upper and lower tendency tones to the A-major triad: the F♮ acts as a upper leading tone to E; the A♭ is the leading tone to A; and the C is the leading tone to C♯. The pattern of dissonance resolution that Britten set with the first two phrases is also destroyed here. The cadence does not make use of the agogic and metric accent on the dissonance, but pulls toward the resolution to C♯, nonetheless.

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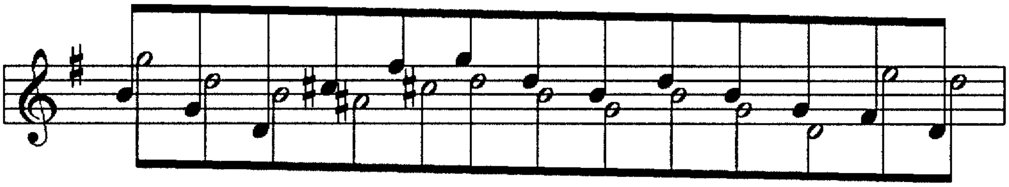
[67] This phrase begins with the retrograde of the gesture of the first beat of phrase *a*.

Concurrent with the resolution in the right hand, the voice enters on the first beat of the measure with an A-major triad, instead of the second half of the measure as the preceding phrases had done (refer to Example 27, m. 18). The phrase ascends to an F♮, which initiates another tonal move, this time toward C major. In the left-hand chords, the A-major triad makes a subtle change of C♯ to C♮, and then the root A steps down to G, completing the motion to the C-major triad, which appears in second inversion. Before the voice can finish the phrase with the outline of a C-major triad, the right hand of the piano begins an answer that ascends through a C-major triad and its major leading-tone triad, B.

The interludes between the four phrases in Section *A* function in two capacities. The first is to reinforce the harmonic goals of the melodic line (refer to Examples 27 and 31). In interludes *a* and *b* (following phrases *a* and *b*, respectively), the tonal area of G major is reaffirmed, with an emphasis on the resolution of the tension between the elements of the F♯ major triad and the G major triad. Phrases *c* and *d* initiate moves to new tonal areas – A major and C major, respectively – so that interludes *c* and *d* take over the role of the melodic line in presenting the tonic triad juxtaposed with its major leading-tone triad. The interludes, with the exception of the interlude between phrases *c* and *d*, also lead to the register of the start of the subsequent melodic phrase. For example, interlude *a* ascends in response to the descent in phrase *a* to the note on which phrase *b* begins, and phrase *b* answers that ascent with an initial descent. The reverse occurs between interlude *b* and the *c* phrase. Thus, the interludes link the phrases by filling in between the cadence of one phrase and the beginning of the next, and provide material against which the next phrase can counter.

The musical settings of the four lines of text in Section *A* reveal an interesting view of the relationships between the lines. Although phrase *a* is primarily an arch design and phrase *b* is an inverted arch, there are several congruous elements that unite them. When the two phrases are lined up note-by-note, their relationship becomes obvious: the *b* phrase presents a different note of the triad that generates the melody at any given point (see Example 28). The text speaks of the relationship between the beloved and the lover, with the lover commenting that he can see his spiritual goal only because of the beloved. He implies that he is made whole by the beloved, a concept that Britten reflects in the relationship between the *a* and *b* phrases.

Example 28: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, correspondences between phrases *a* and *b*.



Consequently, the *c* and *d* phrases also share a co-dependent relationship. The *c* phrase first tries to make a move toward the C major tonal area with the introduction of F♮, which dissolves into A major, as anticipated by the chords in the left hand of the accompaniment (refer to Example 27). The *d* phrase accomplishes what the subsequent phrase could not: F♮ is introduced again, but this time it moves to C major. The lover speaks again of his dependence on the beloved for his strength and wholeness in the image of the beloved's feet carrying a weight that the lover's feet cannot. The first move in the direction of C major in the *c* phrase takes place at the words "*un pondo*" – "a weight" – which repeat as the vocal line moves from F♮ to E to C# then A. The "weight" that the beloved carries then, is evident in the next phrase when F♮ completes its goal of C major, moving to E to G to E then C. Again, the lover's dependence on the beloved is explored in the relationship between the phrases. Further, Britten ties the two sets of phrases together by starting the third phrase (*c*) with the retrograde of the gesture that begins the first (*a*).

Although the arrival of the key of C major takes place at the end of the last phrase of the *A* section, the start of the *B* section, which sets the second quatrain, is clearly delineated by a change in the character of the melodic line. The phrases are still based on triads for the most part, but the range has been greatly contracted in comparison to the expansive phrases of the *A* section (see Example 29). The first phrase of quatrain two (*e*) is generated through repetition. The first beat of the measure outlines C major while the second beat explores B major, the major leading tone triad to C. This gesture repeats for the second measure, coming to rest on an E. The right hand of the piano answers this with a two-beat descent from C major through B major that ends in the same register as the starting note for the second phrase (*f*). The text which this phrase sets, "*Volo con le vostr' ale senza piume*,"[68] speaks of the lover's ability to fly (perhaps, to dream?) because of the beloved's ability to do so. As the images of the text become more abstract, so Britten's vocal line undergoes changes.

The second phrase comprises a scalar ascent starting on the E an octave below the final E of the first phrase (refer to Example 29, mm. 25-27).[69] An E minor scale unfolds, moving through the Lydian sharp fourth and the raised seventh, which creates two augmented seconds. As the scale reaches its goal note G, the C triad in second inversion in the accompaniment becomes an E minor triad in first inversion. The right hand of the piano joins the scale as the G is reached, outlining E-minor and its minor leading-tone triad, D#.

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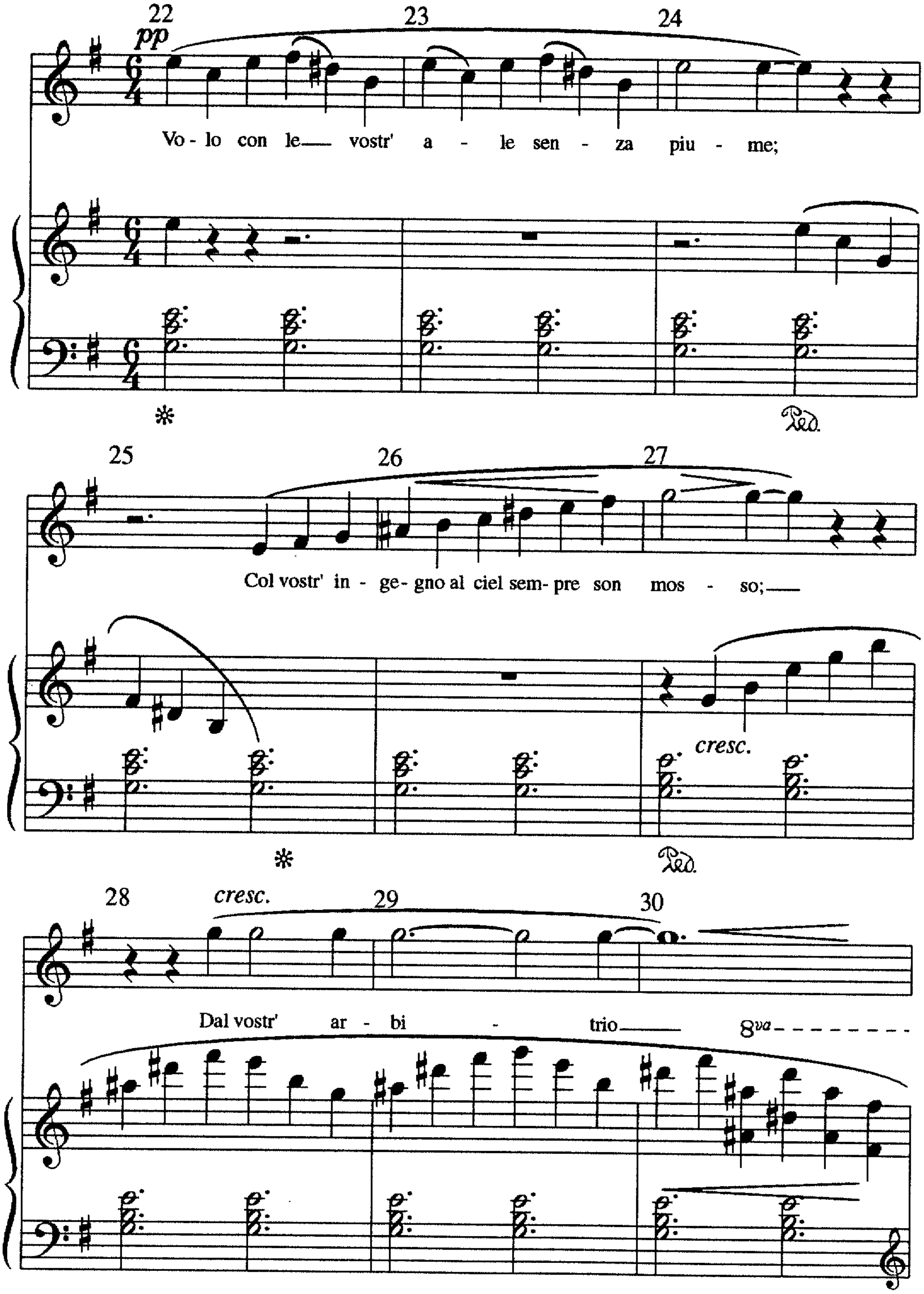
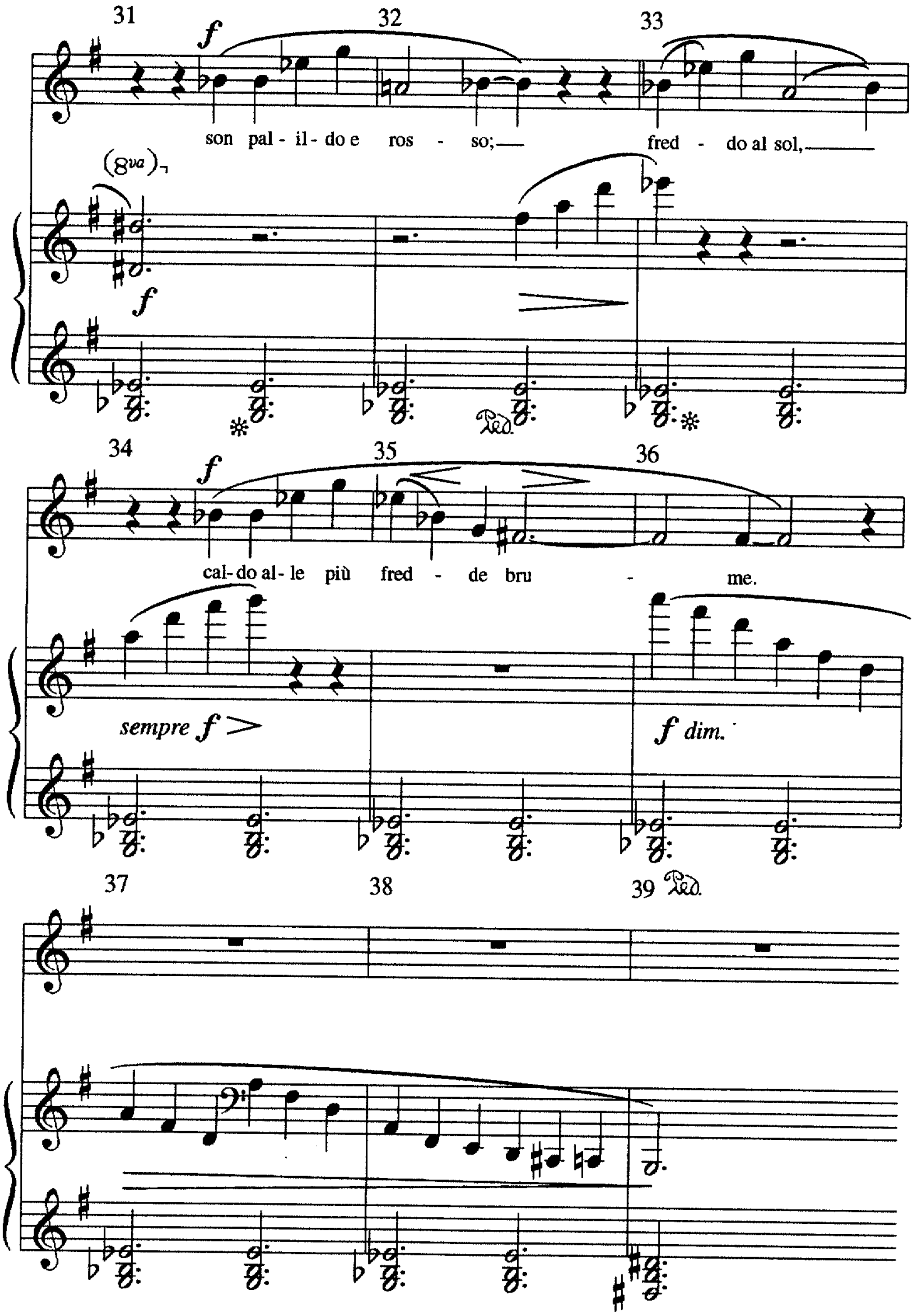
[68] "I fly, though lacking feathers, with your wings."

[69] Evans calls this scale a ". . . striking intrusion of conjunct motion. . . ." Music of Britten, 83.

Example 29: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 22-39.


22
pp
23
24
Vo - lo con le___ vostr' a - le sen - za piu - me;
❋
Ped.
25
26
27
Col vostr' in - ge- gno al ciel sem- pre son mos - so;___
cresc.
❋
Ped.
28
cresc.
29
30
Dal vostr' ar - bi - trio___
8va

Example 29: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 22-39, cont.


31
32
33
f
son pal - il - do e ros - so;
fred - do al sol,
(8va)
f
34
35
36
f
cal - do al - le più fred - de bru - me.
sempre f
f dim.
37
38
39
Ped.

Britten's first phrase of quatrain two (mm. 23-24) anticipated this move to E minor with a B to E gesture across the barline that ended it and linked the repetitions within the phrase. Word painting at this point conveys the text which states that the lover is able to ascend toward heaven and his spiritual goal because of the spirit of the beloved. The G to which the scale ascended in the search for heaven, sets the beginning of line 7 over the right hand's exploration of E-minor and D♯-minor triads – the first time that the two elements have been concurrent – as the lover asserts that he is subject to the will of the beloved ("*Dal vostr' arbitrio*"). This ingenious use of pitch referencing captures the humanist/Neo-platonic slant of the poem: the lover, because he loves the beloved (i.e., beauty) with such abandon, becomes completely one with the beloved and is able to reach spiritual perfection. Moreover, the right hand of the accompaniment and the vocal line finally sound simultaneously, furthering the concept that the lover and beloved are one, although they retain their independence through different pitches and contours. This sheds light on the statement-answer pattern that was explored between the vocal line and right hand in section *A*: since each melodic line found its completion in the accompaniment line, the melodic line could refer to the lover and the accompaniment line to the beloved.

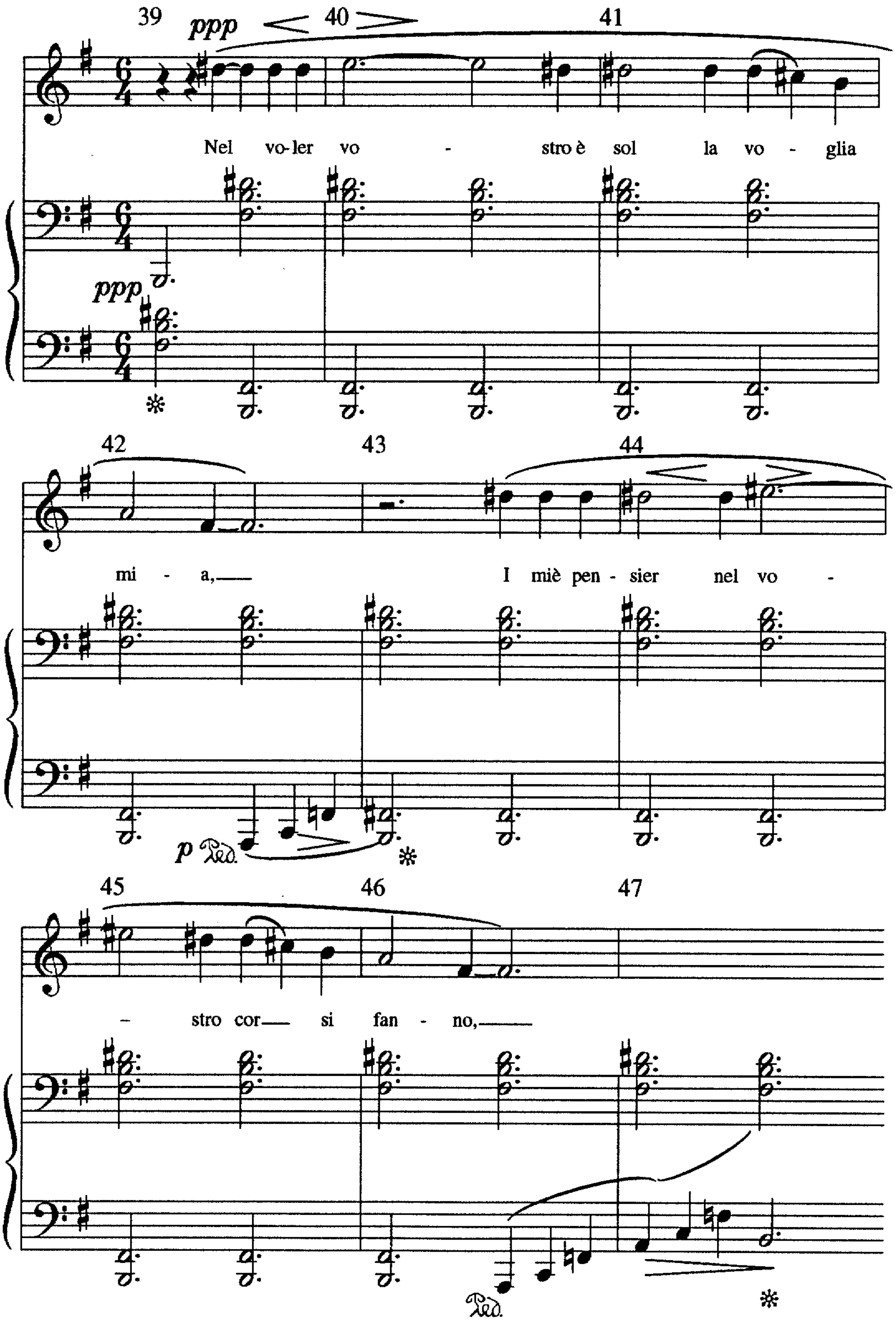
The right hand exploration of E minor and D♯ minor initiates an arrival on E♭ major through the use of enharmonic spelling: the line ends on D♯ above an E♭-major triad, with the result that the D♯ of the minor leading-tone triad to E becomes E♭, which can also be considered the major leading-tone triad to E. The arrival is striking, being the loudest point of the song so far (refer to Example 29), and becomes the climax of the song, and seemingly, of the text as well – the lover is completely at the will of the beloved, and the beloved's will is so strong that he can change the tonal focus through an alternate spelling and reinterpretation of a pitch.

The remainder of the seventh line of text begins a listing of the ways in which the beloved controls the lover that continues through line 8: the lover pales or blushes at his wish, becomes cold when it is hot, or hot when it is cold (refer to Example 29). Britten sets the first of these contradictory conditions to a fragmentary gesture that outlines an E♭-major triad followed by a scale-degree ♯4 to 5 melodic half-cadence. The triad sets the word "*pallido*," while the half cadence sets the opposite, "*rosso.*" In other words, tonic and dominant are set as a polarity. The accompaniment answers it with an ascent through the major leading-tone triad, cadencing D to E♭ to counter the half cadence. The gesture repeats with a change of placement in the barline to set the words "*freddo al sol*" as opposites, with the same answer in the piano. The third condition "*caldo alle più fredde brume*," begins with a repetition of the gesture, but it expands in order to accommodate the longer line. After emphasizing an E♭-major triad, the melodic line ends with G moving to its leading tone, F♯. Before it ends completely, however, the piano interrupts with a descent outlining a D-major triad, the leading-tone triad to E♭, which sets up the transition to the tonal area for the *C* section.

In the third measure of the D-major arpeggio, Britten breaks the pattern with a sudden turn to conjunct motion (refer to Example 29, m. 38). An E enters in place of the expected D, and this unfolds a scalar fragment extending from F♯ to B, with a chromatic descent, C♯-C♮-B in the final three pitches. The E♭-major triad, through enharmonic spelling and step-wise motion, resolves to a B-major triad in second inversion, that in turn becomes the tonal reference for the third musical section, which corresponds to the first tercet.

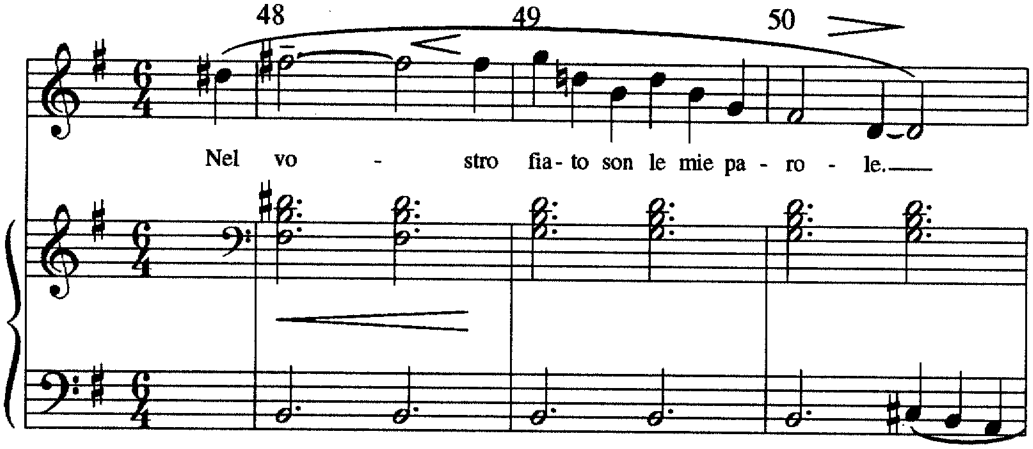
To provide contrast between the sections, Britten again changes the character of the melodic line, making it into a recitative based on the statement of a phrase and its repetition with slight modifications (see Example 30 and Example 31, m. 48, below). The change in each phrase makes an ascent from E to E♯ to F♯ and occurs on the first syllable of the same

Example 30: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 39-47.


39
ppp
40
41
Nel vo-ler vo - stro è sol la vo - glia
ppp
42
43
44
mi - a,
I miè pen - sier nel vo -
p
45
46
47
- stro cor si fan - no,

word found in each phrase, "*vo-stro.*" The first two statements return to cadence motive *x* from the *A* section in anticipation of the return of the *A* section, but at the B-major level and with a lowered-seventh scale degree. The accompaniment begins answers after the first and second statements in the left hand, which outline an F-major triad, providing the typical Mixolydian characteristic (♭7); however, it abandons these, returning to a fifth, B-F# or the single note B.[70] The third statement, which begins similarly to the first two, reaches an F#, leading the vocal line to a return of the second half of the *a* phrase, including cadential motive *x* at its original pitch (see Example 31). As that portion of the *a* phrase recurs, the D# and F# of the B-major triad, now in the right hand of the accompaniment, resolve to D♮ and G♮, respectively.

Example 31: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 48-54.



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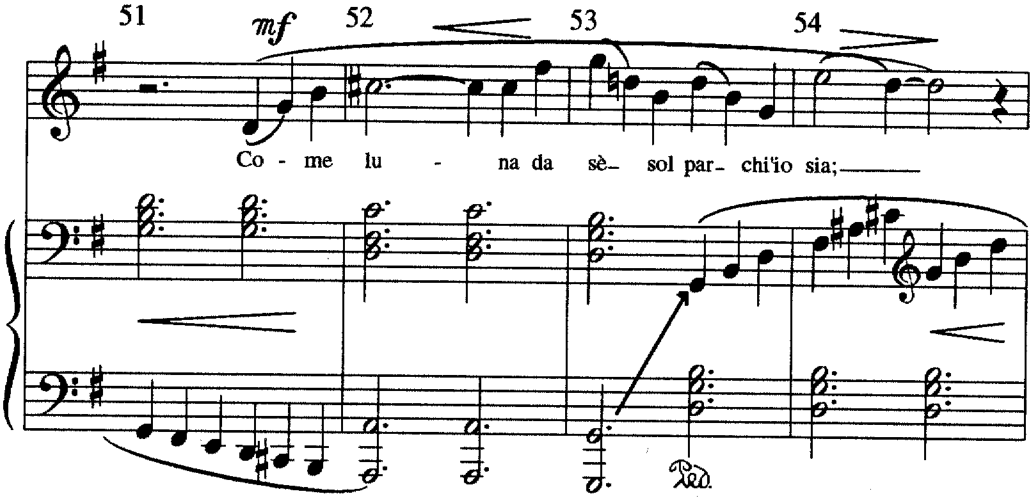
[70] The F♮ leads up to the F#, and the C♮ acts as an upper leading tone to B, but the A does not modify any of the members of the B-major triad.

Example 31: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 48-54, cont.



The subtle use of word painting here again shows the humanist/Neo-platonic elements in the text: the beloved, addressed as "*vostro*" in the poem, leads the lover closer to his spiritual goal through the ascent of stressed pitches E-E#-F#, with the F# resolving finally to G, precipitating a return to elements of the *a* phrase from section *A*. Interesting as well, is the fact that the text at this return states that the lover's words are on the breath of the beloved. The lover has become even more entrenched in the beloved, as the beloved's will and thoughts become those of the lover and vice versa.

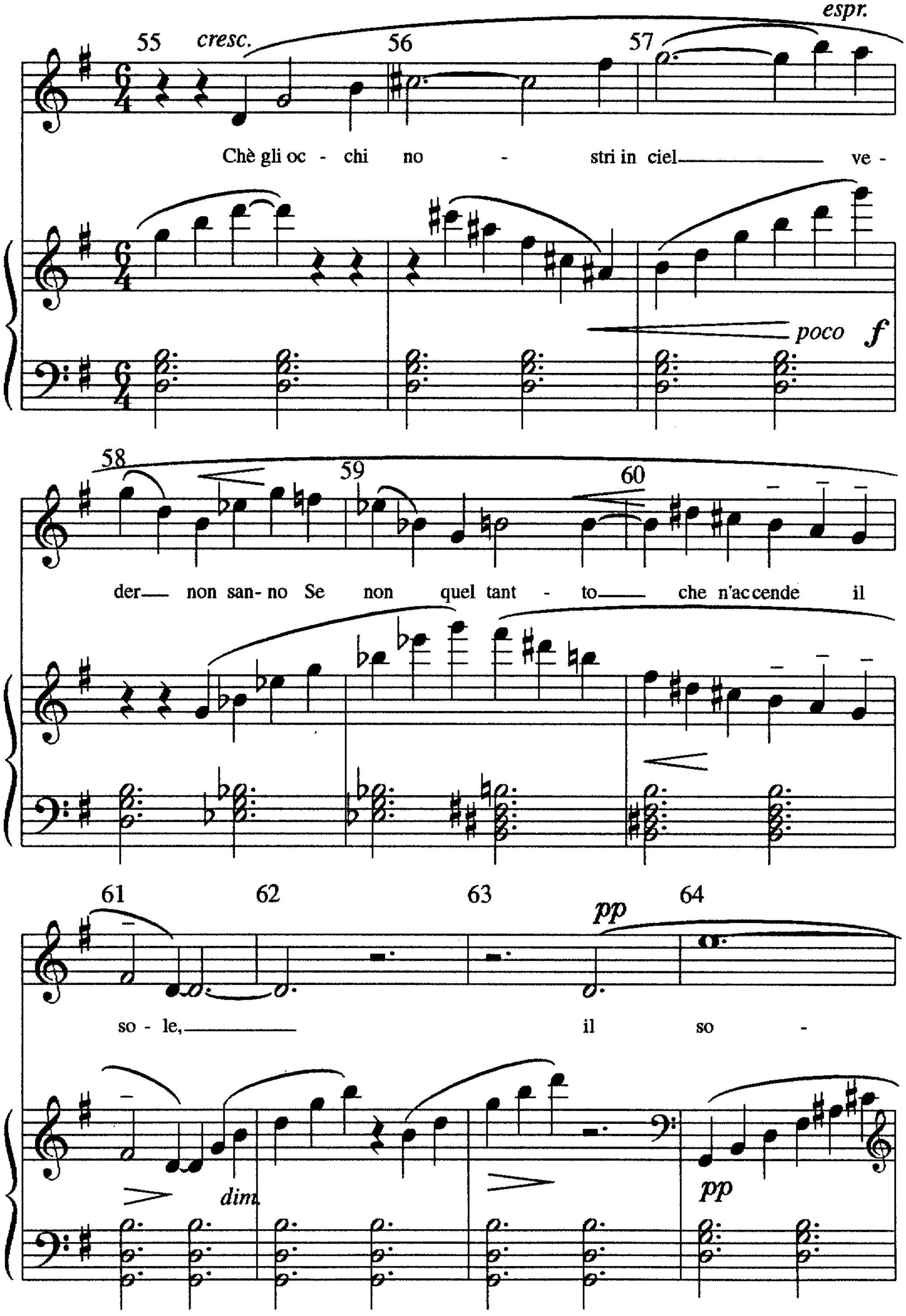
The reappearance of G major at the end of section *C* does not last, for the bass line does not stay on its B, but moves via a descending G-major scale with a Lydian sharp fourth (suggesting the F# major triad), to an A which becomes the fifth of a dominant-seventh chord in G major (refer to Example 31, mm. 50-54). A return to the *a* phrase of the first section – but with the *y* cadential motive – takes place as the final ascent toward the A begins from D. The dominant-seventh chord, with a C♮, occurs with the C# in the melodic line, giving it more tension than it had at its first appearance. The chord, in second inversion, moves to a root position G-major triad, both resolving the tension of the C# and signalling a second return of G major. The return at m. 49 has been usurped by the use of the dominant. Like the previous return, this one also takes place in the middle of a melodic phrase, and as well, the once the root position G-major triad is established, it moves to its second inversion. The exact point of return, then, is obscured and confused by the harmonic activity and the recurrence of melodic elements of the *A* section at both appearances of G major.

The point that appears to be the return (mm. 51-54) is a conflation of the first two melodic lines that occur within the *A* section. The recombination of melodic elements, particularly when considered in light of the high degree of recognition effected in the previous phrase, does not constitute a true return, only a superficial one. The previous phrase, in mm. 47-50, actually contains more elements of the opening line than the point of return, including the signature cadential motive *x*, creating further ambiguity as to the point of melodic return (refer to Example 30). This phrase, however, corresponds to a less emphatic return of the tonic harmony in first inversion, leading the listener into thinking that the end of the contrasting *C* section and the return to the *A* section flow into one another without regard for the event of the return. This may have been the case were it not for the conflicting activity of the harmony at this point.

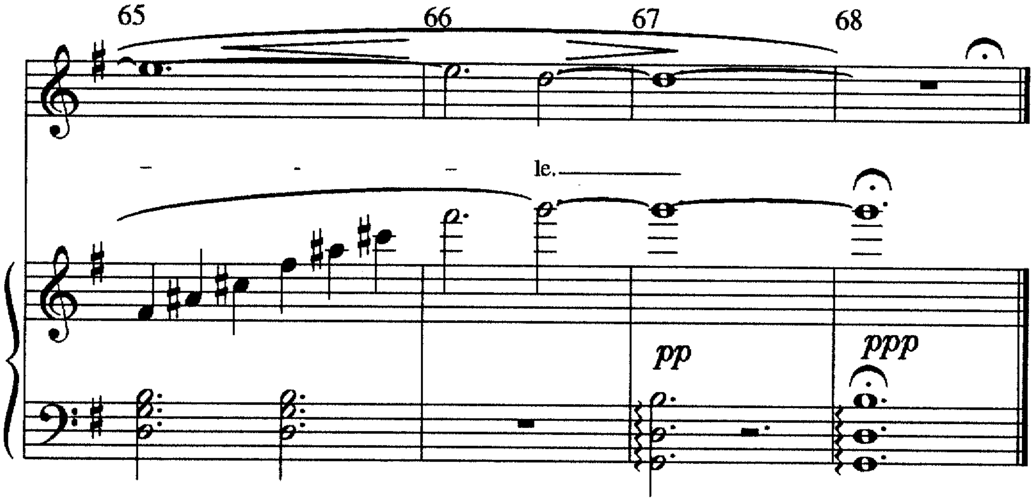
The return to G major at the end of the *C* section takes place in the middle of a melodic phrase and is weak owing to the absence of the major leading tone triad and the position of the tonic triad in first inversion. The true harmonic return, although it also takes place in the middle of a phrase, is accomplished by the only dominant-to-tonic cadence in the song, in mm. 52-53. Once this occurs, the major leading-tone triad to G returns in the accompaniment, unfolding simultaneously with the melodic line, around a second-inversion G-major triad.

After the melodic and harmonic returns, the arpeggios in the right hand of the accompaniment begin to flow out of the held notes in the melodic line (see Example 32). The thirteenth line of the poem begins like a repetition of the *a* phrase, but the piano answers at the C♯ with a descending F♯-major triad. When the F♯ in m. 56 resolves to G, the piano ascends through a G-major triad. At this point, the vocal line expands, and explores the various tonal areas referenced during the song by outlining triads or including scale fragments. In m. 58, a G-major triad arpeggiation is juxtaposed with an E♭-major triad (complete in the right hand of the piano). In the following measure, an E♭-major triad in the vocal line and its mirror in the piano are juxtaposed with a B-major triad in the piano. The single note B in the vocal line initiates the unfolding of a B-Mixolydian scale fragment in m. 60, which turns into a G-major scale fragment at the B, finally concluding with a return of the cadential motive *x* at m. 61. The right hand of the accompaniment, after having joined the vocal line for two measures, answers the cadence with two ascending G-major arpeggios. The final two words, "*il sole*" are repeated, set to an augmentation of cadential motive *y*. As the E of the motive is held for two and one-half measures, the accompaniment unfolds over a G-major second inversion triad an ascending G-major arpeggio for one beat, followed by three beats of an F♯ major arpeggio. This reaches an F♯, and together the E of the vocal line and the F♯ in the accompaniment resolve to G and D, respectively. As the lover increasingly expands the declarations of bonds that the beloved has over him, the harmony keeps moving to higher tonal levels. The arrangement of the key centers comprises an upward motion that continues until the tonic key of G major is reached again. This ascension is in keeping with the ideas expressed in the poetry, in which the lover is led to the contemplation of higher spiritual goals because of his thoughts of the beloved. In the end, however, the work closes quietly with rolled G-major triads in the accompaniment.

Example 32: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 55-68.


55
cresc.
56
57
espr.
Chè gli oc - chi no - stri in ciel ve -
poco f
58
59
60
der non san- no Se non quel tant - to che n'accende il
61
62
63
pp
64
so - le, il so -
dim.
pp

Example 32: Sonetto XXX, *Veggio co' bei*, mm. 55-68, cont.



The ambiguity surrounding the return of the *A'* section has a significant impact upon the meaning of the text and musico-poetic form of the song (see Table 11). The eleventh line, "*Nel vostro fiato son le mie parole*"[71] – the first return – is an interesting turning point in the text, for it is the first reference to any portion of the lover being part of the beloved. Here, the lover's words are on the breath of the beloved, rather than, in keeping with the spirit of the poem thus far, the words of the beloved being on the breath of the lover. The poem turns to the lover briefly, as the music returns, somewhat, to the opening melodic idea. In this phrase, the lover and the beloved become truly one, if we consider that the *A* section refers to the beloved in both music and text. This brief return, then, sets the stage for the true return, although that return is not strong in terms of the form.

In the final section with the return to the melodic ideas of the *A* section, the lover reiterates that he lacks essence without the beloved: in this case the beloved must illuminate him as the sun lights the moon (refer to Example 32). The return to *A* begins with weak

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[71] "And within your breath are my own words."

TABLE 11

TEXT OF SONETTO XXX AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Musical Scheme	Tonal Area
Veggio co' bei vostri occhi un dolce lume, Che co' miei ciechi già veder non posso; Porto co' vostri piedi un pondo a dosso, Che de' mie' zoppi non è già costume;	*A*: I only exist because of you, my beloved – because of you, I can aspire to things that I cannot alone, and I can bear more burdens	GM GM-AM AM-CM
Volo con le vostr' ale senza piume; Col vostr' ingegno al ciel sempre son mosso; Dal vostr' arbitrio son pallido e rosso; Freddo al sol, caldo alle più fredde brume.	*B*: Through you I can realize my spiritual goals; I am completely at your mercy: you make me cold when it is hot and hot when it is cold	CM Em Em-E♭M
Nel voler vostro è sol la voglia mia, I mié pensier nel vostro cor si fanno,	*C*: I have been so completely absorbed by you that your will is my will and your thoughts are my thoughts . . .	BM
Nel vostro fiato son le mie parole.	Point of 1st return of G major: My words are your words	BM-GM
Come luna da sè sol par chi' io sia;	*A'*: point of 2nd return of G major: I am like the moon in the sky. . .	GM
Chè gli occhi nostri in ciel veder non sanno Se non quel tanto che n' accende il sole, il sole.	our eyes cannot only see the part of the moon that the sun illuminates, so the only part of me that exists is that which is illuminated by you	GM-E♭M- -BM-GM GM

references to the main tonal center and a conflation of the opening melodic ideas. These fragments of motives and phrases of the opening section are a metaphor for how much the lover has been absorbed by the beloved. As the lover compares the beloved to the sun, describing his dependent relationship, the key of G major becomes firmly established with a root position triad, which initiates a clear statement of the melodic idea of the opening section (refer to Example 32). The repetition of the words "*il sole*" allows for the confirmation of the key through expansion by augmentation of the cadential motive (*y*) and through the renewed use of the major leading tone triad. The final cadence, as seen in Example 32, has a Renaissance flavor and uses the whole step above D simultaneously with the leading tone to G[72] as the accompaniment ascends ever higher, signifying the spiritual completeness of the lover through his thoughts of the beloved.

Sonetto LV

Tu sa' ch' io so

Tu sa' ch' io so, signior mie, che tu sai	Thou know'st, beloved, that I know thou know'st
Ch' i venni per goderti più da presso;	that I am come nearer to enjoy thee more;
E sai ch' i' so che tu sa' ch' i' son desso.	and thou know'st that I know thou know'st that I am still the
A che più indugio a salutarci omai?	same. Why, then, do I hesitate to greet thee?
Se vera è la speranza che mi dài,	If the hope thou givest me is true,
Se vero è 'l buon desio che m' è concesso,	if true the strong desire that is granted me,
Rompasi il mur frall' uno e l'altra messo;	the wall between us crumbles,
Chè doppia forza hann' i celati guai.	for secret griefs have double force.
S' i' amo sol di te, signior mie caro,	If I love in thee, beloved,
Quel che di te più ami, non ti sdegni;	only what thou lovest most, do not be angry;
Che l'un dell' altro spirto s'innamora.	for so one spirit is enamoured of another.
Quel che nel tuo bel volto bramo e 'mparo,	That which in thy lovely face I yearn for and seek to grasp,
E mal compres' è degli umani ingegni,	is but ill understood by human kind,
Chi 'l vuol veder, convien che prima mora.	and he that would see it, first must die.[73]

The musical problem that Britten sets up in Sonetto LV is based upon two conflicting pitches, B♭ and its Lydian sharp-fourth, E♮, through which he explores another facet of an important relationship in this song cycle.[74] The repetitive accompaniment figure establishes the conflict at the outset of the *A* section: the Lydian sharp-fourth – E♮ – in the right hand is dissonant with the B♭ pedal in the bass line in a 4-3 suspension figure (see

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[72] This cadence type was used previously in the piece, at mm. 48-49, the transition from B major to G major. At that point, however, the half-step above D was used.

[73] There are several changes or misprints in the text as it appears in the score: in line 1, "*ch' io*" should be "*ch' i'* " and "*mie*" should be "*me*;" in line 2, "*Ch' i*" should be "*Ch' i'*;" in line 7, "*frall' uno*" should be "*fra l' uno*;" in line 8, the word "*Chè*" should not have an accent; and in line 13, the words "*è degli*" should be "*e dagli.*"

[74] Britten explores the Lydian sharp-fourth relationship in several of the songs in this cycle, including Sonettos XXXVIII and XIV.

Example 33).[75] Although the E♮ resolves to a D over the B♭, its accented rhythmic position in the syncopation, coupled with its dissonance with the F♮ highlight its role as protagonist against the B♭. The conflict between B♭ and E♮ delineates the formal matters of the song: it recurs at strategic structural points and provides the basis of the principle followed in the contrasting tonal areas.

The opening melodic gesture, which sets the two pitches in opposition, further clarifies the tension between B♭ and E♮ (refer to Example 33). The first half of the phrase, corresponding to line 1 of the sonnet, ascends the interval of a sixth from a G through B♭ to the E♮, arriving at that pitch on a weak beat, but with both tonic and agogic accents accorded to it. The second half, corresponding to line 2, answers this with a descent that pauses on D and A (both elements in the B♭ tonal area), finally landing on an E♮ as part of the cadence, E♮ to D, taken from the accompaniment figure. The A♮, as leading tone to B♭, and the E♮, as the leading tone to its dominant pitch F as fifth of B♭ scale, are unresolved although they occur at resting points in the melodic line, so that the tension between the B♭ and the E♮ in the accompaniment is intensified by the respective positions of the two leading tones A♮ and E♮ in the melody.

Once Britten has fully established the material of the conflict in the melodic line as well as the accompaniment, he initiates a move away from it. The second phrase, which sets lines 3 and 4 of the poem, begins as a repetition of the first phrase – but with a transposition of the first two notes up a step – and then starts toward a new goal of G♭ (or F♯) through an E♭. As the melodic line begins its ascent to G♭, the bass line abandons the

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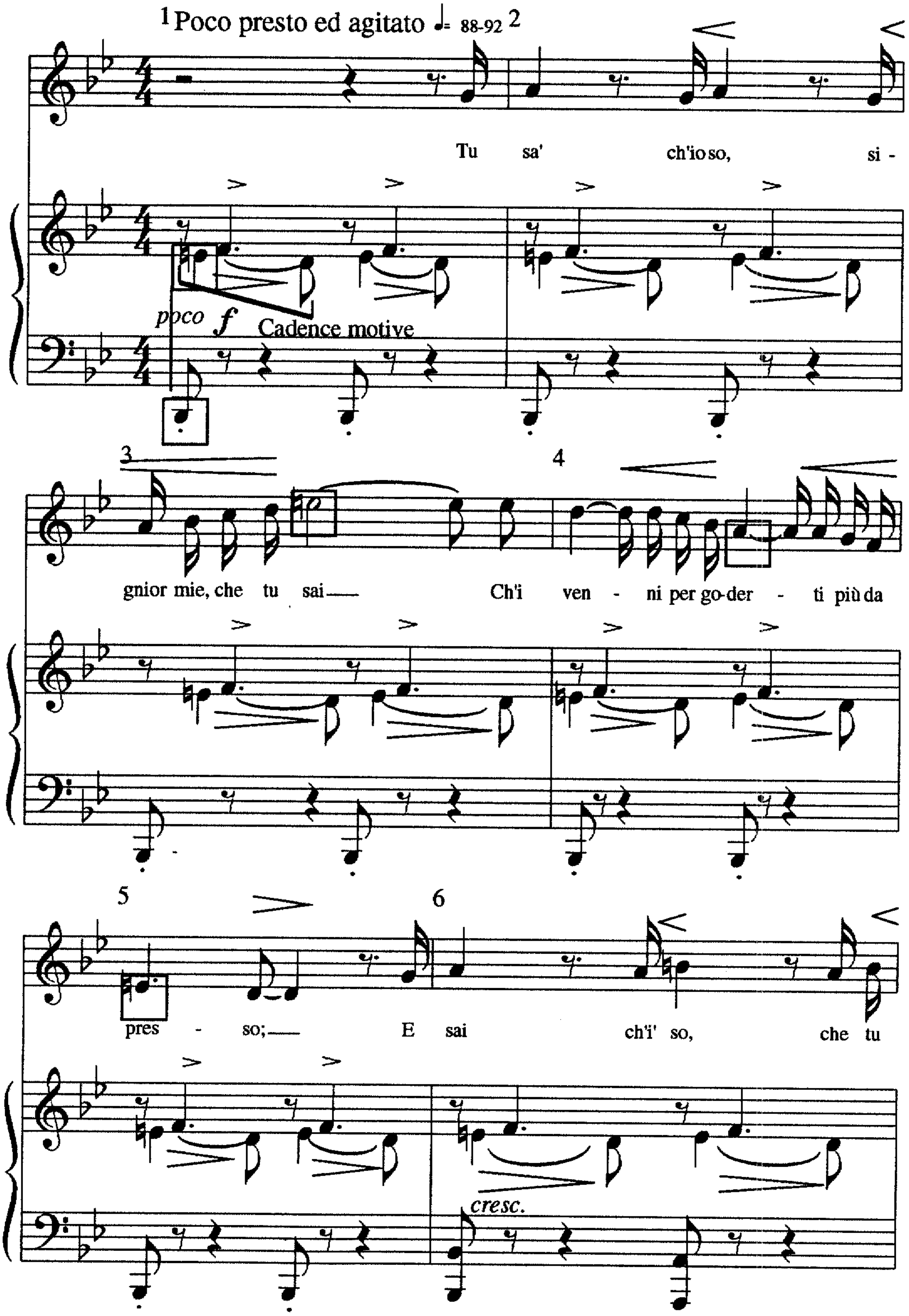
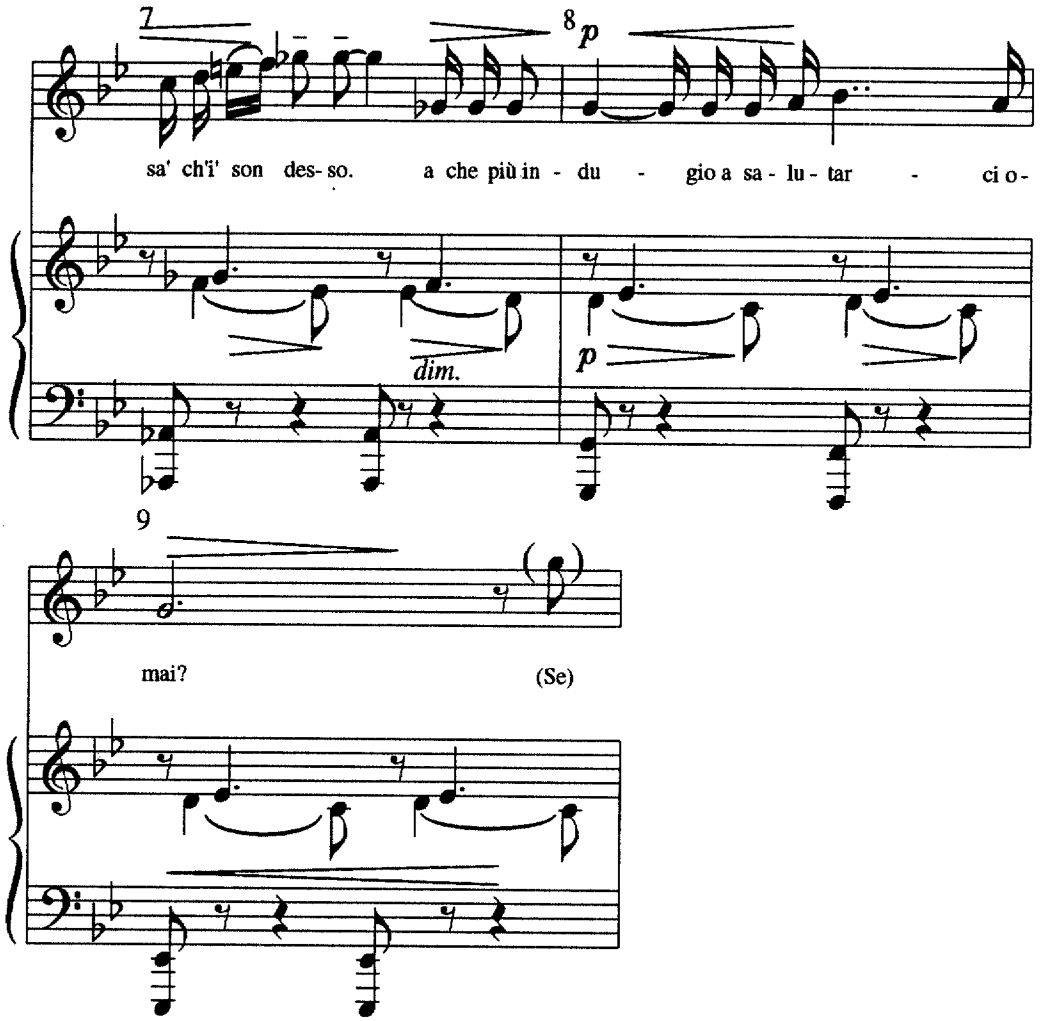
[75] Evans asserts that the accompaniment figure ". . . threaten[s] to become humdrum in [its] patterning." Music of Britten, 83. He also makes this statement regarding Sonetto XXXI, but it must be observed that the use of a repeated pattern in the accompaniment was fast becoming a thumbprint in Britten's songs.

Example 33: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 1-9.


1 Poco presto ed agitato ♩. = 88-92
2
Tu sa' ch'io so, si -
poco *f*
Cadence motive
3
gnior mie, che tu sai
4
Ch'i ven - ni per go-der - ti più da
5
pres - so;
6
E sai ch'i' so, che tu
cresc.

Example 33: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 1-9, cont.


7
8
p
sa' ch'i' son des- so.
a che più in - du - gio a sa - lu - tar - ci o-
dim.
p
9
mai?
(Se)

B♭ pedal with a descent by half-steps toward E♭.[76] Once the first goal of G♭ is reached in the melodic line, the second half of the phrase returns temporarily to the initiating pitch G, ascends to a B♭, then returns to the G as the bass line arrives on E♭.

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[76] In m. 8, the half-step motion in the bass is expanded to a whole step, so that from G the line reaches E♭ after a step to F.

Essentially, Britten explores the E♮ element more fully in the first phrase, reserving an exploration of B♭ for the phrase and cadence that closes out the first section. The G♭ goal note, although it is not an element of B♭, when respelled as the leading tone to G, is consistent with the starting pitch of both phrases and the cadence of the second phrase. The G, apart from being related to B♭ via considerations of the key signature, is important as the median point between E♮ and B♭, and seems to govern the ambitus of the melodic line, which with the exception of the second half of the first phrase is anchored by E♮. References to G and G♭ in this first section also prepare for events that occur in the next section of the song.

The ambitus of the two melodic phrases coupled with the manner in which the B♭-E♮ conflict unfolds is significant in light of the text (see Table 12). The secrecy of the first line, in which the lover implies that only he and the beloved know about their relationship, is explored by the B♭-E♮ conflict as set up in the accompaniment and explored in the ascent from G to E♮ through B♭ in the melodic line. The E♮, however, becomes associated with the beloved, since it governs words that deal directly with the beloved and the lover's relationship with him. An E♮ occurs with the words "*tu sai*" ("thou know'st") as well as with the word "*presso*" ("near"). Moreover, the compass of the second half of the phrase, which sets the text "*Ch' i venni per goderti più da presso*," ("that I am come nearer to enjoy thee more") descends the octave connecting E♮s, ending on D. Thus, as the lover speaks of drawing nearer to the beloved, the focal point is E♮. In lines 3 and 4, the lover backs away from the lover, "*A che più indugio a salutarci omai*" ("Why do I hesitate to greet thee?") because "*ch' i' son desso*" ("I am still the same"). In other words, the lover, while approaching the beloved (expressed by E♮), still hesitates to abandon himself completely because of his fears (expressed by B♭) that the beloved will not return the love that the lover feels.

TABLE 12

RELATIONSHIP OF THE FIRST QUATRAIN OF SONETTO LV TO THE B♭ - E♮ CONFLICT

Text	Melodic Ambitus	B♭-E♮ Conflict
Tu sa' ch' io so, signior mie, che tu sai (Thou know'st, beloved, that I know thou know'st)	G - E♮	B♭ - E♮ acc. B♭ - E♮ melody
Ch' i venni per goderti più da presso; (that I am come nearer to enjoy thee more;)	E♮ - E♮ (D)	B♭ - E♮ acc. E♮ - A melody
E sai ch' i' so che tu sa' ch' i' son desso. (and thou know'st that I know thou know'st that I am still the same.)	G - G♭	B♭ → A♭ bass line B♭ - E♭ melody
A che più indugio a salutarci omai? (Why, then, do I hesitate to greet thee?)	(G♭) G - B♭ - G	A♭ → E♭ bass line B♭ melody

Britten carves the melodic line so that it contains a pictorial element, but not in the sense of individual word painting. The phrases of the melody are very graceful, full of pauses on long notes, each of which comes after a different length of scale fragment, but almost always on the strong beats (1 and 3) of the meter.[77] These gestures give the line a sense of furtiveness that is in character with the concealing nature of the first line: "Thou know'st, beloved, that I know thou know'st." This need for secrecy, explained in the Michelangelo studies of Saslow as an attempt to avoid arousing public suspicion of his homosexual feelings for Cavalieri,[78] was also very much in Britten's mind, owing to the fact that homosexuality was outlawed in England and parts of America. As late as 1959, after it was apparent to his public that his friendship with Pears was an intimate one, Britten still felt the need to describe their early relationship and resulting journey to America as arising from their professional associations:

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[77] There are a few exceptions to the long notes occurring on the strong beats (see particularly mm. 5, 7, 13, 15, 21-22 and 33). Most of these are at the end of phrases.

[78] Saslow, The Poetry of Michelangelo, trans. James M. Saslow (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 154.

> Peter was going to America on holiday and had fixed incidental singing dates there. He and I had been thrown together professionally a year or so before. I liked him enormously, admired his way of thinking, found him stimulating. So we made the voyage together. . . .[79]

Britten, too, accepted his homosexuality only after dealing with feelings of guilt which he expressed through the maintaining of a certain distance in the homosexual relationships he had prior to the one with Pears. The melodic line, then, which unfolds with caution the B♭-E♮ conflict, becomes a metaphor for the private relationship of the beloved and the lover, as well as the reluctance which both Britten and Michelangelo felt toward their feelings of homosexuality.

Taking the final melodic gesture as a model for a false sequence, Britten explores other aspects of the B♭-E♮ conflict in the second section of the song. The arrival on E♭ in the bass line in m. 9 sets up the potential for a subsidiary and parallel conflict between the E♭ and its Lydian sharp-fourth, A♮. In reality, Britten introduces B♮ (spelled C♭) against E♭, so that the basic pitch protagonist names remain the same although the interval between them does not.[80] Further, a linear conflict between E♭ and E♮ develops as the result of both the ascending sequence in the melodic line and a descending bass line, so that the expected fourth within the B♭ tonal area is set in opposition to the sharp-fourth.

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[79] Britten, "Back to Britain with Britten," interview by Charles Reid, High Fidelity 9 (December 1959): 76.

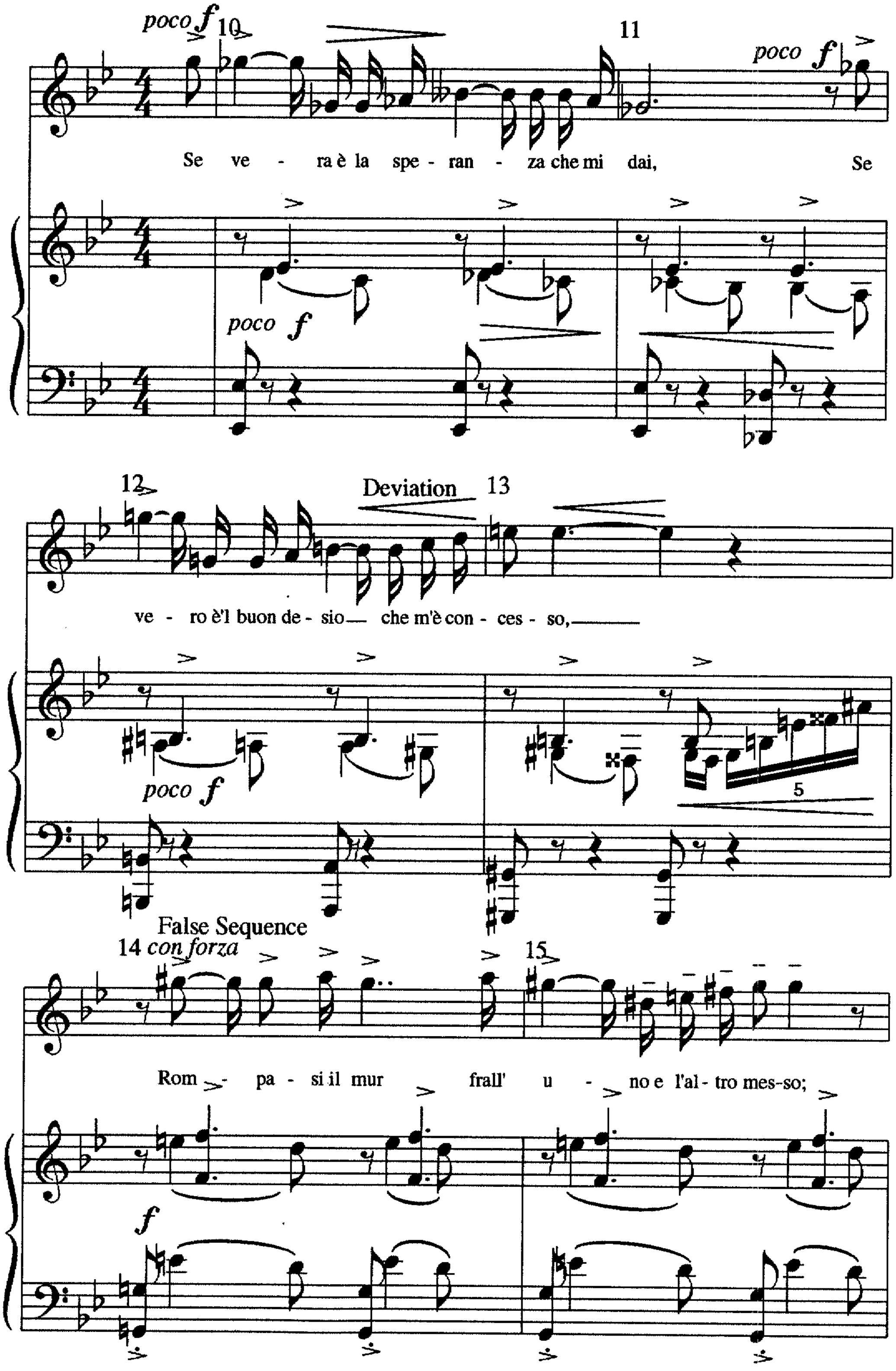
[80] This concept requires more explanation. Particularly in his use of both the major and minor thirds in Sonetto XXXI, Britten was exploring the use of a pitch without regard to its accidental. This creates a set of pitches whose only relation is that they share the same basic name, i.e., E♮ is related to E♭ and E#, etc., by virtue of the designation E.

The melodic setting of line 5 of the poem begins by resolving one facet of the G-G♭ juxtaposition from the first section of the song (see Example 34). Heard over an E♭ in the bass line, these pitches, which initiate the first gesture of the sequence, become the major and minor third, respectively, in an E♭ context. The continuation of the phrase, however, uses a G♭-minor ambitus, which recalls the use of a G compass in the first section.

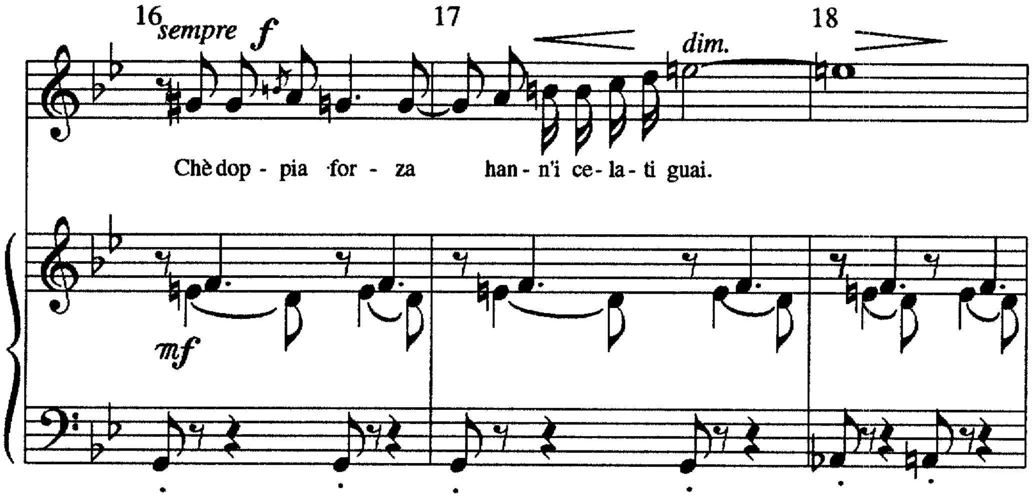
During this first melodic statement, the accompaniment right-hand figure goes through several transformations. At the end of the first section, the F/E♮ to D was transposed to E♭/D to C. After an initial reference to that configuration as the phrase begins, the figure descends, becoming E♭/D♭ to C♭, which introduces the E♭-B♮ conflict. As the melody cadences on G♭ in m. 11, the figure changes character altogether, maintaining E♭ as the top note, but with the interval of the second below it now expanded to a minor third, followed by a perfect fourth. After the cadence, the bass line, under further transformations of the figure, begins a descent by whole steps, eventually reaching an A♭ (spelled G♯) when the final step becomes a half-step. This gesture, over which the second statement of the sequence is heard, parallels the descent in mm. 6-9 in section *A*. There, the bass descended from B♭ first by half-steps, then whole-steps to reach the fifth below, E♭. Here, the step pattern is reversed: from E♭ the bass line descends by whole-steps, then half-steps to reach its fifth below, A♭ (spelled G♯).

In the second melodic gesture, which sets line 6 of the poem, the G♭ and G are resolved within another context. The G♭ (enharmonically F♯) becomes the leading tone to the G, which, in turn, suggests the third of an E-minor tonal reference, although the ambitus suggests G. The sequence breaks when the melodic line fails to return to G after resting on B♮, but continues up to E♮ instead. Coinciding with the melodic arrival on E♮ is the bass line arrival on G♯ (A♭), which suggests an E-major tonal reference. After one

Example 34: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 10-18.


poco f
10
11
poco f
Se ve - ra è la spe - ran - za che mi dai,
Se
poco f
12
Deviation
13
ve - ro è'l buon de - sio — che m'è con - ces - so, —
poco f
5
False Sequence
14 con forza
15
Rom - pa - si il mur frall' u - no e l'al - tro mes-so;
f

Example 34: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 10-18.



measure of G#, the bass line steps down to a G♮ (transposed up an octave), and the right-hand accompaniment figure, F/E♮ to D, is restored.

The melody, which sets line 7, begins on G#, so that both the major and minor thirds of E are present, reminiscent of the use of both the major and minor thirds of E♭ in the first phrase. Although the melodic sequence has been almost totally abandoned, its shadow remains in the basic gesture of this third phrase, which is essentially a mirror image of the arch design that characterizes the first phrase. The relationship between the third phrase and the fourth in this section is similar to that between the first and second. The fourth phrase begins as a repetition of the third, but an octave lower. Instead of returning to G# after a descent to D#, the phrase ascends to E♮ from G#, which is taken from m. 12 in the second phrase. After the arrival on E♮ in the melody, the bass line initiates a return to B♭, which will resolve the appearance of the right-hand accompaniment figure, F/E♮ to D, with the "wrong" bass note, G.

In terms of the text, Britten's musical setting of the second quatrain connects the poetic lines and verses in a way that Michelangelo could not do verbally. First, Britten sets up a link between the first quatrain and the second through the use of the final phrase of the first section as the model for the pseudo-sequence of the second. A second link can be found in the ascent to E♮ which occurs in mm. 11-12 and mm. 16-17, which is based on a similar ascent found in mm. 2-3. These melodic correspondences, coupled with the fact that the first section ends within the tonal area of the outset of the second section blurs the structural seams. Britten signals the end of the *A* section, however, by lengthening the final half-phrase to two and one-half measures, after having set up a pattern of two-measure half-phrase lengths.[81] Second, Britten unites the two conditional clauses that comprise the first two lines of the second quatrain through the use of sequence, including the third and fourth lines through a gradual ascending step progression from G♭ to G♮ to G#.

The B♭-E♮ conflict appears in a new guise, but the lover's fear and feelings of secrecy still remain (see Table 13). Again, the E♮ concerns the world of the beloved. In the beginning, the lover still feels some doubt about the beloved's feelings toward him, so the E♭, which is an element of the realm of B♭, is used to express the first conditional clause: "*Se vera è la speranza che mi dài*" ("If the hope thou givest me is true"). In other words, while the lover feels hopeful about the relationship, he cannot completely trust it, although the use of B♮, an element of E♮, in the right hand figure suggests a tie with the beloved. With the second conditional clause, Britten makes a move toward E, that is not confirmed until the final note of the melodic phrase. Thus, the lover approaches the beloved through the strong desire that he feels. The wall that crumbles as the result of the conditions of the two clauses having been met does so in the area of E, with no elements of B♭ to cloud the arrival. The final line, however, in which the lover asserts that if the wall remains the secrecy of their love will cause them greater sadness, returns to a melodic gesture from the first section (m. 17) over the right-hand figure from the first section (F/E♮ to D), so that the lover's fears and need for secrecy has been quelled by his thoughts of oneness with the beloved.

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[81] Britten uses the augmentation of phrase length to define the end of each section in the song.

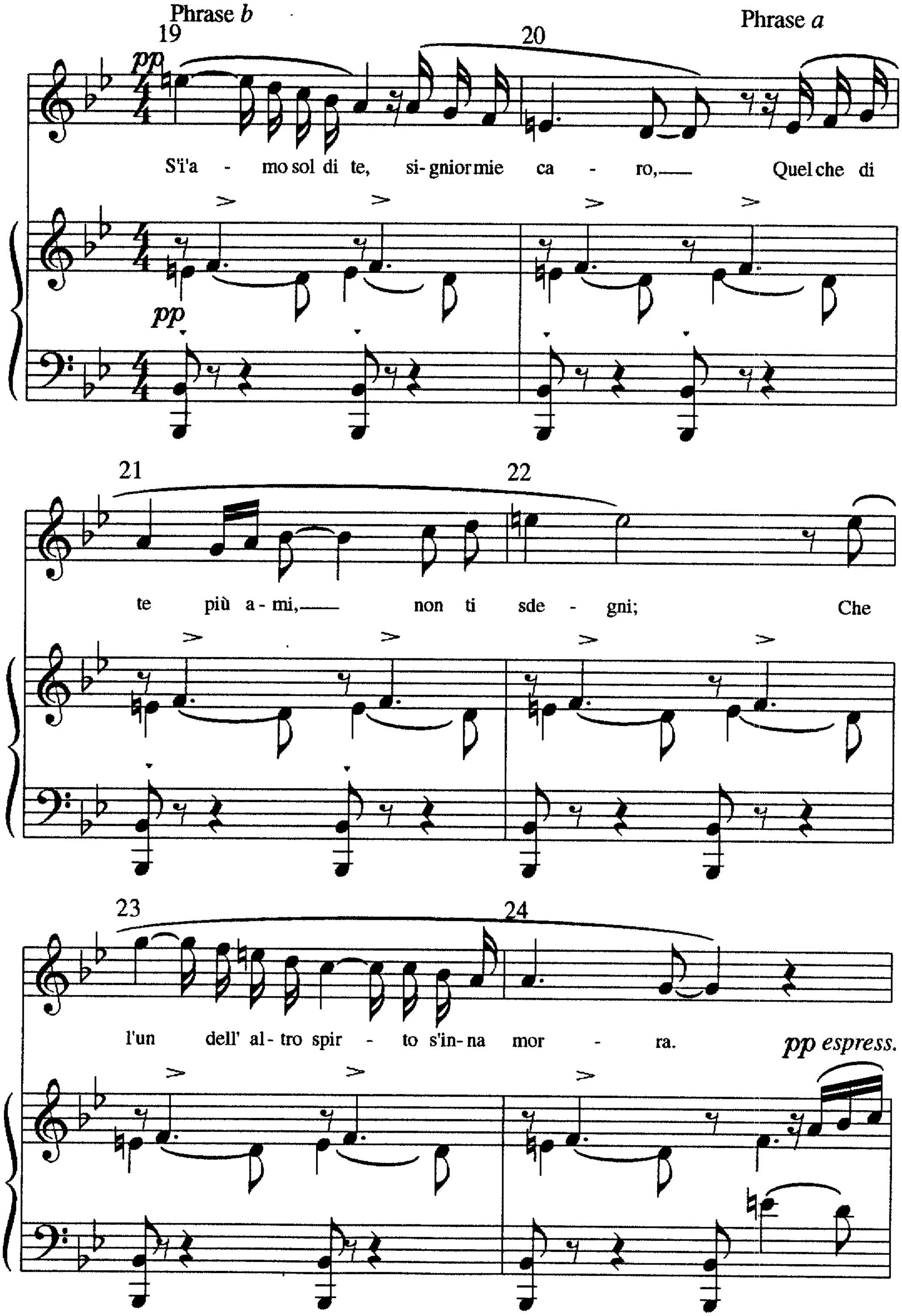
TABLE 13

RELATIONSHIP OF THE SECOND QUATRAIN OF SONETTO LV
TO THE B♭ - E♮ CONFLICT

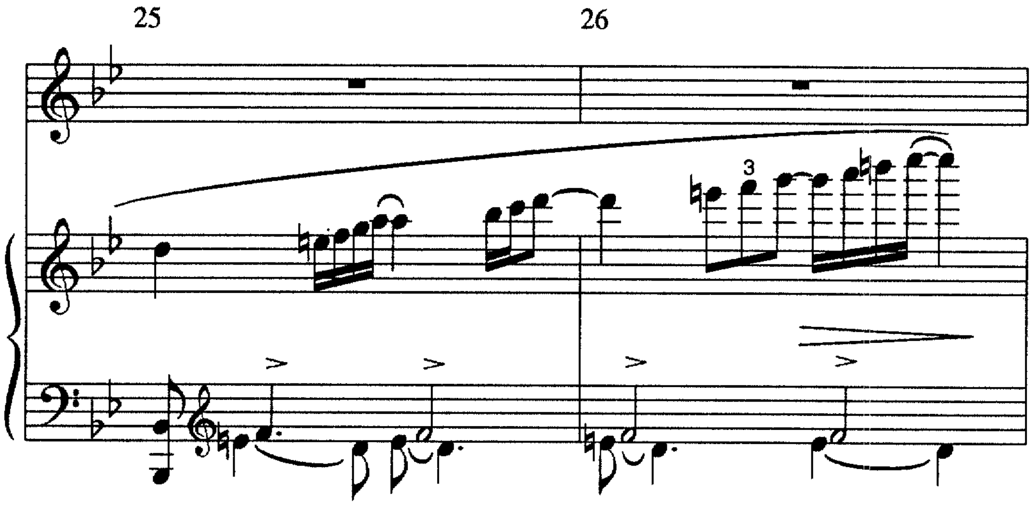
Text	Melodic Ambitus	B♭-E♮ Conflict
Se vera è la speranza che mi dài, If the hope thou givest me is true,	G♭ - G♭	E♭ bass line
Se vero è 'l buon desio che m' è concesso, if true the strong desire that is granted me,	G♮ - E♮	E outline in melody bass → G♯
Rompasi il mur frall' uno e l'altra messo; the wall between us crumbles,	G♯ - G♯	G in bass F/E♮ in acc. rh
Chè doppia forza hann' i celati guai. for secret griefs have double force.	G♯ to E♮	G in bass F/E♮ in acc. rh

Britten's setting of the first tercet marks a return to the B♭-E♮ conflict in both the melody and the accompaniment figure, although the two half-phrases of the first phrase of the *A* section recur in a different order, as seen in Example 35. From the outset the B♭ of the bass line pedal is placed in direct confrontation with an E♮ in the melodic line, which now always occurs on the strong beat of the measure. The first phrase (*a*), refigured into an inverted arch design, includes resting points on the A♮ and the E♮ from its first appearance, so that the B♭-E♮ conflict remains, although the E♮ receives more prominence in the line. The second phrase begins from E♮, but ascends to a G, and becomes a

Example 35: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 19-26.


Phrase *b*
19
pp
20
Phrase *a*
S'i'a - mo sol di te, si- gnior mie ca - ro,—— Quel che di
pp
21
22
te più a - mi,—— non ti sde - gni; Che
23
24
l'un dell' al- tro spir - to s'in- na mor - ra.
pp espress.

Example 35: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 19-26, cont.



transposition of the second half-phrase of *a* to G. This also returns to the G compass that characterized the second phrase of the *A* section. The phrase is continued by a piano interlude in which the right hand ascends using motivic elements from the melody to a C through E♮ and B♮, with the F/E♮ to D figure in the left hand, effectively neutralizing elements of B♭.

The B♭-E♮ conflict again organizes the text, expressing connection that could not be accomplished verbally (see Table 14). In the ninth line of the poem, the lover refers to himself in the first person, which Britten sets with the restoration of the B♭-E♮ conflict, although the E♮ is more prominent melodically. The poem explains an important concept in this tercet. The lover loves in the beloved what the beloved loves the most about himself – which Britten captures through the melodic E♮ references – and implies in the third line that the love of another person must be based on the best of that person so that spiritual goals are realized. Britten uses the G compass of the third phrase as a median between B♭ and E♮, essentially representing the oneness of the individual spirit of the lover with the equally individual spirit of the beloved.

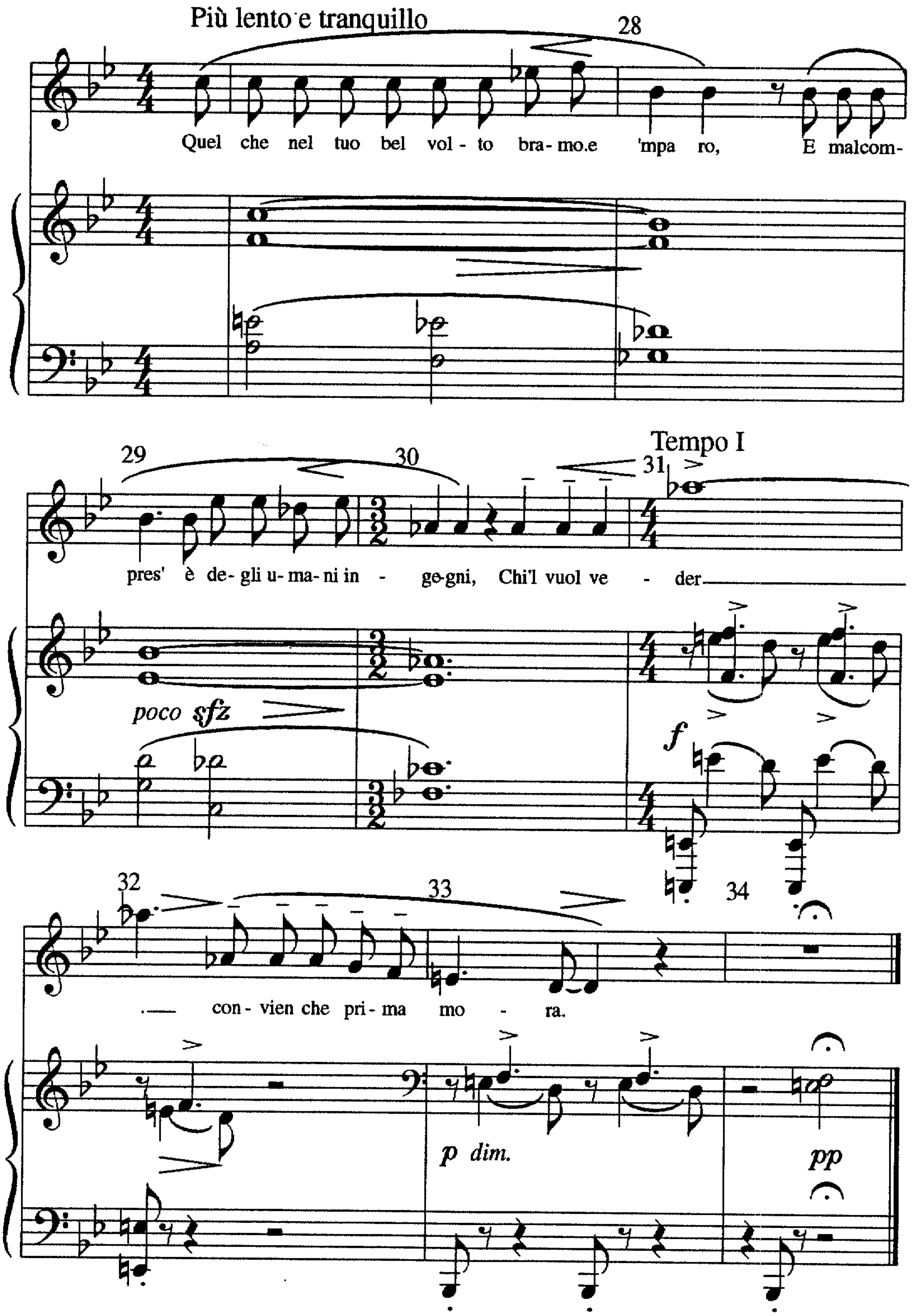
TABLE 14

RELATIONSHIP OF THE FIRST TERCET OF SONETTO LV TO THE B♭ - E♮ CONFLICT

Text	Melodic Ambitus	B♭-E♮ Conflict
S' i' amo sol di te, signior mie caro, (If I love in thee, beloved,)	E♮ - E♮ (D)	B♭ - E♮ acc. B♭ - E♮ melody
Quel che di te più ami, non ti sdegni; (only what thou lovest most, do not be angry;)	E♮ - E♮	B♭ - E♮ acc. B♭ - E♮ melody
Che l'un dell' altro spirto s'innamora. (for so one spirit is enamoured of another.)	G - G	B♭ - E♮ acc. B♭ - E♮ melody

The section that follows features a complete departure from the motivic components of the both the melody and the accompaniment (see Example 36). The melody has the character of a recitative, complete with an ascending second followed by a descending leap of a fifth for a cadence. It, however, derives from an outline of the opening phrase, using its essential intervals, so that although the character is recitative, the connection with the scales of the rest of the song is made clear (see Example 37). The recitative pattern, which sets line 12, is transposed down a step for the setting of the next line of poetry. Both of these phrases explore elements of the B♭-E♮ conflict. In its first appearance, the recitative retains E♭ for the cadence, E♭ to F to B♭, confirming the role of E♭ as an element of B♭. The traditional sounding chords underneath this phrase, F-A-C-E♮/E♭ resolving to G♭-B♭-D♭-F, could be taken as suggesting a V^7 to $\flat VI^7$ progression in B♭, with the E♮ in the chord at the first beat of the measure being a hold-over from the motive in m. 18. If the enharmonic spelling of the G♭ chord is considered, that chord suggests the dominant of B – but with a major seventh, which was important in the interlude and in the *B* section in the context of E♮. Thus, the two chords have reference to B♭ and B♮ respectively.

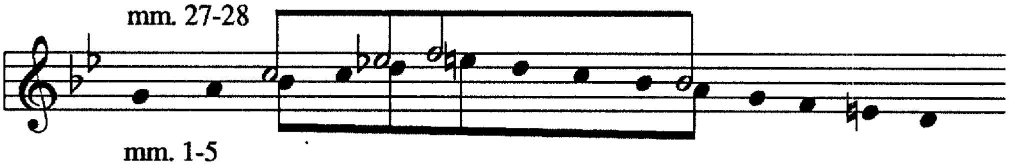
Example 36: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 27-34.


Più lento e tranquillo
28
Quel che nel tuo bel vol - to bra - mo.e 'mpa ro, E malcom-
29
30
Tempo I
31
pres' è de - gli u - ma - ni in - ge-gni, Chi'l vuol ve - der
poco sfz
f
32
33
34
con - vien che pri - ma mo - ra.
p dim.
pp

The second appearance of the recitative pattern cadences D♭ to E♭ to A♭, over an E♭-G-B♭-D♮/D♭ chord that resolves to an F♭-A♭-C♭-E♭ chord. Again the chords could be analyzed as suggesting V7 to ♭VI^7 in an A♭ context, with the D♮ being required for the sequence. If enharmonic spelling is considered, however, then the second chord is an E major chord with an added seventh, so that the two protagonists of the *B* section, E♭ and E♮ are juxtaposed. Therefore, these two phrases present elements of both B♭ and E♮ side-by-side.

Britten begins the third line of the final tercet as a transposition of the recitative pattern another step down, but breaks that with an ascending octave leap that returns to the cadential gesture from the *a* phrase of the first section. As the phrase moves to the upper octave A♭, the accompaniment recalls the F/E♮ to D figure in the right hand, but with an E♮ in the bass line. Aurally, the A♭ fits within the context, being G# enharmonically, third of E; visually, however, it gives the appearance of being in conflict with the E. When the phrase reaches the E♮ to D cadence, now with an A♭ instead of an A♮, the suspension figure recurs with B♭ in the bass. The final section of the song, then, dramatizes the B♭-E♮ conflict through the linear presentation of the conflicting elements rather than the vertical configuration that characterized the three previous sections.

Example 37: Sonetto LV, *Tu sa' ch' io so* , mm. 1-5 and mm. 27-28, vocal lines superimposed.



In terms of the text, the linear presentation of the B♭-E♮ conflict reflects the lover's increasing tendency to elevate his love of the beloved to a higher spiritual plane, which is rooted in Renaissance neo-Platonism. Michelangelo links the feeling of loving the beauty of another to the ecstasy of death and the soul's attainment of the spiritual, ennobling the relationship that he wishes to have with the beloved. Although the spiritual goal of love requires this oneness of the beloved with the lover, this has not been accomplished by this point, nor will it be by the end of the poem, so the union or resolution of the two elements of the conflict would not be representative of the text (see Table 15). Moreover, the lover returns to the need for secrecy and concealment in the relationship, because his feelings for the beloved are "ill understood by human kind" ("*E mal compres' è degli umani ingegni*"), which, in turn, reveals a need for the two elements to be separated. Thus, the return in the final two measures to the accompaniment figure that began the song, which accompanies the word "*mora*" ("must die"), is a spiritual longing for oneness with the beloved. The

TABLE 15

RELATIONSHIP OF THE SECOND TERCET OF SONETTO LV TO THE B♭ - E♮ CONFLICT

Text	Melody	B♭-E♮ Conflict
Quel che nel tuo bel volto bramo e 'mparo, (That which in thy lovely face I yearn for and seek to grasp,)	C-E♭-F-B♭	F7(B♭) - F♯7(B♮)
E mal compres' è degli umani ingegni, (is but ill understood by human kind,)	B♭-D♭-E♭-A♭	E♭7 - E♮7
Chi 'l vuol veder, convien che prima mora. (and he that would see it, first must die.)	A♭ - E♮ to D cadence	F/E♮ - D over E♮ F/E♮ - D over B♭

violent ascending octave leap in the final phrase, coupled with the E in the bass and the return of the accompaniment figure, show that the lover's passionate feelings remain, alluding to the spiritual ecstasy that the relationship, if fulfilled, could achieve. By returning the original accompaniment figure, complete with B♭ pedal, Britten unites the last of the lover's pleas to the beloved with those of the octave, revealing the need for the lover's feelings of urgency: the relationship is a means toward a spiritual and aesthetic experience.

Britten's musical form appears to be closely aligned with the stanzaic quality of the sonnet if one considers the melody (see Table 16). Indeed, there are definite melodic

TABLE 16

MELODIC-POETIC FORM OF SONETTO LV
COMPARED WITH THE B♭-E♮ CONFLICT

Measure nos.	Musical Form	Phrases	Poetic Form	B♭-E♮ Conflict (mel./acc.)
1-9	*A*	*a(x + y)* *b(ax' + z)*	Octave *ll.* 1-2 *ll.* 3-4	E♮/B♭-E♮ B♭/E♭
9-18	*B*	*c (bz')* *c' (bz' + ax")* *d* *d' + ax"*	Octave *l.* 5 *l.* 6 *l.* 7 *l.* 8	E♭/E♭ E♮ E/B♭-E♮ (G) E/B♭-E♮ (G)
19-24	*A '*	*a' (y + zx)* *az* trans.	Sestet *ll.* 9-10 *l.* 11	E♮/B♭-E♮ G/B♭-E♮
24-26	*Interlude*	scales from *ax*		E♮/F-E♮ to D
26-34	*Coda*	*e* *e'* *e" + ay*	Sestet *l.* 12 *l.* 13 *l.* 14	B♭/F7(B♭)-F#7(B♮) E♭/E♭7 - E♮7 A♭-E♮/B♭-E♮

sections defined by the principles of departure and return, with a coda that explores elements of the previous sections. The blurring of the structural design, however, is accomplished by the B♭-E♮ conflict that acts as a thread that binds elements of the text together. Therefore, although the song has a surface form created by the melody, there is an underlying principle that defines the relationship of the lover and the beloved as seen through the eyes of the lover. The result is a complex design that reflects textual logic rather than adhering strictly to musical form logic.

Since the E♮ as separate from the B♭ is associated with the beloved throughout the song, the realm of B♭ can be seen as referring to the lover. This view is supported particularly in the fourth line when the lover draws away from the beloved as the melody emphasizes B♭. The vertical presentation of the two pitches generally coincides with text that speaks of the lover's desire to establish a relationship with the beloved, or with his description of the relationship and its spiritual goals, and so represents the potential of the relationship to realize the lover's spiritual longings. Throughout the course of the song, as the lover draws nearer to the beloved, the tonal focus turns toward E♮; as he backs away due to his fear that the beloved will reject him, the tonal reference emphasizes B♭. This structure created by the tonal portrayal of the intricacies of the relationship between the lover and the beloved becomes more important than the musical form as generated by the melody.

Sonetto XXXVIII

Rendete a gli occhi mei

Rendete a gli occhi miei, o fonte o fiume,	Give back to my eyes, you fountains and rivers,
L'onde della non vostra e salda vena,	the waves of those strong currents that are not yours,
Che più v'innalza, e cresce, e con più lena	which make you swell and grow with greater power
Che non è 'l vostro natural costume.	than is your natural way.

E tu, folt' air, che 'l celeste lume	And thou, heavy air, that dims the heavenly light
Tempri a' tristi occhi, de' sospir miei piena,	to my sad eyes, so full of my sighs art thou,
Rendigli al cor mio lasso, e rasserena	give them back to my weary heart and lighten
Tua scura faccia al mio visivo acume.	thy dark face to my eye's keen sight.
Renda la terra i passi a le mie piante,	Earth, give me back my footsteps
Ch' ancor l'erba germogli che gli è tolta;	that the grass may sprout again where it was trod;
E 'l suono Ecco, già sorda a' miei lamenti;	and Echo, yet deaf to my laments, give back thy sound;
Gli sguardi a gli occhi mie', tue luci sante;	and you blest pupils give back to my eyes their glances;
Ch' io possa altra belleza un' altra volta,	that I another time may love another beauty,
Amar, po' che di me non ti contenti.[82]	since with me you are not satisfied.

Britten's setting of *Rendete a gli occhi miei, o fonte o fiume*, which explores the linear unfolding of a tonic/Lydian sharp-fourth conflict between A and E♭, is cast in the style of a serenata, as indicated by the tempo marking, *Allegretto quasi una serenata.* The fanciful designation has prompted at least one commentator on his style to write that the work "evokes the strumming of a guitar and the splashing of courtyard fountains. . . ."[83] Certainly the accompaniment imitates the percussiveness of the guitar, but this song's connection with a serenata, or serenade, extends much deeper than mere imagery.

In his Syntagma musicum of 1618, Praetorius identified a serenata as "a composition in three or more parts, sung while one promenades through the streets in the evening, serenading...young ladies, with ritornellos being played in between."[84] The form of Britten's Sonetto XXXVIII, unique in the cycle, bears some resemblance to Praetorius's definition. Through the musical setting, Britten divides the poem into four parts: the two quatrains of the octave comprise two of the parts, while the first four lines of the sestet and the final two lines make up the other two. In between the sections, Britten inserts short interludes, which, though not melodically or harmonically connected, all derive from the same repetitive accompaniment pattern. According to Praetorius's concept of the term, then, Britten's rendition of this sonnet is a serenata, a genre which would have still been in use during Michelangelo's lifetime (see Table 17).[85]

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[82] The Italian text as it appears in the score has a few punctuation changes in comparison with Guasti's edition: at the end of line 2 Guasti uses a semi-colon; and at the ends of lines 6 and 13, Guasti includes no punctuation.

[83] Johnson, "Voice and Piano," 290.

[84] Michael Praetorius, "Von den Gesängen Welche in Brassaten und Mummerien gebraucht werden: als Giustiniani, Serenata und Balletti," Syntagma musicum (Wolfenbüttel, 1618), iii; quoted in Stanley Sadie, ed. New Grove Dictionary of Music (London: Macmillan, 1980), s.v. "Serenata," by Thomas Edward Griffin.

TABLE 17

MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF SONETTO XXXVIII

Measure nos.	Musical Form	Phrases	Poetic Form	Tonal References
1-4	*Prelude*			A
5-18	*A*	*a a b b'*	Octave *ll.* 1-4	A/E♭
18-20	*Interlude*			A
21-33	*A'*	*a a' a" a'''*	Octave *ll.* 5-8	A/E♭ to C (A♭/E♭
33-35	*Interlude*			C (A♭/E♮)
35-50	*A" (transposed)*	*a a b' b*	Sestet *ll.* 9-12	C/G♭ to A♭/E♭
50-52	*Interlude*			D/A
52-63	*A'''*	*a a(aug.)*	Sestet *ll.* 13-14	A/E - E♭/B♭
63-68	*Postlude*			A/B

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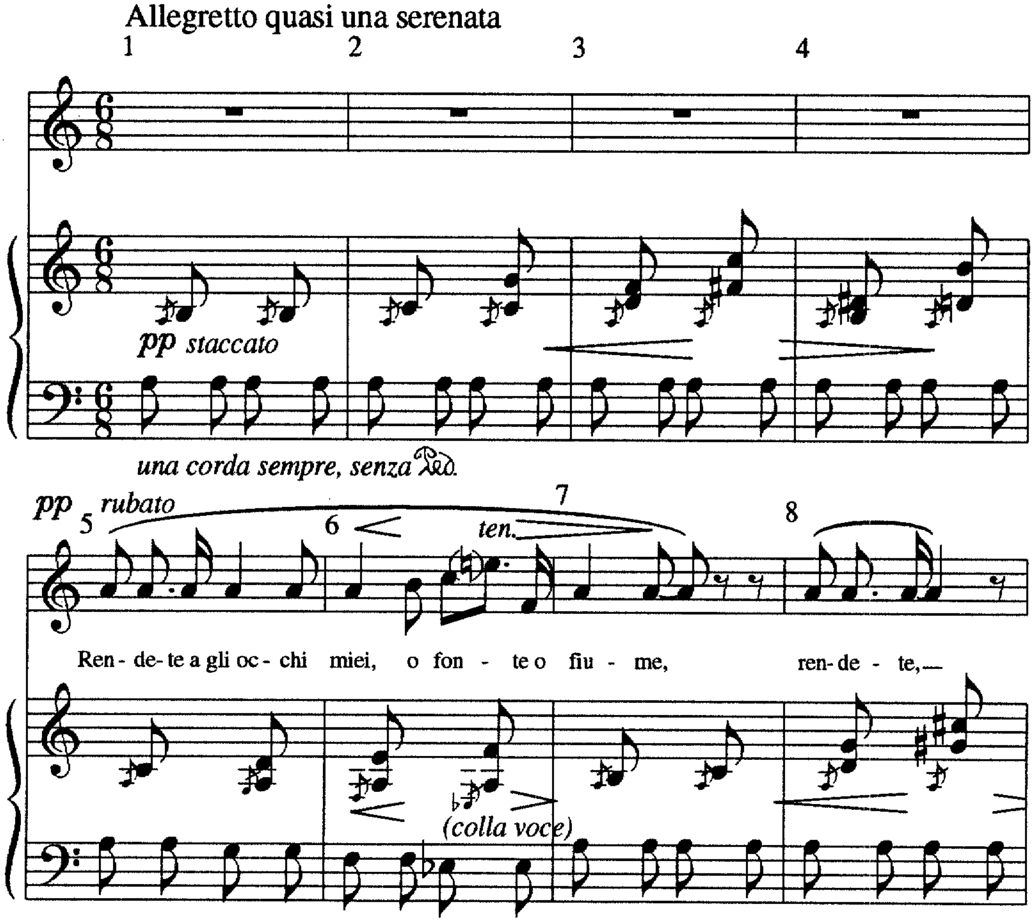
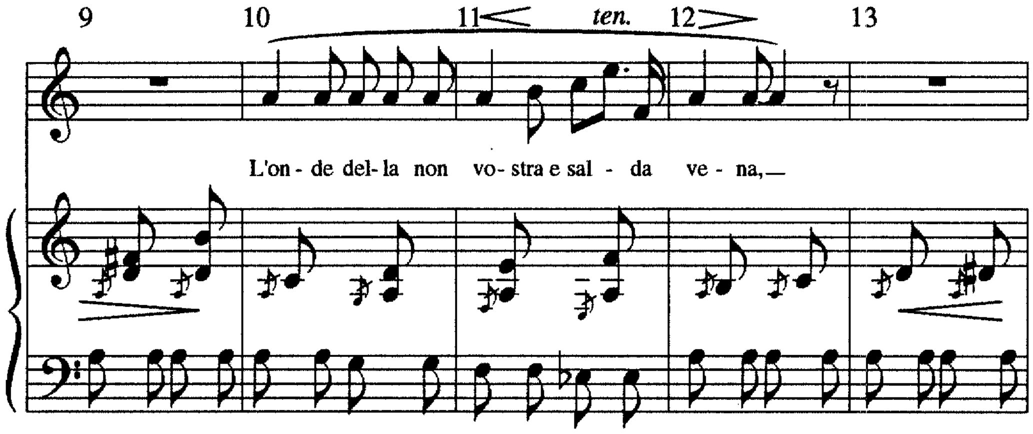
[85] Thomas Edward Griffin discovered that several of Petrarch's sonnets were set as serenate. One in particular, "*Hor che'l ciel e la terra e'l vento tace*," a pastoral text, was set as such repeatedly. Ibid.

Britten sets the four parts of the poem strophically, with essentially the same melody, slightly varied or transposed, returning for each section. This treatment is somewhat related to the concept of strophic variations, a popular manner of setting sonnets in the sixteenth century, although it lacks the recurring bass line. He associates a particular progression with the first melodic phrase, bringing it back with the melody on two occasions (see Example 38), but the association is inconsistent after these. Instead, the rhythmic pattern of the accompaniment provides the foundation for the recurring melody, along with a tonal conflict between E♭ and the persistent A♮ in the first two sections.

Example 38: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 1-13.


Allegretto quasi una serenata
1
2
3
4
pp staccato
una corda sempre, senza Ped.
pp
5
rubato
6
7
ten.
8
Ren- de- te a gli oc- chi miei, o fon - te o fiu - me, ren- de - te,—
(colla voce)

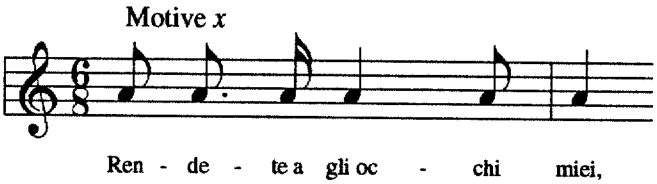
Example 38: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 1-13, cont.



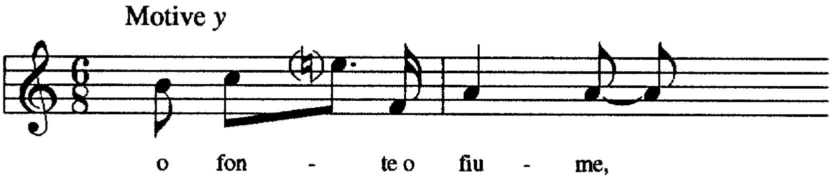
In a strophic setting of a poem, it is difficult to uncover interpretative ideas in the musical form unless there is a pictorial element displayed, as in Schubert's accompaniments to "Erlkönig" or "Gretchen am Spinnrade." Britten's setting of this sonnet is rather direct, following Michelangelo's divisions in the octave and sestet closely, with the division of the sestet as four lines plus two as opposed to three plus three. There are, however, elements in the unfolding of the musical form that reveal Britten's attempt to glean more than mere surface meaning from the poetry. In my opinion, by referring to the song as a serenata and aligning the form with the meaning of the term, Britten deliberately tries to capture the essence of the tradition behind it. In what may be mere happenstance, this song also has ties to later meanings of the term serenata. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the term had come to designate an elaborate outdoor cantata, which like its earlier counterpart, consisted of several parts separated by ritornellos. Texts were taken from several sources, in particular mythology, allegories and pastorals. The characters represented these sources, being mythological, pastoral or allegorical personages or the personification of flora and fauna.[86] This particular sonnet of Michelangelo's is one of his few in the pastoral tradition, addressing objects of the natural world as though they had life and thought, and making a plea to Echo, a figure from mythology. Britten's use of the term serenata, then, encompasses both its earliest and later traditions. Admittedly, linking the poetry and the music through the meanings of a single term does not imply any attempt at interpretation of the poem. But, it does show how conscious Britten was of the poetic tradition from which Michelangelo derived his ideas, lending credence to Britten's interpretative efforts.

Before setting the poem to music, Britten had a problem in the poetry to solve. Three motives generate the melodic material for the whole song, resulting in a very tightly constructed work (see Examples 39a-c). The recombination, repetition, and transposition

Example 39a: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, vocal line, mm. 5-6.



Example 39b: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, vocal line, mm. 6-7.



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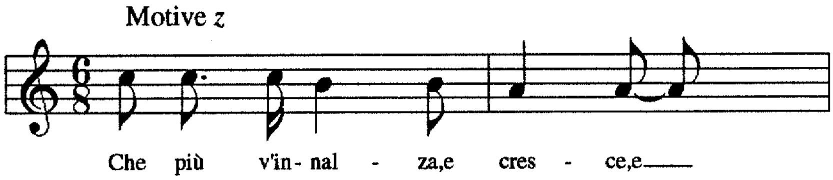
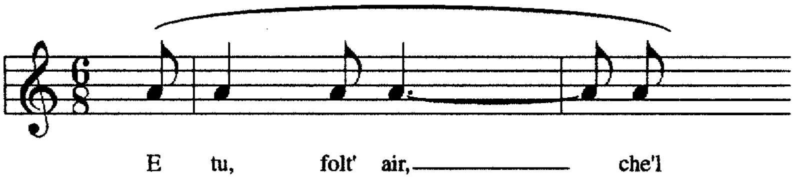
[86] For further information, see New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, s.v. "Serenata," by Thomas Edward Griffin.

Example 39c: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, vocal line, mm. 14-15.



of motives throughout the song both creates a sense of variation from strophe to strophe and unifies the melodic material. While motivic construction of melody is not new in the song cycle, its use here seems to have arisen out of a need for a practical and economic solution to the abundance of enjambment in the poem, which, if the grammatical sense is to be followed, causes a skewed syllable count in some of the lines.[87] The motives can be repeated, lengthened, or shortened depending upon the needs of the grammatical unit. For example, since motive *x* consists solely of a repeated pitch (refer to Example 39a), its rhythm can be manipulated to accommodate a lesser or greater number of syllables, as shown in Examples 40a and 40b, respectively. Likewise, the individual notes

Example 40a: "Sonetto XXXVIII," *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, vocal line, mm. 21-22.



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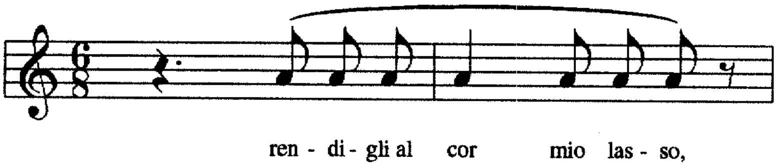
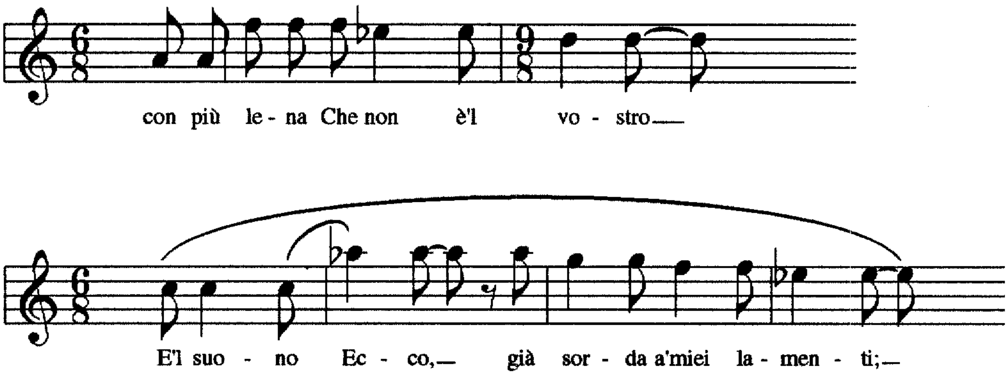
[87] The normal syllable count for Italian sonnets is eleven per line.

Example 40b: "Sonetto XXXVIII," *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, vocal line, mm. 27-28.



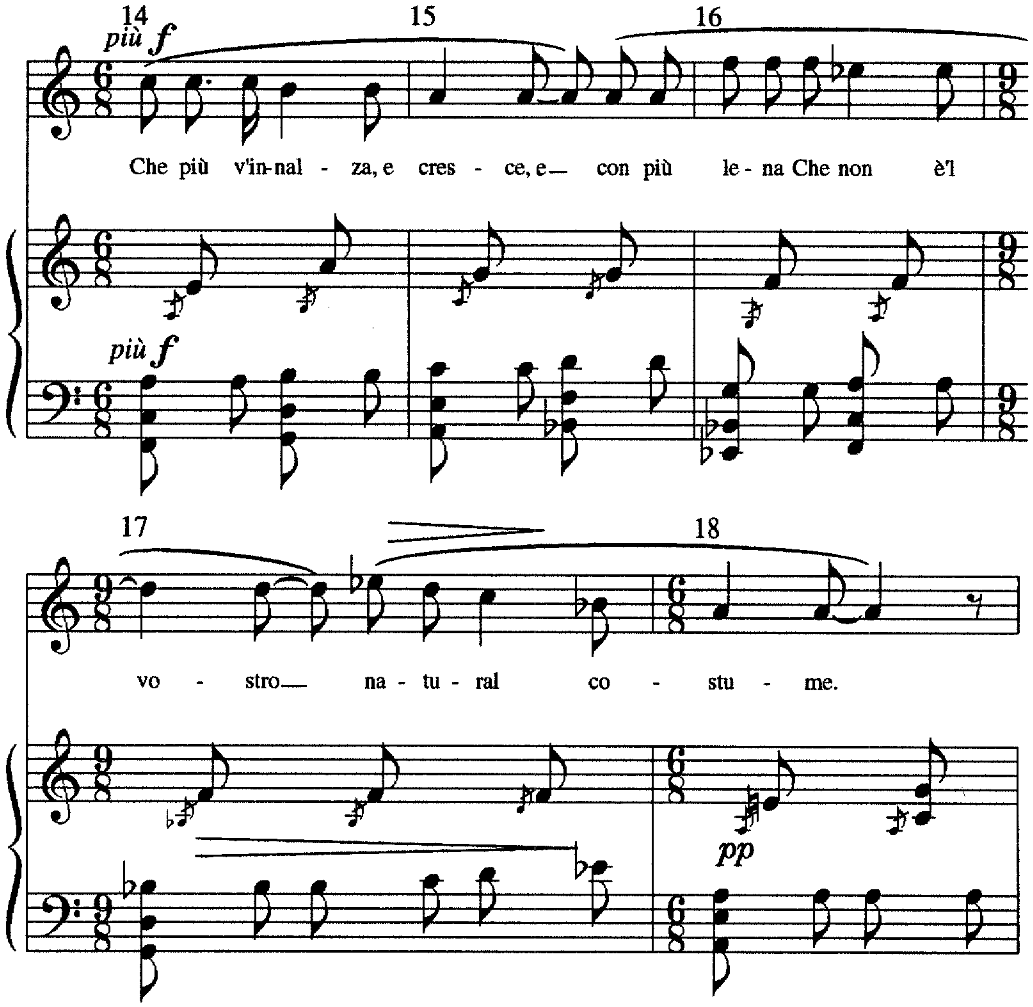
of motive z can be repeated, or the span of the motive can be lengthened to allow for more syllables (see Example 41). This built-in versatility assures that a certain degree of phrase balance can be retained, or if necessary, relinquished, depending upon the constraints of the enjambment.

Example 41: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 16-17 and mm. 43-46.


con più le - na Che non è'l vo - stro
E'l suo - no Ec - co, già sor - da a'miei la - men - ti;

The enjambment also affects the length of the strophes, which, by definition, should be balanced. Despite the problems of the extensive use of enjambment, or perhaps because of it, Britten confines the first three sections to three phrases each, with one or two of the phrases naturally longer than the others, since four lines of text are being set. The final strophe, with only two lines of text, falls into two phrases, the last one augmented to balance that section with the others. In the beginning of the first strophe, he sets up a pattern of three-measure phrases separated by a short link, only to destroy it in the third phrase, which is essentially five measures long.[88] This phrase contains an enjambment, which Britten handles by inserting a 9/8 measure, shown in Example 42. This pattern of 3+3+5 is slightly modified in the second and third strophes to accommodate changes in the location of the enjambment.

Example 42: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 14-18.


14
più f
15
16
Che più v'in-nal - za, e cres - ce, e— con più le - na Che non è'l
più f
17
18
vo - stro— na - tu - ral co - stu - me.
pp

---

[88] The repetition of the first word in m. 8 is an echo, not an integral part of the phrase.

The design of the third strophe follows that of the first section very closely, with only a lengthening of the final phrase. Although the melody recurs, this section needs a closer association with the other strophes since it is modulatory. Similar phrase structure is one means of achieving that. Britten's construction of the second section is a more radical departure from the pattern. The first two phrases are not broken by a short link as in the first section, and the second phrase consists of two repetitions of the *y* motive, rather than being a repetition of the *a* phrase. The pattern of 3+3, however, remains intact. The modification occurs in the third phrase which encompasses the enjambment between lines 7 and 8 of the poem (see Example 43). The short phrase in mm. 27-28 accomplishes two purposes with the use of the repeated-note motive *x*: 1) it dispenses with seven syllables in a short time frame, and 2) because it lacks harmonic or melodic drive, it both emphasizes the fragmentary grammatical structure of line 7 and connects musically with the next melodic idea to form a single phrase. The final phrase, then, is six measures long, incorporating a short pause between the speaker's thoughts. Britten's careful treatment of the enjambment gives the song a stronger tie to the patterns of natural prosaic speech that Michelangelo was using.[89]

Britten designs his melodic phrases so that they are essentially mirror images of the bass line that accompanies them, with twists of the line used to create melodic interest (see Example 44; refer to Example 38). Both the vocal line and the bass line unfold the central conflict between A and E♭. In the first strophe, the bass line, which keeps the note A as a

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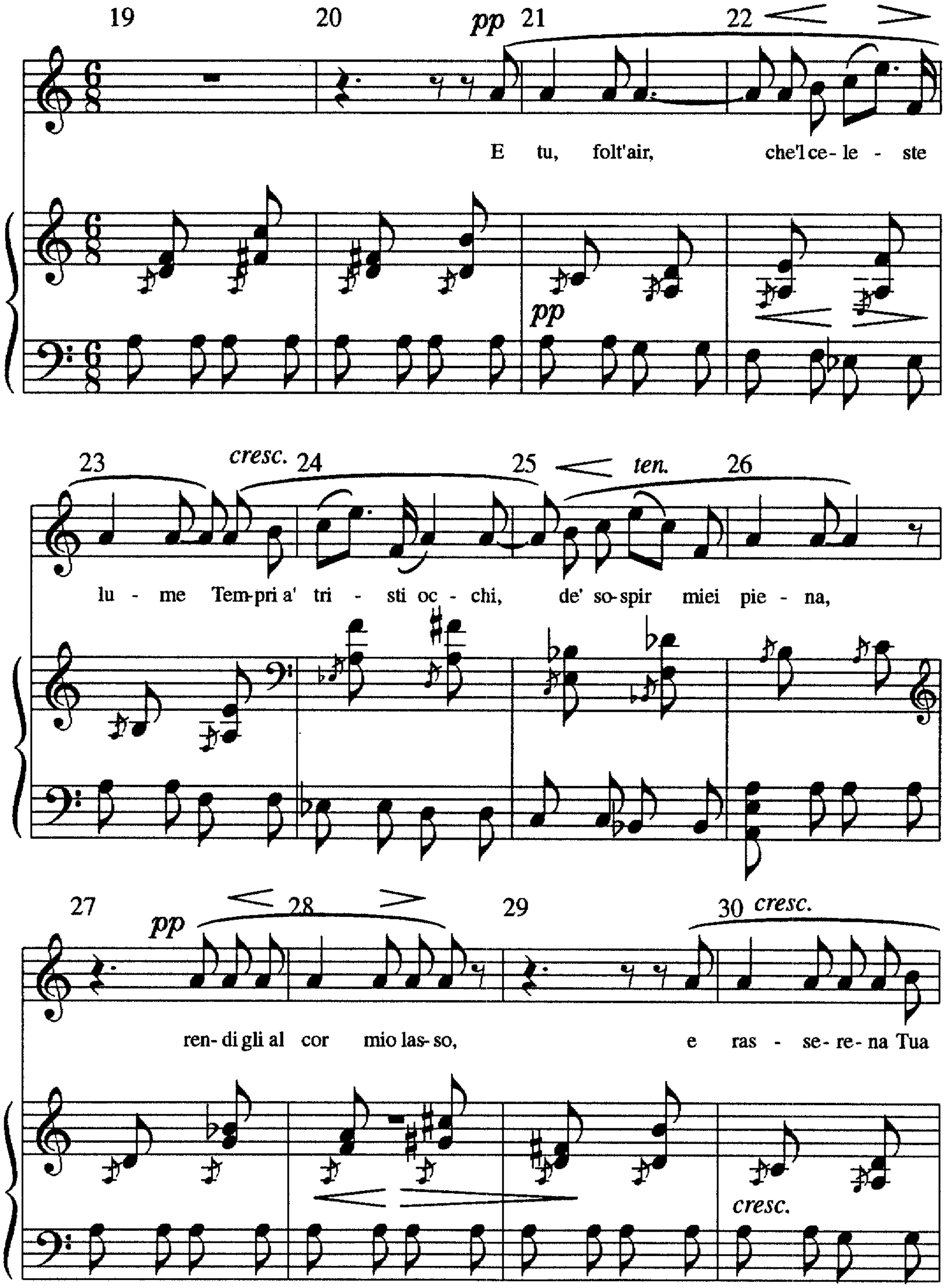
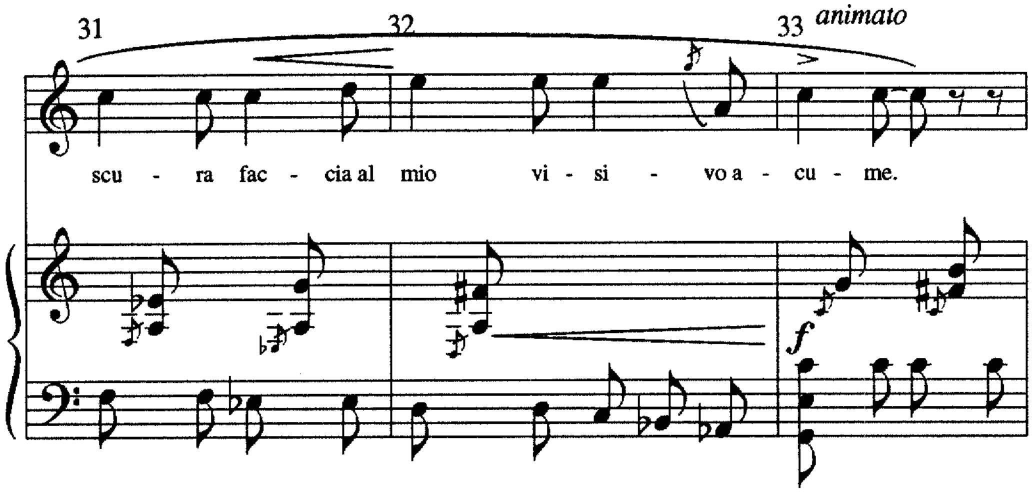
[89] Michelangelo's poems have long been criticized for the abundance of enjambment that is contained within them. One reason, for this, however, may have been his lack of formal training in languages and rhetoric. A second reason resides in his attitude toward form in art. When he was painting the Sistine ceiling, he often broke out of the guidelines that he had prepared. Form, then, served the content, and not the content, the form. Robert J. Clements, The Poetry of Michelangelo (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 33.

Example 43: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 19-33.


19
20
pp
21
22
E tu, folt'air, che'l ce- le - ste
pp
23
cresc.
24
25
ten.
26
lu - me Tem-pri a' tri - sti oc - chi, de' so-spir miei pie - na,
27
pp
28
29
30
cresc.
ren- di gli al cor mio las- so, e ras - se- re- na Tua
cresc.

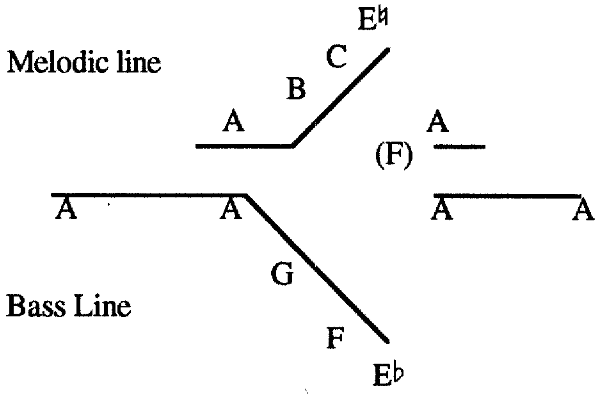
Example 43: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 19-33, cont.



pedal for four and one-half measures, descends by step beginning in the fifth measure to an E♭. The vocal line, on the other hand, ascends from an A to an E♮ against the E♭ in the bass. As the melody arrives back at the A from which it began, the E♭ in the bass line leaps up to return to its A. In these mirror gestures, Britten sets up a linear conflict between A and its flat-fifth, E♭ (or in its enharmonic spelling, the Lydian sharp-fourth), and a vertical conflict between E♭ and the note E, which suggests the dominant of A. With the E♭ progressing to the A in the bass and the E♮ in the melodic line descending to an F instead of the A, Britten avoids a sense of traditional resolution to a tonic. Indeed, throughout the song, there is a constant avoidance of resolution through the omission of one or more of the elements (i.e., leading tone, dominant, or tonic) or through the intervention of pitches that destroy the half-step-up or perfect fourth-up/perfect fifth-down motion to a tonic. Further, the right hand of the accompaniment, which sets up a recurring pattern with the first two melodic phrases, phases in and out of that pattern at will, so that the relationship between it and the melodic line is constantly changing. In its various manifestations, the right hand either anticipates or follows the motion of the melodic line, or repeats the opening melodic gesture underneath a contrasting melodic line.

The *b* phrases of the first strophe, which set the third and fourth lines of the poem, abandon the E♮ that provided the top note of the *a* phrases, and concentrate on the linear unfolding of the A/E♭ conflict, with the right hand imitating the first gesture in the melody a third below. In the left-hand accompaniment at m. 14, the A pedal is absorbed into an F-major triad, with the chord presented so that the third is the highest pitch. The line departs from the F triad, and uses stepwise, planing motion through G and A triads to reach a B♭ triad that leaps down to an E♭ triad. From the E♭, the bass line ascends again, arriving at an A from a G in the lowest notes of the triad configuration, and an A from an E♭ in the highest notes of the left hand triad configuration. The melodic line also explores the A/E♭ conflict: after an initial descent to A from C, the line leaps up to an F that is followed by an E♭; the E♭ returns following a brief point of repose on D above a G triad in the bass, and initiates a descending line that arrives on A concurrent with the bass line. In the first strophe, then, the A/E♭ conflict pervades the texture, with the E♭/E♮ conflict being particular to the *a* phrases.

Example 44: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, design of the bass line and melody, phrase *a*.

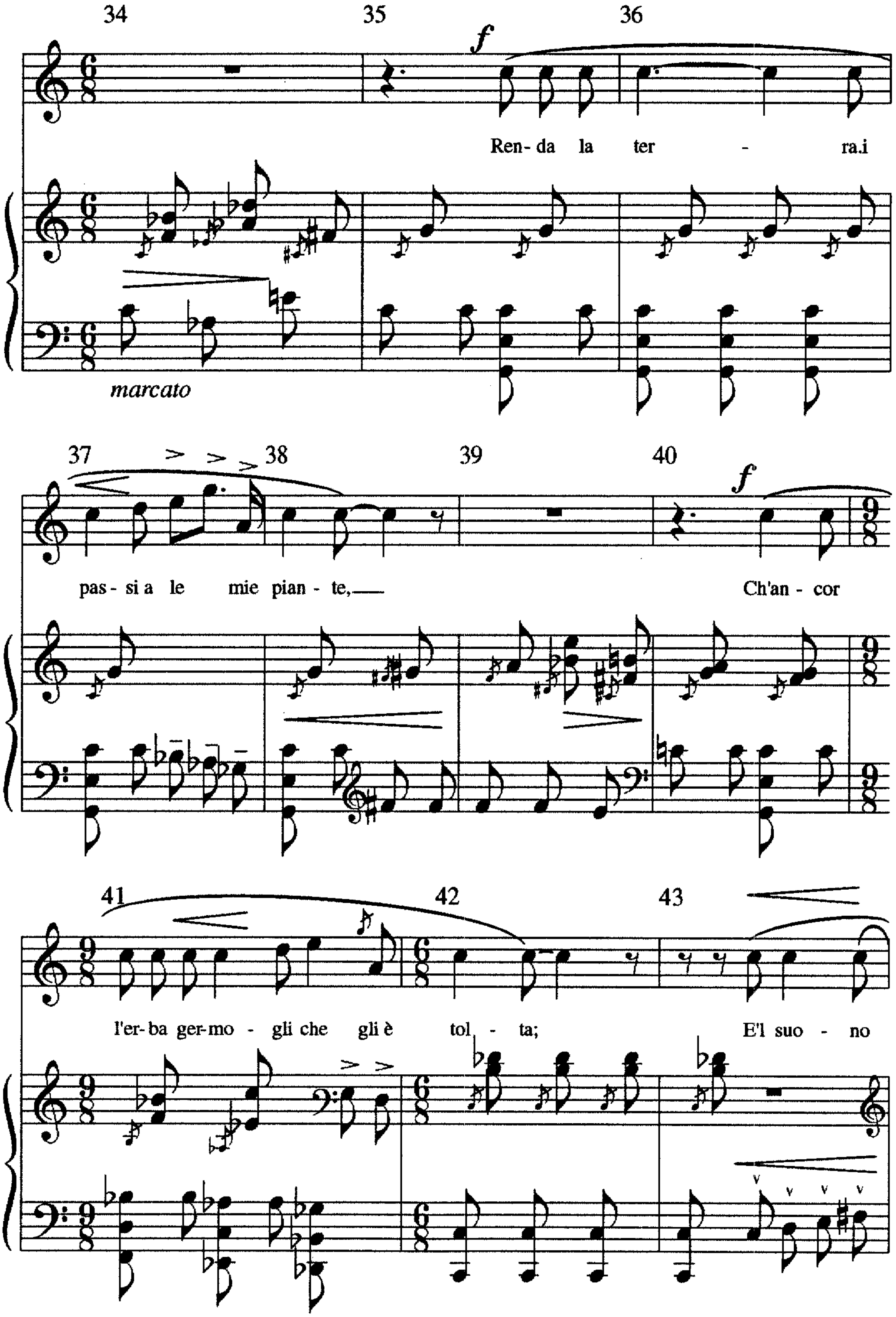


As presented in the first strophe, there seem to be certain procedures that govern the unfolding of the conflict. Either the E♭ progresses directly by leap to an A, or approaches it by stepwise motion. The A, on the other hand, either approaches the E♭ by a stepwise descent, or leaps to it with a pitch intervening, as for example in mm. 15-16 when the A leapt up to an F which then descended to E♭. These procedures remain in place for the whole of the song, so that the conflict unfolds in the same manner in each strophe, although the conflict itself undergoes some transformation.

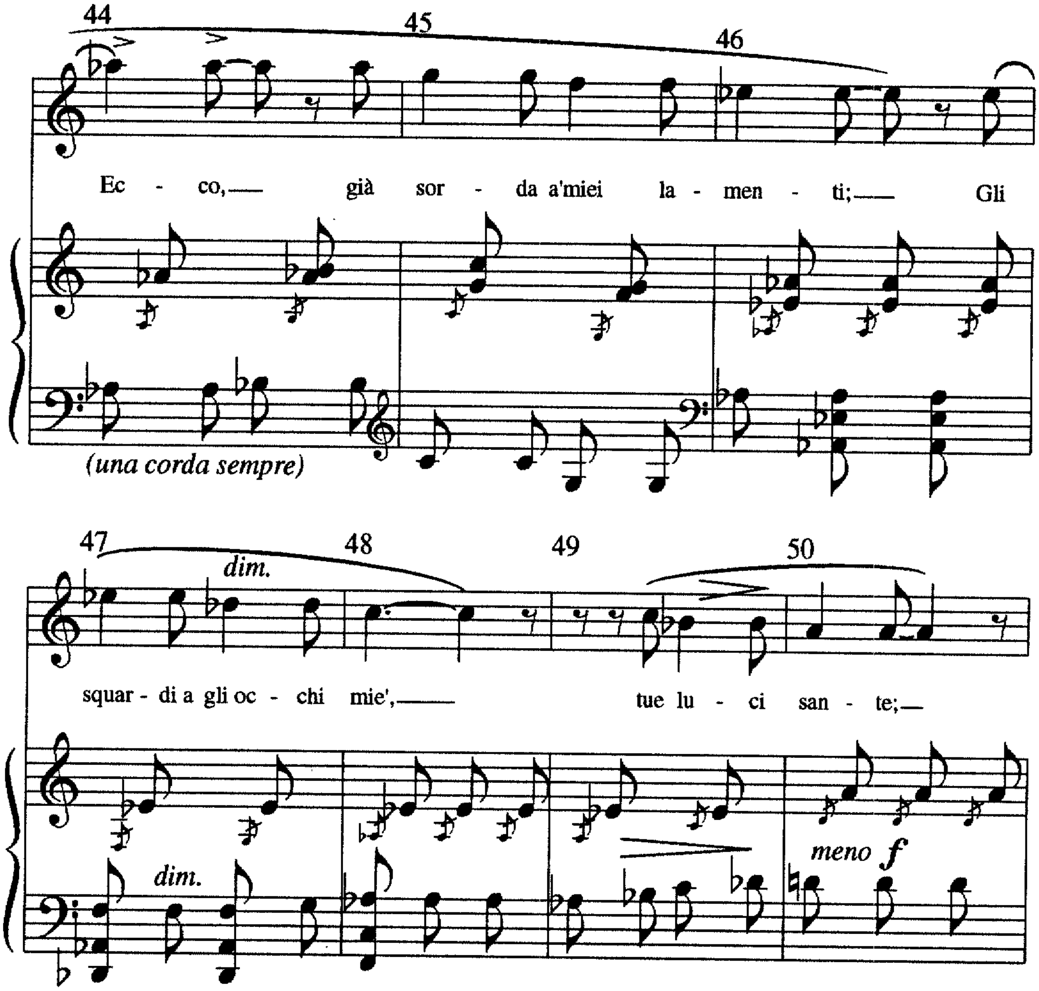
In the second strophe, the conflict between A and E♭ in both the bass line and the melodic line remains for the *a* phrases, and is even explored further when a repetition of the *y* motive from phrase *a* is tacked onto the first melodic gesture (refer to Example 43, mm. 23-26). At the start of the final phrase of the strophe, a modified repetition of the *a* phrase, the bass line again descends from A to E♭, but the descent continues through B♭ and A♭ to a G in m. 33 that suggests the dominant of the C that marks the arrival point in the melodic line. In the melodic line, the E♭/E♮ conflict is avoided through the repetition of the C that has always preceded the leap to the E♮, and the insertion of a D to fill in the leap from C to E♮. The C and the D coincide with the bass line E♭, so that when the E♮ is achieved in the melodic line, the bass line has already begun its descent from E♭ to A♭ and G. This allows the E♮ to change the tonal focus toward C. After a descending leap from E to A (through a grace note G), the A arrives on C, and the left hand of the accompaniment replaces the A pedal with one on C to begin the interlude that leads to the third strophe.

Imbedded among the repeated Cs in the interlude between the second and third strophes is a leap from A♭ to its raised fifth, E♮, which returns to C (see Example 45). This isolated gesture presents an interesting aspect of the A/E♭ conflict by pitting the

Example 45: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 34-50.


34
35
36
f
Ren- da la ter - ra.i
marcato
37
38
39
40
f
pas- si a le mie pian - te,
Ch'an - cor
41
42
43
l'er- ba ger- mo - gli che gli è tol - ta;
E'l suo - no

Example 45: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 34-50, cont.


44
45
46
Ec - co,— già sor - da a'miei la - men - ti;— Gli
(una corda sempre)
47
48
49
50
dim.
squar - di a gli oc - chi mie',— tue lu - ci san - te;—
dim.
meno f

dominant to A against what would be the tonic to E♭.[90] Its role in the song, however, does not become apparent until the final phrases of the third strophe. The first half of the third strophe (mm. 35-42) is basically a transposition of the *a* phrase into the frame of C. The bass line has undergone a slight change, however, with Gs appearing as the bottom note of a C-major triad for which C is the top at the start of the first statement of *a*. The C at the top of the chord retains the stepwise descent, reaching G♭, its lowered fifth, before moving back to C. The A/E♭ conflict, then, has been transposed to the level of C, which pushes the pitch focus higher, although the right hand figure does not coincide. The pitch C is also the median between A and E♭.

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[90] This is a similar situation as found in Sonetto LV in which B♭ and its Lydian sharp-fourth E♮ are in conflict, and then the tonal area of E♭ is introduced with B♮s.

Between the first *a* phrase and its repetition, Britten moves from C back to G♭, now spelled F♯, and then proceeds to G, resolving it to C. This particular move would seem to correct the conflict that has persisted, but the right hand clouds the resolution with an F♯. The conflict between C and G♭ returns with the repetition of the *a* phrase for the tenth line of the poem, with a new element added. Britten uses the triads that accompanied the *b* phrases in the first strophe, but with the root on top and the fifth on bottom. From a C-major triad, the bass descends through B♭- and A♭-major triads, reaching a G♭-major triad before the vocal line ascends to a G grace note. The G♭ and D♭ of the bass move to an octave C, with the result that two chromatic resolutions occur simultaneously: a descending tritone leap (G♭ to C) and a descending step of a minor second (D♭ to C). The addition of the flat-second above the tonal area adds to the disturbance caused by the tritone, as well as providing a potential reference point for the flat fifth, G♭. As the text progresses, Britten heightens the tension by adding more chromatic motion, which, in turn, brings more protagonists into the conflict, and by transposing the tonal focus to a higher level, from A to C.

With the third phrase of the third strophe, which sets line 11 of the sonnet, Britten renews the A♭/E♮ relation temporarily by ascending stepwise from C through E♮ to A♭. In The vocal line departs from a C, leaps to A♭ which then descends through G (reminiscent of the D♭ to C half-step in mm. 41-42) on its way to E♭. The answering bass line departs from A♭ and arrives on a C, only to leap to G and resolve to A♭ as the E♭ in the vocal line is reached. The final phrase of the strophe is somewhat fragmented, occurring in two halves separated by rests. The first half begins at E♭ and descends to C as a resting point, while the second half starts at the C and continues down to A♮ for the return. The C, then, is the median between E♭ and A♮.[91] The bass line ascends from A♭ to D♮ while E♭ is heard in the right hand, which moves to an A as the D in the bass occurs.

The melodic return to A in m. 50 brings about the return of the melodic material at the pitch level of A, beginning in m. 52, for the fourth strophe (see Example 46). The bass line that accompanied the *a* phrase of the first and second strophe does not return, nor does the right hand material. Instead, the bass line descends by step from D, through A♭ to an E♮, which occurs as the vocal line reaches its E♮. The bass line E♮ then resolves to an A, which alleviates the conflict between E♭ and A temporarily. The conflict is renewed in the bass line that accompanies the final, augmented statement of *a*: the bass descends from A through E♭ to a B♭, which is held against an E♮ in the melodic line. The B♭ then resolves to an A as the vocal line again returns to its starting note A, which recalls the D♭ to C resolution that Britten introduced in the third strophe. The postlude corrects the B♭ to a B♮, which alternates with A until the final gesture concludes on the lowest A of the piano.

In the poem, the lover is asking for the beloved to return all that he has given him so that he can spend them on another relationship, since the beloved now longer wishes to pursue the relationship. The lover's emotion, very deliberate and mechanistic in the demands of the octave and first four lines of the sestet, is found to be indignant and approaching martyrdom in the accusatory final two lines: "*Ch' io possa altra belleza un' altra volta, /Amar, po' che di me non ti contenti*".[92] Britten's melody, with its prosaic rhythms, conveys the lover's anger and accusatory rejection of the beloved; his strophic setting, however, asserts a different view, which is exhibited in several ways (see Table 18).

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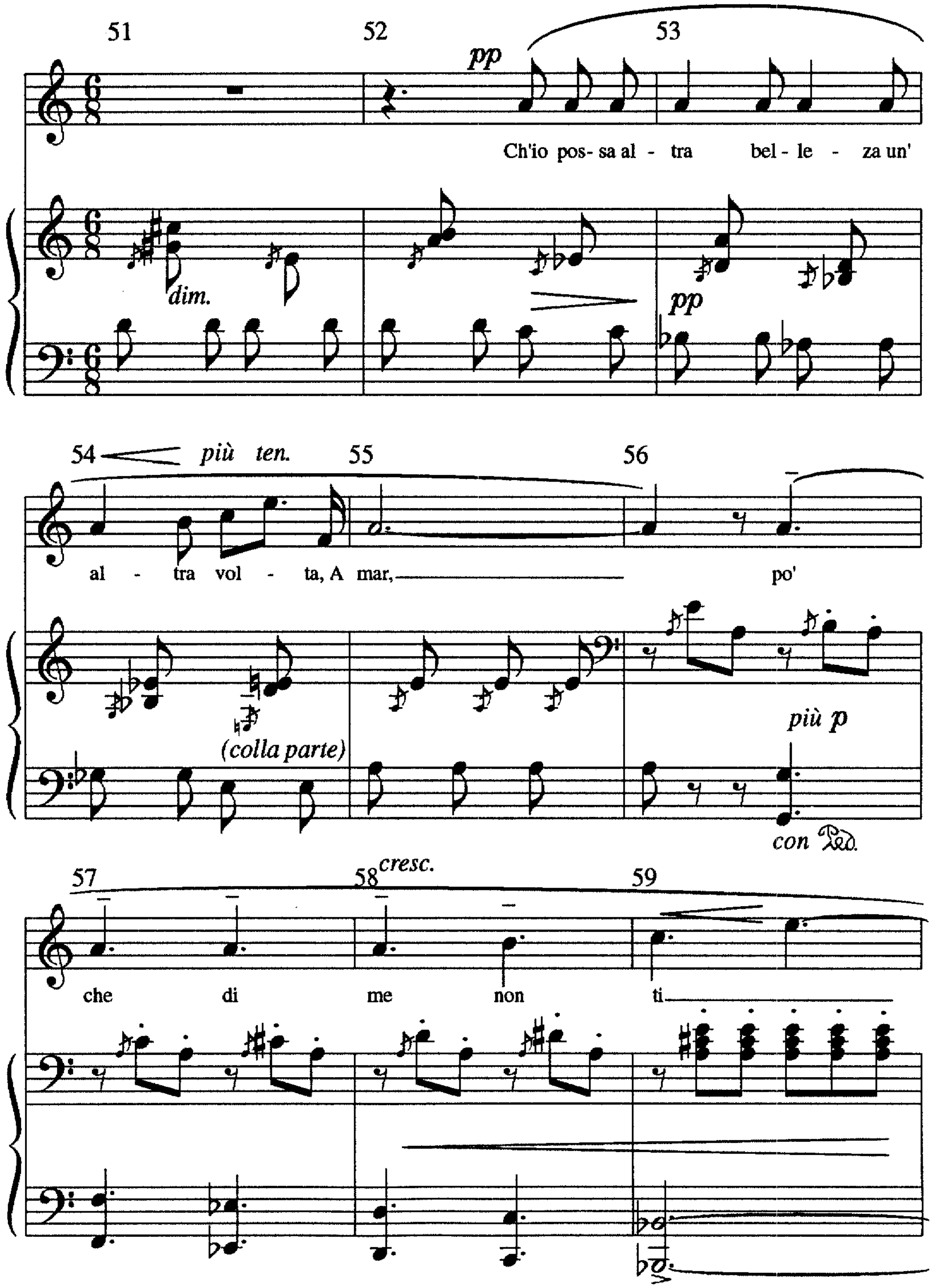
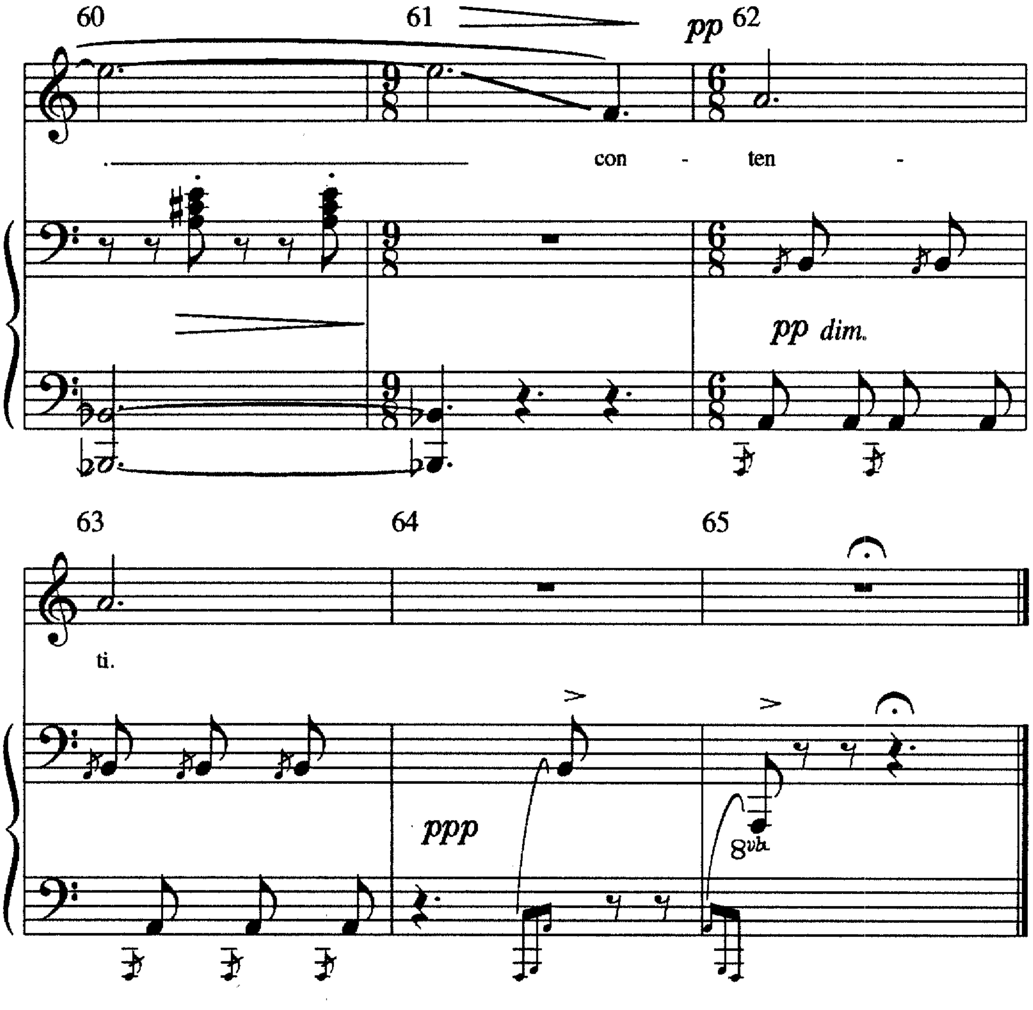
[91] The note C is also the median between A♭ and E♮.

[92] "That I another time may love another beauty, since with me you are not satisfied."

Example 46: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 51-65.


51
52
53
pp
Ch'io pos- sa al - tra bel - le - za un'
dim.
pp
54
più ten.
55
56
al - tra vol - ta, A mar,
po'
(colla parte)
più p
con Ped.
57
58
cresc.
59
che di me non ti

Example 46: Sonetto XXXVIII, *Rendete a gli occhi miei*, mm. 51-65, cont.



The lack of resolution in the music, played out by the A♮/E♭ conflict, suggests that although the speaker exhibits all of the signs of being resolute, he harbors doubts about his decision to rescind his love from the beloved. This betrays a different state of mind from the emphatic and resolute utterings of the melodic line which is punctuated by a repetition of the first word in the first phrase. On the contrary, the lover is uncertain about his decision to stop loving the beloved. A cessation would remove his emotional ties from whom he felt was the sole object of his desire – in effect, his means of attaining a deeper union with Beauty. This concept is confirmed in the appearance of the A/E♭ conflict at arrival points (with the level of C functioning as the median), all of which, with the exception of one, are modelled after the first point of resolution in the song (refer to Example 38).

TABLE 18

TEXT OF SONETTO XXXVIII AND THE A♮/E♭ CONFLICT IN BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Italian Text	Form	English Translation
Rendete a gli occhi mei, o fonte o fiume, L'onde della non vostra e salda vena, Che più v'innalza e cresce, e con più lena Che non è 'l vostro natural costume.	*A*: A/E♭	Fountains and rivers, give back to my eyes those things of yours which I thought so beautiful while I was in love
E tu, folt' air, che'l celeste lume Tempri a' tristi occhi, de' sospir miei piena, Rendigli al cor mio lasso e rasserena Tua scura faccia al mio visivo acume.	*A*′: A/E♭ C	Air, give back the sighs that I uttered when I was in love – I need them since my heart is heavy
Renda la terra i passi a le mie piante, Ch'ancor l'erba germogli che gli è tolta; E'l suono Ecco, già sorda a' miei lamenti; Gli sguardi a gli occhi mie', tue luci sante;	*A*″: C/G♭ A♭/E♭	Earth, give me back the journeys that I made while I was in love, so that others may enjoy their beauty, and Echo, give me your sound so that I may lament my loss; may the ability to see clearly return to my eyes,
Ch' io possa altra belleza un'altra volta, Amar, po' che di me non ti contenti.	*A*‴: A/E A/E♭	so that I may love another beauty, since you, my beloved, are not satisfied with me.

Britten gathers the three exhortations to the elements of water, air and earth (*ll.* 1, 5 and 9, respectively – the start of each of the three quatrains) in which the lover asks them to give back to him that portion of himself he gave to them as he contemplated his beloved, setting these lines to the same melodic phrase. The elements of water and air are addressed at the level of A, while the third element, earth, is addressed in the tonal area of C. Each call for a return of some portion of himself becomes more desperate, so the pitch ascends.

The tritone conflict between A and E♭ (transposed to C and G♭ at the level of C) is very much present, accompanying each melodic line, or being part of the melodic line. The desperation of the lover, however, is borne out of his attempts to reproach the beloved for not returning his love. Each exhortation is more complex and finds the lover sinking deeper into a depression caused by his dislike of his situation. His continual references to having *been* in love, which imply that he is not now, are undermined by the constant attendance of the A/E♭ conflict in some form and the restlessness of the accompaniment rhythm. Were the lover truly rejecting the beloved, then he would gradually be freed of the conflict.

When the lover turns to a figure from mythology, Echo, not only does he reach the highest pitch in the vocal line, an A♭, elements of the tritone conflict are placed into a new context: E♭ as the arrival point from A♭. The abandoning of the conflict between A and E♭ is short-lived, for Britten returns to it in the vocal line at a very significant moment in the text: "*Gli squardi a gli occhi mie' tue luci sante*" ("may the ability to see clearly return to my eyes"), which can be taken as a double-*entendre* . The lover wants to reject the beloved, but he also does not want to be driven to say the hurtful words that are already coming out of his mouth. In other words, he is going too far in his reproach of the beloved.

Britten abandons the conflict again with the setting of the thirteenth line of text, which returned to the *a* phrase at the original pitch level, A. Here Britten corrects the E♭ to A resolution in the bass line to E♮ to A. In the text, the lover tells the beloved that he wants to be free to give his love to another beauty, finally giving his reason in the last line of the text: "*po' che di me non ti contenti*" ("Since with me you are not satisfied"). In other words, the lover feels that he has to withdraw from the beloved because the beloved is either not returning his love or because there has been some difficulty in the relationship.

Britten punctuates the line with an augmented *a* phrase, under which the bass line returns to the A/E♭ conflict, but with the intervention of B♭ before the final vocal arrival on A and the return to the restless elements of the introduction. The B♭ in the bass line is set against E♮ in the melody – another transposition of the A/E♭ tritone conflict. Instead of making emotional progress, the lover is going in a circle, unresolved.

The A/E♭ conflict represents both the lover's need to break free of the constraints the beloved has on him, and his own reluctance to give up the beloved so easily. The poem has the tone of a lover who has been scorned, and who is now trying to either get revenge by rejecting the beloved or get the beloved back through a show of martyrdom, seen in the recital of parts of the lover that he has given to the beloved. When Britten abandons the A/E♭ conflict with the setting of line 13, it is almost as if the lover has stepped outside the limits that he had set for himself to regain or reproach the beloved. His anger and fear has led him to say that which he only wanted the beloved to think: "I want to be free of my love for you." In the next line, the lover backs away from his anger by placing the blame on the beloved – "It is you who are not satisfied with me" – so the conflict returns, with the twist of the B♭/E transposition added for tension.

Sonetto XXXII

S' un casto amor

S' un casto amor, s' una pietà superna,	If love be chaste, if pity heavenly,
S' una fortuna infra dua amanti equale,	if fortune equal between two lovers;
S' un' aspra sorte all' un dell' altro cale,	if a bitter fate is shared by both, and
S' un spirto, s' un voler duo cor governa;	if one spirit, one will rules two hearts;
S' un' anima in duo corpi è fatta eterna,	if in two bodies one soul is made eternal,
Ambo levando al cielo e con pari ale;	raising both to heaven on the same wings;
S' amor d' un colpo e d' un dorato strale	if at one stroke and with a gilded arrow love
Le viscier di duo petti arda e discierna;	burns and pierces two hearts to the core;
S' amar l' un l' altro, e nessun se medesmo	if in loving one another, forgetting one's self,
D' un gusto e d' un diletto, a tal mercede,	with one pleasure and one delight there is such reward
C' a un fin voglia l'uno e l'altro porre;	that both wills strive for the same end;

Se mille e mille, non sarien centesmo	if thousands and thousands do not make one hundredth part
A tal nodo d'amore, a tanta fede;	to such a bond of love, to such constancy,
E sol l' isdegnio il può rompere e sciorre?	can, then, mere anger break and dissolve it?[93]

As with several of the songs in this cycle, very little has been written about the sixth song, Sonetto XXXII. Peter Evans includes a few statements in his book, but does not attempt a detailed analysis.[94] Indeed, his comments tend more toward the descriptive rather than furnishing any sort of theoretical information about the compositional method. When a song is ignored in the literature in favor of others, it might be assumed that the composition is ordinary, that it lacks unique musical ideas or form construction. This, however, is not the case in this sonnet setting. On the contrary, while it makes use of melodic construction techniques found in previous songs, in both its treatment of the musical form and the harmony, it is unlike any of the other songs in the cycle in several ways. First, the text is set strophically, but with another form overlaid, so that the form is not clearly articulated; and second, this song seems to be concerned with a quartal sonority in opposition to tertian sonorities in a conflict that generates the melodic and accompanimental material.

Britten exploits the strophic form in the melody of this song as in Sonetto XXXVIII, but where the previous sonnet followed the traditional divisions of the sonnet form, beingdivided into more or less equal parts, this setting does not (see Table 19). He retains the double quatrain division of the octave, but the sestet is divided into three strophes as three lines, two lines, then one line, avoiding the normal three plus three or four plus two divisions. This delineation of the sestet in this manner is not necessarily warranted by the

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[93] There are two differences in punctuation between the text as it appears in the score and Guasti's edition: at the end of line 2, Guasti has no punctuation; and at the end of line 9, he includes a comma.

[94] Evans, Music of Britten, 83.

TABLE 19

MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF SONETTO XXXII

Measure nos.	Musical Form	Phrases	Poetic Form	Tonal References
1-4	*Introduction*			quartal C#
5-9	*A*	*a a a b*	Oct. *ll.* 1-4	quartal C#
9-10	*Interlude*			C - quartal C#
11-14	*A'*	*a a a b' (trans.)*	Oct. *ll.* 5-8	quartal at C# - F
15-16	*Interlude*			F
17-20	*A''*	*a' b'' b'''*	Ses. *ll.* 9-11	F (C) to E♭
21	*Interlude*			E♭
22-24	*A'''*	*b (aug.) b*	Ses. *ll.* 12-13	F#
25-27	*Introduction '*			quartal C#
28-30	*A''''*	*b*	Sestet *l.* 14	quartal C#

text itself. The sonnet form as Michelangelo has constructed it in this poem via the punctuation, clearly calls for two tercets in the sestet. Britten does articulate the first tercet of the sestet, but he breaks the second tercet into two lines plus one, indicating that he is imposing an interpretation upon the poem by giving weight to the final line, much as he did in the first song. This treatment is interesting, especially since the final line provides the conclusion for the dependent conditional clause that occurs in the first two lines of this final tercet. It imposes a different slant on the meaning than found in traditional readings, particularly with regard to the final line. In Britten's text, the line is a question, whereas anthologies based on the manuscripts show it to be a declarative sentence. As a declarative sentence, the line allows for anger breaking the bonds that the lovers have forged between them, which are outlined by the conditional clauses.[95] As a question, it assumes an entirely different meaning, as Britten's formal procedures show.

Each element of the music – melody, harmony and form – leads toward the final line of the text, even though it does not contain the musical climax. The melody contributes to this emphasis in two ways. The first has to do with the way in which the melody leads toward the final line in the strophic form and the number of lines of text that each strophe contains. The first two strophes each contain four lines, but the successive strophes contain one line less than each previous one, giving it a reductive structure that isolates the final line.

The second way in which the melody leads toward the final line can be found in the one-measure phrases that comprise each strophe. The melodic material is generated from a one-measure phrase, shown in Example 47. Each melodic phrase incorporates one line of the poem, putting all eleven syllables into one measure with the aid of repeated notes.[96] Britten gives the strophes a sense of forward motion by setting the conditional clauses of the first quatrain and the lines of the second quatrain as one line per measure without any break between them, which is reminiscent of patter songs. In constructing the phrase structure of the first two strophes of four lines of text each, he uses a threefold repetition of the *a* phrase, followed by one statement of the *a'* phrase, which begins similarly. This results in an *aaaa'* design, in which the final phrase either rounds out the strophe with a point of arrival within the original tonal area as in the first strophe (refer to

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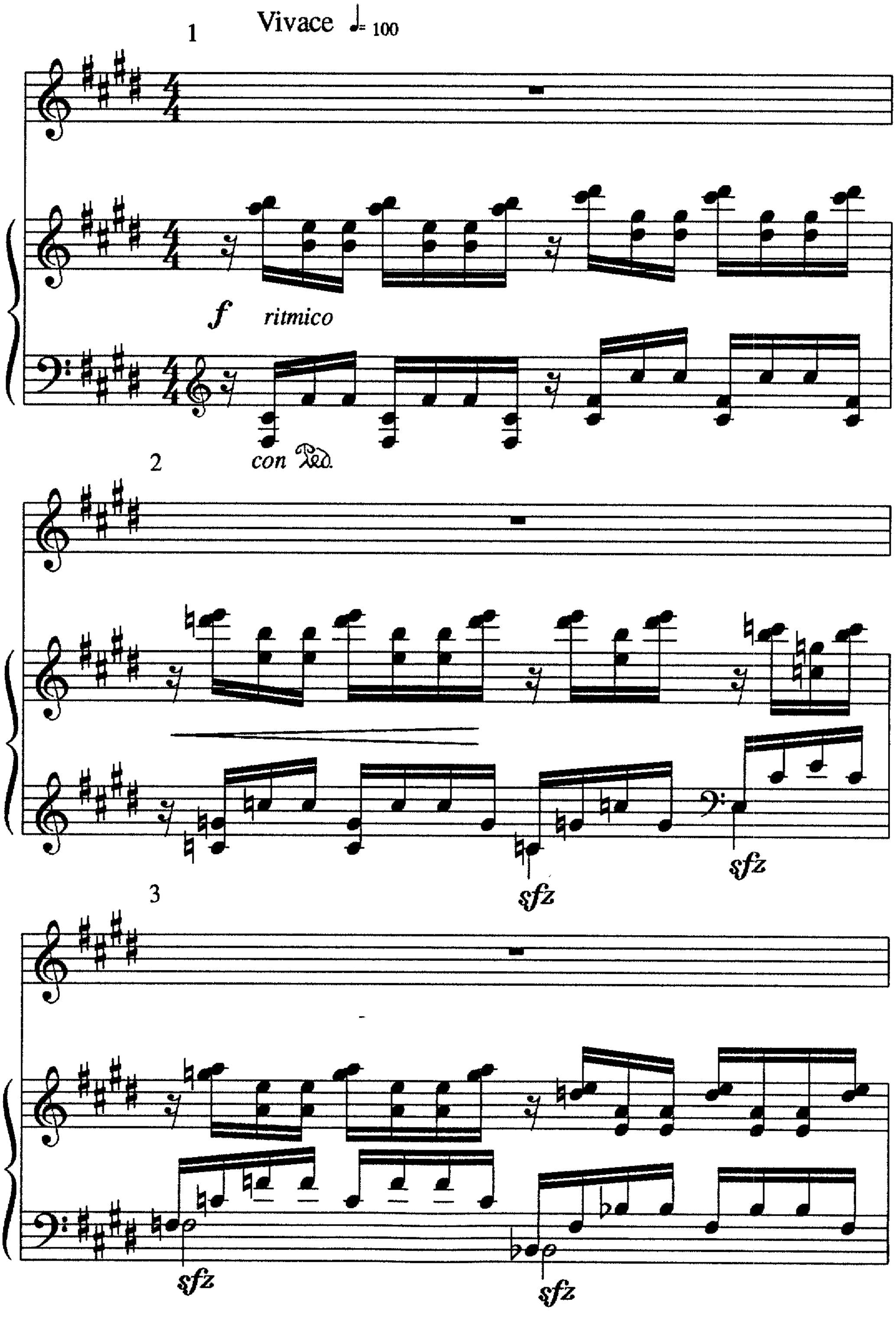
[95] Saslow translates the line: "And only anger could untie and break it." Poetry of Michelangelo, 152.

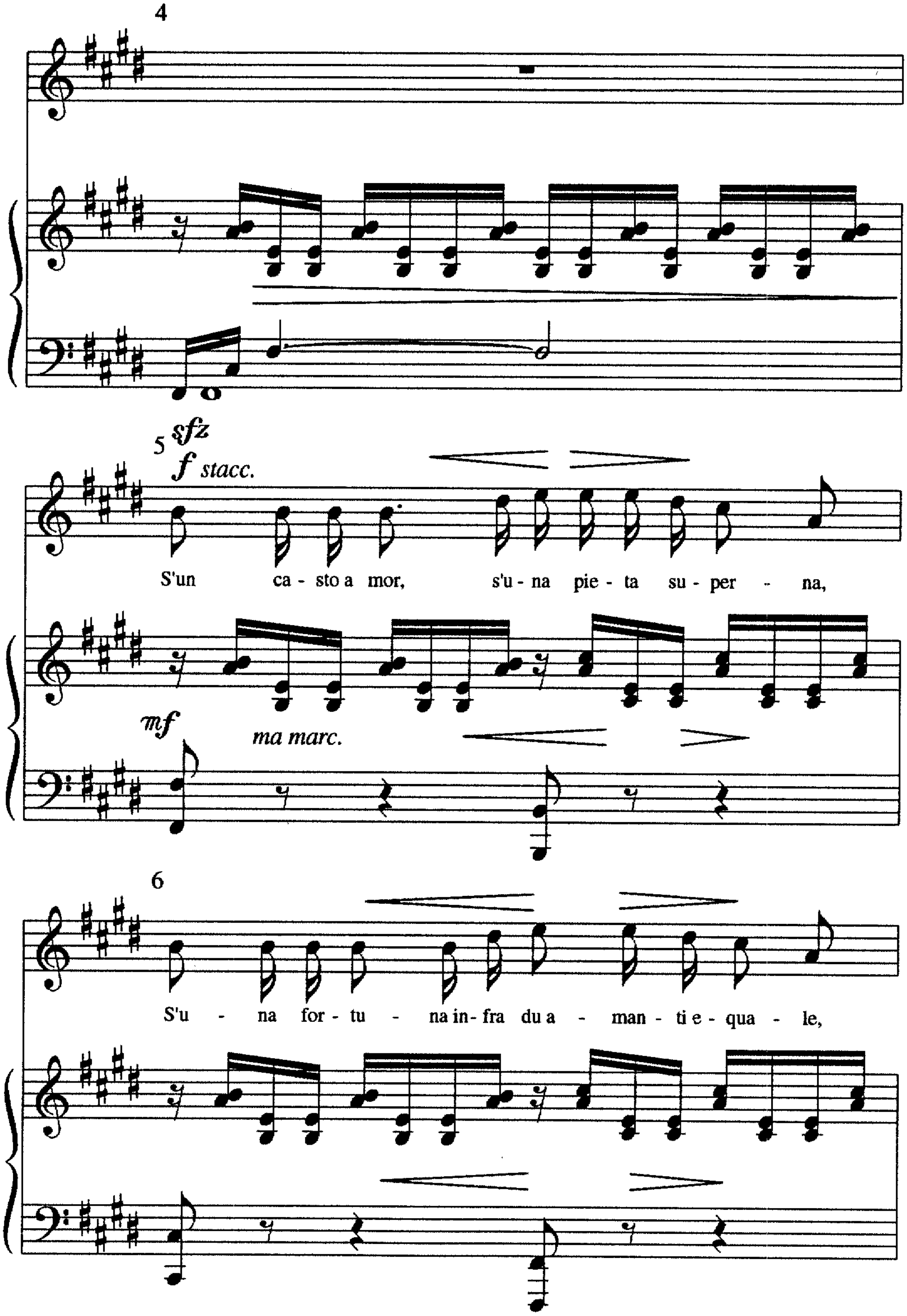
[96] In its use of repeated notes, the melody is related to that in Sonetto XXXVIII, in which repeated notes were used to solve problems arising from extensive enjambment.

Example 47), or drives toward a new tonal focus, as in the second strophe (see Example 48).

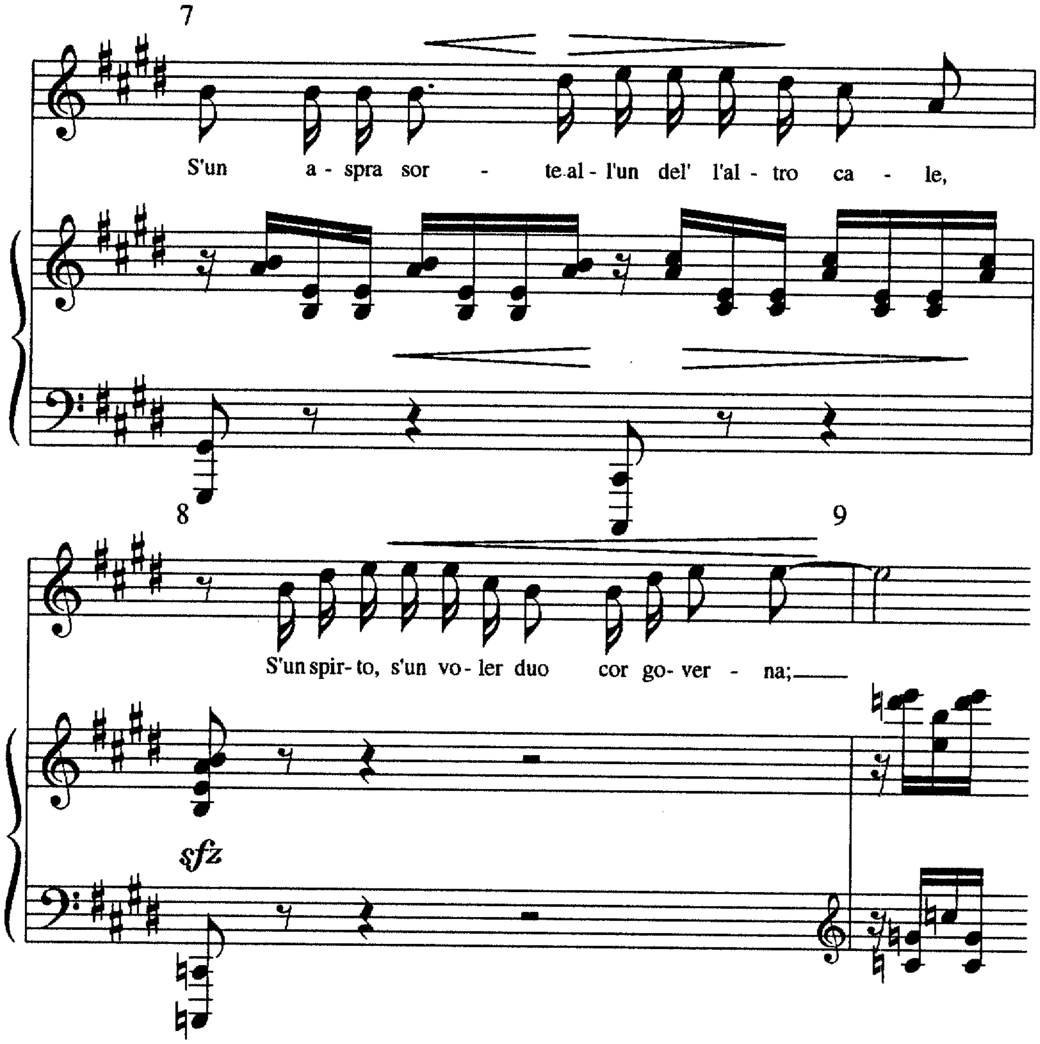
Example 47: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 1-9.


Vivace ♩.= 100
1
f
ritmico
con Ped.
2
sfz
sfz
3
sfz
sfz

Example 47: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 1-9, cont.

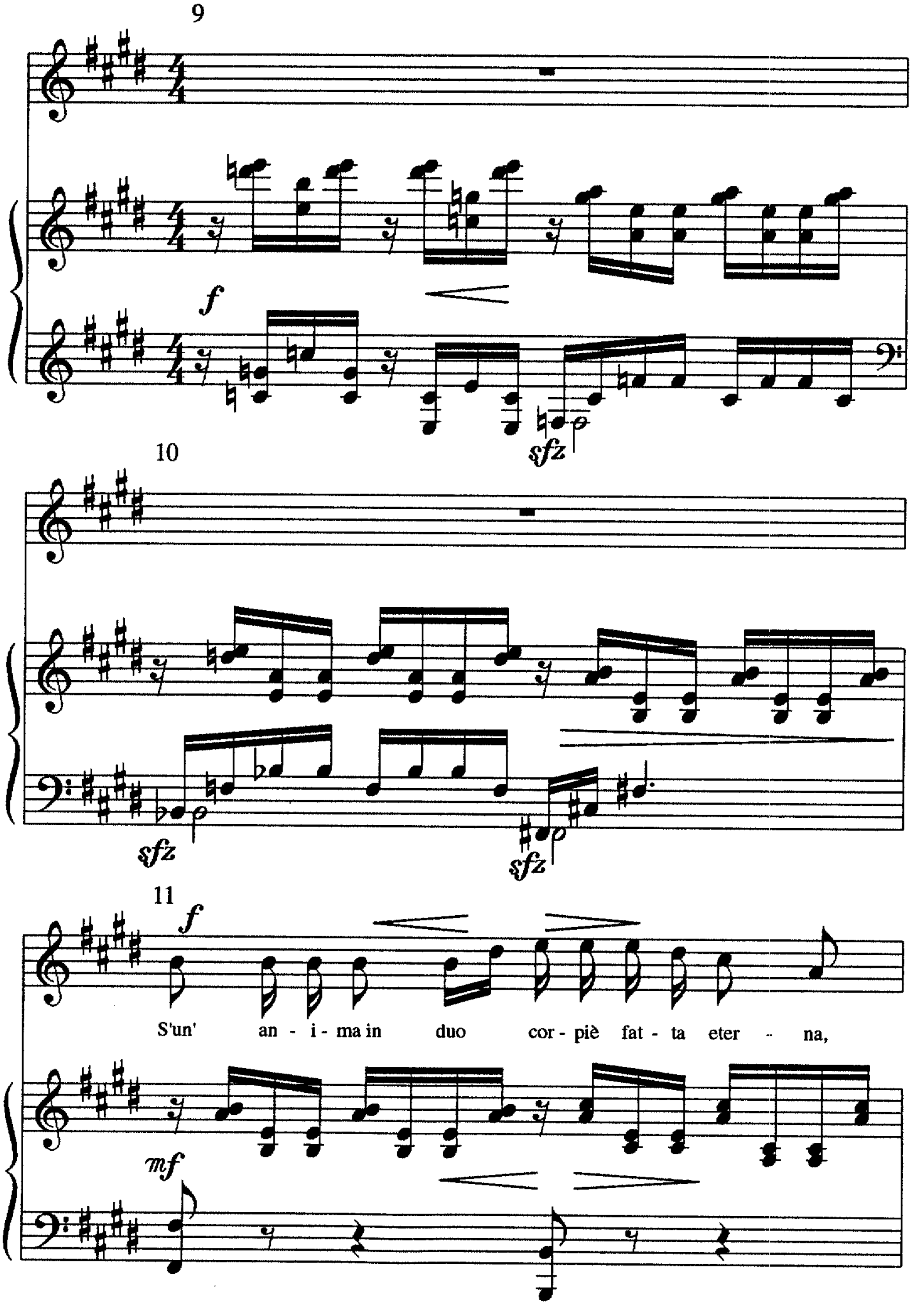

4
5
sfz
f stacc.
S'un ca - sto a mor, s'u - na pie - ta su - per - na,
mf
ma marc.
6
S'u - na for - tu - na in - fra du a - man - ti e - qua - le,

Example 47: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 1-9, cont.

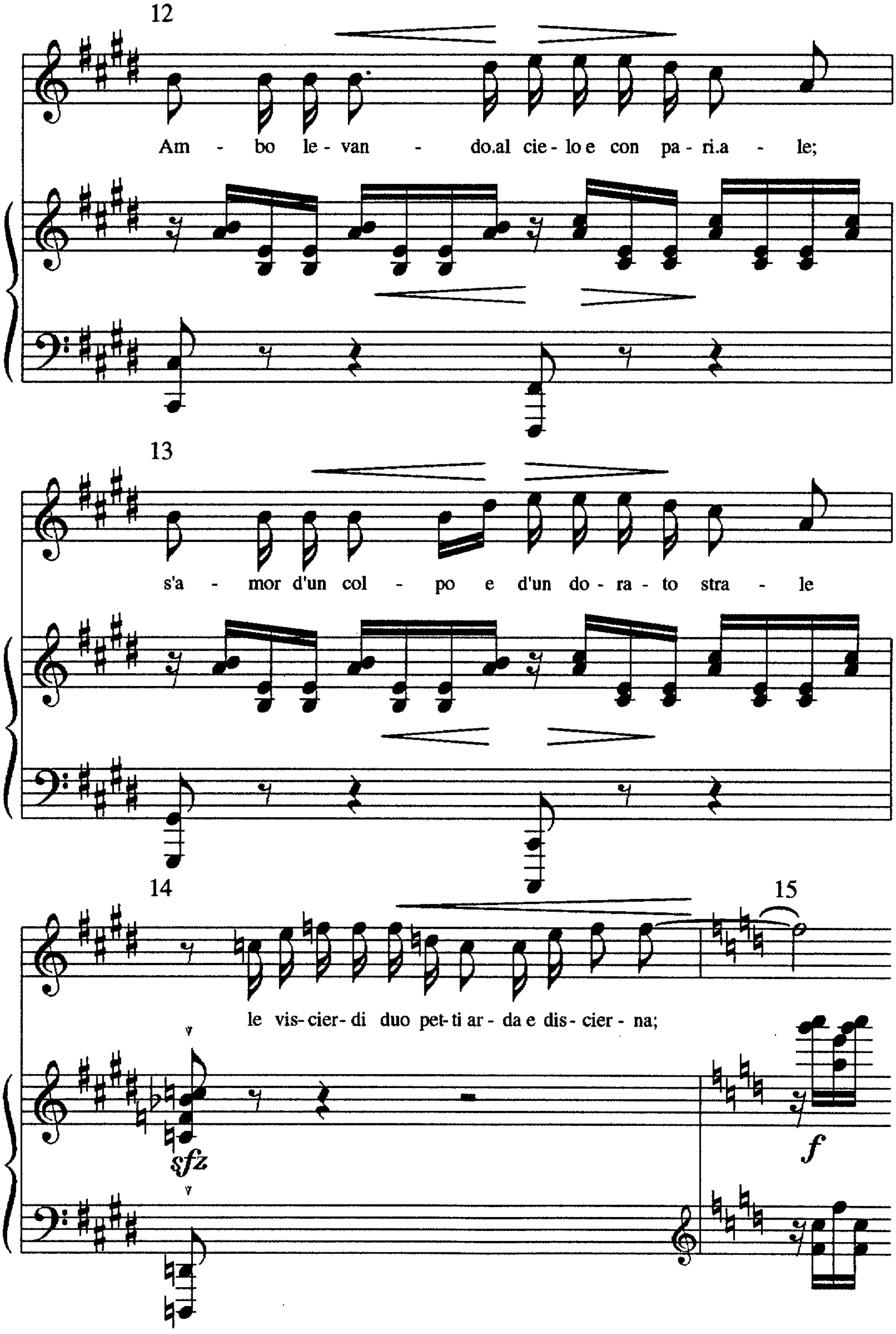

7
S'un a - spra sor - te al - l'un del' l'al - tro ca - le,
8
9
S'un spir- to, s'un vo- ler duo cor go- ver - na;
sfz

While their basic shapes remain intact, the generative melodic phrase undergoes, in the third strophe, a slight variation in which the opening interval is expanded to conform with the needs of the tonal focus. The result changes the melodic emphasis from the *a* phrase to the *a'* phrase (see Example 49). This shift in melodic emphasis occurs for two reasons: 1) the many repetitions of the *a* phrase in the first two strophes threaten to numb the listener to its effects; and 2) it gives the sestet its own identity apart from the octave. Britten uses the shift in melodic emphasis to organize the strophes and articulate the larger divisions of the sonnet despite the subdivisions emphasized in the strophes.

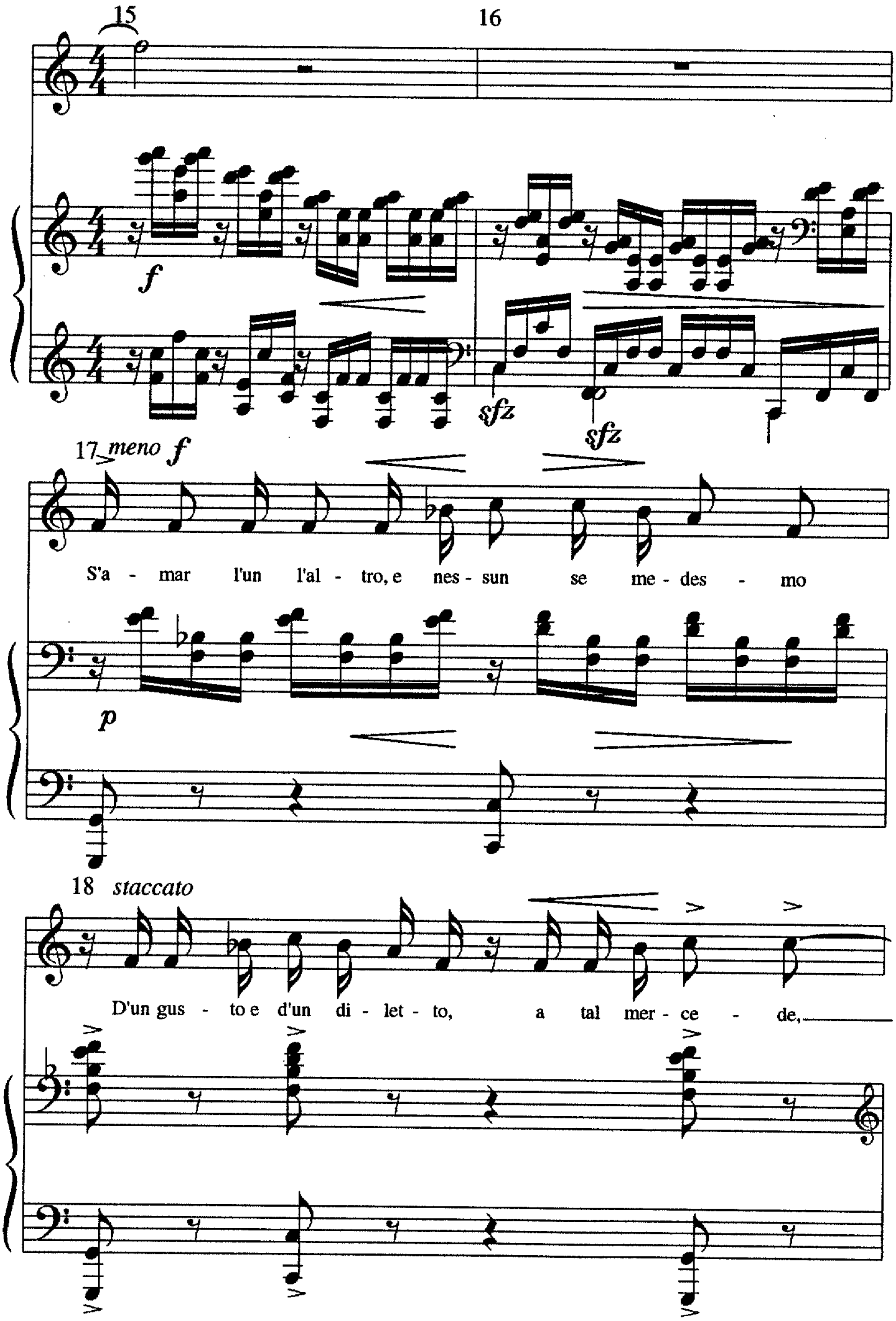
Example 48: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 9-15.


9
f
sfz
10
sfz
sfz
11
f
S'un' an - i - ma in duo cor - piè fat - ta eter - na,
mf

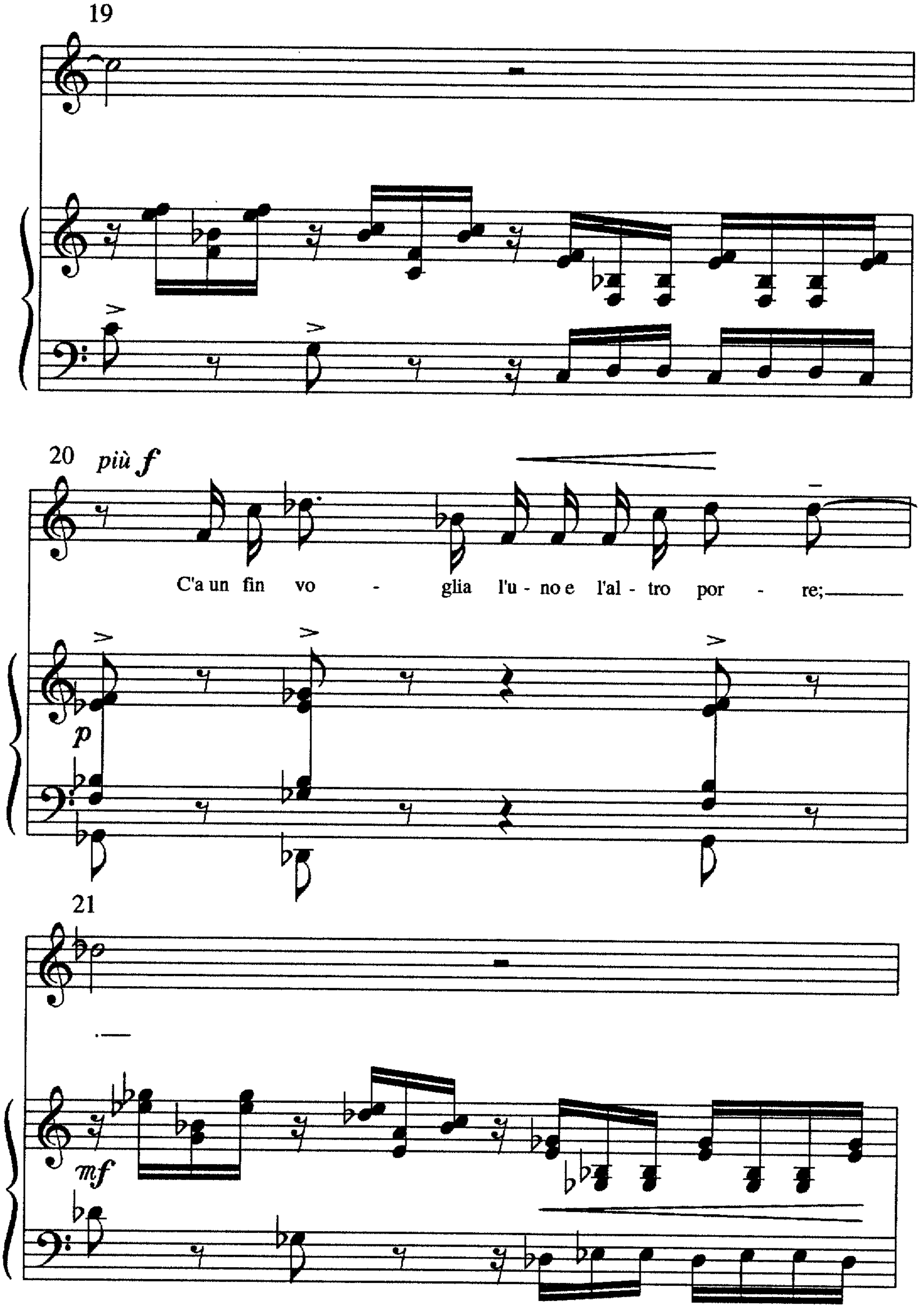
Example 48: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 9-15, cont.


12
Am - bo le - van - do.al cie - lo e con pa - ri.a - le;
13
s'a - mor d'un col - po e d'un do - ra - to stra - le
14
le vis- cier- di duo pet- ti ar - da e dis- cier - na;
sfz
15
f

Example 49: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 15-21.


15
16
f
sfz
sfz
17 *meno f*
S'a - mar l'un l'al - tro, e nes - sun se me - des - mo
p
18 *staccato*
D'un gus - to e d'un di - let - to, a tal mer - ce - de,

Example 49: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 15-21, cont.


19
20
più *f*
C'a un fin vo - glia l'u - no e l'al - tro por - re;
p
21
mf

The third strophe sets three lines of text, *ll.* 9-11, again in one-measure phrases, but with a break between lines 10 and 11, placing a slight emphasis on line 11 with the design, *aa'(interlude)a"*. Line 11, translated by Pears and Mayer as "both wills strive for the same end," introduces the Platonic concept of spiritual union through death found in love itself or in the love of Beauty. The two lines before it lead to this climactic moment by suggesting that the lovers lose themselves entirely in each other, becoming one. With the breaking of the melodic pattern, Britten achieves the textual climax, aided by the further estrangement of the melody from its original form (refer to Example 49). Once he breaks the pattern, Britten pursues other variations of it. Before he returns to the one-measure phrases of the first two strophes, he sets line 12, "If thousands and thousands do not make one hundredth part," in two measures, augmenting the transposed *a'* phrase in the design *a'(expanded to 2 mm.)a"*. This decision seems largely to have been based both in the desire to capture natural speech patterns and to expand the fourth strophe to match the proportions of the previous ones since it contains only two lines of text. The return to a one-measure phrase with the subsequent line of text (*l.* 13), gives the song a second textual climax in this strophe (see Example 50). Britten's setting of the sestet, then, builds toward the final line by continually building up to climaxes created by breaking the phrase patterns set up in the first two strophes.

Britten's use of a quartal sonority in the accompaniment imbues the song with a lack of tonal clarity, placing the burden on the final measures of the song – and hence the final line of text – to provide a sense of resolution. The quartal structure does recur, however, imposing a harmonic shape to the song which is at odds with the strophic design of the melody. The governing quartal sonority is a combination of E, B, and A in the right hand and F# and C# in the left, or C#-F#-B-E-A. The absence or presence of this sonority defines a rounded binary structure in the harmonic framework, seen in Table 19. For

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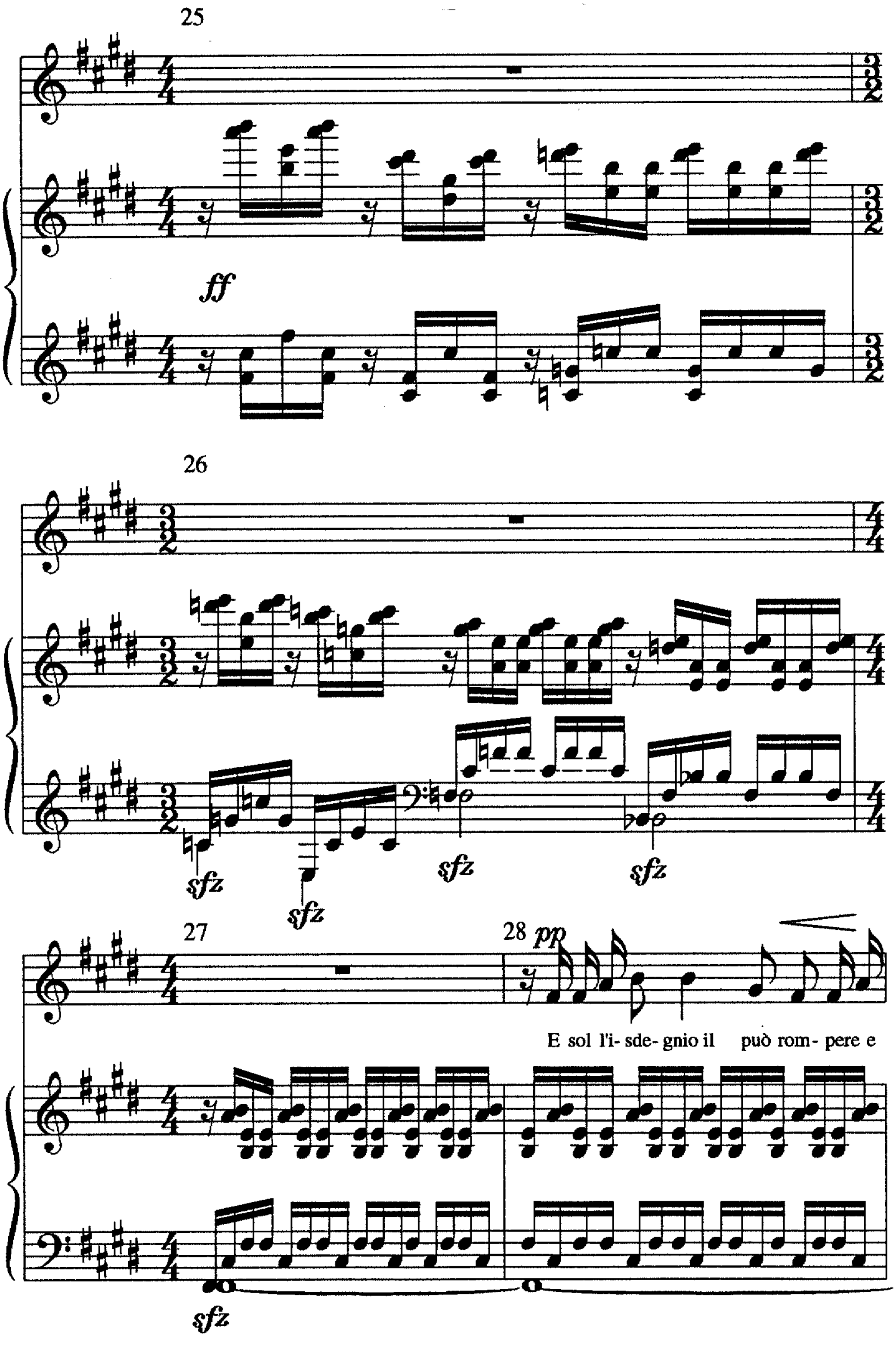
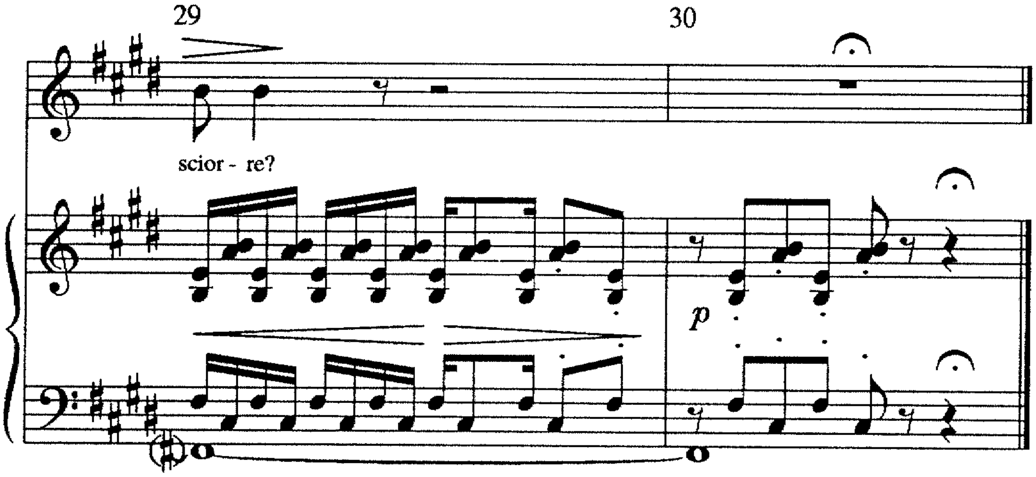
Example 51: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 25-30.


25
ff
26
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz
27
28 pp
E sol l'i- sde- gnio il può rom- pere e
sfz

Example 51: Sonetto XXXII, *S' un casto amor*, mm. 25-30, cont.



Throughout the course of the first strophe, elements of the quartal sonority are extracted and recombined to generate the accompanimental material, or even arranged vertically, as in m. 8.[97] The bass line uses the pitches of the sonority in a sequence consisting of descending fifths a whole step apart, over which the right hand alternates between various combinations of the remaining pitches, as in mm 5-8 (refer to Example 47). The G# at m. 7, which is not part of the original quartal sonority, still fits into the the quartal scheme, replacing C# temporarily as the initial pitch of the series of fourths.

Tonal movement occurs when the elements of the quartal harmony disappear, as in m. 14, at the final phrase of the second strophe (refer to Example 48). At first glance, the verticality in that measure seems to be a transposition of the quartal sonority from m. 8; however, the D♮ in the bass line does not fit into a quartal framework. At this point, Britten uses gestures that appear to be quartally based, but in actuality are tertian. The reference to F at m. 15 is constructed from a series of thirds, F-A-C-E-G, which was foreshadowed in the introduction at m. 3. Tertian elements, then, provide contrast, not resolution. After the return in m. 25, the quartal sonority regains control, moving through the tertian references in m. 26 as it did in mm. 2-3 in the introduction.

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[97] The vertical quartal sonority uses C♮ instead of C#, foreshadowing a move in that direction during the course of the song.

The manner in which Britten unfolds the harmonic framework of the song also places emphasis on the final line of the text. In the first strophe, the melody centers around E and B, part of the quartal sonority, over the C♯ quartal sonority in the bass. At the final melodic phrase of the strophe, the bass pattern is broken, moving to a C♮ with the right hand and melody emphasizing E. After the turn toward E in the melodic line, the interlude between the first and second strophes presents a truncated version of the tertian elements in mm. 2-4 of the introduction (refer to Example 48, mm. 9-10; compare to Example 47), which brings the tonal reference point back to the quartal sonority for the start of the second strophe.

The first three phrases of the second strophe are identical with the first phrases of the first strophe. And similar to the first strophe, the bass pattern is interrupted at the start of the fourth phrase. Here the accompaniment suggests a move toward F with a D♮ in the bass line, using the exact same chord configuration as in m. 8, but one half-step higher in the right hand and one whole step lower in the left hand (refer to Example 48, mm. 13-14). The chord has tertian implications, for it consists of the root, fourth and fifth of the prevailing melodic tonality around F, with a sixth scale degree in the bass.

The second interlude also suggests F, which was foreshadowed in m. 3 of the introduction (refer to Example 47). With the start of the second strophe (m. 17), the melody retains the F emphasis, over B♭ and C in the right and left hands of the accompaniment (refer to Example 49). In the final phrase (m. 20), the harmony has moved to an E♭-minor chord with D♭ in the bass, but the melody, a variation of the *a'* phrase hovers around D♭, on which it ends. After a brief turn back to E♭, the D♭ of the melody becomes C♯, placing the melody of the fourth strophe at the level of F♯ minor with a raised sixth scale degree.[98] The accompaniment explores aspects of F♯, finally coming to rest on an F♯-minor triad in first inversion (refer to Example 50). This gesture prepares the way for the return of the quartal sonority since all three pitches are common to it. The opening material returns in the fourth interlude, which presents a truncated version of the introduction (refer to Example 51). Once the accompaniment settles back onto the quartal sonority, it remains there for the final line of text, with the melody now emphasizing B, in one of the most stable sections of the entire song.

Formally, two structures are explored: the strophic setting of the melody, which has been discussed previously, and the rounded binary design of the accompaniment and harmony. Britten exploits the two most important elements of the rounded binary design, contrast and return, to emphasize the final line of text. The moment of most intensity in the text – the sestet – constitutes the contrasting *B* section of the form. Although the melody is still related to the the generative phrase, Britten's treatment breaks the pattern that he set in the first section, creating contrast and effecting the climax of the piece. Harmonically, the tonal areas referred to, F, C, and E♭ in tertian guise, are the farthermost afield from the starting tonal point of C♯, so that the return at m. 25 to the governing quartal sonority seems to provide a resolution to the previous section, particularly as the F♯-minor reference is completely absorbed by the quartal sonority. This links the final line to the opening sentiments, and suggests that the lover feels his efforts at pleading have been in vain (see Table 20).

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[98] This is the same scale configuration that Britten uses in Sonetto LV.

TABLE 20

TEXT OF SONETTO XXXII AND BRITTEN'S TWO MUSICAL FORMS

Text	Strophic Setting (Melody)	Rounded Binary (Harmony)
S' un casto amor, s' una pietà superna S' una fortuna infra dua amanti equale, S' un' aspra sorte all' un dell' altro cale, S' un spirto, s' un voler duo cor governa;	*A*: If we love each other chastely and share the same fate; and if we are one in spirit, and one will rules our hearts . . .	*A*: quartal
S' un' anima in duo corpi è fatta eterna, Ambo levando al cielo e con pari ale; S' amor d' un colpo e d' un dorato strale Le viscier di duo petti arda e disciema;	*A*′: If we become one soul and rise to heaven at the same time, and if love conquers us simultaneously . . .	(part of *A*)
S' amar l' un l' altro, e nessun se medesmo, D' un gusto e d' un diletto, a tal mercede, C' a un fin voglia l' uno e l' altro porre;	*A*″: If we forget ourselves because we are so absorbed by each other, if we share pleasure and delight as though we were one, and if we strive for the same end. . .	*B*: F/C to E♭
Se mille e mille, non sarien centesmo A tal nodo d' amore, a tanta fede;	*A*‴: If thousands and thousands are not even a small amount of our bonds and our constancy . . .	(part of *B*)
E sol l' isdegnio il può rompere e sciorre?	*A*⁗: Can anger destroy all these bonds that we have together?	*A*′: quartal

Further emphasis on the final line comes with Britten's use of interludes. Throughout the work, each strophe builds to a fever pitch, then abates in an interlude. These interludes accomplish two purposes, one musical and one dramatic. Musically, they provide relief from the one-measure phrases of the melody by creating space between occurrences of the melodic line, and they lead the harmony to the next tonal emphasis. Their dramatic purpose lies in the creation of a sense of passage of time. The text grouping that Britten devised gathers similar questions and places them within the same strophe, or the same larger section. The interludes give the speaker time to think of what tactic he is going to take next in his pleas to his beloved, creating dramatic time. Before the harmonic and melodic return in the final strophe, the interludes are relatively short, lasting only two or three measures, as though the lover's mind, in desperation, is working desperately to find a means of solving the problem between him and the beloved. The interlude at the return, however, is considerably longer, augmented by a 9/8 measure. All the frantic melodic, harmonic and rhythmic activity of the previous sections was for this moment: the lover, having told the beloved of the greatest union that they can share – death – and, having reminded him of the thousands of ties that bind them (*ll.* 9-13), pauses to give dramatic weight to the root of their relationship's problem.

The final line poetically provides a resolution to the barrage of questions by illuminating the problem in the relationship: the anger that has driven a wedge between the lover and the beloved. This resolution comes in the form of a question itself that the conditional clauses were leading to: Can anger tear apart all the bonds that we have established between each other? Britten, however, seems to leave the problem unsolved. After a return to the progression of the introduction, the accompaniment settles down on one quartal structure as though a resolution has occurred at the statement of the final line of text. Yet, the dissonance of the quartal sonority remains: the final question and all previous questions will go unanswered.

Sonetto XXIV

Spirto ben nato

Spirto ben nato, in cui si specchia e vede	Noble soul, in whose chaste and dear
Nelle tue belle membra oneste e care	limbs are reflected all
Quante natura e 'l ciel tra no' può fare,	that nature and heaven can achieve with us,
Quand' a null' altra suo bell' opra cede:	the paragon of their works:
Spirto leggiadro, in cui si spera e crede	graceful soul, within whom one hopes and believes
Dentro, come di fuor nel viso appare,	Love, Pity and Mercy are dwelling,
Amor, pietà, mercè; cose sì rare	as they appear in your face; things so rare
Che ma' furn' in belta con tanta fede:	and never found in beauty so truly:
L' amor mi prende, e la beltá mi lega;	Love takes me captive, and Beauty binds me;
La pietà, la mercè con dolci sguardi	Pity and Mercy with sweet glances
Ferma speranz' al cor par che ne doni.	fill my heart with a strong hope.

Qual uso o qual governo al mondo niega	What law or earthly government,
Qual crudeltá per tempo, o qual più tardi,	what cruelty now or to come,
C' a sí bel viso morte non perdoni?[99]	could forbid Death to spare such a lovely face?

For the final song of the cycle, Britten recalls many of the musical conflicts and techniques he explored in the previous songs, but with a view toward a resolution. He considered that this song should be the focal point, or climax, of the cycle, evident from Peter Pears's statement: ". . . the increasing speeds (or apparent speeds) of the inner Sonnets are carefully calculated, together with their rhythmic patterns, in order that the last noble Sonnet may appear to its best advantage."[100] This build up to the final song, however, goes beyond mere tempo or rhythmic concerns, for not only does the musical setting resolve some of the same conflicts as found in the previous songs, but also the text of the poem finds the lover at peace with his love for the beloved. Certainly, the sonnet is one of the most positive that Britten chose to set, and his setting the most stable in its musical ending.

The form arises out of an interplay between extended piano ritornelli on the one hand, and the vocal line on the other. According to Arnold Whittall, the form of Sonetto XXIV ". . . is determined by the four statements of the piano's ritornello."[101] This is true to a certain extent, but this assessment neglects the contribution of the melody, particularly in the contrasting section, and fails to address the intricacies of the design and the resolution of conflicts. The ritornelli do function as a unifying factor in the work, due to their presence within or between every section, and in no small way they create structural pillars for the form by alluding to tonal areas that are explored in subsequent sections or by presenting elements of the tonal conflicts; but the melody, particularly because of the supremacy of the text, has the greater control over the form.

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[99] There are several differences between the text as it appears in the score and Guasti's edition: at the end of line 4, Guasti has a semi-colon instead of a colon; in line 7, Guasti does not have the comma after "*Amor*" or the accent on "*sì*;" Guasti does include an accent on the word "*beltà*" that the score omits in line 9; at the end of line 12, Guasti places a comma; in line 13, the word "*più*" does not have an accent in Guasti's edition; and in line 14, the word "*sí* " appears without accent in Guasti's edition.

[100] Pears, "Vocal Music," 67.

[101] Whittall, Music of Britten and Tippett, 67.

The form is essentially ternary with a written-out repeat of the first section, and includes elements of strophic variations (see Table 21). The traditional divisions of the octave and sestet are finely articulated through the use of clear structural junctions and points of arrival. There is, however, some ambiguity involved at the return. In many ways it can be said that there is no true return in the sense that the restatement of the first section follows its predecessor closely. On the contrary, the return section, while it retains many of the elements which comprised the first statement, sets off on a different purpose, so that in actuality it is only remotely related. While the main tonal area of D major is

TABLE 21

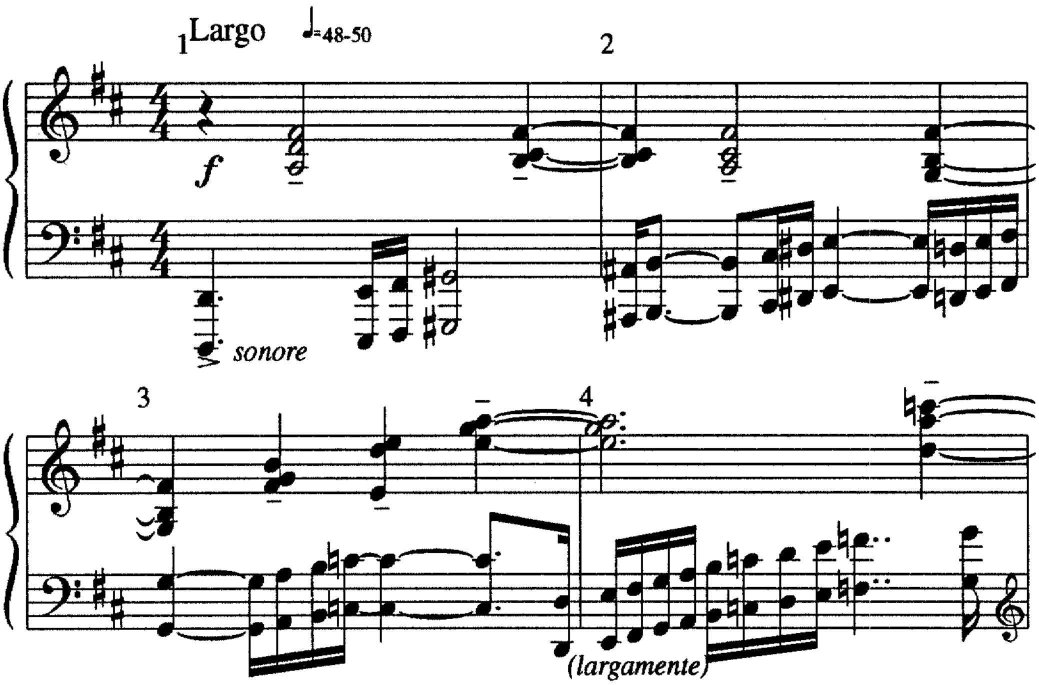
MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF SONETTO XXIV

Measure nos.	Musical Form	Phrases	Poetic Form	Tonal Areas
1-8	*Ritornello A*			DM
8-15	*A*	*a a' b c*	Octave *ll.* 1-4	DM
15-21	*Ritornello A'*			Dm
21-28	*A'*	*a a' b c*	Octave *ll.* 5-8	Dm to Cm
28-35	*B/Ritornello A"*	*d d' d"*	Sestet *ll.* 9-11	Cm to G♭m
35-40	*A"*	*a" a''' a""*	Sestet *ll.* 12-14	DM
40-46	*Ritornello A'''*			DM

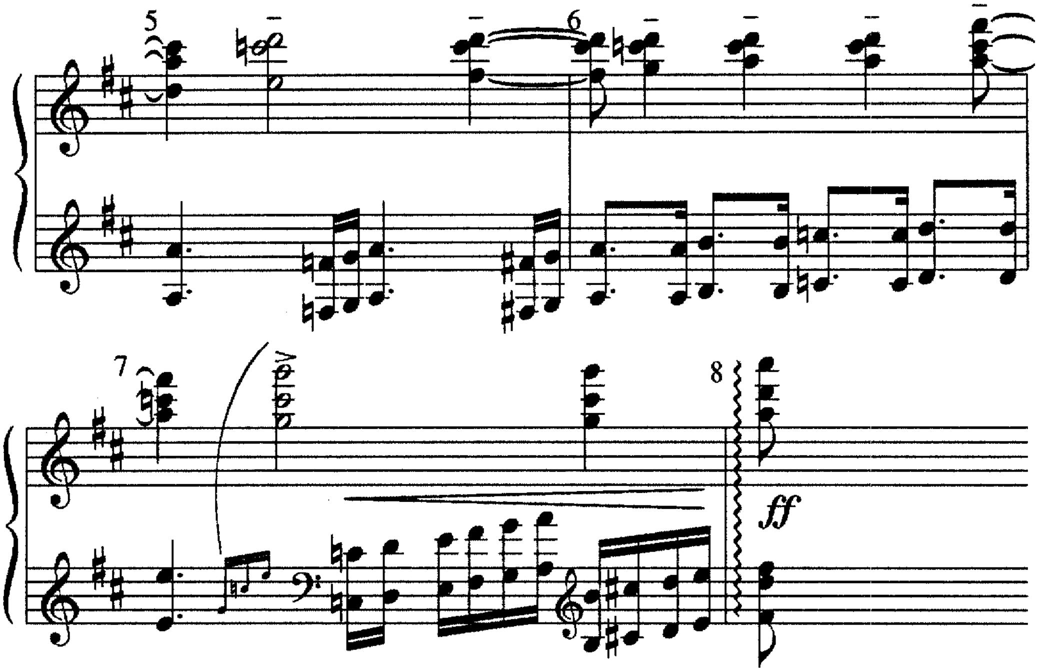
recapitulated, it is not accomplished with the strong sense of arrival that so often accompanies such an event. Thus, the return does not constitute the resolution for the song or for the cycle as a whole – this must be found in other elements instead.

The first ritornello, which serves as the introduction to the song, is organized by means of an ascent through a D major scale that spans three octaves. The scale undergoes chromatic twists and turns, which allude either to tonal areas that will be explored – however briefly, or to unfold a particular conflict between two pitches. Britten begins the ritornello with the presentation of a conflict between D, the basis of the scale that organizes the section, and G♯, its Lydian sharp-fourth, which has been the basis of the tonal material for several of the previous songs (see Example 52, m. 1). As in Sonetto XXXVIII, the

Example 52: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 1-8.



Example 52: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 1-8, cont.



conflict is explored linearly, and as in other of the songs , the sharp-fourth does not resolve to scale degree five.[102] Britten relieves the conflict somewhat in the third measure with an arrival on the pitch G, but this does not completely solve the sharp-fourth, whose tendency is to push toward the fifth, A. A second conflict, between the major and minor third of D is explored in the fourth and fifth measures as the bass line, in its ascent, temporarily wavers between the two pitches. Throughout the ritornello, points of rhythmic arrival (i.e., on the first or third beat of the measure, or on agogic accents) on B, E, G, and C♮ anticipate tonal areas that will be explored either in the melodic line or in future interludes.

The ritornello can also be seen as the metaphorical representation of the lover's struggle to reach the pedestal on which he places the beloved with the first words, "*Spirto*

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[102] Here the G# ascends to an A#.

ben nato" ("Noble spirit"). Many of the other poems have alluded to the lover's insecurities and believed inadequacies, and his own feelings that he cannot achieve the relationship because of the supremacy of the beloved. In this introduction, the lover finally reaches the beloved, with the scale's wrong turns and backtrackings signifying the lover's arduous journey to arrive there. But the use of the ascending scale here alludes also to the lover's state of mind: the beloved still remains above him. The passage recurs at several times throughout the work both to unify it musically and to keep the lover's struggle to win the beloved ever present.

The opening phrase of the setting of the first quatrain, sung unaccompanied, descends to balance the ascent of the ritornello that precedes it. The construction of the melody of the first two phrases, which set lines 1 and 2, is through a sequence of descending triads in which the root and third of one becomes the third and fifth of the next (see Example 53). Each triad outlined, D major, B minor, G major and E minor, was anticipated in the scale of the introduction, though in a different order (see Example 53, m. 1, m. 2, and m. 3).[103] The third phrase, which sets line three, recalls the scale of the introduction, though without the chromatic diversions which prolonged that statement. The musical purpose of the phrase is to return the melody to D after the E minor of the final triad of the second phrase. Once this is accomplished, a descent in the fourth phrase, cadencing A to D, balances the ascent of phrase three and closes the section.

Britten's treatment of the first quatrain is somewhat unusual given the open-ended text. The first four lines comprise the first part of a formal and elaborate address to the beloved. The lover flatters the beloved, calling him a "noble soul" whose beauty is the very model of

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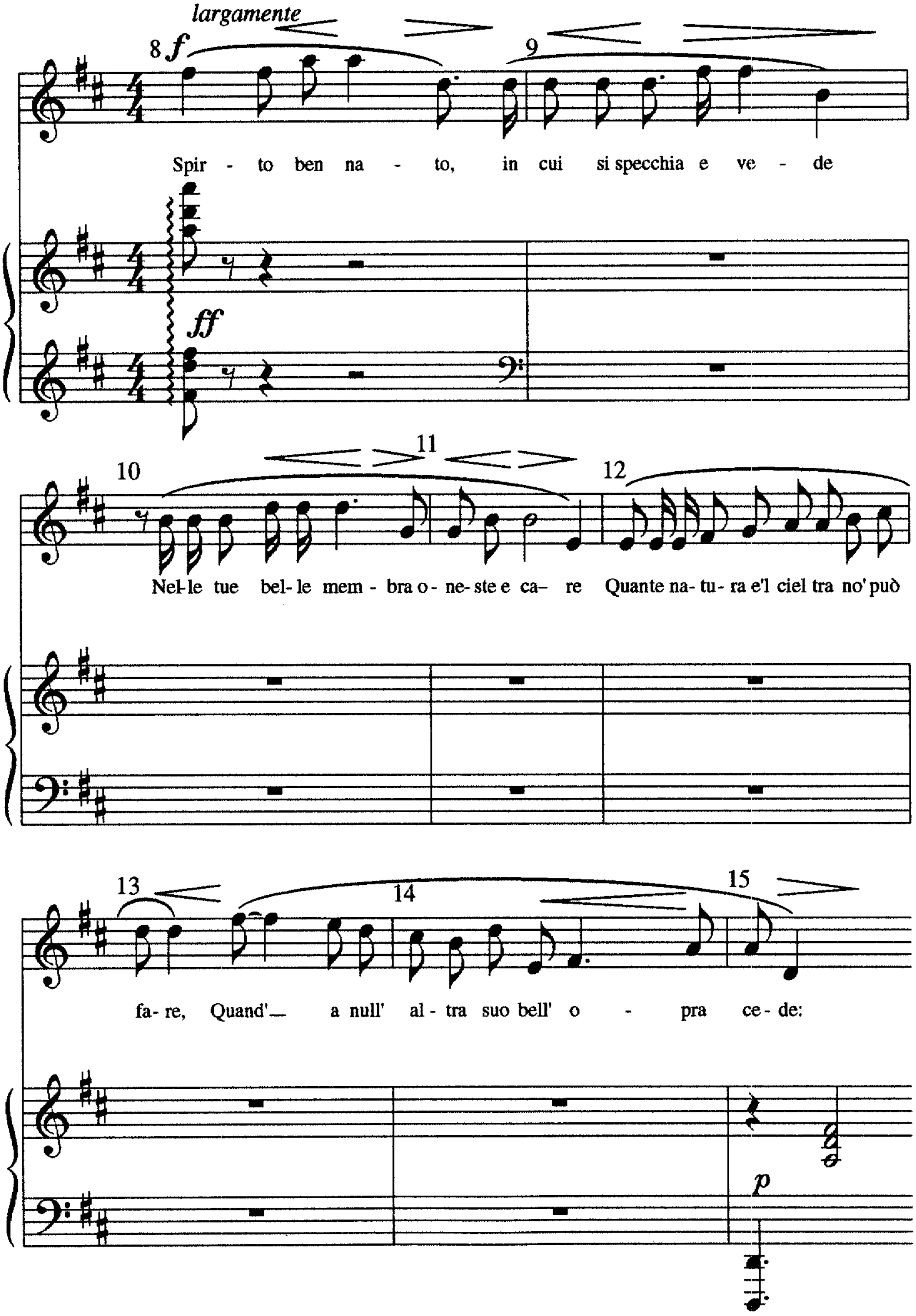
[103] The order differs only because of the direction of the scale and the way in which the triadic melody is generated.

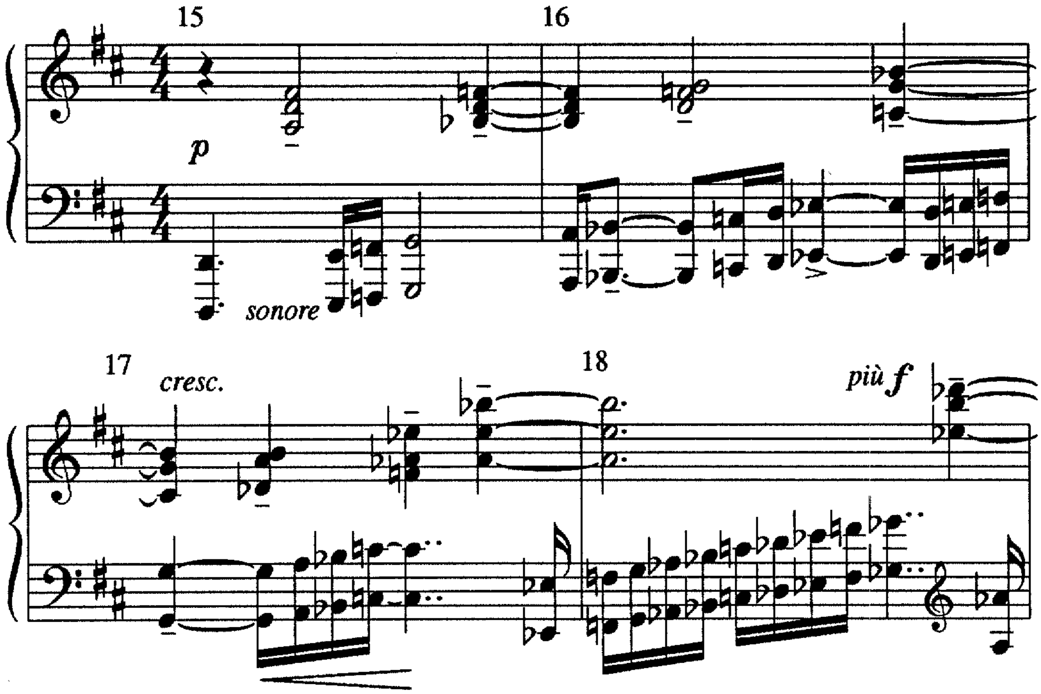
Example 53: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 8-15.


largamente
8
f
9
Spir - to ben na - to, in cui si specchia e ve - de
ff
10
11
12
Nel-le tue bel-le mem - bra o - ne-ste e ca- re Quante na- tu- ra e'l ciel tra no' può
13
14
15
fa- re, Quand'— a null' al - tra suo bell' o - pra ce - de:
p

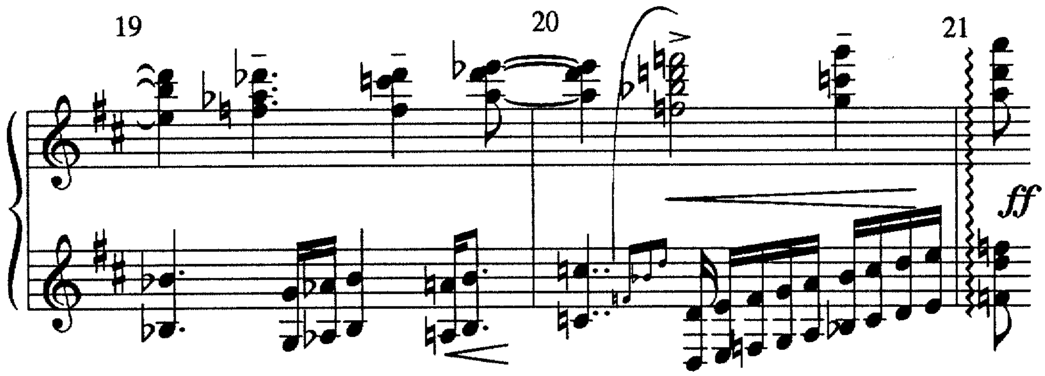
the best that nature and heaven can achieve in a human. Although the lover's thoughts about the beloved's beauty are completed, the grammatical structure is left open, waiting for its conclusion, which finally occurs in the first tercet. Britten chooses to have a definite cadence at the end of the fourth line (and fourth phrase, refer to Example 53), so that he can return to the opening ritornello and emphasize that the second quatrain is a parallel section to the first. Further, the use of a melodic line that is clearly rooted in D-tertian harmony must have some significance in light of the text, for it accompanies references to the beloved as a model of perfection.

The second ritornello starts from D minor rather than D major, recalling the conflict between F♯ and F♮ in the first ritornello, and exploring the flat side of the tonal area, as shown in Example 54. The same struggles occur as the passage makes its way toward the

Example 54: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 15-21.



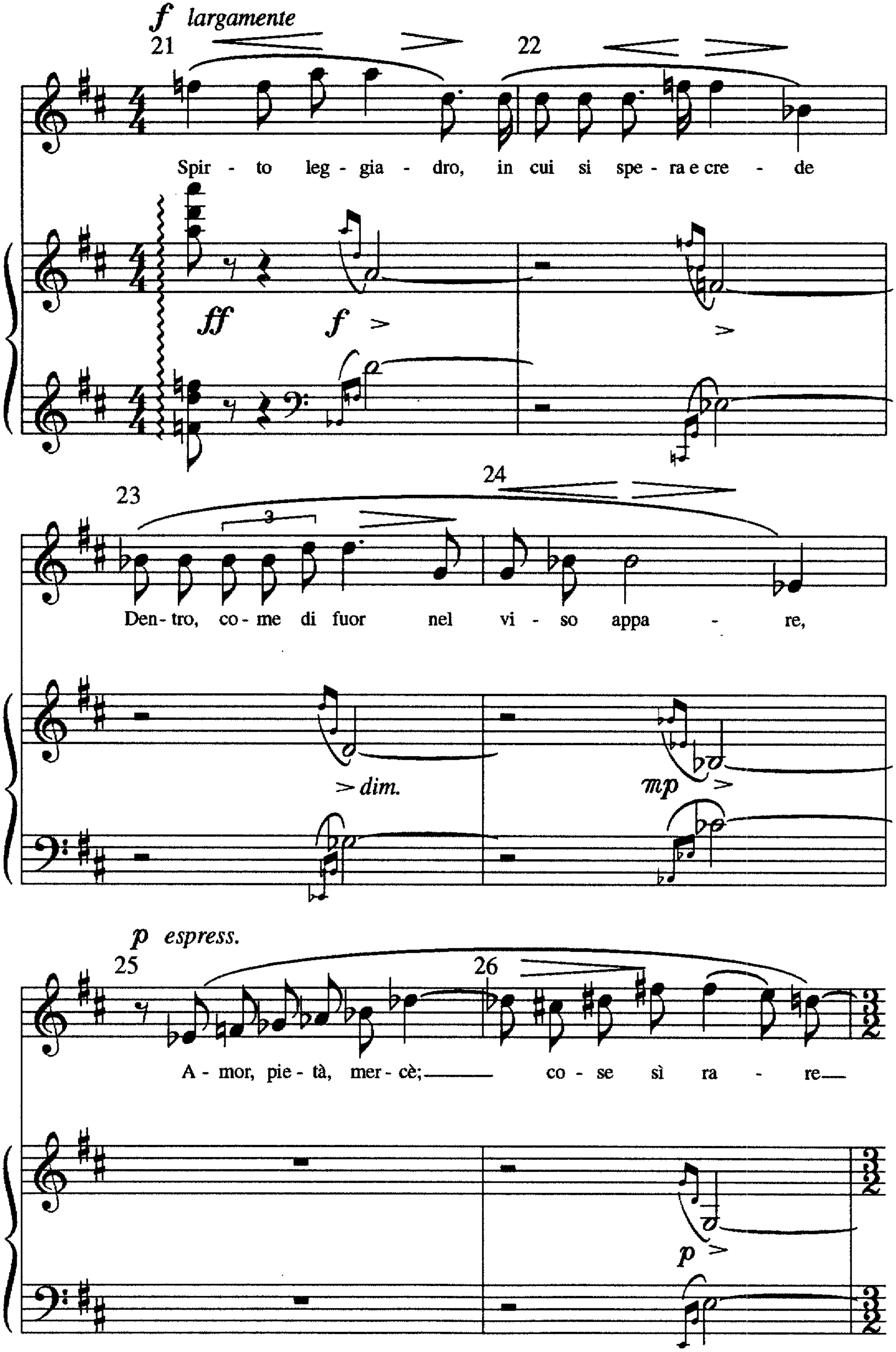
Example 54: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 15-21, cont.



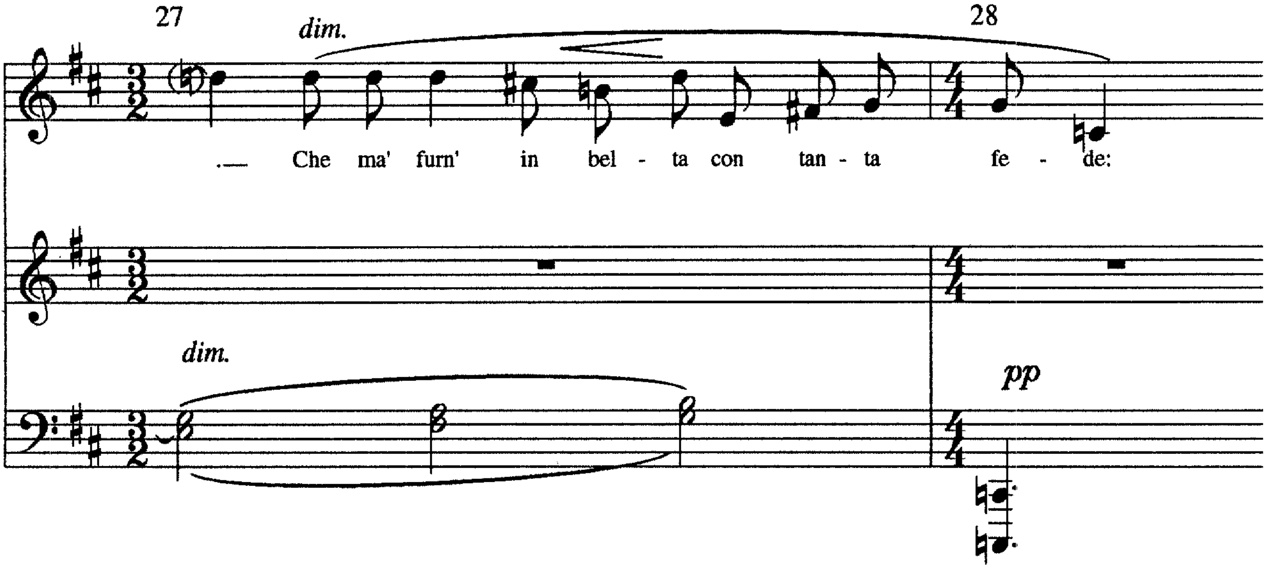
first phrase of the second quatrain, but with several important changes. Britten neutralizes the D/G♯ linear conflict of the first measure by simply replacing the F♯ to G♯ with an F♮ to a G♮. This keeps this transposition from returning to the accidentals from the first ritornello. In m. 19, which corresponds to m. 5, the vacillation between F♮ and F♯ has been replaced with a conflict between A♭ and A♮. This recalls the use of ♭5 in Sonetto XXXVIII, as well as the conflict between D and G♯ from the opening.

The melodic line for the second quatrain, is the same as for the first, but transposed into the realm of D minor. One difference, however, is that it is now accompanied with mirror images in the accompaniment that often end in a dissonant interval, presumably to provide some contrast with the first unaccompanied section. The first and second phrases, setting lines 5 and 6, now outline D minor, B♭ major, G minor and E♭ major chords, all of which were foreshadowed in the second ritornello. The third phrase, which sets line 7, again ascends to D, like its parallel phrase in the first section, but to major not minor, and the fourth phrase descends, but cadences G to C, with D being reinterpreted as the second degree of a C scale (see Example 55). The major twist at the end of the third phrase serves to reopen the conflict of the major and minor thirds from the first ritornello that was absent

Example 55: "Sonetto XXIV," *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 21-28.


f largamente
21
22
Spir - to leg - gia - dro, in cui si spe - ra e cre - de
ff
f
23
24
3
Den - tro, co - me di fuor nel vi - so appa - re,
dim.
mp
p espress.
25
26
A - mor, pie - tà, mer - cè; co - se sì ra - re
p

Example 55: "Sonetto XXIV," *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 21-28, cont.

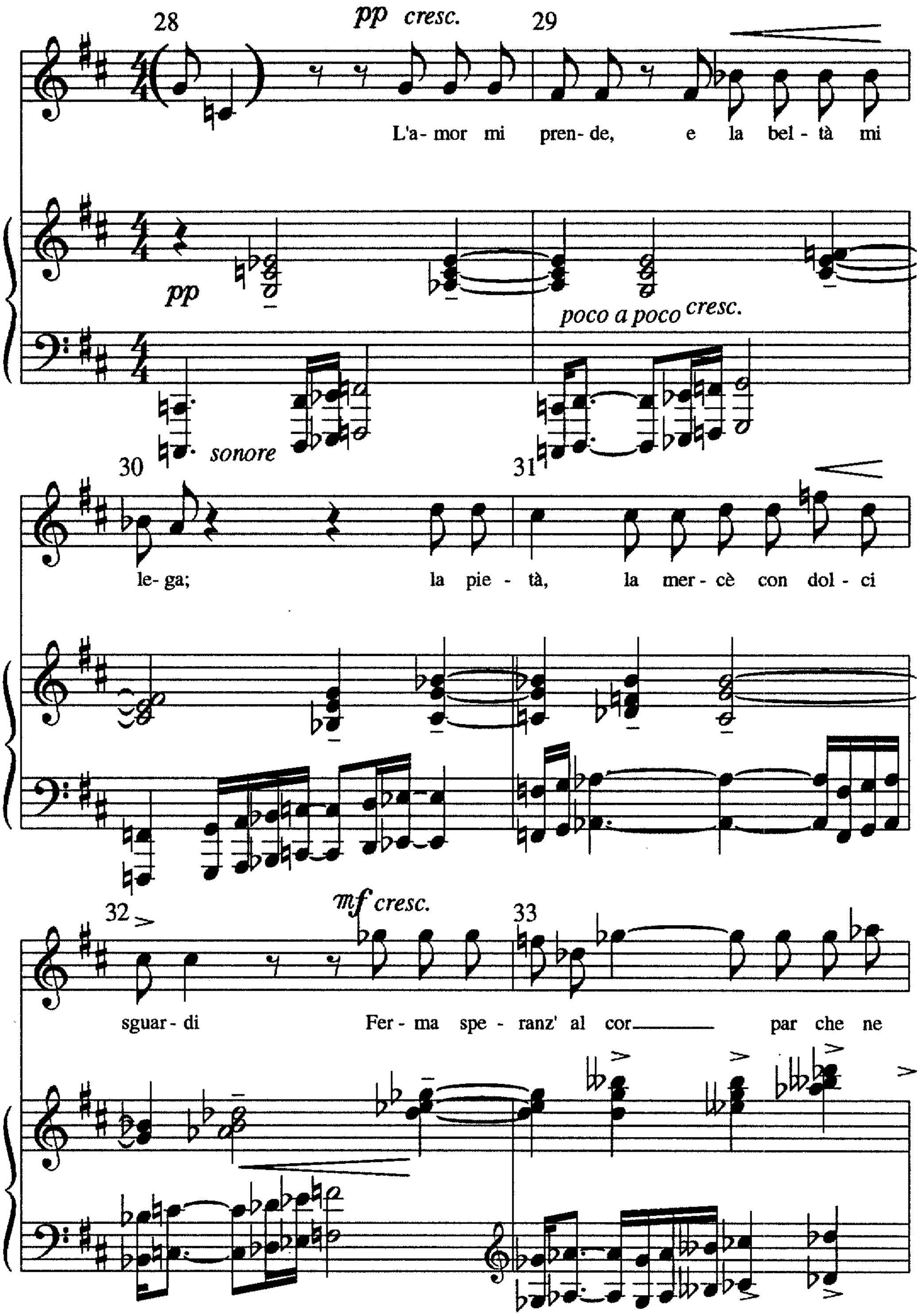


in the second. The scale starting from E♭ had led away from D minor, through E♭ minor to G♭ major, eventually leading to C minor, the tonal area for the next strophe. All three of the tonal references – E♭ minor, G♭ major and C minor – had been explored briefly in the ritornello which precedes this melodic statement (refer to Example 54, m. 18 right hand, m. 18 left hand, and m. 16, respectively), so their presence is not as arresting as that of D major, which had been usurped by its minor scale. To put the tonal region back on track and lead to the cadence on C, Britten respells and reinterprets the D♭ in the G♭ reference as C♯, alludes to E major via C♯ and F♯, but resolves to D instead and sends the next phrase closer to its goal of C minor as the D is reinterpreted within the context of C.

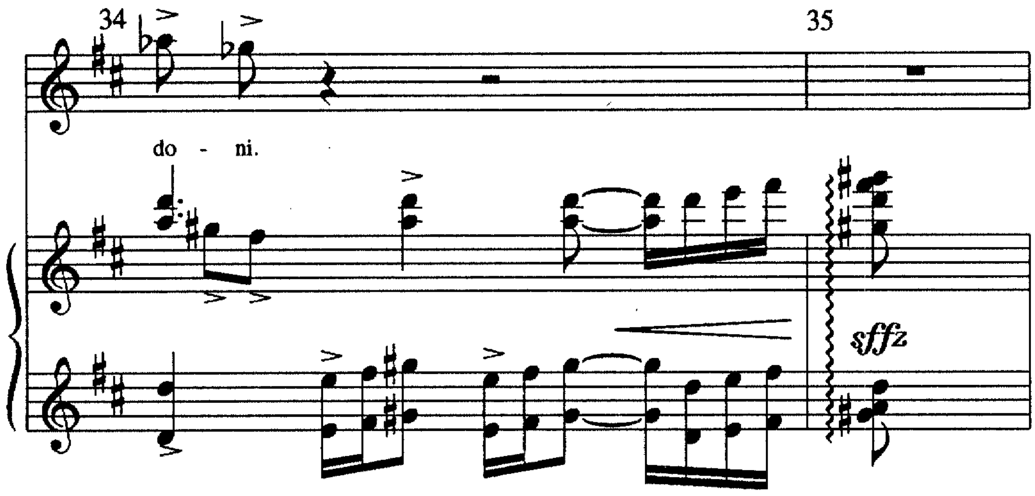
The detour into D minor for the second section, although necessary for the key scheme, also affects our perception and interpretation of the text. Although this address to the beloved parallels that of the first quatrain, the text itself provides clues that there is doubt remaining in the lover about the beloved's devotion to him. A reference to hope as yet unfulfilled in lines 5 through 7 – "*Spirto leggiadro, in cu' si spera e crede / Dentro, come di fuor nel viso appare, / Amor, pietà, mercè, . . .*" ("graceful soul, within whom one hopes and believes Love, Pity and Mercy are dwelling. . .") – seems to assert that the lover is not sure that the beloved will accept or return his love. The minor key, then, sets the tone for our perception of this portion of the text.

After two similar sections, though in different key qualities, Britten introduces the element of contrast. The *B* section of the work begins with a C minor triad, and combines melody and ritornello for the first time (see Example 56). The vocal line, which sets the first tercet, gradually ascends to a G♭ minor triad – the enharmonic spelling of the Lydian sharp-fourth of C – through G minor (mm. 29-30) and D minor (mm. 31-32), using recitative-like melodic formulas that contrast with the triads and scales of the first two sections. For the most part, the accompaniment and the melody are not entirely in agreement harmonically: the G minor (*l.* 9) and D minor phrases (*l.* 10) are essentially accompanied by elements of C minor. In contrast, in the G♭ minor phrase, which sets line 11, the accompaniment supports the vocal line with an unfolding of a portion of the G♭ minor scale, ending on D♭. As the voice cadences on G♭ (m. 34), the accompaniment moves back to a D major reference point, with the D♭ of m. 33 acting as the leading tone. The A♭ and G♭ of the melodic line are reinterpreted as G# and F# within the area of D. The goal of the G♭ minor scale in the bass line is redirected into D major, after which it moves on to A. A slight change at the end of the measure sends the scale to G#, which is sounded with an A and a D, a harmony reminiscent of the first chord of the first song, Sonetto XVI. The D/G# conflict returns, then, as a linear and a vertical conflict. The recapitulation of the D-major area occurs in both melody and accompaniment, but because of the enharmonic relationships between G♭ minor (= F# minor) and D major, Britten cunningly slips into it by using pitch reinterpretation, thus taking out some of the drama inherent in the event.

Example 56: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 28-35.


28
pp cresc.
29
L'a- mor mi pren- de, e la bel - tà mi
pp
poco a poco cresc.
sonore
30
31
le- ga; la pie - tà, la mer- cè con dol - ci
32
mf cresc.
33
sguar- di Fer - ma spe - ranz' al cor par che ne

Example 56: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 28-35, cont.



The lover's struggle to win the love of the beloved can be seen also in the melodic structure of the *B* section, which comprises the first three lines of the sestet (refer to Example 56). At this point, the melody becomes more recitative-like, as opposed to the more fluid phrases of the *A* and *A'* sections and follows the rhythmic inflections of natural speech. Taking this into consideration, the text takes on a restless and unsettled quality, particularly since the melodic line is combined with the ritornello. The tonal focus changes for each phrase, although the accompaniment remains in area of C for the first two phrases, joining the melody only at the final phrase of the section. The phrases make a slow ascent, finally arriving at G♭, which conflicts as a Lydian sharp-fourth with the C minor in which the passage started.

Prior to the start of the sestet, the text centers on the beloved, with each quatrain being addressing him. In this first tercet of the sestet, the focus changes to the lover, with the lover describing the effect that the beloved has on him. His desire for the beloved is so great that he is imprisoned by his love for the beloved and by the beloved's beauty. The beloved's own responses, as interpreted by the lover, give him hope for the return of love.

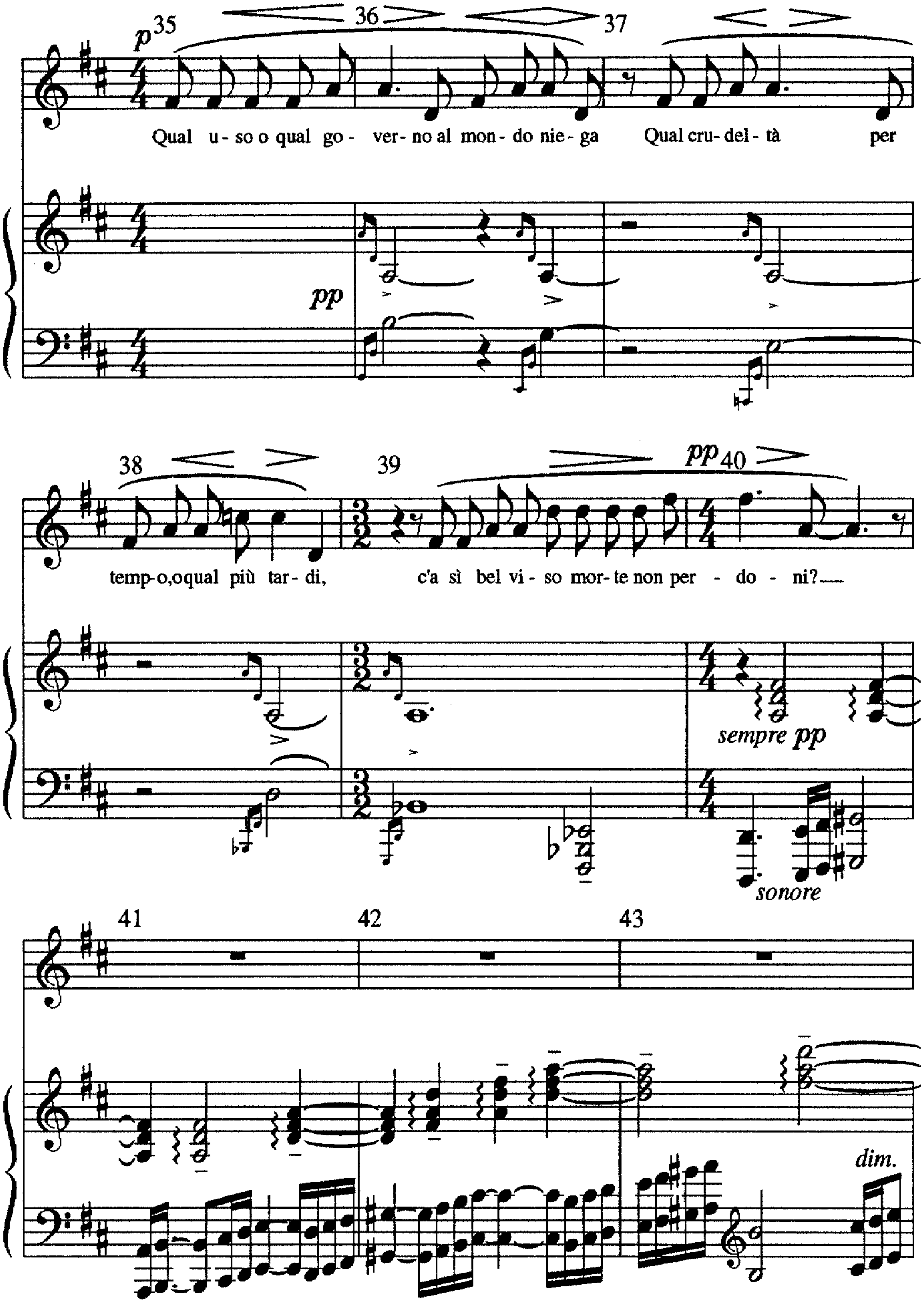
The melodic ascent, then, represents the struggle of the lover again, but this time it is coupled with an unfolding of a C/G♭ conflict (a transposition of the D/G♯ conflict), emphasized when ascent reaches G♭. The text at this point, "*Ferma speranz' al cor par che ne doni*" ("[sweet glances] fill my heart with a strong hope"), alludes to the lover's fervent belief that the beloved's attentions mean that an relationship is assured. By setting this in the area of G♭, at the opposite pole of the C/G♭ conflict, Britten stresses the importance of this belief in the lover's psychological journey through his feelings toward the beloved.

The return section bears only a nominal relationship to the *A* and *A'* sections that it recapitulates, although in the final tercet the lover redresses his thought to contemplation of the beloved's beauty. The link between the two tercets again underscores the lover's state of mind. The final phrase of the first tercet ends an octave above the beginning note of the second tercet, and is accompanied by the ascending scale passage which renews the D/G♯ conflict. At this point, the accompaniment is struggling to reach a resolution of the Lydian fourth, G♯, to A (refer to Example 56). This never occurs because the scale backtracks one note, making G♯ the new goal note. At the resolution, both G♯ and A are sounded simultaneously, but the inclusion of D in the chord shifts the goal from G♯ to D, which was prepared by its leading tone in the previous measures (see mm. 33-35). Still, the feeling of arrival in D major is detracted from by the G♯, leaving the sought after resolution unfulfilled. When at the start of the second tercet the voice reiterates the triad motive from the first phrase of the *A* section in the next measure, the sense is one of resignation because the statement is an octave lower than both the final line of the previous section and the first statement of the motive at the beginning of the work. The lover has accepted the fact that the beloved remains out of reach.

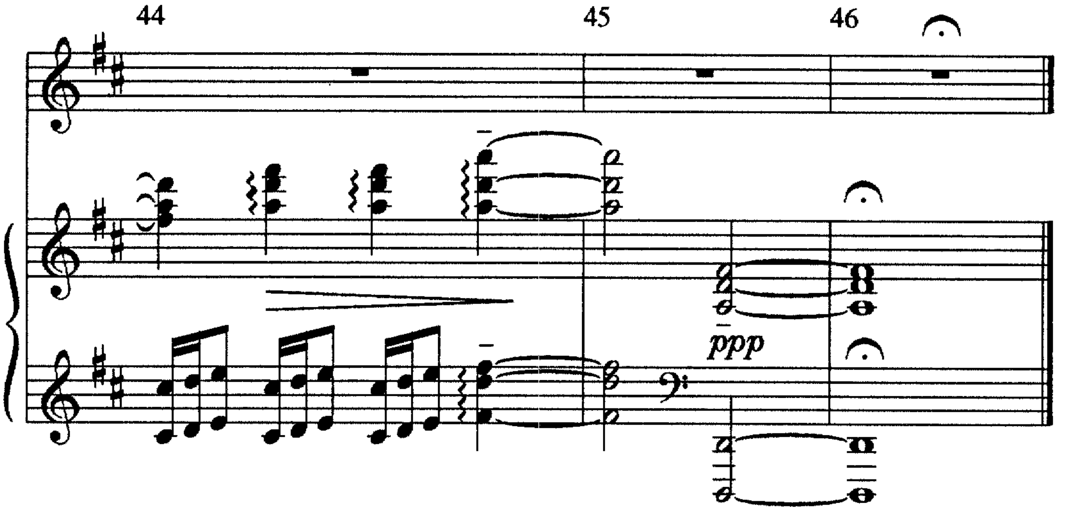
The melody which Britten uses to set the second tercet is modelled after the first phrase of the *A* section, being essentially triadic; but rather than descending, it remains on the D-major triad, an octave lower than in the *A* and *A'* sections. In m. 38, there is a brief allusion to the *B* section via a widening of the melodic line to include a lowered seventh scale degree, as shown in Example 57. To set the final line of text, Britten returns to the D major triad, ascends through it to an F♯, and ends the vocal line with a resolute descending leap of a sixth as the piano begins the ritornello. The F♯, which Britten reaches through an ascent in the setting of the fourteenth line of text, bears a relationship to the G♭ that ended the setting of the eleventh line of text, being in the same octave. At the end of the poem, the lover has reached a resolution of his fear that the beloved will not return his love; but in the eleventh line, he sees hope in what he interprets as attention on the part of the beloved, although he harbors some doubt. Each time the F♯ has been used in the vocal line, the lover has been self-assured and confident about his love of the beloved, mainly because the beloved has a noble spirit or a spiritual and physical beauty. The F♯, then, represents the beloved's confidence of beauty, while as a G♭, it represents his doubts about his attaining of his spiritual goals through the beloved.

The final ritornello, which brings the work to a close, avoids the extreme chromaticism of the first, admitting only the Lydian G♯, and including D major chords above the scale to solidify the tonality. Where in the first ritornello the G♯ occurred only once and did not progress to an A, here it becomes a goal note of the ascending D scale twice (m. 40 and m. 42), and it always moves to an A, thus giving a sense of resolution, however brief. After the scale reaches B as a goal note in m. 43, Britten repeats the pattern C♯-D-E four times before ascending to F♯, which becomes the third of a D-major triad. The song ends very solidly on a D major triad with a D octave in the bass, a stark contrast to the final notes of the previous song, and a secure ending to the cycle.

Example 57: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 35-46.


p
35
36
37
Qual u - so o qual go - ver - no al mon - do nie - ga Qual cru - del - tà per
pp
38
39
pp 40
temp-o,oqual più tar - di, c'a sì bel vi - so mor - te non per - do - ni?
sempre pp
sonore
41
42
43
dim.

Example 57: Sonetto XXIV, *Spirto ben nato*, mm. 35-46, cont.



In the final phrase of this last tercet, the lover asks how anything on earth could wish an end to the beloved, once again focusing on the beloved's extraordinary beauty.[104] In Renaissance Platonism, the contemplation of beauty leads the beholder toward heaven and his spiritual goal. In response, the final phrase of the melody ascends, outlining a D major triad, and leads the lover back to an ennobling of the beloved and into a peaceful acceptance of the beloved's distance from him, which had been a source of consternation in the first tercet. The final ritornello assures the peaceful state that the lover has reached by avoiding the chromatic diversions of first three statements, resolving the Lydian G# to A, and eventually moving to a root position D major triad. And thus the cycle ends quietly with the lover accepting the beauty that he has been given to love for his spiritual aims, without thought of it being returned.

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[104] "*C'a sì bell' opra morte non perdoni?*"

Conclusions

Techniques and Procedures

At the outset of each of the songs that comprise the Michelangelo cycle, Britten sets up a particular musical problem (or problems) involving the tonal and melodic material that will be the basis of the musical form. The tonal problem, expressed in both the accompaniment and the melodic line, involves conflict between two regions, expressed by scale fragments, triads and quartal chords, or even single pitches set in linear or vertical opposition. The presence or absence of a tonal conflict becomes a subsidiary form-defining element, so that procedures of departure and return in the songs are not necessarily based upon traditional harmonic concepts of tension and resolution, particularly since many of the conflicts remain unresolved at the close of the songs.

Britten's melodic material, which generates the structure that the musical form ultimately is perceived as expressing, is often constructed motivically, with the result that motives are refigured throughout the course of the song, giving the impression of partial return, even in contrasting sections. He uses this interrelationship between his melodic lines to blur structural pillars, particularly at the point of return. The melodic relationships also affect the text. By setting disparate lines of text to the same or similar melodic gestures, or even portions of lines to similar motives, Britten achieves connections within the text that could not be achieved in the poetry.

A review of the tonal conflicts that Britten uses in the cycle reveals that a common thread unites the songs, and that the final song is a summation of relationships explored in the previous ones (see Table 22). Britten often explores the conflict between a tonic and its Lydian sharp-fourth (sometimes spelled as ♭5), either as the principal conflict or as a secondary one, as in Sonettos XVI (secondary), XXX (secondary), LV (principal), XXXVIII (principal), XXXII (secondary), and XIV (principal). Third relationships between tonal areas are also important, including the conflict between major and minor thirds of a tonal area, as seen in Sonettos XVI (principal), XXXI (principal), LV (secondary), XXXVIII (secondary), and XIV (principal). Two tonal areas a half-step apart are exploited in Sonetto XXX, a relationship that unfolds linearly, while in Sonetto XXXII conflict is between quartal and tertian sonorities.

TABLE 22

THE SONGS OF THE MICHELANGELO SONNET CYCLE AND THEIR TONAL CONFLICTS

Sonetto	Principle Tonal Conflict	Contrasting Tonal Region
XVI	F♯/A	C
XXXI	CM/Cm	E♭/E/A♭/A
XXX	G/F♯	C
LV	B♭/E	G
XXXVIII	A/E♭	C
XXXII	quartal	C/F
XIV	D/G♯ and DM/Dm	C/G♭

Interestingly, Britten's secondary tonal areas all relate to the pitch or the diatonic set of C. In the case of Sonetto XXXI, the primary tonal material is based on C. Only in Sonetto LV does Britten not use C in some way, but the pitch G that is the median between the two conflicting pitches B♭ and E, is dominant of the pitch C. The common thread between these songs, then, is C, or some element of C. Thus, the cycle is unified, and is not a random collection of songs as it has been thought to be by some authors.[105] Since the songs do not tell a story, but reveal the state of mind of the beloved, this common musical element is very important, for it ultimately represents a common element in the texts.

The Musico-Poetic Forms and the Interpretation of the Poetry

In his settings of Michelangelo's sonnets, Britten was bound by certain constraints of grammar and syntax which define the sections of the individual sonnets. With the exception of Sonetto XXXI, all of the songs articulate the end of the octave and the beginning of the sestet. This division is accomplished in two ways: 1) by contrast, as seen in Sonettos XVI, XXX, XXXII, and XIV; or 2) by return to elements of the *A* section, as seen in Sonettos LV, and XXXVIII, which is strophic. Lower level articulations of the octave into two quatrains is common. Either the setting of the second quatrain begins a departure from the musical elements of the first, as in Sonettos XVI, XXX, and LV; or the second quatrain is set as a parallel section, as in XXXVIII, XXXII, and XIV. Britten's relationships between the first and second quatrains are determined by matters of the text. For example, in Sonetto XIV, the two quatrains of the sonnet are related by several factors, including their address to the beloved and their similar imagery. In contrast, in Sonetto XVI, Britten sets the two quatrains as unrelated because the text has disparate imagery.

Divisions of the sestet vary from song to song, and it may be considered that Britten expresses his interpretation of the text most freely within this section of the poem. A division of the sestet into two tercets (3 + 3) occur in only three of the songs: Sonettos XXX, LV, and XVI. In the remainder, Britten expresses any number of articulations of the poem, including 5 + 1 (Sonetto XVI), 4 + 2 (Sonetto XXXVIII) and 3 + 2 + 1 (Sonetto XXXII).

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[105] See Arnold Whittall's discussion in "Britten's Song Cycles," 3-4. Whittall sees a link between the first and last sonnets, A moving to D, but disallows Peter Pears's comments that the key sequence leads to the final sonnet in the intervening songs.

Britten's treatment of the poem in his setting of Sonetto XXXI deserves special mention. Because of an enjambment from line 5 to the middle of line 6, Britten sets the first five and a half lines as one section. He then gathers lines 6b to 11 (the third line of the sestet) into a second section, and sets the final tercet (lines 12-13) with a repetition of the final line as the third section. Thus, neither the octave nor the sestet receives a definite articulation, although he does separate the final line of the octave (*l.* 8) from the first line of the sestet (*l.* 9) with a short piano interlude.

For the most part, Britten explores a variety of familiar forms in the songs, as can be seen in Table 23; but, although they nominally resemble traditional paradigms, such as

TABLE 23

MUSICAL FORMS USED IN BRITTEN'S MICHELANGELO SONNETS

Sonetto	Musico-Poetic Form
XVI	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *B* (*ll.* 4-8) *C* (*ll.* 9-13) *A'* (*l.* 14)
XXXI	*A* (*ll.* 1-6a) *B* (*ll.* 6b-11) *A'* (*ll.* 12-14)
XXX	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *B* (*ll.* 5-8) *C* (*ll.* 9-11) *A'* (*ll.* 12-14)
LV	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *B* (*ll.* 5-8) *A'* (*ll.* 9-11) *Coda* (*ll.* 12-14)
XXXVIII	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *A'* (*ll.* 5-8) *A"* (*ll.* 9-12) *A'''* (*ll.* 13-14)
XXXII	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *A'* (*ll.* 4-8) *A"* (*ll.* 9-11) *A'''* (*ll.* 12-13) *A""* (*l.* 14) Tonal: *A* *B* *A'*
XIV	*Rit. A* (*ll.* 1-4) *Rit. A'* (*ll.* 5-8) *Rit./B* (*ll.* 9-11) *A"* (*ll.* 12-14) *Rit.*

ternary, strophic, or rounded binary forms, they display a complexity of relationships between sections of contrast and return. In particular, the point of return, which is a form-defining element, is often blurred. This procedure affects the perception of contrast and similarity, thus, redefining concepts of form. Only two of the songs demonstrate a clear return to elements of the *A* section: in Sonetto XVI, the return occurs with the final line of text; and in Sonetto XIV, the return occurs with the final tercet. The remainder of the songs have returns that are ambivalent for a variety of reasons, including: 1) the use of a different quality in the return than in the *A* section (Sonetto XXXI); 2) the use of partial melodic repetition in the final phrase of the contrasting section (Sonettos XXX and LV); 3) the inclusion of elements of the *A* section in the accompaniment in a different context before the return (Sonetto LV); and 4) the anticipation of the tonal return in either the accompaniment or the melodic line (Sonettos XXXVIII and XXXII).

The point of return has particular significance with regard to interpretation of the text, for return in music generally denotes a return to the emotion of the opening, or a triumph over that emotion. Britten uses the return, or a blurring of the return and the resolution or non-resolution of the tonal conflict to express the lover's state of mind and feelings about the beloved. Throughout the texts that Britten chose, the lover is attempting to establish a relationship with his beloved because contemplation of the beauty of the beloved and oneness with the beloved will lead the lover to a higher spiritual plane. The relationship between the lover and the beloved is somewhat strained, either because the lover has angered the beloved, or because the beloved has refused the lover.

At the outset of each of the sonnets, the lover establishes a series of images to convince the beloved to love him, indicating that there is doubt in the lover's mind that the beloved is his. Michelangelo develops the images, using them to tell the beloved of how beautiful he is and how much the lover derives from his beauty. At the end, however, the lover often retreats back into his feelings of doubt by referring to his unworthiness of the beloved's love or his imprisonment by his unrequited love for the beloved. The musical return, then, rearticulates the lover's doubt, no matter how well he has convinced himself that his love will win the beloved; and the lack of resolution of the tonal conflict confirms it. There are clear resolutions at the end of only two of the songs, Sonettos XXX and XIV, whose texts reveal that the lover accepts the terms of his relationship with the beloved – that his love will go unrequited, but that because he loves, he will reach his spiritual goal.

Britten's arrangement of the sonnets is significant for its unfolding of the progress of the lover in his pursuit of the beloved. The sonnets seem to be arranged in pairs in terms of the state of mind at the the musical return and the end of the poem. The lover begins his conquest in sadness because the beloved is not his (XVI), but immediately after, he finds happiness in his love for the beloved (XXXI); Britten's setting, however, which has the return in the area of C major and the closing bars in the area of C minor, reveals that the lover still harbors doubts about his happiness. In the third song, XXX, the lover is found in a more positive state of mind as he discusses the many ways in which he is one with the beloved; Britten's setting has a very clear resolution at the end. In the next song, LV, the lover feels that death must occur in order for him to fully realize and understand his love for the beloved, which would be the ultimate oneness in neo-Platonic philosophy. In the next pair of songs, the lover rebukes the beloved for his lack of attention (XXXVIII), but retreats by listing the bonds between them and then challenging the beloved to let anger destroy those bonds. By the end of the cycle, although he remains a prisoner of his love for the beloved, the lover has found peace through his contemplation of the beloved's beauty and his love of the beloved, despite the fact that the beloved does not return his love.

CHAPTER V

"HOLY DISCONTENT": JOHN DONNE AND HIS HOLY SONNETS

The years of John Donne's life, 1572-1631, span that dark period in England's history when religious authority was sought by the Church of Rome and the Pope on the one hand, and the Church of England and the monarchy on the other. Donne experienced the bitter controversies from a position of social and geographical advantage and became embroiled in the paper war that marred the reign of James I. As a result, Donne's works, both prose and poetic, present a witty and personal recollection of the times – at times sympathetic and questioning, and at times rendering a vitriolic attack upon the political struggles he was forced to endure.

Donne's Life and Influences

Donne was born into an upper-middle-class family that enjoyed the many opportunities of their social position despite the fact that the father was merely a tradesman. The family fortune largely derived from his mother, who was descended from Sir Thomas More and whose family included a number of eminent papists. When Donne's father died in early 1576, his mother used her background to attract the attention of a prominent physician, John Syminges, whom she married just six months later. Syminges had been educated at the finest schools, Oxford and Bologna, and had ascended to a position of power as president of the Royal College of Physicians. He seems to have accepted the Donne children as his own and gave John Donne the best possible education available to a Catholic during the reign of Elizabeth I.

Donne was educated at home until the age of twelve, when he entered Oxford, matriculating at Hart Hall.[1] Records indicate that Donne was only eleven when this occurred, but this discrepancy may have been a ploy to exempt Donne from being forced to accept during his tenure the Oath of Royal Supremacy and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England that was required at Oxford upon the boy's reaching the age of sixteen.[2] Boys under the age of sixteen were considered incapable of understanding either document, which unwittingly helped to keep many Catholics in disguise while gaining an education. Tensions between Parliament and Catholics were steadily rising toward the end of 1584, escalated in part by a law forbidding Catholic clergy and an increase in the expulsion of Catholics from the country. Among those exiled was Donne's uncle on his mother's side, Jaspar Heywood, a noted Jesuit, who plotted for the reconversion of England. Heywood was indicted for treason, which would have carried a punishment of death, except he had won the favor of the Queen and therefore was sent away instead.

Donne left Oxford after only three years,without taking a degree, presumably because doing so would have forced him to sign the Oath of Royal Supremacy, which as a Catholic he could not in good conscience do. He may have entered Cambridge – records are unclear – but again, he did not take a degree. John C. Bald, author of the definitive Donne biography, speculates that Donne may have studied privately with a tutor because of the stifling Anglican requirements at the university.[3] From 1589-1591, Donne was probably travelling on the continent. It is known that he went to Spain prior to his later involvement in the war there, but given the hostilities between England and Spain following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, it was a reckless adventure for him. Most likely he entered the country posing as a Catholic refugee, moving on quickly to Italy. In his later years, Donne frequently used the knowledge obtained during his travels to bolster his chances of gaining state appointments in the area of diplomatic relations. Upon his return, Donne entered the Inns of Court as a student of law and broke into London social life as a sought-after ladies' man. Although he was under the tutelage of practicing, but discreet, Catholics, Donne went through a period of doubt concerning his own religious views.

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[1] Hart Hall was renamed Hertford College in the eighteenth century.

[2] Robert C. Bald, John Donne: A Life. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970 42-43.

[3] Ibid., 46.

The controversy between Catholicism and Anglicanism, which was escalating under the intolerance of Parliament, affected Donne personally. When his brother was arrested for associating with a Jesuit, Donne saw first hand the dangers of being a Catholic in London society. The state appointment, which he desired after completing his studies, could well have depended upon his religious affiliation. Because of the incident with his brother, it seems likely that Donne's own religious opinions and inclinations were under careful surveillance, which in turn possibly caused him to challenge his Catholic beliefs. The education that he had received at Oxford, Cambridge, and the Inns of Court, too, had bred skepticism and cynicism, leading him to query those beliefs that he had accepted on faith in his younger days. This may be the study that Walton refers to his biography of Donne:

> About the nineteenth year of his age, he, being then unresolv'd what Religion to adhere to, and, considering how much it concern'd his soul to choose the most Orthodox, did therefore (though his youth and health, promised him a long life) to rectifie all scruples that might concern that, presently lay aside all study of the Law: and, of all other Sciences that might give him a denomination; and begun seriously to survey, and consider the Body of Divinity, as it was then controverted betwixt the *Reformed* and the *Roman Church*.[4]

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[4] Izaak Walton, The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wooton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert and Robert Sanderson (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 25.

No less important is the effect that his discovery of women had upon his senses. During this time, Donne committed several indiscretions with married ladies of breeding, penning many of his secular and profane love poems to them, to their delight. Despite these factors, the real crisis of faith for Donne did not take place until several years later when he became intellectually involved in the controversy.

Following his studies at Lincoln's Inn, Donne was ripe for adventure and also looking toward ingratiating himself to the eyes of the royal court in preparation for service. Moreover, he was badly in need of money, having squandered much of it on the social life he was enjoying. When the Earl of Essex undertook an expedition against Spain in 1596, Donne joined him, possibly even serving on Essex's ship.[5] While in Spain, he met Thomas Egerton the younger, beginning a friendship that proved to be fruitful for his own advancement, for upon his return in 1597, he was selected by Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper, to be his secretary. A successful career in the service of the court seemed to be assured by this, for Egerton had the reputation of launching some of the most influential men into their state service careers. Unfortunately and unwittingly, however, Egerton provided the instrument of destruction for Donne's career in the form of Anne More, the second Lady Egerton's niece. Donne had living quarters at Egerton's residence, York House, which was the official London residence of the Archbishop of York. Tradition had reserved it for the family of the Lord Keeper as long as suitable accommodations were obtained for the archbishop when he visited.

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[5] Edmund Gosse, The Life and Letters of John Donne (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), I, 46.

At the behest of her father, Anne More was living with her aunt at York House so that she could be launched into London society, since Anne's father, Sir George More, a member of Parliament, did not reside in London, but maintained a country estate in nearby Loseley. Donne, then twenty-six years old to Anne's fourteen, knew that he would never be accepted by Anne's father because he could not provide for her as her father desired. Anne's older sisters had all married either landed gentry or Peers of the Realm, in keeping with their father's own social and political position. Donne, though of a wealthy family, had several factors against him: 1) he, himself, had little money; 2) he was Catholic; 3) he was not yet in an enviable state position, although his stature was not considered to be entirely undesirable; and 4) he had a reputation for being ". . . a great *Visiter* of Ladies, a great frequenter of Plays, [and] a great writer of conceited Verses."[6] After the death of Lady Egerton in January of 1600, Anne's father became suspicious of Donne and removed Anne from the household, thinking that removal would calm the growing passion between the young lovers. Unfortunately for Sir George, and in many ways for Donne himself, absence had the opposite of the desired effect. When Sir George came to London in 1601 for Elizabeth I's last meeting of Parliament, Donne and Anne met several times, and then married. Anne's father refused to pay her dowry and had Donne arrested and dismissed from his position with Egerton, effectively destroying their early life together.

Donne's marriage to Anne ruined his hopes of securing a court appointment, and in many ways tainted his vows of priesthood. Edward Le Comte, who has called the chronology of this period in Donne's life into question, suspects that when Anne returned to London in December 1601 with her father and met with Donne secretly, that passion overwhelmed the couple and she returned to her father's estate already expecting the Donne's first child.[7] Although Le Comte cannot support all of his claims with proven fact, his theories seem to be rational, given Donne's reputation with the ladies. It is generally considered that the sin of marrying clandestinely and without parental consent kept Donne from attaining secular fame. But it seems more likely that impregnating a woman, who at seventeen was legally still a child, out of wedlock, was a far more serious breach of both social and legal mores and that any rumor connecting Donne with such a scandal would have barred his way in the royal court.

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[6] Sir Richard Baker, A Chronicle of the Kings of England, 1643, quoted in Edward Le Comte, "Jack Donne: From Rake to Husband," in Just So Much Honor, ed. Peter Amadeus Fiore (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 11.

Donne spent the years between 1602 and 1609 studying both civil and canon law on his own and trying to place himself back into the court circle. Several times he tried to get an appointment from the king, but the circumstances of his marriage kept him from succeeding. In 1608, ill and in despair, he wrote an essay on suicide, Biathanatos, arguing for its legality. By 1609, Donne had caught the attention of Thomas Morton, the future bishop of Durham and Dean of Gloucester, who was heavily involved in the paper war that was being conducted among Anglican, Puritan and Catholic officials. The Catholics were in a rather precarious situation with the governing authority. When James I came into power, he adopted a stand of leniency in an attempt to unite the kingdom. But the Parliament in power opposed his plan, and in 1604 the body advanced its policies with new laws that held the practice of Catholicism in contempt. In November of 1605, when a faction of Catholics launched the Gunpowder Plot, the monarch reneged his commitment to leniency, and a plan to convert or exile the papists was put into action.

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[7] Le Comte, "From Rake to Husband," 9-32. Even Walton hints of such in his biography, though with some vagueness: "And such an Industry [as love] did, notwithstanding much watchfulness against it, bring them secretly together (I forbear to tell the manner how) and at last to a marriage too, without the allowance of those friends, whose approbation always was, and ever will be necessary, to make even a vertuous love become lawful." Lives of Donne, 28.

For his part, Donne began to realize that apart from his ill-conceived marriage an enormous barrier to a state position was his own Catholicism. According to Gosse, Donne "had been giving his most earnest attention to the points in dispute between the Church of England and the Papacy,"[8] with the result that he had copious notes on the subject. As Thomas Morton's research assistant, he supplied Morton with these documents that became the basis of Morton's position in the debate. Not wishing to relinquish his ideas completely, Donne published his own essay on the problem of uniting an Anglican nation with its Catholic patriots, Pseudo-Martyr (1610). Donne was clearly examining the religious crisis in his own life, working to find an acceptable solution to the debate over supreme authority. His answer was that Catholics should take the Oath of Royal Supremacy to the king as the secular authority, maintaining the Pope as their own spiritual authority, basically ignoring the King's title as head of the Church of England. He acknowledged, however, that he had accepted Anglicanism as the true religion. The essay so impressed King James that he suggested Donne should become a priest in the Anglican Church, as Morton had advised as early as 1607. Donne, however, still entertained dreams of a royal appointment, and directed himself toward realizing those goals, amassing a letter-writing campaign and dedicating poetry to the influential Lady Bedford and her friends.[9] His reasons for persistence were various: 1) the indiscretions of his past life could bring disgrace upon himself and the Church; 2) his vow might be seen as a means for escaping poverty rather than a desire to serve God, thus bringing disgrace upon himself and the

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[8] Gosse, Life and Letters of Donne, I, 245.

[9] Bald, Donne.

Church; and 3) the issues of his acceptance of the Anglican church were not entirely resolved.[10] Winny, among others, believes "His anglicanism was not insincere, but it did not reach down to the deeper levels of his emotional being from which his catholicism had never been properly evicted."[11] King James, however, by effectively banning Donne from any secular position, essentially forced him into the clergy for the sake of survival.

With his ordination inevitable, Donne still did not give up hope of realizing his secular ambitions. The year before he was ordained, 1614, found him petitioning for a secular appointment and dispensing secular poems in the face of taking his vows.[12] After all his efforts failed, Donne relented and was ordained an Anglican priest in 1615, assuming the position of reader at Lincoln's Inn. Just two years later in 1617, Anne Donne died after giving birth to a stillborn child. The effect her death had on Donne was immeasurable. With his marriage to her, he had essentially given up any hope of a royal appointment, and now after he had committed himself to the Church, one living barrier to his secular dreams was gone. James Winny asserts that Anne was a constant and painful reminder of Donne's career mistake and that as a result he travelled extensively and did not heed warnings of the danger in her final, difficult pregnancy.[13] Edward Le Comte paints a slightly different picture, emphasizing the strength of their physical relationship and the love that accompanied it: "One aspect of their married life can be summarized by stating that in fifteen years Anne Donne bore her husband twelve children. Then, not surprisingly, she died."[14] Gosse sees Anne as the barrier to Donne's full realization of his sacred duties, surmising: "It was the loss of his wife which brought about the final process of sanctification and illumination."[15]

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[10] James Winny, A Preface to Donne (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 28-29.

[11] Ibid., 29.

[12] The 1614 edition of poems, dedicated to the Earl of Somerset, has not been found, leading scholars to doubt its existence.

[13] ". . . although Donne loved his wife, he could not conceal from himself that she had brought misfortune upon him, as he upon her." Winny, Preface to Donne, 25.

These theories, taken separately, have some measure of truth; taken together, they explain much of Donne's own religious crises. Donne almost certainly had the weight of guilt upon him for the state in which he forced his wife to live. The Donnes had little money and many children, several of whom died in infancy; and these several problems had a profound effect on Anne's mental and physical health. Moreover, Anne could not have been insensitive to the fact that their marriage had caused these circumstances and the ruin of Donne's career. Therefore, she must have seen Donne's state of depression, which seems to have lasted from 1602 to 1608 or 1609, as resulting from her presence.[16] Donne did not hide his feelings, for in several letters, Donne compared the loss of his job and his inability to find a subsequent one to being dead.[17] Thus, when Anne died, Donne's grief and resulting guilt were not only for the loss of her, but also for that which they had denied themselves by their ill-conceived marriage.

As a clergyman, Donne achieved the material wealth and fame that he sought in a secular appointment, but he did not cease to conduct himself in the manner of a courtier as he strived for a more prestigious position. When the deanery of St. Paul's Cathedral became vacant, Donne initiated a letter-writing campaign, much like the one he waged to retain his marriage to Anne. Bald submits that Donne won the position through flattery and wit, the same methods that he used in trying to gain a secular position.[18] There has been some speculation that Donne bought his position from the Duke of Buckingham, to whom Donne addressed several of his letters, and who "exacted a price for every bishopric and deanery during the period of his power,"[19] which derived largely from his influence with the court. Bald summarily dismisses this notion, citing King James I's genuine interest in promotions within the Church.[20] It is unclear whether Buckingham suggested Donne for the vacancy or the King had him in mind from the first, but it does appear that Donne won the position on his own merits,[21] and from 1621 to his death in 1631, he held forth in the office that was the source of his fame.

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[14] Le Comte, Grace to a Witty Sinner, 94.

[15] Gosse, Life and Letters, II, 101.

[16] K. W. Grandsen is the first to have believed that Donne was suffering from a period of depression during these years. K. W. Grandsen, John Donne (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), 128.

[17] Winny, Preface to Donne, 25.

Donne's Holy Sonnets

Dating

The dates and circumstances of Donne's Holy Sonnets are important to an understanding of the religious concepts embedded in them. Early scholarship, particularly that based on the beliefs of Izaak Walton, holds that the poems are the work of a converted man, issuing from the year 1617. In his biography of Donne, Walton asserts that Donne wrote all of his secular poetry before his ordination and only sacred poetry after it.[22] Gosse solidifies Walton's opinion, stating:

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[18] "Donne . . . seems to have owed his deanery largely to the successful employment of the courtier's arts which he had cultivated, and persisted with in spite of heart-breaking disappointments during the decade preceding his ordination." Bald, Donne, 376.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 378.

[21] Ibid., 378-380.

> . . . Donne's life at this time [1617] was as a shining light among his old friends. This radiance beams from the *Holy Sonnets*, where the voice of personal emotion is more clearly audible than anywhere else in the religious poetry of Donne.[23]

Current scholarship considers these assertions to be largely myth, created to uphold, or even dispel, certain facts of Donne's reputation.[24] In truth, the works contain a sense of restlessness and guilt over having conflicting feelings, in keeping with a man struggling with his faith and the world.[25]

According to Helen Gardner, the sixteen poems from the 1633 and 1635 posthumous editions date from 1609, with the three found in the Westmoreland MS dating from 1619.[26] Her opinion, which is generally accepted,[27] is based on a number of issues, including theological concerns, language, and physical evidence. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to present Gardner's evidence in detail, certain points of her argument have relevance to any discussion of Donne's sonnets. Theologically, the Holy Sonnets differ on several points with Donne's later sermons as Dean of St. Paul's and reader at Lincoln's Inn, causing Gardner to believe that the poems predate these positions.[28] Her points are valid, but center upon very detailed points of theology that have little effect upon interpretation of the poetry. Suffice it to say, that theological evidence supports the notion that the poems were written while Donne was still formulating his personal theology.

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[22] "And now all his studies which had been occasionally diffused, were all concentred in Divinity. Now he had a new calling, new thoughts, and new imployment for his wit and eloquence: Now all his earthly affections were changed into divine love. . . ." Walton, Lives of Donne, 48.

[23] Gosse, Life and Letters of Donne, II, 106.

[24] Trevor James, The Metaphysical Poets, York Handbooks, ed. A. N. Jeffares (Essex: Longman-York Press, 1988), 54.

[25] Ibid. 55.

[26] Helen Gardner, "Introduction: The Date, Order, and Interpretation of the 'Holy Sonnets,'" in Donne, The Divine Poems, ed. by Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, 1978), xlix-l, 78.

[27] Surprisingly, James Winny enlarges upon Walton's assumption that the poems date after Donne's ordination, placing them after the death of Donne's wife in 1617. Preface to Donne, 140.

Donne's essay on the Ignatian method of meditation, which he published as Saint Ignatius, His Conclave in 1611, is significant to the Sonnets. Donne came into contact with the method through his review of the Jesuits for Sir Thomas Morton. Anthony Low comments: "Paradoxically, it may have been a re-reading of Jesuit materials during his controversial attacks on them at this time [1609] that led to renewed interest in their method of prayer."[29] The importance of Donne's essay to the Holy Sonnets is two-fold. First, Gardner sees the first sixteen poems as easily categorized into the themes of Ignatian meditation, with their internal structure also following a typical meditative design, affecting their meaning. Second, Donne's use of an essentially Jesuit practice, in which he certainly could have been educated because of his family's association with the order, reveals that he was still holding to some Catholic practices despite his sure and certain conversion. According to Gardner, Donne's research for his essay and the composition of the Holy

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[28] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xliii-xlvii.

[29] Anthony Low, Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 58.

Sonnets must have been concurrent because of their heavy reliance upon Ignatian meditation, and because of this they predate his ordination.

The prevailing tone of the Holy Sonnets also suggests that they predate Donne's ordination. Whereas Gosse sees them as the work of a converted man, basing his thoughts upon Walton's assertions,[30] most modern day scholars recognize a sense of despair and doubt. Grandsen comments:

> The problem of when the various sonnets were written is a complex, largely theological one, but it seems likely that many of them belong to that period of doubt and intense thinking about his religion which preceded Donne's entry into the Church.[31]

The scholars' attitudes toward the sonnets largely rest upon whether the individual scholar sees them as didactic poems meant to instruct and entertain or as personal and autobiographical, perhaps shared with a small circle of friends. By far, the greater number of scholars hold the opinion that they are autobiographical, functioning as an exercise for Donne to work out his personal religious crisis.

There are three important Donne scholars who believe Donne wrote the poems for the edification of his public. Since Gosse (1959) bases his opinions on Walton's biography (1640), their views are the same, as discussed previously. Roger Rollin, writing in 1986, is the only present-day scholar to uphold this theory, even though he ascribes to Gardner's dating of the poems.[32] He contrasts the concept of public and private:

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[30] Gosse, Life and Letters of Donne, II, 106.

[31] Grandsen, John Donne, 127.

[32] Roger B. Rollin, "'Fantastique Ague': The Holy Sonnets and Religious Melancholy, " in The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 131-146.

> They are not so much 'private ejaculations,' highly personalized confessional works, as they are 'sacred poems,' public demonstrations of (in this case) spiritual malaise meant to be exemplary to disease-prone readers.[33]

His conclusions arise from his perception of universality in the poems, which he finds in the "psychological forms and contents."[34] Rollin's further discussion, particularly about the recurrent theme of despair in the poems and the mood swings that often take place within a single poem, appears to me to contradict his earlier assertion about their nature. If these are public poems, then why did Donne not publish them during his lifetime and why are they couched in metaphor, paradox, and other witty and bizarre conceits that render them incomprehensible to the congregation he was trying to reach? Indeed, GeorgeParfitt claims that Donne, like many others, did not have his sacred poems published because there was an atmosphere of doubt concerning the rectitude of religious art in any form.[35] Graham Parry argues:

> Donne's poetry almost always assumed a small intellectual audience who knew the author personally and who were responsive to his ingenuity and mannerisms of style and expression, as well as to his idiosyncrasies of subject matter.[36]

This fact, however, does not contradict their privateness.

Evelyn Simpson in 1924, was the first to recognize the autobiographical nature of the Holy Sonnets, stating: ". . . the *Divine Poems* are intensely personal, the record of Donne's inner life."[37] Her opinions are echoed by many scholars, too numerous to list, and strongly influenced Gardner's method of dating the sonnets, which relies heavily on biographical information. Parry carries Simpson's ideas further, calling them: "brief, highly disciplined meditations on his sinful condition and on his need for grace,"[38] assuming that they were a means for Donne to work out his theological and religious crisis. These theories are founded upon the evidence of Donne's secular poetry, which has been shown to have autobiographical statements.[39] In Le Comte's opinion, Donne's style remained unchanged from his secular to his sacred poems:

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[33] Ibid., 131.

[34] Ibid., 133-134.

[35] George Parfitt, John Donne: A Literary Life (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 88.

[36] Graham Parry, Seventeenth-Century Poetry: The Social Context (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1985), 44.

[37] Evelyn M. Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962; 1924), 211.

> One can say of the *Holy Sonnets* that Donne had been composing since 1609 that literarily, at least, there was less change than would be expected. The clever sinner did not cease to be clever. He merely applied his individual style to a new object of affection, God.[40]

Indeed, Donne's reluctance to publish the poems supports his need for privacy where his religious crisis was concerned. In several of his sermons as Dean of St. Paul's, he states that, like many in his congregation, he had sinned in matters of the flesh and in matters of an ill-prepared mental state, or despair, to receive God; but he refers to these in only the vaguest of terminology, giving no details and revealing nothing of the despair and depression that the Holy Sonnets disclose. Donne believed that melancholia, a strong undercurrent in the poems, was a serious sin against the natural order of God.[41] By associating himself with the sins of his congregation, Donne sets himself up as a model – he understands the condition of sin, but he has risen above it – and by not telling of the severity of his sins, he can maintain the now sinless and worthy demeanor that would have been expected of a priest in his position.

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[38] Parry, Seventeenth-Century Poetry, 68.

[39] Le Comte, Grace to a Witty Sinner, passim.

[40] Ibid., 151.

[41] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xxxi.

Donne's Theological Concepts and the Holy Sonnets

The debate over whether the poems were intended for public instruction or private use has a direct effect on the interpretation of the poetry and on the theological concepts that Donne espouses in them. If they were public poems, they would necessarily be based upon the doctrine of the Anglican Church, without the speaker expressing any doubts about the tenets of that doctrine. Since, however, they clearly were written before Donne had entered the Anglican Church as a religious teacher – during a time of doubt and possibly conversion – the doctrine that Donne writes in them is not sanctioned Church doctrine nor entirely reflective of his later thinking, but his own intellectual understanding of it at that time. The sonnets do, of course, contain much of the foundation for his later interpretations of Anglican doctrine. Therefore, before an examination of the individual poems that Britten set in his song cycle, Donne's theological beliefs must be explored.

Many of the Holy Sonnets that Britten set address the problem of man's sinfulness and his journey back to God, the same problem that many of Donne's sermons examine. In the matter of conversion, Donne held to the precepts of justification and sanctification. Man received justification, or faith, only through grace given by God. Grace could not be earned, but was merited for man by the sacrifice of Christ. After justification by God, sanctification could begin – the restoring of the image of God in man. Man himself could initiate neither justification nor sanctification. The process of sanctification – the restoration of the image of God – results in the restoration of the state of sinlessness. Sin is also a negation of being, for the soul, as it exists in its purest form in Heaven (assuming both a pre-conscious and post-conscious state), exudes complete innocence – freedom from original sin and acquired sin because it is the image of God in man. The soul, then, enters earth in a state of innocence and grace, but falls from that state through the experience of sin. Man destroys the image of the Creator within himself when he sins, and therefore negates his being. When a soul is in the state of sinfulness, it is also in a state of disorder. As Donne says in a later sermon: "There is no order in sin itselfe. The nature, the definition, is disorder. . . . "[42] By comparison, then, the state of innocence or purity of conscience represents order. To restore the image of God in the soul, or sanctify it, man had to reach a state of sinlessness or innocence. Innocence, therefore, was a state unknowing of evil and sin. As the soul is made in the image of God, God represents innocence. Sanctification, then, restores the soul to its original state of innocence. Donne asserts this point in one of his sermons:

> Christ shall bear witness for me, in ascribing his righteousnesse unto me; and delivering me into his Father's hands, with the same tendernesse, as he delivered up his owne soule, and in making me, who am a great sinner, they who crucified him on earth for me, as innocent and as righteous as his glorious selfe, in the Kingdome of heaven.[43]

This alludes to the redemptive power of innocence – Christ, the Redeemer, being innocent, restores souls to innocence.

The road to sanctification is a long, arduous one. To begin the process, man first has purify himself with the help of faith, or justification from God. The condition of being without sin is not a decision that man could make, since he must have the grace of God. After receiving grace, man can purify himself by completing three steps: 1) having knowledge of and confessing the sin; 2) coming to despise the sin; and 3) making amends with the person against whom the sin was committed. Donne instructs his congregation:

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[42] Donne, LXXX Sermons, 37; quoted in Itrat Husain, The Dogmatic and Mystical Theology of John Donne (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), 89.

[43] Donne, LXXX Sermons, 7; quoted in Husain, Dogmatic and Mystical Theology, 114.

> I acknowledged in myselfe, I came to a feeling in myselfe, what my sinfull condition was. This is our quickning in our regeneration, and second birth; and till this come, a sinner lies as the Chaos in the beginning of the Creation, *before the spirit of God had moved upon the waters, Dark and voyd,* and *without forme*.[44]

The process of purification could be initiated, also, by potentially alienating knowledge or sin, giving the possibility of innocence being regained through experience. Staying free from sin did not, in itself, guarantee sanctification by God for this could not be merited by deeds. It merely readied the soul for the process, whenever it should take place. If the state of purification should be lost through one's impurity, it had to be regained through God's power. For Donne, sinfulness, though not a choice of man, was executed by man. On the other hand, sinlessness could only be executed by God. After man reaches purity of conscience, he can partake of the Sacraments and the instruction of the Church. Man, however, must remain in the state of sinlessness until he receives justification, or grace, from God to start the process of sanctification. To do so, man must avoid certain traps, which Donne outlined in a sermon at St. Paul's:

> There are three great dangers in this consideration of perfectnesse, and purity; First to distrust of God's mercy, if thou finde not this purity in thyselfe and this perfectnesse; And then to presume upon God, nay upon thine own right, in an over valuing of thine own purity, and perfectnesse; And againe to condemne others whom thou wilt think less pure or perfect than thyselfe.[45]

Moreover, man must abstain from anything that does not lead to God.

Having reached a state of sinlessness, or purity of conscience, man now awaits justification, or grace, from God, which prepares him for sanctification, although it does not assure it. Grace can only be given by God and is not merited through man's good deeds. Again, Donne outlines his position in a sermon:

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[44] Donne, LXXX Sermons, 58; quoted in Husain, Dogmatic and Mystical Theology, 127.

[45] Donne, LXXX Sermons, 80; quoted in Husain, Dogmatic and Mystical Theology, 130-131.

> Let him that is holy be more holy, but accept his Sanctification from him, of whom he had his Justification; and except he can think to glorifie himself because he is sanctified, let him not think to sanctifie himself because he is justified; God does all.[46]

Aside from the interpretation of the Eucharist, this is the most controversial point between Anglicanism and Catholicism that Donne had to adopt in his conversion. The lack of control over his own soul once purity of conscience had been reached must have frustrated Donne, who as a former Catholic would have merited grace by his deeds and actions. Many of the Holy Sonnets express doubts about the Anglican concept of grace through the speaker's impatience with God. In several, the speaker prepares himself for justification and sanctification by purifying himself, only to be frustrated by the lack of acknowledgement by God. His impatience mounts, causing him to remove himself further from God's grace and from the restoration of God's image in his soul.

Editions

There are numerous editions of Donne's Holy Sonnets, dating from two years after Donne's death in 1631 to the present day. Because of the excessive number, only a few will be mentioned due to their superiority in matters of manuscript reliability, historical importance, or criticisms and explications of the poems. The 1633 edition, which was registered for publication by John Marriott in 1632, provides, according to Helen Gardner, the most accurate versions of the first twelve Holy Sonnets, a group which includes several set by Britten.[47] It is an incomplete edition of Donne's poetry, an error that the 1635 edition sought to correct. In that edition, four more Holy Sonnets were added, including two, "Thou hast made me" and "O might those sighes and teares," that Britten set. Gardner finds several problems with the texts of these sonnets as published in this edition, citing her questions regarding the authority of the manuscript used.[48] Taken together, these two editions, along with the Westmoreland manuscript, are the basis of all subsequent editions from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries.

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[46] Donne, The Sermons of John Donne, ed. G. R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953-1962) 5 : 316.

The 1912 Grierson edition is the first of this century, but retains the original, seventeenth-century spellings, complete with the ligatured s (ſ).[49] Until Gardner published her edition in 1924, Grierson was considered the definitive edition of Donne's poetry. Grierson's edition is in two volumes: the first volume contains all of Donne's poetry, and the second has commentaries on the poems as well as several pertinent articles, including a summary of Donne's poetry and poetic style and a survey and criticism of texts and manuscripts for the poetry. Based upon spelling and word variation concurrences, one can determine that Britten used the Grierson edition as the source of his text for the Donne cycle, although the Gardner edition is superior because it includes some modern spellings to clarify matters of pronunciation and meaning for the singer.[50]

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[47] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," lxxxiii-lxxxiv. Those poems from Gardner's "Group I" that Britten set include: "Oh my blacke Soule," "At the round earths imagin'd corners," "Death be not proud," "What if this present," and "Batter my heart."

[48] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," lxxxviii. The manuscript that was used was the O'Flaherty manuscript dating from 1632 now in the possession of the Harvard Library, MS. Eng. 966/5. For more information, see Helen Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," lxix. The definitive versions of the four Holy Sonnets added in this edition exist in other manuscripts.

[49] Donne, The Poems of John Donne, ed. Herbert J.C. Grierson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912).

Gardner clearly models her edition, which contains only the so-called Divine Poems, after Grierson's.[51] She includes the same critical reports as Grierson, although as a preface to the texts of the poems, rather than following them. Her versions of the poems differ from Grierson's on a very superficial level in terms of punctuation and some word variations (i.e., in "O might those sighes and teares:" "my" in Gardner for "mine" in Grierson). The most important difference, however, has to do with her ordering of the Holy Sonnets. Whereas the order in Grierson's edition corresponds to the arrangement of the 1635 edition with the Westmoreland MS sonnets added at the end, Gardner's ordering shows the publication history of the sonnets, presenting the twelve 1633 sonnets first, the four sonnets added to the 1635 edition second, and the Westmoreland MS sonnets last. Although there has been some debate that there is a particular meaningful arrangement of the sonnets having to do with the Ignatian meditative tradition that Donne was studying concurrently, that order is of little importance in the present study because Britten's arrangement of the poems in the song cycle is his own.[52]

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[50] One example occurs in "At the round earths imagin'd corners," in which Britten changes the original "tast" to "taste" so that the pronunciation and meaning can not be called into question.

[51] Donne, The Divine Poems, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; reprint 1978).

[52] Several articles have addressed the concept of a particular arrangement of the sonnets, including: Stanley Archer, "Meditation and the Structure of Donne's Holy Sonnets," in John Donne's Poetry, ed. A. L. Clements, 237-246 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966; Howard L. Canaan, "The Art of Meditation in the Poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Marvell," Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 1972); Gardner, "The Date, Order, and Interpretation of the Holy Sonnets," in The Divine Poems of John Donne, xxxvii-lv; Louis L. Martz, "Donne and the Meditative Tradition," in Essential Articles for the Study of John Donne's Poetry, ed. John R. Roberts, 142-149 (Hamden, Connecticut:

Although neither the Grierson nor the Gardner editions can be improved upon in terms of accuracy in the poetic texts, the Norton Critical Edition of Donne's complete poetry from 1966, edited by A. L. Clements, provides a slight advantage in that it reprints many of the seminal and pertinent articles on the Holy Sonnets.[53] One feature, however, seems unnecessary: the texts have been put into modern English. In the Holy Sonnets this practice is not warranted – the texts are very readable without this aide. A second modern language edition dates from 1971, John Donne: The Complete English Poems, edited by A. J. Smith.[54] Again, the texts of the poems are not valuable because of the modern spellings, but the extensive commentary that Smith provides is worthwhile. The latest edition, from 1985, edited by C. A. Patrides, retains the original spellings of the poetry.[55] The only improvement that this edition offers over Grierson's and Gardner's is an extensive bibliography, which, of course, is now out of date because of the large number of articles appearing after its publication.

Archon Books, 1975); Phillip C. McGuire, "Private Prayer and English Poetry in the Early Seventeenth Century," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 14 (1974): 63-77; Lucy J. Price, "The Emblematic and Meditative Poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, Andreas Gryphius, and Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg," Ph.D. diss. (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1977); Reuven Tsur, "Poem, Prayer and Meditation: An Exercise in Literary Semantics," Style 8 (1974): 405-424; and John N. Wall, Jr., "Donne's Wit of Redemption: The Drama of Prayer in the Holy Sonnets," Studies in Philology 73 (1976): 189-203.

[53] Donne, John Donne's Poetry, Norton Critical Edition, ed. A. L. Clements (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966. References to the articles contained within the edition can be found throughout the Bibliography of this document.

[54] Donne, John Donne: The Complete English Poems, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

[55] Donne, John Donne: The Complete English Poems, ed. C. A. Patrides (London, 1985).

The Critical Studies

Donne's poems have been recognized as a significant part of his output, even though his primary fame is as a preacher and theological thinker. Therefore, explications, criticisms, and commentaries for the Holy Sonnets abound in the literature. A basic bibliography for the poems can be divided into several categories and subcategories: 1) bibliographies of Donne;[56] 2) monographs and articles that survey the poems; 3) monographs that contain a collection of articles; 4) monographs and articles that address an isolated subject; 4) groups of monographs and articles that address the same subject, including the meditative tradition, the metaphysical nature of the poems, the relationship of the poems to Anglican Doctrine or Donne's religious philosophy, and matters of linguistics or style; and 5) articles dealing with only one or two of the poems. Because the secondary sources for Donne research are extensive, I have chosen to discuss the only those that survey the poems, mentioning the more specialized publications within the examination of the individual poems when the discussion warrants.

There are a number of monographs and articles that provide very general information about the Holy Sonnets. Apart from the articles included in the Grierson and Gardner editions, several deserve a mention. There was a surge of scholarly research into Donne's poetry in the early 1950's, beginning with Leonard Unger's 1950 monograph, Donne's poetry and Modern Criticism[57] and Doniphan Louthan's The Poetry of John Donne: A

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[56] Geoffrey Keynes, A Bibliography of Dr John Donne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). John R. Roberts, John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1912-1967 (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1973). Roberts, John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1968-1978 (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1982). Donne, John Donne: The Complete English Poems, ed. C. A. Patrides (London, 1985).

[57] Leonard Unger, Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism (New York: Henry Regnery Company, 1950).

Study in Explication, published in 1951.[58] Despite their age, these publications are still very valid and offer many welcome insights into Donne's use of paradox and other literary devices. The two most important works from this era were published in 1954: K. W. Grandsen's book entitled John Donne, and Clay Hunt's Donne's Poetry: Essays in Literary Analysis.[59] Grandsen relates the subject matter of the Holy Sonnets to Donne's life during the years they were written. His interpretations are well-conceived and thorough, exploring both the biographical aspects as well as the theological, and commenting on important points of Donne's literary style. Grandsen has a tendency to assign thoughts to Donne, however, which detracts from the otherwise objective commentary. Hunt takes an opposite view, seeing the poetry as "intellectual fussing around with theological concepts, doctrinal paradoxes, and ambiguities on words,"[60] although he does assume an autobiographical nature. His analysis tends toward the practical and often debunks Donne's more dramatic displays of wit in his conceits. These two monographs complement each other well by giving the researcher points of opposition to explore.

Another surge of scholarly activity concerning Donne came in the mid-1970's which produced three significant studies. The topics are various, including the place of the sonnets in English literary history,[61] the form of the sonnets,[62] and a monograph that concentrates on Donne's use of conceits.[63] The decided lack of general surveys of Donne's poetry within the last decade and the early 1990's reveals more about the nature of the field of literature than Donne scholarship. There has been an increasing trend toward research that emphasizes highly specialized topics, such as the concept of the metaphysical gesture in a small corpus of Donne's poetry which has generated numerous studies, or a comparison of the religious thoughts in the Holy Sonnets with Anglican doctrine. Furthermore, collections of articles centering on Donne have also been numerous, documenting the crucial topics of the era in which they were published.[64]

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[58] Doniphan Louthan, The Poetry of John Donne: A Study in Explication (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951).

[59] K. W. Grandsen, John Donne (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954); Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry: Essays in Literary Analysis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

[60] Ibid., 134.

In summary, there is an overwhelming amount of information about Donne's poetry and the Holy Sonnets, in particular. The difficulty lies in dealing with the volume of knowledge rather than the lack of precise scholarship that plagues a study of Michelangelo's poetry. Quite often Donne scholars have entered into long debates over the reading of a single phrase or small portion of a poem, which makes for interesting reading and stimulates thought, but which also begs the question of author intent. Any explication is, by necessity, bound in the era in which it is written. Therefore, it becomes more a record of thought of the era than a precise reading of the poem. Ideas change in the wake of new information and new sensibilities. For this reason, in the following discussion of the individual sonnets that Britten set in the cycle, I present previous explications, but also add my own thoughts based upon my study of Donne's life and religious thought.

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[61] William L. Stull, "Elizabethan Precursors of Donne's 'Divine Meditations,'" Comitatus 6 (1975): 29-44.

[62] Antony F. Bellette, "'Little Worlds Made Cunningly': Significant Form in Donne's Holy Sonnets and Goodfriday, 1613," Studies in Philology 72 (1975): 322-347.

[63] Murray Roston, The Soul of Wit: A Study of John Donne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

[64] Studies in Shakespeare, Milton and Donne, ed. by the English Department of the University of Michigan (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925). Frank Kermode, ed., Discussions of Donne (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, n.d.). This includes seminal articles by T.S. Eliot and George Williamson. A. J. Smith, ed., John Donne: Essays in Celebration (London: Methuen and Co., n.d.). The Clements edition of the poetry from 1966 reprints several important articles, and in 1962, Helen Gardner also compiled a volume that reprints pertinent essays: John Donne's Poetry, Norton Critical Edition, ed. A. L. Clements (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966); and Helen Gardner, ed., John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962). Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, eds., The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1986).

An Analysis of Donne's Holy Sonnets Set by Benjamin Britten

Donne's sonnets have long been celebrated for their lack of adherence to the formal expectations of the sonnet form as established by Petrarch or Shakespeare. He experiments with the rhyme scheme in that he mixes the English (Shakespearean) and Italian (Petrarchan) forms. Moreover, his conceits often flow past the end rhyme of one line and into the next, destroying the impact of the end rhyme.

In the Petrarchan sonnet structure, the two quatrains of the octave feature a closed rhyme: *abba abba*, followed by a turn at the sestet which is subsequently divided into two tercets, generally rhyming *cde cde*. The octave and sestet function as observation or statement and conclusion or counter-statement, respectively. The quatrains of the octave state the proposition or subject and then prove or elaborate on that statement. The turn at the sestet is reflected in the rhyme scheme, and each of the tercets has a particular role in the form. The first confirms the ideas of the second quatrain, and the second tercet draws the conclusions. A final rhyming couplet is avoided. By contrast, the English sonnet usually delays the turn until the final rhyming couplet, which forces the poem into three quatrains plus two lines. The rhyme schemes of the quatrains are based on *rima alternata*, rhyming *abab cdcd efef*, with the final couplet *gg*. The extensive number of lines given to the development of the subject in this sonnet form enhances the impact of the final two lines.

Donne follows the English sonnet form in the use of three quatrains and a final rhyming couplet, but his rhyme scheme for the quatrains of the octave reflects the Petrarchan form (*abba abba*), while his sestet can be English (*cdcd ee*), or a mixture of the two (*cddc ee*). The turn in Donne's sonnets is not always delayed until the final couplet, but can occur at the beginning of the sestet as in the Petrarchan manner. Moreover, Donne often ignores the form imposed upon the sestet by the rhyme scheme by having punctuation that divides the sestet into various combinations, including the expected 4 + 2, but also 3 + 3, and even 2 + 4. In the octave as well, Donne often cuts across the quatrains in his punctuation, causing the blurring of the usual 4 + 4 division.

The English sonnets are composed in iambic pentameter, although Donne often employs metrical variation, as, for example, in the reversal of the foot (generally at the beginning of a line). The primary cause of this irregularity lies in Donne's use of colloquial language and speech patterns. Such pervasive breaking of meter provoked Ben Jonson to declare that "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging."[65]

Holy Sonnet IV: Oh my blacke Soule!

Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned
By sickenesse, deaths herald, and champion;
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled,
Or like a thiefe, which till deaths doome be read,
Wisheth himselfe delivered from prison;
But damn'd and hal'd to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.

Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;

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[65] Ben Jonson; quoted in Winny, Preface to Donne, 46-47.

Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white.[66]

Donne's sonnet, "Oh my blacke Soule!" was first published in the 1633 edition of his poetry. Gardner places the poem within the time frame of February to August 1609, based on the evidence of a verse letter addressed to the Earl of Dorset which refers to six holy sonnets.[67] Grandsen asserts that the sonnet refers to Donne's severe illness of 1608 through the images that it contains, allowing for the possibility that the sonnet was written during that same year.[68]

Donne shows the traditional division of the sonnet into octave and sestet by the rhyme scheme and punctuation, but in many ways, he is breaking out of the form. Leonard Unger concludes that Donne's poetic structure is determined by a sequence of ideas and the relationship of those ideas to each other.[69] This organizing principle is clearly at work in this poem and in many of the other Holy Sonnets that Britten chose. The sonnet, by virtue of its rhyme scheme, is organized into three quatrains and a final rhymed couplet, in the form of the Shakespearean sonnet mixed with Petrarchan elements: *abba abba cdcd ee.* The enjambment that occurs throughout the poem provides rhythmic disturbance, such as that between lines 3 and 4. Moreover, the rhyme scheme does not delineate the octave or the sestet accurately in terms of the images presented in them. Most Shakespearean sonnets have images that are grouped lines 1-4, 5-8, 9-12 and 13-14, with the octave presenting a conflict and the first four lines of the sestet resolving that conflict and the final couplet taking the resolution further.[70] Donne's internal punctuation and images, however, reveal a very different scheme.

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[66] The texts of the poems are quoted from the Grierson edition of Donne's poetry: The Poems of John Donne. Britten made a few punctuation changes for reasons of clarity and for the melodic line: lines 2 and 5, "deaths" to "death's"; line 6 "delivered to deliver'd;" and line 12, removes the internal comma between "blushing" and "as." Some of the changes may have been executed by the printer. The texts as Britten set them are included in the discussions of the individual songs in Chapter VI.

[67] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xlviii-xlix.

[68] Grandsen, John Donne, 128.

[69] Leonard Unger, Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 66.

The octave begins with a two-line introduction that sets the scene. The speaker has an illness, which has caused him to think about his own mortality, for illness is "deaths herald and champion." These two lines stand as a unit, expressing a complete thought that is not necessarily dependent on what follows. The next six lines, 3-8, contain two extended metaphors that explain the speaker's situation further by comparing the soul to a man who has committed the crime of treason and cannot return to his home and to a thief who, having reached the day of his execution, wishes that he were merely imprisoned. In both cases, the person has committed sins that have alienated him from a situation to which he would like to return. He regrets having done the deeds that have put him in his present state, but his regret is not enough to purify him of the crime. Gardner sees a traditional meditation prelude in the octave because it contains the *compositio loci*, or the setting of the place or situation for the subject of the meditation proper.[71]

The turning point, or crisis, of the sonnet occurs in the first two lines of the sestet, which, like the beginning of the octave, encompasses a complete thought.[72] The speaker confronts the problem of grace in repentance: a person cannot repent without grace, but also cannot do anything to obtain grace since grace is given by God.[73] The speaker, then, remains in limbo (not the Catholic concept), unable to accept the grace of God until God gives him grace to accept it. In just two lines, Donne captures the essence of the most difficult aspect of Protestant theology, which also directly contradicts the Catholic teaching on which he was raised. To work toward acceptance of the doctrine, Donne tries to reconcile his own doubts in the four lines that remain: the speaker tells his soul that it has two alternative ways to prepare for purification while waiting on God's grace. The first is to grieve over the sins that have been committed, making himself "with holy mourning blacke," and to express regret and embarrassment, making himself "red with blushing." The colors black and red link the image of the sinful soul from the first two lines of the poem with the image of Christ's blood that is presented in the final two lines as the second alternative. Christ's blood, which, in a reference to the sacrament of the Eucharist, Donne tells the soul to wash in, purifies the unclean soul, making it white, because it is red. In other words, the Eucharist represents the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, in which Christ took on the sins of all mankind, and thus, through its acceptance by man, can purify a sinful soul. The speaker will await God's grace, but will do what he can to put himself in the right frame of mind and spiritual condition. The final four lines of the poem, then, are the resolution to the conflict presented in the first two lines of the sestet, so that the final couplet is linked grammatically to the two lines preceding it. Donne, then, breaks out of the traditional octave/conflict – sestet/resolution mold.[74]

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[70] William L. Stull claims that "Oh my blacke Soule" follows that traditional division in all considerations. "Elizabethan Precursors," 31.

[71] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," li.

[72] Bellette recognizes these two lines as the crux of the poem, saying that it affects the impact of the final couplet. He does not, however, discuss a 2- + 4-line division of the sestet. "Significant Form," 338.

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[73] Stephenie Yearwood sees these two lines as a "healing assertion" because the speaker has assumed that he "will be judged on his own merits." Her statement is based on the opinion that Donne's comparison of his soul to persons who have committed crimes is not a recognition of the state of sinfulness but of the actual sins. "Donne's Holy Sonnets: the Theology of Conversion," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 24 (1982): 208-221.

There has been some debate about whether a resolution actually takes place in the sestet. By far the greater number of scholars favor the opinion that there is a resolution. John N. Wall, Jr. asserts: "the sonnet ends on a note of harmony and resignation in hope and praise."[75] William Zunder makes a statement about the structure of the entire poem: "the sense of inadequacy, even worthlessness, expressed in the octave is answered in the sestet by a sense of God's unbounded generosity."[76] On the opposite end, those scholars who do not see a resolution, tend to see the first two lines of the sestet as a point of conflict rather than a recognition of "God's unbounded generosity." Anthony Low sees the bleakness of the situation that soul finds itself in:

> Faced with its terrible predicament, the soul must seek Christ's grace and wash in his blood. But it is paralyzed by the thought that it cannot seek grace without "grace to beginne" – still further grounds for despair that must somehow be escaped.[77]

Susan Linville finds that Donne's theology in the sestet is inconsistent with the process of contrition outlined in Anglican doctrine.[78] To purify oneself, there are three steps: 1) recognition and confession of the sin; 2) remorse and guilt for the sin; and 3) reparations to the person against whom the sin was committed. Linville points out that Donne offers alternatives: have remorse and guilt for the sin *or* accept the Eucharist. Thus, there is no resolution because the all the steps are not present – true contrition has not taken place and will not take place. In my opinion, Linville's argument is less satisfactory than Low's – since this is a poetic expression of contrition, not a doctrinal one, not all the steps have to be present in order for the point to be made. Low, on the other hand, recognizes the futility of the speaker's chosen action: he cannot merit grace, yet he will still try to do something to deserve it. The resolution is not final because it only solves the problem in the short term. Grace is not yet forthcoming from God. Therefore, although Donne leaves us with the image of the white, purified soul, nothing has actually changed because the speaker has not executed any of the actions or received grace.

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[74] Gardner sees the sestet as expressing the "petition according to the subject" in a meditation (Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," li.). This seems unlikely since the speaker is addressing the soul and not God. Anthony Low is of the opinion that the sestet is not a petition. Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 60.

[75] John N. Wall, Jr., "Donne's Wit of Redemption: The Drama of Prayer in the Holy Sonnets," Studies in Philology 73 (1976): 194.

[76] William Zunder, The Poetry of John Donne: Literature and Culture in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Period (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982), 92.

[77] Low, Love's Architecture, 60.

[78] Susan E. Linville, "Contrary Faith: Poetic Closure and the Devotional Lyric," Papers on Literature and Language 20 (1984), 148.

Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart, three person'd God

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee,'and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due,
Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.

Yet dearely'I love you,'and would be loved faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemie:
Divorce mee,'untie, or breake that knot againe,
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.[79]

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[79] The apostrophes in lines 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 13 represent vowel elisions so that the iambic pentameter is retained. Britten removes the comma between "you" and "and" in line 9, possibly because of the elision which he sets in the vocal line, although he does not remove the comma between "mee" and "untie" in line 11, an elision that he also sets. In

Donne's fourteenth sonnet is perhaps the most enigmatic and disturbing of all the Holy Sonnets. The wealth and nature of the imagery included has led to heated debates about its significance. The arguments begin in the 1950's with J. C. Levenson, who remarks that he has always been able to read the first quatrain of the poem without "any discomfort at insufficient comprehension."[80] He asserts that although Donne's shifting from verb to verb seems to indicate that "no single metaphor could be adequate," in actuality the quatrain is governed by a single conceit: "God is a tinker, Donne a pewter vessel in the hands of God the artisan."[81] Levenson's curt explication prompted George Herman to reply that the metaphor has little to do with tinkers and pewter because the metaphor must extend for the whole of the poem, not just the first quatrain.[82] He offers his view that the poem operates under a Trinitarian framework, although he admits that he does not fully understand it, and associates each of the verbs with a member of the Trinity, stating that each one acts upon an earthly trinity of the heart, a town and a woman.[83] Fundamental to Herman's argument is the assumption that because the poem consists of only fourteen lines Donne would not abandon a conceit after the first four lines but would extend it throughout the poem. This assertion governs a number of explications for the sonnet and often results, as in the case

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line 14, Britten changes the word "chast" to "chaste" for pronunciation clarity for the singer.

[80] J. C. Levenson, "Donne's Holy Sonnets XIV," Explicator 11 (1952-1953): Item 31.

[81] Ibid.

[82] George Herman, "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIV," Explicator 12 (1953-1954): Item 18.

[83] Ibid.

of Herman, in fantastical twists of language and logic. Levenson cites this weakness in Herman's argument in his answer and sees a unity in the concept of violence rather than in a single metaphor:

> Mr. George Herman's comment on Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, XIV seems to me to err in stating *a priori* that no good poet, "much less Donne," would develop a conceit of metal-working in his first quatrain, a military conceit in his second quatrain, and a sexual conceit in his sestet, given the contracted space of fourteen lines in which to work. This is, of course, precisely what Donne did. . . .[84]

Levenson reasserts his earlier reading, though he backs away from his claim that God is a tinker, preferring to use a more general view of Donne as a vessel of any sort, which is a familiar Biblical image. He further condemns Herman's associations of the verbs with certain members of the Trinity as resting on "untenable theological premises" and using "tenuous lexicographical methods."[85]

The argument seemed settled until it was recapitulated in 1956 by George Knox, who calls both scholars' arguments "somewhat oblivious of the obvious."[86] Knox reiterates that the Trinity determines the structure of the sonnet, as suggested by the first line.[87] The difference between this view and Herman's is largely one of semantics. Knox retains Levenson's separate metaphors, but incorporates them into his own view that the members of the Trinity are acting apart from one another with each one governing their own quatrain in the order God, Son, and Holy Ghost. Knox's views were challenged by A. L. Clements, who associates the series of verbs with Biblical references to each of the

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[84] Levenson, "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIV," Explicator 12 (1953-1954): Item 36.

[85] Ibid.

[86] George Knox, "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIV," Explicator 15 (1956-57): Item 2.

[87] Ibid.

Trinity.[88] Clements further claims that Donne's use of the Trinity is a paradox that parallels the paradox of the Trinity itself as "three-in-one."[89] Because the Trinity does not act separately, the central organizing principle, then, is the concept of death and rebirth, "the central paradox of Christianity."[90] In a summary article, John Parish takes up Clements's cause by attempting to enlarge upon his points through more Biblical and involved imagery.[91] Parish's explication may be the most colorful of all, for it includes a description of a town ruled by a King and his viceroy, the Princess:

> In the first quatrain the perspective is mainly that of the King outside the walls, seeking admission. In the second, the reader is carried inside the usurped town and sees the lamentable state of affairs through the eyes of the populace, rightfully the subjects of the King and of the Princess whom he has appointed as his Viceroy (these subjects being all the forces of man that should be governed by reason, here identified with the soul). In the sestet the point of view is that of the captive Princess herself (Reason, or the Soul), who has entered into a shameful marriage with the Usurper and is held in solitary confinement deep within the citadel.[92]

Clements and Parish are subsequently challenged by David Cornelius, who cites Donne's sermons as the basis for recognizing the Trinitarian framework of the sonnet as each member governs a separate part of the poem.[93] The only real difference between

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[88] A. L. Clements, "Donne's 'Holy Sonnet XIV,'" Modern Language Notes 76 (1961): 484-489.

[89] Ibid., 484.

[90] Ibid., 496.

[91] John E. Parish, "No. 14 of Donne's Holy Sonnets," College English 24 (1962-1963): 299-302.

[92] Ibid., 300.

[93] David K. Cornelius, "Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV," Explicator 24 (1965-1966): Item 25.

Cornelius's discussion and those by Herman and Knox is that Cornelius sees another order of the Trinity.

The next article in the series of debates takes us full circle to Levenson's original assertion that there are three metaphors, not just an extended single one. About his opponents, Elias Schwartz states: "in their concern with the doctrine of the Trinity, the poem's critics seem to me to have been led far astray from the poem's dramatic immediacy and into irrelevancy."[94] Using Levenson's identification of the metaphors, Schwartz expounds upon their functional roles in the poem, explaining that they take us through the progress of man's soul, "from creation, through Fall, to love of and union with his Creator."[95] Dennis Klinck, who essentially subscribes to Clements's reading, points out that Schwartz's explication still follows a three-fold structure.[96] Mary Tenney Wanninger, on the other hand, breaks entirely from any references to the Trinity or the number three, suggesting that the work has a dual nature upheld by two types of metaphor (military and destructive, and marital and uniting) as well as a series of antitheses.[97]

In a summary article, R. D. Bedford reduces the debate to its central arguments and tackles them one by one.[98] Dealing solely with the first quatrain, he concludes:

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[94] Elias Schwartz, "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIV," Explicator 26 (1967-68): Item 27.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Dennis R. Klinck, "John Donne's 'knottie Trinitie,'" Renascence 33 (1981): 240-255.

[97] Mary Tenney Wanninger, "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIV," Explicator 28 (1969-1970): Item 37.

[98] R. D. Bedford, "Donne's Holy Sonnet, 'Batter my heart,'" Notes & Queries (New Series) 29 (1982): 15-19.

> it is not an uncontrolled outburst of whirling words, nor simply a verbal arithmetic of vaguely focused triplet, and though its imagery is rendered entirely through its verbs it is as clear and as consistent as the two subsequent extended metaphors.[99]

There are several remaining articles which take up or challenge various points put forth in the course of the debate, but none – however interesting they may be – adds to the existing body of knowledge, and in many ways, only serve to muddy the waters.[100] The problem still remains of the lack of a reading that is relevant to the message that Donne is articulating. [101]

The poem dates from 1609 and was among the first poems of Donne to be published, appearing in the 1633 edition.[102] The rhyme scheme reflects a mixture of the Italian and English forms, with the quatrains of the octave organized with internal rhymes and the sestet revealing a final couplet: *abba abba cdcd ee*. Donne divides the octave clearly into two quatrains by presenting two separate images in each. In the first, the speaker paradoxically implores God to destroy him violently so that he can be made new. God has previously sought to only mend him with a minimal amount of force ("for, you / As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend"). It has become obvious that more drastic measures are needed to penetrate his sinful heart. The second quatrain likens the soul to a town that has been captured by the enemy. The soul wants to admit God, but cannot because his reasoning is weak or even false. This image points to Donne's beliefs concerning the unity of Reason and Faith in coming to God. In a verse letter to the Countess of Bedford, Donne writes, "Reason is our Soules left hand, Faith her right, / By these wee reach divinity."[103] In the poem, then, Donne is saying that although he has faith, it cannot act without reason.

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[99] Ibid., 19.

[100] William R. Mueller uses Biblical stories to prove his view that Donne considers himself to be adulterous in "Donne's Adulterous Female Town," Modern Language Notes 76 (1961): 312-314; Lucio P. Ruotolo sees the Trinitarian structure as deriving from Saint Thomas Aquinas in ""The Trinitarian Framework of Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV," Journal of the History of Ideas 27 (1966): 445-446; Charles E. Lloyd takes issue with Ruotolo's claims in "The Author of Peace and Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV," Journal of the History of Ideas 30 (1969): 251-252; William W. Heist claims a further three-fold explanation, that the images express materially, socially and personally the need for Divine Grace, "Donne on Divine Grace: Holy Sonnet No. XIV," Michigan Academician 53 (1968): 311-320; and Tunis Romein contradicts almost everyone, stating that the image we must have is one of "God as a glass blower confronting an imperfect piece of blown crystal." "Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV," Explicator 42 (Summer 1984): 13-14.

[101] For example, Donald Zimmerman consistently only scratches the surface of the sonnets with his two-line explications. "The Nature of Man: John Donne's Songs and Holy Sonnets." Emporia State Research Studies 8 no. 3 (March 1960): 26.

[102] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xlix.

The sestet introduces a third image, that of marriage or of physical love. The inclusion of erotic imagery in a religious poem has caused some scholars to cover up or explain away such overt sexuality.[104] In fact, Donne had no reservations about the use of erotic images in describing the soul's relationship with God:

> Solomon whose disposition was amorous and excessive in the love of women, when he turned to God he departed not utterly from his old phrase and language, but having put a new and a spiritual tincture and form and habit in all his thoughts and words, he conveys all his loving approaches and applications to God, and all Gods gracious answers to his amorous soul into songs and Ephithalamions and . . . marriages between God and his church and between God and his soul.[105]

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[103] Donne, quoted in Bruce Henricksen, "The Unity of Reason and Faith in Donne's Sermons," Papers on Literature and Language 11 (1975): 20.

[104] One case in point is Wilbur Sanders, who sees in a reading of sexual violence "something hysterically out of control." John Donne's Poetry (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 130. Thomas Steele also tries to soften the imagery by providing an alternate meaning for the word "ravish." He states that the word can also mean "to take away" or "remove spatially." "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIV," Explicator 29 (1970-1971): Item 74.

[105] Donne, quoted in Grandsen, John Donne, 130.

That Donne would use such such imagery suggests that he was struggling to unite his strong physical urges (evidenced by his promiscuous past) with a desire for God. If he could express this desire in terms with which he can identify, then he can set his contrition into motion by purifying himself.

The first two lines of the sestet, as in "Oh my blacke Soule" present the central conflict of the poem. The speaker loves God and wishes to be loved back, but this cannot happen as long as he is in a state of sin. The problem of contrition, then, governs this poem as well. Until he has been carried off and imprisoned by God, he can never be pure. The conclusion is not a resolution as might be expected in the sonnet form. There is no indication that God works upon the speaker as he is asking or that a state of sinlessness is reached by the end of the poem. Donne only notes what needs to happen if contrition is to be completed, or even begun. He knows what is needed, but we are not left with a sense that it will happen.

Holy Sonnet III: O might those sighes and teares

O might those sighes and teares returne againe
Into my breast and eyes which I have spent,
That I might in this holy discontent
Mourne with some fruit, as I have mourn'd in vaine;
In mine Idolatry what showres of raine
Mine eyes did waste? what griefs my heart did rent?
That sufferance was my sinne; now I repent;
'Cause I did suffer I must suffer paine.

Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night-scouting thiefe,
The itchy Lecher, and selfe tickling proud
Have the remembrance of past joyes, for reliefe
Of comming ills. To (poore) me is allow'd
No ease; for, long, yet vehement griefe hath beene
Th'effect and cause, the punishment and sinne.[106]

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[106] Britten's changes to the text are as follows: line 5, "showres" to "show'rs;" line 7, removal of the semicolon at the end of the line; line 9, elimination of the hyphen between

The third sonnet that Britten chose for his Donne song cycle, "O might those sighes and teares," was first published in 1635 in the second edition of Donne's poetry. Gardner places the composition in the second half of 1609, although she admits that it "cannot be dated with certainty. . . ."[107] The rhyme scheme follows the same pattern as the earlier sonnets, *abba abba cdcd ee*, and iambic pentameter is used for the most part. Once again, Donne finds very subtle ways of breaking out of the form. He interrupts the meter in three lines with three three-syllable words that add one extra syllable to their respective lines, requiring elision, hence destroying the meter. In line 7, the word "sufferance" should be elided as suff'rance; in line 11, the word "remembrance" is best rendered in an amphibrachic meter, causing an eleventh syllable to be added; and in line 13, the word "vehement" is dactylic unless the first two syllables are elided. Donne's use of enjambment in the sestet also disturbs the impact of the final couplet. He marks off the octave and sestet clearly by his punctuation and the organization of his thoughts, and within the octave he delineates the first two quatrains. Less clear, however, is the sestet because of the enjambment. In line 12 there is a complete internal stop that links it to line 11. Subsequently, the thought in line 12 is completed in line 13, which is marked by a brief pause. This idea can stand alone or be linked to the final idea presented in the remainder of line 13 and line 14. The impact of the final couplet, then, is destroyed by the enjambment in lines 12 to 13. Further, lines 12 to 13 can be read as the beginning of an idea that is completed in lines 13 and 14.

"night" and "scouting;" line 12, "comming" to "coming;" and line 13, "beene" to "been," possibly for clarity of pronunciation for the singer.

[107] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," l.

The first quatrain addresses the situation that the speaker finds himself in: he has entered a period of discontent with his life and himself that has been motivated by his realization that he needs God. He wishes that the instruments of mourning that he has felt before would come to him now that he has reason to regret his sins. The second quatrain refers to the reason for his need to mourne, his past life. In what Zunder calls a "rejection of the experience recorded in the love poetry,"[108] Donne ponders all the tears of regret and grief he felt for a lost profane love. Line 7 has been misunderstood as referring to the suffering of the pains of love as a sin.[109] What Donne has really written is a clever twist, using the word "suffer." By "sufferance" (l. 7), he refers to the fact that because he did nothing to prohibit the physical experiencing of profane love, he essentially assented to it. The sin that he repents was in the physical relationship with a profane love, not the grief that the love caused. Line 8, then, draws the conclusion that because he experienced physical love, suffering when that love was removed, now he must suffer the pain of remorse and guilt. Evelyn Simpson claims that Donne was obsessed by the sins of physical love:

> A careful study of Donne's works shows that the particular sins for which he felt the deepest repentance were those sins of the flesh committed in his youth. Again and again he laments the ruin wrought in his soul by wantonness and lust.[110]

The regret expressed in the second quatrain, then, is not for the suffering or the tears spilt over the loss of a love, but for the physical act itself.

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[108] Zunder, Poetry of John Donne, 95.

[109] This misreading began in Grierson, Poems of John Donne, 2 : 232.

[110] Evelyn M. Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 85.

Lines 9-11 and part of 12 present a recital of characters who find physical pleasure of some sort and who can turn to a memory of this pleasure to help them through dark days: the "hydroptique drunkard" who thirsts constantly still has the memory of drink; the "night-scouting thief" who pleasures in the search for something to steal can think of the crimes he has committed; the insatiable "lecher" can remember his physical relationships; and the overly proud man takes pleasure in himself and his own accomplishments. As the next sentence states, Donne cannot think about his past pleasures because God has caused him to feel discontent with them. This brings him back to his earlier assertion, that the false regret caused by his physical sin, has now become true despair for the sins he committed, and is both the punishment for the sin and a sin because he despairs.

Donne believed that melancholy, or despair, was a sin against God.[111] This attitude toward depression may have arisen from the mental illness that he suffered between 1602 and 1608 caused by his loss of favor in the royal circle. He seems to see in it a sense of self indulgence, which he captures in his list in the poem of self-indulgent people.[112] Bellette is of the opinion that the sonnet begins with the soul estranged from God and that the gap grows wider as the poem progresses.[113] In effect, then, there is no resolution, only conflict because God has forced him into despair over his past sins, which he feels is a sin. The tone in the final lines is one of indignation with a heightened sense of separateness from God, not denouement as one might expect. The poem only reaches a conclusion – "To poore me is allow'd no ease" – as Arthur Clements suggests.[114]

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[111] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xliii.

[112] Donald Zimmerman completely misses the point of the poem in his explication, particularly with regard to the idea of suffering: "I wish that all my suffering were not in vain. I shall repent; then, I shall knowingly suffer, as I did not realize I suffered in sin." Zimmerman, "The Nature of Man," 26.

[113] Bellette, "Significant Form," 328.

Donne uses his disturbance of the conventions of the sonnet form to show that his speaker is in a state of disorder. The final couplet is cut short by the enjambment that encroaches on line 13, which, in turn, affects the rhythm and sense of completeness within the meter that the final couplet generally provides. Donne causes further unsettledness through the introduction of a dactylic word, "vehement," into the iambic meter. Furthermore, the idea in lines 12-13, "To poore me is allow'd no ease," is both the appropriate comparison to end the recital of characters who can find relief, and the sentence modified by the clause in lines 13-14.

Holy Sonnet XIX: Oh, to vex me

Oh, to vex me, contraryes meet in one:
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott
A constant habit; that when I would not
I change in vowes, and in devotione.
As humorous is my contritione
As my prophane Love, and as soone forgott:
As ridlingly distemper'd, cold, and hott,
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.

I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day
In prayers, and flattering speaches I court God:
To morrow I quake with true feare of his rod.
So my devout fitts come and go away
Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.[115]

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[114] Arthur L. Clements, Poetry of Contemplation: John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and the Modern Period (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990), 67.

[115] Britten changes "prophane" to "profane" in line 6; "to day" to "today" in line 9; "flattering" to "flatt'ring" in line 10; and "to morrow" to "tomorrow" in line 11.

Donne's nineteenth sonnet, "Oh to vex me," was one of three included in the Westmoreland MS. Helen Gardner seems to assert that it was written after 1617, possibly in 1619, although she does not supply any date in connection with this specific sonnet.[116] In dating the Westmoreland MS sonnets, she bases her decision largely on the fact that the three sonnets found in that manuscript are unrelated in subject matter from those of 1609.[117] Bellette refers to this sonnet as "the most complete upsetting of the sonnet form we will find in these poems."[118] Indeed, the sonnet is unusual in its rhyme scheme, its treatment of meter, and its manipulation of the form. The octave has the same division as Donne's others, two quatrains rhyming *abba abba.* The first four lines of the sestet, however, displays a very different rhyme scheme by imitating the quatrains of the octave, rhyming *cddc.* Most of the sonnets written earlier have the scheme *cdcd* in the sestet. The final two lines, as is Donne's usual pattern, are a rhymed couplet, *ee.*

The meter of this sonnet is unusual in its use of many points of elision, with sometimes two elisions required per line. For example, line 11, "To morrow I quake with true feare of his rod," can be read as ten syllables with elision between "morrow" and "I." Two of the lines contain twelve syllables, but can be reduced to eleven with some elision. The first of these is line 2, "Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott," which can be reduced with an internal elision in the word "unnaturally," reading it "un-na-tr'lly" as three syllables Line 9, "I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day," can also be reduced by an internal elision on the word "heaven" and an elision between "yesterday" and the word "and."

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[116] Gardner, Divine Poems, 78.

[117] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xli.

[118] Bellette, "Significant Form," 331.

The inspiration for the sonnet comes from Donne's own life, as David Novarr has pointed out: "Donne's distress stems from his disappointment that he is far from the perfection which he thinks to be characteristic of the truly spiritual life. He is vexed that he finds something of his old secular self in his attitude toward God. . . ."[119] With few exceptions, each line of the sonnet contains an adjective and its opposite, which form the framework on which Donne examines the problem as stated in the first quatrain: Donne's life is a mass of contradictions. He has been so inconstant in his devotion to God, that this lack of devotion has become a consistent habit. When he least needs or wants to doubt God is the very time when he does. In a sermon, Donne defines habit in sin:

> When a man receives figures and images, into his Fancie and Imagination, and leads them on to his Understanding and Discourse, to his Will, to his Consent, to his Heart, by a delightful dwelling upon the meditation of that sin; yet this is not *a setting of the heart upon doing evil*. . . . But it is, when by a habitual custom in sin, the sin arises meerly and immediately from my self.[120]

The second quatrain continues the use of "contraryes" by setting up a series of opposites to represent his actions. Lines 5-6, even though they can be separated, are meant to be read as a complete thought because of the absence of a comma after line 5. First, Donne explains that his contrition, or sorrow for his sins, is hardly that, and that his attitude toward contrition is like his attitude to his profane (i.e., frequent) loves of the past: they are soon forgotten because he feels no particular commitment to them.[121] In line 7, he refers to the contradictions of an illness in which a fever can make a person both cold and hot, which describes his feelings toward God. The eighth line contains two separate contraries, "as praying as mute" and "as infinite as none," which again refer to Donne's state of mind. This recital of opposites in the second quatrain has an *accelerando* built into the sentence structure. The first thought encompasses two lines, the second one line, and the third and fourth a half line each. The structure impels this quatrain into the first lines of the sestet, despite the full stop at the end of line 8 by creating a rhythmic drive.

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[119] David Novarr, The Disinterred Muse: Donne's Texts and Contexts (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 122.

[120] Donne, Sermons, 1 : 178-179.

[121] Norman E. Carlson has very different ideas about the modifications by the antonyms based on grammatical and syntactical irregularites. "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIX," Explicator 32 (1973): Item 19.

The sestet is divided into two tercets, in direct defiance of the structure implied by the rhyme scheme (*cddc ee*). The first tercet, lines 9-11, refers to the timelessness or eternity of God. In a sermon, Donne stated his belief: "He is with you now, when you fix upon him; He was with you before, for he brought you to this fixation; and he will be with you hereafter, for *He is yesterday, and to day, and the same for ever.*"[122] In the sonnet, however, Donne shows that he personally cannot have eternity in God as a comfort. In the past ("yesterday") he was not able to say that he had his sights on heaven, referring to Donne's indiscretions as a young man. Today, he is trying by his own means to come to God, which, although he does not state so in the poem, will fail because he lacks grace. This line, "And to day in prayers, and flattering speaches I court God," probably refers to Donne's activities as a priest.[123] Tomorrow, or in death, because he is not atoned with God, Donne has reason to fear God's judgment.

The final tercet appears on the surface to be more of a summary than a resolution, particularly due to Donne's use of the word "so" to introduce his statement. His devotion to God comes and goes like an ague, or a fever, but his best days are the ones in which he shakes with fear. In other words, during those days when he is furtherest from God, he is actually closer because he knows that he is sinning. Donne allowed that fear of God could lead to the love of God:

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[122] Donne, Sermons, 7 : 52.

[123] This line, 10, with its reference to Donne's priesthood, places the date of composition at least after his ordination in 1615.

> Place the affection . . . upon the right object, God, and I have, in some measure, done that which this Text directed, (*Taught you the fear of the Lord*) if I send you away in either disposition, *Timorous*, or *amorous*; possessed with either, the fear, or the love of God; for, this fear is inchoative love, and this love is consummative fear; The love of God begins in fear, and the fear of God ends in love; and that love can never end, for God is love.[124]

The resolution, then, lies in the realization of sin – he would be lost if he had no consciousness of his inconsistent relationship with God.

Holy Sonnet XIII: What if this present

What if this present were the worlds last night?
Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether that countenance can thee affright,
Teares in his eyes quench the amasing light,
Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell.
And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell,
Which pray'd forgivenesse for his foes fierce spight?

No, no; but as in my idolatrie
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pitty, foulnesse onely is
A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
This beauteous forme assures a pitious minde.[125]

Antony Bellette considers "What if this present" to be "one of the most carefully controlled that Donne wrote," citing a "congruence between thought and form."[126] In this statement, Bellette presumably refers to the economy of grammar in the sestet. The subject of the octave is presented in a very straightforward fashion, with the logic and direction guiding it easily ascertained. The sestet, on the other hand, unfolds in a complex manner, revealing Donne's adeptness at manipulating the English language. Each thought presents a piece of the puzzle, but the route is circuitous until the summary couplet gathers the thoughts into a whole.

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[124] Donne, Sermons, 6 : 113.

[125] The changes in the text that Britten used are: line 1, "worlds" to world's;" line 5, "amasing" to "amazing;" and line 14, "pitious" to "piteous."

[126] Bellette, "Significant Form," 339.

The precise date of this sonnet is uncertain, but Gardner presumes that it was composed in the latter part of 1609 because it is "so closely linked to the first [six] in inspiration. . . ."[127] The rhyme scheme is the same as that for "O to vex me," with the two quatrains of the octave rhyming *abba abba*, the quatrain of the sestet rhyming *cddc*, and the final couplet set apart as *ee*. In contrast to "O to vex me," the meter of this sonnet is very regular, with only one line requiring an elision to place it within the limit of ten syllables.[128] Donne uses more one- and two-syllable words in this sonnet, which perhaps explains the lack of lines extending beyond ten syllables.[129] Several scholars contend that the poem also displays a regular English sonnet structure, with three quatrains and a final couplet.[130] I disagree with this assessment. While Donne does observe the traditional octave/sestet division, he clearly ignores the internal structure of both the octave and the sestet in favor of a more dramatic design.

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[127] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xlix-xlx.

[128] Line 13 requires an elision within the word "spirits" ("spir'ts").

[129] There are some three- and four-syllable words ("countenance," *l.* 4; "idolatrie," *l.* 9), but Donne surrounds them with words that have a very clear syllable count, which allows the larger words to be fit into the meter more easily.

[130] William L. Stull, in particular, places this into his category of four-fold sonnets. "Elizabethan Precursors," 34.

The first line of the poem functions as an introduction, much like the first two lines of "Oh my blacke Soule." It sets the scene for the rest of the poem, both in subject matter and tone and reveals a speaker who realizes that his relationship to God may not withstand the end of the world and the final judgment. The next five lines, *ll.* 2-6, form a complete thought. The speaker, again addressing his soul as he did in "Oh my blacke Soule," questions whether the gruesome image of the crucified Christ is frightening or causes unease, forcing the soul to confront its tenuous relationship with God. The image of Christ that Donne paints arouses both mercy and horror, but instills a sense of guilt for God having to sacrifice Christ for the benefit of man. Donne presents a very human Christ: the blood shows the physical suffering that Christ endured, but the tears that Donne places in Christ's eyes reveals a mental anguish that is far more upsetting than the physical pain. The tears represent a weakness in Christ that shows that although he is God, he is also a man who feels pain.

Donne also captures the spiritual or godly side of Christ by alluding in lines 7 and 8 to his intercessory role between God and man. After forcing the soul to confront the sacrifice of Christ – an allusion to the Catholic practice of placing a Crucifix before a dying person's eyes[131] – he immediately reassures the soul through a paradoxical question that Christ works for forgiveness rather than damnation because he did so even for the very people who gave him up for sacrifice. The purpose of exploring this aspect of Christ is revealed in the sestet.

The image of the Crucifixion is disturbing to man mentally and disgusting physically – few would see the physical beauty in it. The sestet addresses this problem, again with a paradox. In a reference to his past life and loves, Donne tells his soul that he used to tell his mistresses that beauty was of no matter, "foulnesse" was a sign that lady was healthy.[132] This may be a reference to the difference between aristocratic and peasant stock. The practice that the non-working nobility and gentility had of marrying relatives produced beautiful, but sickly women (and men) because they lacked sufficient genes to develop a hearty immune system. As wealthy members of society, they were not exposed to disease-ridden conditions and did not develop physically through their work situations. Peasants, on the other hand, while they did intermarry, also were raised in such conditions that they developed a strong immunity or died, and because of their working conditions, were in much better shape physically than their aristocratic counterparts. Donne assumes that peasants are naturally ugly and aristocrats are beautiful, but that the "foul" are stronger, and thus shows the strength inherent in the "foul" image of Christ on the Cross.[133] In the final three lines – there is an enjambment from line 12 to 13 – Donne contrasts an outer reflection of the Crucifixion, which assumes that because it is a "horrid" shape, it is wicked, with an inner one that concludes it is beautiful because Christ is an intercessory, a thought which causes the necessary contrition in the soul.

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[131] Low, Love's Architecture, 67.

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[132] Several scholars have concluded that Donne was comparing Donne's love for Christ with his love for his "prophane mistresses:" Terry G. Sherwood, Fulfilling the Circle: A study of John Donne's Thought (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 150; Zimmerman, "Nature of Man," 26.

[133] Donald Zimmerman has a very different interpretation of the sestet: "Unless one seriously misreads this passage, he sees that Donne is employing the imagery of sex. Reference to the organs of reproduction, are, perhaps, somewhat indelicate in a holy sonnet, particularly when the image is singled out for comment. In the whole poem, however, when the image is taken in its true context and in recognition of the poet's purpose (the transformation of sexual into mental activity, and of physical into spiritual activity), the image becomes meaningful." "Nature of Man," 30.

Holy Sonnet XVII: Since she whom I lov'd

Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her Soule early into heaven ravished,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.
Here the admyring her my mind did whett
To seeke thee God; so streames do shew their head;
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett.

But why should I begg more Love, when as thou
Dost wooe my soule for hers; offring all thine:
And dost not only feare least I allow
My love to Saints and Angels things divine,
But in thy tender jealosy dost doubt
Least the World, Fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out.[134]

Donne's seventeenth sonnet, "Since She whom I loved," has a clear reference to an event in Donne's life – the death of his wife Anne in 1617. David Novarr has assessed it contents as "an astonishing confession of how much his love for a woman means to him and an extraordinarily passionate expression of how her death has affected him."[135] Because of this poem, early Donne scholars reached the conclusion that Donne came to God only after Anne's death.[136] The chronology of his ordination does not uphold this assumption, but there may be some truth in it since the circumstances of his marriage to

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[134] Britten's changes in this text involve only the punctuation: line 7, removes the internal comma between "thee" and "and," presumably because he elides the vowels; line 8, the final period is made into a comma (this may be a printing error since the melodic line clearly cadences); and line 10, the colon after "hers" is a semicolon.

[135] Novarr, Disinterred Muse, 126.

[136] Walton actually initiated the belief: ""In this retiredness [after his wife's death], which was often from the sight of his dearest friends, he became *crucified to the world,* and all those vanities, those imaginary pleasures that are daily acted on that restless stage; and they were as perfectly crucified to him. . . . And, thus he continued till a consideration of his new ingagements to God, and St. *Pauls Wo is me, if I preach not the Gospel*: disper'st those sad clouds that had then benighted his hopes, and now forc'd him to behold the light." Lives of Donne, 51-52.

Anne eventually led him to the clergy. After her death, Donne was essentially free to pursue the secular career that he had long sought and which he was denied after he married Anne without first seeking parental or canonical consent. He did not, of course, abandon his new sacred career, but grew in it. The sonnet, however, does betray Donne's contradictory feelings towards God and his relationship with him. The date of the sonnet is uncertain, although its tone of resignation about Anne's death and similarities to "A Hymn to Christ" has led Gardner to suggest that it was not written immediately after her death, but before May 1619.[137]

The rhyme scheme is similar to that used in "Oh my blacke Soule" and "O might those sighes and teares:" the two quatrains of the octave rhyme *abba abba*, the sestet rhymes *cdcd ee*. The lines are constructed primarily in iambic pentameter, with only four requiring elision to fit into the ten-syllable limitation (*ll.* 2-4 and *l.* 7). There are metrical irregularities in the first line, as Helen Gardner's reading points out.[138] The line contains not only iambic feet, but also trochaic and spondaic ones, and reads:

˘ ´ ˘ ´ ´ ˘ ´ ´ ´ ´
Since she | whom I | lov'd hath | payd her | last debt.

Donne uses the shifts between meters, which continues throughout the poem, to create a sense of disorder that parallels the state of his mind following Anne's death.[139]

The octave occurs in three sections, destroying the division suggested by the rhyme scheme. In the first four lines, Donne states that his wife has died, completing her debt to nature (all things must die) and to him, and that all that was good in his life is gone.[140] Since she was taken into heaven, he now turns toward heavenly things. The assumption has been made with this line that Donne means that he turned his attention toward God. I think that the next line contradicts this conclusion, largely because of Donne's use of the word "here." Having just set his mind "wholly on heavenly things," it is his contemplation of her in heaven ("*Here* [emphasis mine] the admyring her my mind did whett / To seeke thee God") that leads him to seek the love of God and to realize that God is the source of all love. Donne allows that love of another can lead to God:

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[137] Gardner, Divine Poems, 78.

[138] Ibid.

[139] In her discussion, Gardner makes it seem that only the first line is metrically irregular. Ibid.

> What a perverse madness is it, to love a creature and not as a creature, that is, with all the adjuncts, and circumstances, and qualities of a creature, of which the principal is that, that love raise us to the contemplation of the Creator. . . and so we love other creatures, as we all meet in our Creator.[141]

Furthermore, in a sermon from 1617, Donne alludes to that fact that the passion felt in secular love can be turned to God, so that there would be little change required in the transition between loving God and loving a woman:

> That soul that hath been transported upon any particularly worldly pleasure, when it is entirely turned upon God, and the contemplation of his all-sufficiency and abundance, doth find in God fit subject and just occasion, to exercise that same affection piously and religiously, which had before so sinfully transported and possessed it. . . .[142]

In the final two lines of the octave, 7 and 8, the speaker states that he found God and that loving God satisfied him for awhile, but that it did not last. At the end of the octave, then, Donne is precariously on the edge of falling from grace.

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[140] Eleanor Faulkner and Edgar F. Daniels believe that the reference is to Anne's duty to "her own nature as a woman (the danger peculiar to all women of dying in childbirth)." "Donne's Holy Sonnets XVII (Since she whome I lovd), 1-2," Explicator 34 (1976): Item 68.

[141] Donne, Sermons, 1 : 243.

[142] Donne, quoted in Grandsen, John Donne, 130.

In the first two lines of the sestet, Donne questions his motives with regard to God: why should he ask for more love when God is trying so hard to fill the gap left by the death of Anne.[143] The remainder of the sestet reveals that Donne desires an earthly love despite his knowledge that the love of God is enough. God should fear that Donne will never let go of his love for Anne ("least I allow / My Love to Saints and Angels things divine") and that even a return to his earlier rakish ways ("doubt / Least the World, Fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out") is a possibility. This may also be a reference to one of Donne's beliefs about love, that we take on the characteristics of the object of our devotion, which could also potentially lead him to sinfulness:

> Love is a Possessory Affection, it delivers over him that loves into the possession of that that he loves; it is a transmutatory Affection, it changes him that loves, into the very nature of that that he loves, and he is nothing else.[144]

The disorder that Donne created in the meter, then, is reflected also in the absence of a clear resolution to the problem. Donne only realizes that God's love is sufficient. He does not leave us with the indication that he accepts this as a truth in his particular situation. Indeed, he seems to assert that he will seek other means of comfort.

The pioneering explication of this poem was written by M. E. Grenander and was published in 1975 in a collection edited by John R. Roberts, Essential Articles for the Study of John Donne's Poetry.[145] The focus of Grenander's discussion is his opinion regarding a change of attitude in the speaker that occurs from the octave to the sestet. In the octave, although the speaker has found God and realizes that God loves him, he still feels unsatisfied. By the end of the sestet, the speaker has serenely accepted that God's love is all-sufficient. Grenander draws his conclusions from an analysis of the breakdown and establishing of relationships between the three characters of the poem, God, the speaker, and the woman. While scholars have generally accepted Grenander's opinions about the relationships, they have contradicted his assertion that a resolution occurs in the sestet. Both Louis Martz and David Novarr see little evidence that the speaker has accepted God's love as completely fulfilling his needs.[146] In fact, Novarr believes that the speaker reveals that God will need to act more strenuously with him because he is tempted by earthly love.[147] This reading seems to be more consistent with the tone of the Holy Sonnets in general. In none of them does the speaker reach the state of contrition or purification that he desires, nor is there any indication that God has acted upon him during his pleas in the sonnets.[148]

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[143] Harry Morris sees a pun on Anne's maiden name of More in line 9. "John Donne's Terrifying Pun," Papers on Language and Literature 9 (1973): 134.

[144] Donne, Sermons, 1 : 184-185.

[145] M. E. Grenander, "Holy Sonnets VIII and XVII: John Donne," in Essential Articles for the study of John Donne's Poetry, ed. John R. Roberts (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1975), 324-332.

Holy Sonnet VII: At the round earths imagin'd corners

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
From death, you numberlesse infinities
Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,

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[146] Louis L. Martz, "The Action of the Self: Devotional Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," in Metaphysical Poetry, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 108; Novarr, "*Amor vincit omnia*: Donne and the Limits of Ambiguity," Modern Language Review 82 (1987): 289.

[147] Novarr, Disinterred Muse, 125. William Zunder sees the poem as a rejection of Anne Donne, sexual love and all human relationships, both personal and social. Zunder, Poetry of John Donne, 99.

[148] Even in the most positive of the sonnets, "Death be not proud," the triumph is left for the future.

All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes,
Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe.

But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,
For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,
When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,
Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.[149]

Clay Hunt, with great amusement, sees in the first line of Donne's seventh sonnet an attempt to correct the science of the Bible in the "Book of Revelations."[150] The verse from which Donne's opening scene is taken, Revelations 7:1, refers to four angels guarding the four corners of the earth.[151] Since it had already been proved that the earth was round, Donne gently corrects the mistake before moving on to the true subject of his poem, the need for contrition.[152]

The sonnet is one of six that Gardner believes Donne dedicated and sent to the Earl of Dorset, a group which Gardner dates as falling between February and August of 1609.[153] The rhyme scheme is typical of Donne, the quatrains of the octave display the same pattern, *abba abba*, while the sestet is Shakespearean, *cdcd ee*. Donne closely obeys the syllable count for iambic pentameter, with just one elision indicated by Donne himself in the last line, but the meter is hardly regular. The first line gives an indication of Donne's attitude toward the confines of convention, for the meter of the first foot is neither iambic nor its reverse:

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[149] Britten makes the following changes in the text: line 1, "earths" to "earth's;" line 2, "Angells" to "Angels;" line 3, "numberlesse" to "numberless;" line 4, "scattred" to "scatter'd;" line 7, removes the final comma; line 8, "tast" to "taste" for clarity of pronunciation; and line 9, "a space" to "aspace."

[150] Hunt, Donne's Poetry, 159.

[151] R. E. Pritchard, "Donne's Angels in the Corners," Notes & Queries (New Series) 33 (1986): 348. Gale Carrithers also points out that contemporary maps were frequently decorated with angels in the corners. Donne at Sermons: A Christian Existential World (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1972), 63.

[152] Hunt also asserts that only Donne would have concerned himself with such a correction in the midst of a "poetic moment." Ibid.

[153] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xlix.

˘ ˘ ˘ ´ ˘ ´ ˘ ´ ˘ ´
At the | round earths | i-ma- | gin'd cor- | ners, blow.

The rest of the sonnet contains similar breaks from the meter, as it was Donne's tendency to use natural speech rhythms whenever he felt it necessary for poetic expression.[154]

Donne's approach to the form of this sonnet is quite different from the others we have seen. Predominantly, but not exclusively, Donne articulates the two quatrains of the octave. When he does not, then he has an introductory statement, which is followed by a discourse that encompasses the rest of the octave, or that, at least, crosses the boundary between the two quatrains. In this sonnet, Donne sets the octave without a full stop after the first quatrain. The pause between the two is short, and the material of the second quatrain modifies a word from the first, resulting in a sentence that continues for the entire octave. The scene is that of the Last Judgment, in which the trumpets are sounded, calling the dead from their graves.[155] Donne augments it with a recital of ways that men can die, possibly alluding to the fact that how the body dies is of no concern in the salvation of the soul. Gardner, and later, Pritchard, have seen the number four as operating in this section.[156] The types of death can be grouped into four pairs, which Pritchard asserts correspond to the four angels, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael, who, in turn, are the "intelligences of the major ruling planets."[157] Both Gardner and Pritchard ignore line 5, which also contains a pair of "deaths," and which would destroy their count of four. Whether Donne was thinking of the angels as a general reference or whether he had their images and associations in mind are debatable points. It does seem clear, however, that he groups his deaths into pairs of opposites, an exercise that he obviously enjoyed based on its extensive use in his poetry.

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[154] Winny, Preface to Donne, 46-47.

[155] Gardner has pointed out doctrinal problems with the first quatrain (Gardner, 68). Donne seems to imply that the souls have been in a state of purgatory, a decidedly Catholic belief. This lapse into Catholicism is not surprising given the period in Donne's life from which this poem originates. During 1608-1609, he was not a practicing Catholic, but he also was not yet a practicing Anglican.

There is a definite change of attitude in the sestet: after the speaker has called for the start of the Last Judgment in the octave, he suddenly realizes that his own sinfulness is such that he would be one of the damned. He petitions God to allow him to get his own contrition and purification ("and [let] mee mourne a space") in order, since it would be too late once his death has occurred. He asks God to teach him how to repent his sins while he is still on earth, which fulfills the same function as the sacrament of Communion.

The organization of the sestet defies formal convention because of the extensive use of enjambment and the lack of a full stop until the very end. The first four and a half lines form one idea, but can be divided into two sub-thoughts, almost articulating a quatrain: lines 9-10 and lines 11-12a. The enjambment from line 12 to 13 encompasses another portion of the sentence, which is contained in lines 12b-13a. The final idea comes not in a full couplet, but in the second half of line 13 and all of line 14, and cannot grammatically be separated from the previous structure in lines 12b-13a. The result is that the divisions are not clearly defined. The tercet principle is not entirely at work here, but neither is the quatrain/couplet. Donne once again is breaking out of the limitations of the form that he chose for the expression of his thoughts.

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[156] Gardner, Divine Poems, 67-68.

[157] Pritchard, "Donne's Angels," 349.

Holy Sonnet I: Thou hast made me

Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?
Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
Such terrour, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh;

Onely thou art above, and when towards thee
By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine;
Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.[158]

Donne's sonnet, "Thou hast made me," was one of the six sonnets believed to have been sent to the Earl of Dorset. Gardner has dated this poem as falling between February and August of 1609.[159] This particular poem was not included in the 1633 edition of Donne's poetry, but was first published in 1635. The rhyme scheme, as a mixture of the Petrarchan and Spenserian forms, is typical of Donne: *abba abba cdcd ee*. There are only two lines that require an elision to maintain the syllable count: line 9, internally in "towards;" and in line 14, the word "iron" should be pronounced as one syllable. Donne again uses iambic pentameter, but breaks the rhythm frequently, as in the first line:

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[158] The changes in the text that Britten uses are minimal: line 1, "worke" to "work;" line 5, "any way" to "anyway;" line 7, "terrour" to "terror;" and line 9, "towards" to "t'wards," for an elision.

[159] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xlix.

´ ˘ ´ ˘ ˘ ´ ˘ ´ ˘ ´
Thou hast | made me, | And shall | thy worke | decay?

Irregularities in the meter continue throughout the poem.

Surprisingly, the form falls into the traditional articulations of the Shakespearean sonnet: two quatrains in the octave and a quatrain and couplet in the sestet. This attention to convention is atypical of Donne. There is, however, an internal subdivision in the first quatrain and extensive use of enjambment, both of which break the form somewhat. The first line functions as an introduction to the sonnet, and presents a challenge to God: if God has made him, then why is He letting his creation die?[160] At this point, we cannot be sure if Donne is referring to a physical decay or a spiritual decay, or possibly both. In lines 2-4, he asks God to repair him, which assumes a spiritual problem, because death is coming soon, an event that he welcomes because he is no longer capable of feeling pleasure. The reference to the ability of God to mend a person is echoed in the sermons. Donne believed that there were three resurrections: "In the first, God made us; in the second, God mends us; in the third, God shall perfect us."[161] The second resurrection was the sacrament of Communion, about which Donne said: "If thou have truly given thy self to him in the Sacrament, God hath given thee thy selfe back, so much mended, as that thou hast received thy self and him too."[162] That the speaker asks God to repair him, rather than taking the burden of Communion and contrition on himself, is an indication that Donne was still struggling with the problem of grace not being merited by deed. The second quatrain, lines 5-8, refers again to the decay of the body with the words "dimme eyes" and "feeble flesh," but points out spiritual problems: despair over his past sins and death in the future, both of which cause him terror because they remain unresolved.[163] He is still sinful today and therefore, is on a sure path to Hell. Donne, as in "Oh to vex me," refers to the concept of the eternity of God and his exclusion from it because of his sinful nature.

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[160] Grandsen thinks that the poem, like "Oh my blacke Soule," refers to Donne's illness of 1608. John Donne, 128.

[161] Donne, Sermons, 4 : 93.

[162] Ibid., 7 : 283.

The attitude in the sestet does not represent a significant change from the octave, as Anthony Bellette suggests.[164] Bellette sees a change of mood in the sestet with a shift back to the mood of the octave briefly in lines 11-12, and that the speaker finds release in line 9 when a revelation about the presence of God occurs. I agree that the language is more positive in lines 9-10, but there is also Donne's struggle with the problem of grace to consider. Anglican doctrine holds that grace can not be merited, but has to be given by God, a point of faith that differs significantly with Donne's Catholic upbringing. The second half of line 9 and all of line 10, points this doctrine out, perhaps with a touch of indignation. As well, as with so many of these sonnets, there is no indication that God has acted upon the speaker, or that the speaker would accept God's action upon him. The first two lines of the sestet are an affirmation that a person should strive only for God, but this does not imply that the speaker will act upon this belief. In fact, the speaker seems to take a passive role: only when God gives him grace can he rise to Him, but sin is so tempting that the speaker is unable to break himself of it. Only two things may be able to help him,

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[163] John J. Pollock finds a pun in the words "dimme eyes." He reads them as "demise" which in Donne's time meant "the conveyance or transfer of an estate by will or lease, and action which usually occurs at the time of one's death." Pollock, "Another Donne Pun," American Notes & Queries (New Haven) 16 (1978): 83.

[164] Bellette, "Significant Form," 335.

God's grace, and if God will draw the reluctant speaker to Him with great force. At the end of the poem, we are left with no resolution of the opening question, why is God allowing the speaker to rot spiritually and physically, nor any sense that God gives him grace in the end. We get a glimmer of hope in the final couplet — God may be able to save him — but this hope is certainly not a match for the darkness of the octave. The problem is not resolved, only postponed, and even possibly deepened by the speaker's passive attitude.

Holy Sonnet X: Death be not proud

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.

Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better then thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.[165]

The final sonnet that Britten chose for his song cycle dates from between February and August 1609 and was one of the first poems of Donne's published.[166] The rhyme scheme is typical of Donne, with three internally-rhymed quatrains and a final rhyming couplet: *abba abba cddc ee*. In the presentation of his thoughts, Donne is faithful to the form that the rhyme scheme indicates, which, as we have seen with other of his sonnets, is somewhat atypical. There are two lines that require elision to fit into a ten-syllable line, lines 9 and 11, but these elisions are not indicated by Donne. The meter, iambic pentameter, is very irregular, with several reversed feet and spondees. Many of the metric changes that are required in this sonnet can be traced to Donne's punctuation. For example, in line 3, the words "For, those," with commas separating them, would be read differently than "For those" without punctuation, ´ ´ as opposed to ˘ ´.

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[165] As in the previous sonnet, the changes that Britten makes to the text are minor: line 5, removes the final comma; line 10, "sicknesse" to "sickness;" and line 12, "then" to "than."

[166] Gardner, "Holy Sonnets," xlix.

The subject of the sonnet is the rebuke of the fear of death. In the first quatrain, the speaker tells death that although man fears him, he cannot destroy man because of the promise of the Resurrection and Christ's sacrifice. Man does not die, but lives on in Heaven. In the next four lines, the speaker tells him that he is like sleep, and that men actually derive more pleasure from him because of this similarity. Donne expounds upon this concept by stating that even the best men, i.e., those whose consciences are clear, find rest and deliverance in death.[167] The quatrain of the sestet begins a more aggressive attack on death. The speaker tells death that he does not act of his own power, but is controlled by Fate and even humans, and that in actuality, he exists in vile things, such as poison, war and sickness. Indeed, the sleep that death brings can be imitated by earthly things, so death should not feel so important in the life of man. The final couplet drives the point home: after death, man is taken to heaven so that death does not triumph over the soul in the end. And further, when the Last Judgment occurs and the soul is reunited with its body, death will no longer exist.

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[167] Gardner thinks that this might be a reference to the old adage, "Only the good die young." Divine Poems, 69.

This sonnet is possibly the most positive of all the Holy Sonnets, and yet there are some scholars who find its triumph over death "shrill and unconvincing."[168] Donne was obsessed with death, particularly in the final years of his life when his own body began to show the natural signs of aging. Donne even posed for his own death effigy, shrouded in the wrappings of a funereal robe. The obsession began early in Donne's life, potentially as soon as 1602, following the demise of his career with his marriage to Anne, and may have been linked to the depression that Donne suffered in those years. Donne often referred to the end of his career as a death, and there is some evidence that he may have contemplated the suicide that he wrote about in Biathanatos, hence the reference to "desperate men" in the the poem (*l.* 9).[169]

Donne clearly considered death to be an adversary, which may account for the desperate and, at times, hysterical tone of many of the sonnets.[170] There was a real and present fear that he would die without having reached the state of perfection that he needed to ultimately overcome death: "The possibility that God might leave his soul in the company of the other damned souls and 'never thinke more of that soule, never have more to doe with it,' was the source of great spiritual agony to Donne."[171] Sonnets such as "Oh my blacke Soule," "Thou hast made me," "O might those sighes and teares," "Oh to vex me," and "Batter my heart," show a speaker in the throes of despair and hopelessness because of his sinfulness. This sonnet, though it may be unconvincing, is an attempt to defy his fear of death by confronting the reality of death.

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[168] Low reports this fact, but unfortunately does not indicate his sources. Love's Architecture, 65.

[169] Winny, Preface to Donne, 25.

[170] Graham Parry remarks: "The idea of living on a grave is congenial to Donne." Seventeenth-Century Poetry, 67.

[171] Husain, Dogmatic and Mystical Theology, 116. The quote also includes a portion of a sermon by Donne from LXXX Sermons, 76.

After his ordination, Donne's fight within himself about the horrors of death subsided as he began to realize the importance of Christ's resurrection in the death of death:

> If I can say (and my conscience doe not tell me that I belye mine own state) if I can say, that the blood of my Saviour runs in my veines, that the breath of his spirit quickens all my purposes, that all my deaths have their Resurrection, all my sins their remorse, all my rebellions their reconciliation, I will harken no more after this question as it is intended *de morte naturali*, of a naturall death, I know I must die that death, what care I? nor *de morte spirituali*, the death of sin, I know, I doe, and shall die so; why despair I? but I will finde out another death, *mortem raptus*, a death of rapture, and of extasie, and that death which St. Paul died more than once. The death which *S. Gregory* speaks of, *Divina Contemplatio quoddam sepulchrum animae*, the contemplation of God, and heaven, is a kinde of buriall, and sepulchre, and rest of the soule, and in this death of rapture, and extasie, in this death of the Contemplation of my interest in my Saviour, I shall finde myself and all my sins enterred, and entombed in his wounds, and like a Lily in Paradise, out of red earth, I shall see my soul rise out of his blade, in a candor, and in an innocence contracted there, acceptable in the sight of his Father.[172]

In the final couplet, which alludes to the supreme triumph of Christianity over complete and utter decay, Donne finally resolves his crisis with death. In a sermon from 1621, Donne states: "Death shall triumph over me God knows how many generations, till I shall be no more, till that Angel come, who shall say, and swear, that time shall be no more."[173] In other words, Donne realized that death would win over him and that he would cease to exist bodily until the end of time, but the promise of triumph over death given to him through the resurrection of Christ was the reality, not the death itself.

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[172] Donne, LXXX Sermons, 27; quoted in Itrait Husain, The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1948; reprint, 1966), 104-105.

[173] Donne, quoted in Grandsen, John Donne, 136.

CHAPTER VI

BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S DONNE SONNETS: THE MEANING BEHIND THE FORM

Premiere and Reception

Britten's Donne cycle had its premiere at Wigmore Hall in London on November 22, 1945 at a concert to mark the 250th anniversary of the death of Purcell. The program consisted mainly of works by Purcell, including the verse anthem "My beloved spake," his "My song shall be alway of the loving kindness of the Lord," the Elegy upon the Death of Queen Mary, the anthem "Why do the Heathen?" and in honor of the day, the Ode for St Cecilia's Day. Britten's songs were received warmly, but not with the fervor that marked the first public hearing of the Michelangelo set. The London Times critic notes Britten's obvious inspiration in Purcell, and that four of the songs were particularly outstanding: "Oh my blacke Soule," "Since she whom I lov'd," "At the round earth's imagined corners," and "Death be not proud."[1] The reviewer did allow that not all of the songs made a favorable impression. In particular he cites "Batter my heart," as raising "the question whether what might be called his scherzo treatment of words is as effective in fact as it is ingenious in conception."[2] It appears that Britten could not shake the charges of cleverness that had been levelled against him during his collaborations with W. H. Auden, no matter how far afield from those times his style might seem. The critic concluded his review with praise, however, declaring that "the cycle triumphs by its sustained intensity."[3] William McNaught's review in the Musical Times contained his usual questionable praises. In the same paragraph he notes that the songs make an impressive showing, but questions whether the music competes with Donne's strong poetry and suggests that they are not up to the standard set by the Michelangelo cycle:

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[1] "Purcell Celebration: Mr Britten's Tribute," review of The Holy Sonnets of John Donne by Benjamin Britten, Times (London), 24 November 1945.

[2] Ibid.

> Of their general character it can be said at once that they were quite individual in their musical colouring, their declamation, their storm and calm, and that the total of their incidents impressive. But there is need of closer acquaintance to discover how far they add a helping or a competing significance to Donne's outpourings, and what it means that their musical outlines seemed to be less clear-cut than those of the Michelangelo Sonnets and the Serenade.[4]

The noncommittal attitude taken by the critics without doubt had some effect on Britten, although he never indicated as much. Britten's letters following the premiere contain little about the cycle, focusing primarily on the Purcell realizations that had been included on other nights of the celebration and that he and Pears were performing during a tour of France. Britten wrote to Ralph Hawkes in December 1945 that the Purcell concerts "really went well and we are developing ambitious plans about a long series of Purcell realisations by me!"[5] He did mention the sonnets in a letter to Mary Behrend, the dedicatee of the second string quartet that had its premiere the night before on November 21, explaining that although the quartet was well-received, the Donne sonnets made a greater impact on the audience: "People don't understand it as they do the Donne, but that is because those wonderful words help so."[6] He does not appear to have dispatched the same bevy of letters to friends telling them of the success as he did after the premiere of the Michelangelo sonnets, however. The reasons for this are several: 1) the Michelangelo sonnets were written in America among friends who shared their first hearing in private, so that the success of the songs was of concern to a larger number of people because of their shared experience; 2) moreover, they were the first cycle written for and to Pears, so Britten's anticipation of the event was very high; 3) Britten was inordinately busy at the time the premiere of the Donne cycle was to take place; and 4) Britten had been suffering from negative press at the time of the Michelangelo premiere.

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[3] Ibid.

[4] William McNaught, "London Concerts: Purcell Britten," review of The Holy Sonnets of John Donne by Benjamin Britten, Musical Times 87 (1946): 60.

[5] Britten, Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976, ed. Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Letter no. 514, dated [3 December 1945]. Britten published several sets of realisations of Purcell, clearly with the intention to initiate a series under his and Pears's editorship. The project continued sporadically throughout Britten's life.

The premiere of Peter Grimes in June had taken more time than Britten imagined possible, with the result that he felt behind on his production of new works.[7] The Purcell celebration, the organization and preparation of which required frequent visits to London, was then followed by a French tour utilizing the same program. After the premiere of the Donne cycle, Britten was looking ahead to completing work on The Rape of Lucretia, which had first been proposed around the time he was finishing the Donne songs. Unfortunately, several commissions kept him from that score, including the incidental music for The Dark Tower, and The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra. Britten became rather impatient to get on with the business of the opera, as evidenced by a letter to

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[6] Britten, Ibid., Letter no. 513, to Hubert Hales, dated 8 October 1945.

[7] Britten had a set working routine and did not like to depart from it. When he was unable to write because of business or tours, he became anxious.

Basil Wright in 1946: "Excuse brief scrawl, but Lucretia is patiently waiting to be raped – on my desk."[8] With all the work to be done, his usual letter writing fell off significantly, with the result that Britten's attitude about the premiere of the Donne cycle remains undisclosed.

Critical Studies

In comparison to the setting of the Michelangelo Sonnets, this cycle has received greater attention in the literature. There is, of course, an overlapping of sources for both cycles. The five overviews of Britten's music or the vocal music also contain analyses or descriptions of the Donne cycle with the same biases or problems as discussed for the Michelangelo set.[9] Several of the sources, however, discuss the Donne sonnets in more detail. Peter Pears includes more information about the background of the Donne cycle in his article than for the Michelangelo Sonnets, and also describes each of the songs as opposed to a few select ones. Likewise, Peter Evans delves into each of the songs, possibly because he considers this work: "Britten's biggest song cycle since Our Hunting Fathers."[10] Whittall, in contrast, centers his discussion around the final song of the cycle,

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[8] Britten, Letter to Basil Wright, early 1946, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, Benjamin Britten: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 232.

[9] Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: a Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists, ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London: Rockliff, 1952), 69-71; Peter Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979); Arnold Whittall, The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Robert Gene Brewster, "The Relationship Between Poetry and Music in the Original Solo-Vocal Works of Benjamin Britten Through 1965" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1967); Graham Johnson, "Voice and Piano," in The Britten Companion, ed. Christopher Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 308-328.

[10] Evans, Music of Britten, 355.

"Death be not proud," much as he did with the second song in his discussion of the Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo. For the remainder of the songs, he merely gives their key centers, with little information regarding how he arrived at his conclusions. Whittall does include a brief discourse on the influence of Purcell's music on the Donne cycle, but Evans provides actual examples from Purcell's *oeuvre* for study.

There are several essays and dissertations devoted solely to Britten's Holy Sonnets of John Donne. David Brown stresses the importance of form in the cycle, asserting that the songs are arranged according to a dramatic plan.[11] His ideas are interesting, but he addresses the cycle as a whole rather than examining the operative principles in each song, where the essence of a text-music relationship must, by necessity, be found. Rembert Herbert's dissertation from 1974 contains a number of errors and is generally weak in the musical analyses.[12] For example, he states that Britten gives the melodies in "What if this present?" some of the "most distorted shapes and vicious leaps of the cycle," because of the reference to "horrid shapes" in the text.[13] These observations do not hold in an examination of the melodic line. First, several of the other songs have more angular lines and larger leaps. Second, Britten does not use a "distorted shape" in setting the words in question. The analyses given throughout Herbert's dissertation are full of such inaccuracies and naïve observations, rendering this source almost entirely useless. The second dissertation, by William White, presents an interpretation of the poetry and music for the performer.[14] White includes a great deal of biographical information on Britten, as well as scansions of the poems, but the analyses of the songs received little attention. Barbara Docherty also addresses the relationship between poetic meter and melodic rhythm in the Donne cycle in two articles: "Sentence into Cadence: The Word-setting of Tippett and Britten" and "Syllogism and Symbol: Britten, Tippett and English Text."[15] The relationship between poetic meter and the rhythm of the songs is important, but is of less significance to the present study.

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[11] David Brown, "Stimulus and Form in Britten's Work," Music and Letters 39 (1958): 281-226.

[12] Rembert Herbert, "An Analysis of Nine Holy Sonnets of John Donne Set to Music by Benjamin Britten" (Ph.D. diss., American University, 1974).

[13] Ibid., 27.

The need for a discussion of Britten's musical response to the Donne texts is evident. The literature has tended to focus on the musical end of the songs rather than on the phenomenon of textual-musical fusion, or musico-poetic form. Before we turn our attention to the songs themselves, however, several influences on Britten's style at this time must be explored in light of the close relationship between text and music that he achieved in the cycle.

Influences on the Cycle

Britten and Purcell

In a controversial article, Hans Keller has described the relationship between Henry Purcell and Britten as a "superego identification," asserting further that "Purcell . . . is

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[14] William R. White, "A Performer's Analysis of Benjamin Britten's The Holy Sonnets of John Donne" (D.M.A. diss., University of Texas-Austin, 1988).

[15] Barbara Docherty, "Sentence into Cadence: The Word-setting of Tippett and Britten," Tempo 166 (September 1988): 2-11; "Syllogism and Symbol: Britten, Tippett and English Text." Contemporary Music Review 5 (1989): 37-63. The second article is an expansion of the first.

Britten's father."[16] Of course, we cannot prove this claim with any certainty, nor do we necessarily want to think of their relationship on these terms, but the influence of Purcell's music on Britten is very much evident.

Britten first became involved in Purcell's music in the late 1930s-early 1940s in a search for material to perform on recitals with Peter Pears. Pears and Britten had formed a recital partnership in 1938, so that by the time they moved to America, arriving in May 1939, Britten was Pears's regular accompanist. The first noted concert that included some of Britten's realizations of the continuo parts to Purcell's songs took place in Riverhead, New York on November 19, 1939, shortly after the couple's arrival in Amityville.[17] Britten worked on realizations of Purcell's music throughout the 1940s, gathering a significant collection, much of which was published in the late 1940s.[18] Indeed, he continued throughout most of his life to edit Purcell's music for publication and performance, though not with the same rate of speed as during the first years of his partnership with Pears.[19] His last realization was of Purcell's opera The Fairy Queen, in

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[16] Hans Keller, "Britten and Mozart: A Challenge in the Form of Variations on an Unfamiliar Theme," Music and Letters 29 (1948): 17.

[17] A Britten Source Book, comp. John Evans, Philip Reed and Paul Wilson (Aldeburgh, Suffolk: The Britten Estate Limited for the Britten-Pears Library, 1987), 42.

[18] Henry Purcell, Orpheus Britannicus: Seven Songs, ed. Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947); Harmonia Sacra: The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947); Harmonia Sacra: Three Divine Hymns, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947); Harmonia Sacra: Saul and the Witch at Endor, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947); Orpheus Britannicus: Six Songs, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1948); Harmonia Sacra: Job's Curse, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1950); Dido and Aeneas, ed. Britten and Imogen Holst (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1951).

[19] Purcell, Orpheus Britannicus: Suite of Songs, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1956); Orpheus Britannicus: Five Songs, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes 1960); Harmonia Sacra: Two Divine Hymns and Alleluia, ed.

1967, which was recorded in 1972, with Britten conducting and Pears, of course, in prominent roles as Phoebus and Coridon.[20]

Although they are very much in Britten's style, the Holy Sonnets of John Donne gained much from Britten's study of Purcell's music, both in matters of text setting and form. It is unclear whether Britten set out deliberately to compose songs that could be juxtaposed with Purcell's songs in a celebratory recital of Purcell's music, but the influence is apparent. Much of what has been said about Purcell's songs is true also of Britten's. One of Purcell's significant achievements was "a change from a fairly restrained [as in the works of Matthew Locke and Pelham Humfrey] to a more flamboyant, rhetorical style."[21] This quote accurately describes Purcell's approach to recitative, in which he sought to match "rhythm and melody to the rhetorical and emotional quality of the words."[22] In other words, Purcell was attempting to convey the meaning of the text, much as Britten would do in his songs. To accomplish this, Purcell used various devices, particularly with regard to rhythm, melodic shape, and the tension between consonance and dissonance, in imitation of the Italian style.

Purcell's expression of the text in the music can be seen on two levels: 1) the surface or objective level, and 2) the emotional or subjective level. In the first category belong

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Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1960); Orpheus Britannicus: Six Duets, ed. Britten and Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1961); The Fairy Queen, ed. Britten and Imogen Holst (London: Faber Music, 1967);

[20] Purcell, The Fairy Queen, Benjamin Britten, conductor, SET 499-500, Decca, 1972.

[21] Ian Spink, English Song: Dowland to Purcell (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1974), 204.

[22] Ibid., 214.

word or text painting techniques, a favorite device in the Baroque. Purcell not only shaped melodic motives into representations of the text (for instance, a rising line at the word "high"), but also used dissonance and consonance to punctuate certain words (as for example, a dissonance on the word "pain"). Rhythm, as well, plays an important part in word painting. The emotional interpretation of a text through the music is more difficult to ascertain, but certain characteristics of Purcell's music stand out as belonging to this category. First is the use of unprepared dissonance, false relations, and extreme leaps in the melodic line, all of which impart a particular shape to it and give it a particular sound that can be associated with the emotion of the text. Second is the rhythmic setting of the text which either follows or destroys the accent of the verse, both of which serve to create a meaning for the text. As well, the use of certain rhythms create an atmosphere in which the text operates, such as disjointed rhythms for military or war themes.

Britten makes use of several Purcellian devices in the Donne sonnets, inspired, perhaps, by the Baroque texts. He exploits word painting in this cycle to some degree, which he did not do in the Michelangelo set. For example, in "Thou hast made me," at the words "Onely thou art above," Britten uses a rising line to indicate the concept of "above." He uses this device judiciously, however, ignoring some opportunities for word painting in favor of a more abstract, or deeper, impression of the text. Britten frequently juxtaposes the major and minor third, creating false relations, and unprepared dissonances and leaps play a role in shaping his melodic line. Most important in these particular songs is the use of rhythm to set the atmosphere for the text. Purcell does this on a small-scale in his songs, but Britten carries the concept further, permeating the texture with a dominant figure that persists for the entire song. There are, as well, several examples in these songs of

Britten's having used specific gestures taken from Purcell's songs, as Peter Evans has discovered.[23]

Peter Grimes

Much has been made of the influence that the composition of Peter Grimes had on the works that immediately followed it. Humphrey Carpenter goes so far as to call the Donne cycle "an epilogue to the opera."[24] Certainly, the organization of the music for an entire drama had a profound effect on Britten's style and formal sensibilities. Opera, by nature, requires some degree of musical representation of the various characters, whether this is accomplished by the type of arias that a character sings or by the atmosphere which is created by the music whenever a certain character is on stage or when the character is to be remembered by the audience. The manipulation of this element of opera defines the dramatic intent as interpreted by the composer. Britten, in particular, became masterful at setting up the drama and its implications through his music, sung or otherwise. Peter Grimes was the first experiment for Britten at expressing a dark and non-satirical subject in which much of the psychological background was left unstated in the libretto (as, for example, the moral judgments of the village implied by the hymns that emanate from the church as Ellen discovers bruises on the new apprentice).[25] Britten seemingly honed his technique of dramatic expression of psychological undercurrents in a text through his struggles in the composition of Peter Grimes. In a letter to Peter Pears in January 1944, he wrote,

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[23] Evans, Music of Britten, 349-351.

[24] Humphrey Carpenter, Benjamin Britten: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 227.

[25] His earlier choices of texts (up until roughly 1940) were very much influenced by Auden, or were by Auden, and therefore, were reflective of Auden's satirical nature.

> Well, at last I have broken the spell and got down to work on P.G.. I have been at it for two days solidly and got the greater part of the Prologue done. It is very difficult to keep that amount of recitative moving, without going round & round in circles, I find – but I think I've managed it. It is also difficult to keep it going fast & yet paint moods & characters abit.[26]

This ability to capture the drama of the text and imply elements that are unspoken would serve him well in the composition of song. After Peter Grimes his songs and song cycles become more operatic and less song-like through his use of musical portrayal of the speaker's thoughts.

Analytical Procedures

As with the Michelangelo cycle, a study of Britten's Donne cycle with a view toward identifying the effect of the musical form upon the poetic form, raises several issues: 1) the articulation of the large-scale divisions of the poetic form (i.e., octave, sestet, quatrain, tercet) in the music, or the lack thereof; 2) the potential of the musical setting to make connections between lines of the text that might not otherwise have existed; 3) the potential of the musical setting to follow or imitate the thought processes of the poem or to highlight a particular aspect of the poem; and 4) the placement of the return in the music, when one occurs. Again, these issues form the basis of the analytical procedures that I undertake in the ensuing discussion of Britten's musical settings of the sonnets.

Although each song in the cycle has its own textual and musical problems to solve, the issues of coincidence between musical form and poetic form as outlined are common to all. In the discussion of each song, therefore, I present only the findings that are pertinent to the uncovering of the musico-poetic form. Thus, where appropriate, the analyses are conducted on various levels of the form-defining musical elements, including melody, harmony, pitch, timbre, and dynamics: 1) the macro-level, or the large-scale musical form, and 2) the micro-level, or the phrase and motivic structures.

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[26] Britten, Letters from a Life, Letter no. 446, dated 10 January 1944.

General Techniques in Britten's Donne Sonnets

The most striking elements of Britten's Donne cycle are the ostinato-like accompaniments that Peter Pears calls "affections."[27] Pears elaborates, saying

> Characteristically, in these Sonnets as in the others, Britten takes a rhythmic pattern or figuration or harmonic scheme, and works it out by logical balance and timed phrasing. In each one the tension is held by the persistent use of these patterns, unswervingly developed.[28]

In these brief statements, Pears perceptively captures the essence of Britten's approach to Donne's poems. Everything arises out of a response to a particular image, or images, in the text. Britten takes an image central to the meaning of the text, creates a musical metaphor for it, and then spins his material from it. The metaphor has two distinct functions that operate on two levels. At the surface level, it creates an environment or atmosphere in which the text can unfold. On a deeper level, the manipulation of the musical metaphor in the melody and accompaniment influences the formal design, so that ultimately, the image of the text suggests the musical form. By selecting from the poem an image or set of images to portray, Britten imposes a musical interpretation on the poem that may or may not correspond to traditional explications of that poem. The analyses of the songs, to which we now turn, attempt to define the image or images from which the musical metaphor arises, and seek to uncover how the choice of metaphor generates the musical form, and thus interprets the poem.

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[27] Pears, "Vocal Music," 70.

[28] Ibid.

Oh my blacke Soule

Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned
By sicknesse, death's herald, and champion;
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled,
Or like a thiefe, which till death's doome be read,
Wisheth himselfe deliver'd from prison;
But damn'd and hal'd to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.

Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
Oh make thyselfe with holy mourning blacke,
And red with blushing as thou art with sinne;
Or wash thee in Christ's blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white.

The opening measures of Britten's Donne cycle has been characterized as one of the bleakest and most despairing of his entire output.[29] Britten achieves this atmosphere through rhythmically persistent F# octaves in the piano, suggestive of a funeral knell, and through a sense of desperation in the vocal line, expressed by the use of extreme leaps (see Example 58). In the case of this song, the F# provides the material for both the portrayal of the image of death in the song and for the musical form, which presents a very different view of the poetic form than that found in traditional scholarship.

An important image presented in this first poem of the cycle is sickness. Sickness is itself an agent of destruction, or death, affecting either bodily or spiritual health. Allusion to bodily illness is made in the first couplet by an analogy to death, illness being its "herald and champion." The idea of spiritual illness, or illness of the soul, is perhaps less

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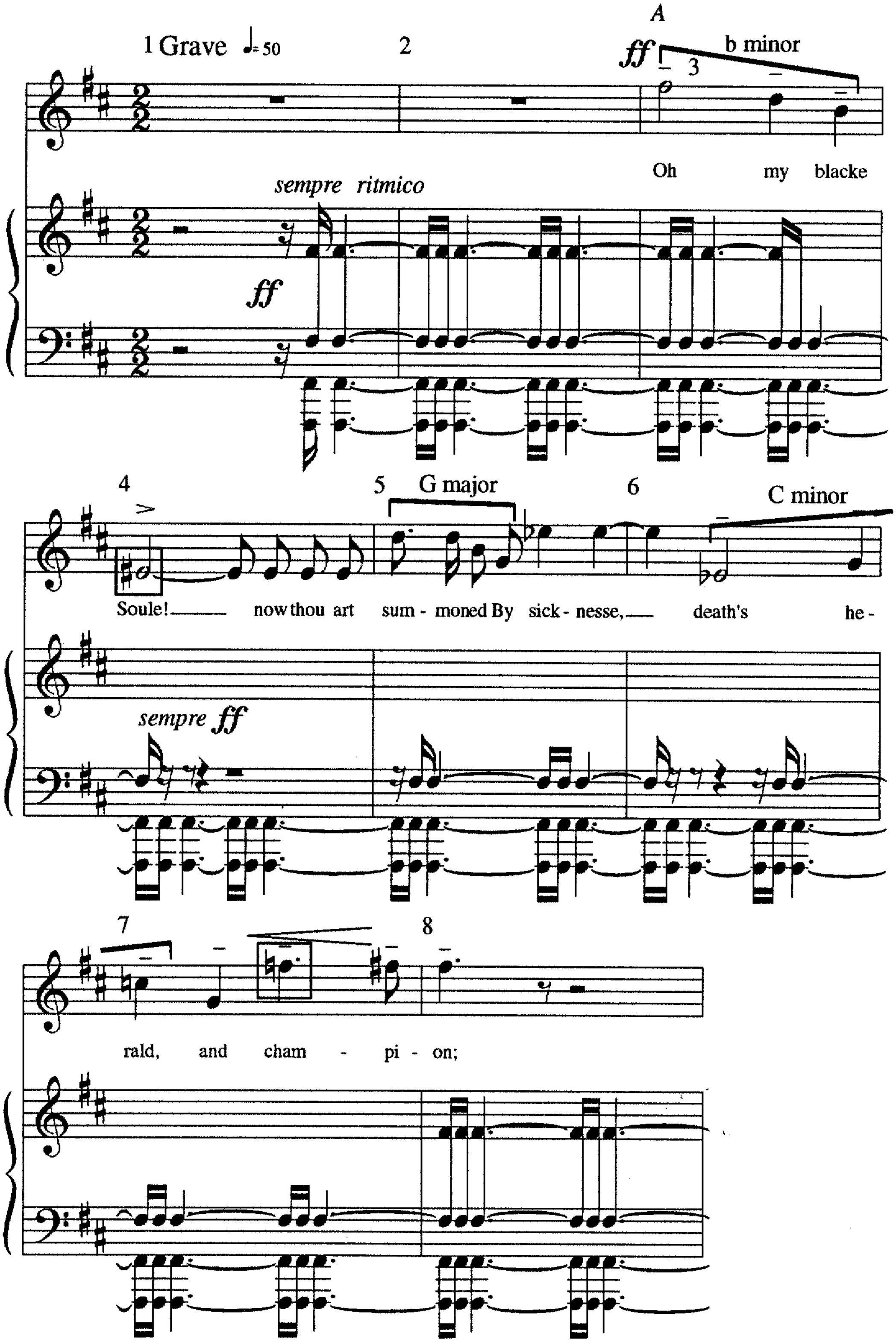
[29] Whittall, Music of Britten and Tippett, 104.

Example 58: "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 1-8.


1 Grave ♩.= 50
2
A
ff
b minor
3
Oh my blacke
sempre ritmico
ff
4
5 G major
6
C minor
Soule! now thou art sum - moned By sick - nesse, death's he -
sempre ff
7
8
rald, and cham - pi - on;

apparent, but has more validity with regard to the musical setting. The word "death" has a double meaning within the sonnet: physical death – or ceasing to exist, or a condition of being without grace. Sickness of the soul, then, essentially denotes a state of sinfulness. At the outset, Britten's musical atmosphere underscores the opening image of a "blacke Soule" – a soul in sinfulness, out of balance with its creator. Incompatible rhythmic accents, angular melodic lines and an initial tonal instability effect a musical disorder that seeks for resolution.

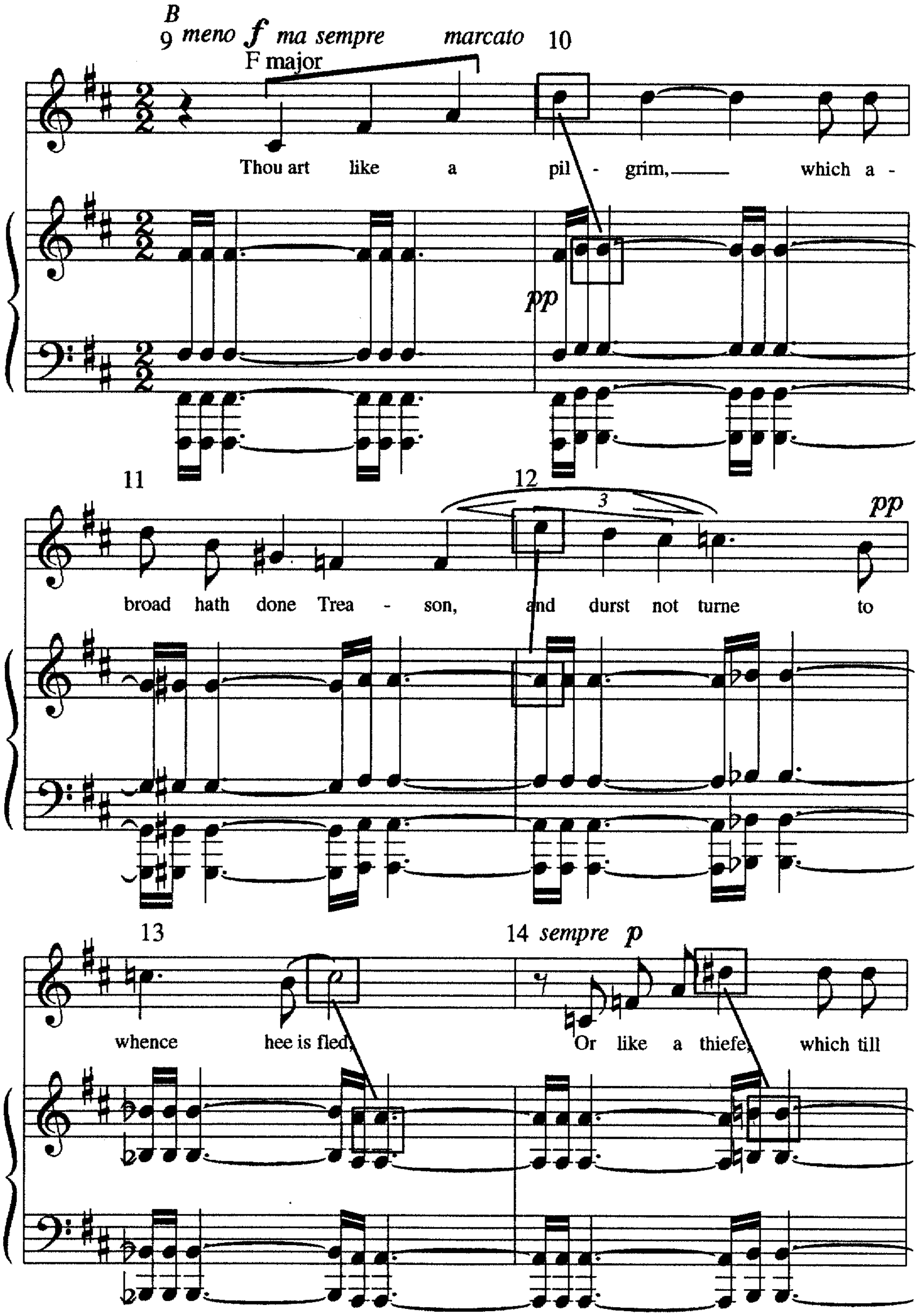
Much of the disorder in the first section of the song, which comprises lines 1 and 2 of the poem, is borne by the persistent F♯ in the accompaniment (refer to Example 58). Although in the opening measures it seems to be presented in a rhythm that accents strong beats of the measure, the entrance of the voice on the true downbeat destroys its rhythmic sensibility. Moreover, until the voice enters, the function of the F♯ is open to question. The vocal line departs from an F♯, outlines a B-minor triad, and ultimately arrives on E♯, the leading tone to F♯. The F♯, then, is seen in two different roles at the outset, creating a sense of tonal instability: 1) as dominant in a B-minor context, suggested by the B-minor triad; and 2) as a potential tonal level, as asserted by the E♯ and the vocal line in this section, which departs from an F♯ and returns to that F♯ at the end of section, suggesting that F♯ is a tonal reference.

The continuation of the vocal line after the arrival on E♯ presents outlines of triads that confuse the issue and create dissonance with the F♯. First the melodic line outlines a G-major triad in which the D is stressed, followed by a C-minor triad in which E♭ is given particular prominence. As the vocal line for this section finally cadences E♯ (spelled as F♮) to F♯, the role of the F♯ seems defined; Britten destroys this tonal security, however, in the following section. The definition of the role of the F♯ is only gradually revealed, although throughout the process, one function or another cannot be affixed.

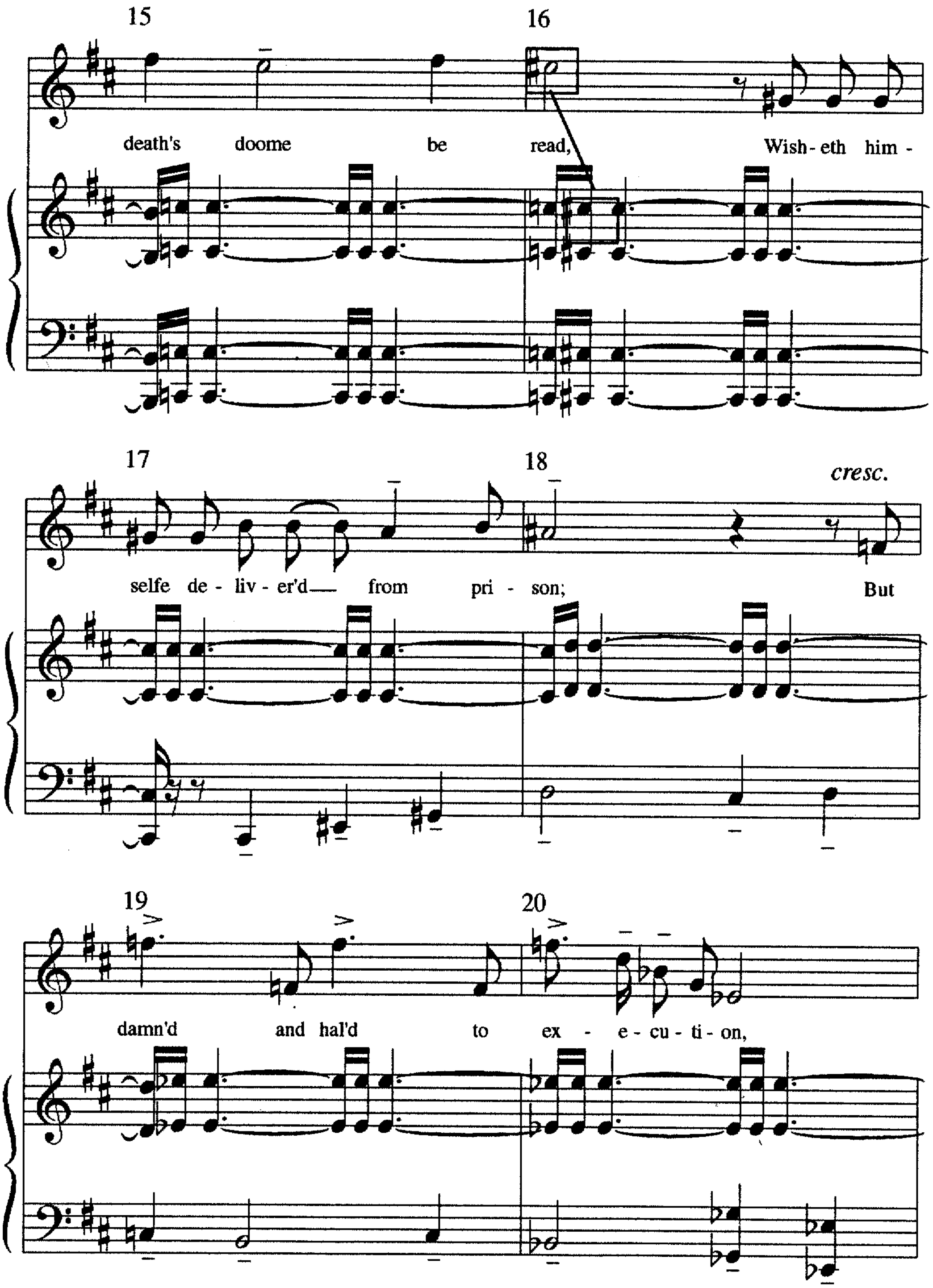
As the first section ends and the second begins, an F#-minor triad outlined in the vocal emphasizes the role of F# as a tonal center (see Example 59). The gesture of return in the vocal line at the end of the first section can now be viewed as a return to a tonal level. With this accomplished, the bass line moves away in a gradual unfolding of a Phrygian scale fragment. The tonal orientation is somewhat lost, intensifying the atmosphere of unsettledness and instability that Britten sets at the beginning. The scale fragment, however, does give some indication of the direction in which the song is moving. If F# is considered the point of departure, or tonic of the scale, then certain Phrygian qualities result, supported by the fact that the specifically Phrygian scale tones occur as goal notes, as evident in their duration. Only a portion of the scale is presented, so that even this direction is only partially completed. Once the line reaches a sustained D#, Phrygian elements are no longer in control and a new direction results.

As the scale evolves, the vocal line again moves in and out of consonance with the pitches in the bass line. There are, however, certain correspondences that must be noted. Britten uses fifths and thirds to create momentary consonant arrivals: in m. 10, D in the vocal line corresponds with a G in the scale; in m. 12, an E in the vocal line occurs over an A; in m. 13, an arrival on C occurs with a backtracking to A; in m. 14, a third occurs between B in the bass and D# in the vocal line; and finally, in m. 16, C# and E# coincide, giving the dissonant E# of the first section a consonant context. Each of these pitches, with the exception of the A and C# at mm. 12 and 16, respectively, appeared in the vocal line of the first section. The G and D were part of a G-major triad; the C was part of a C-minor triad; the B part of a B-minor triad; and the D# in its enharmonic spelling, E♭, was part of the C-minor triad. These pitches, then, play an important role in the construction of the melody, and may have implications with regard to the text.

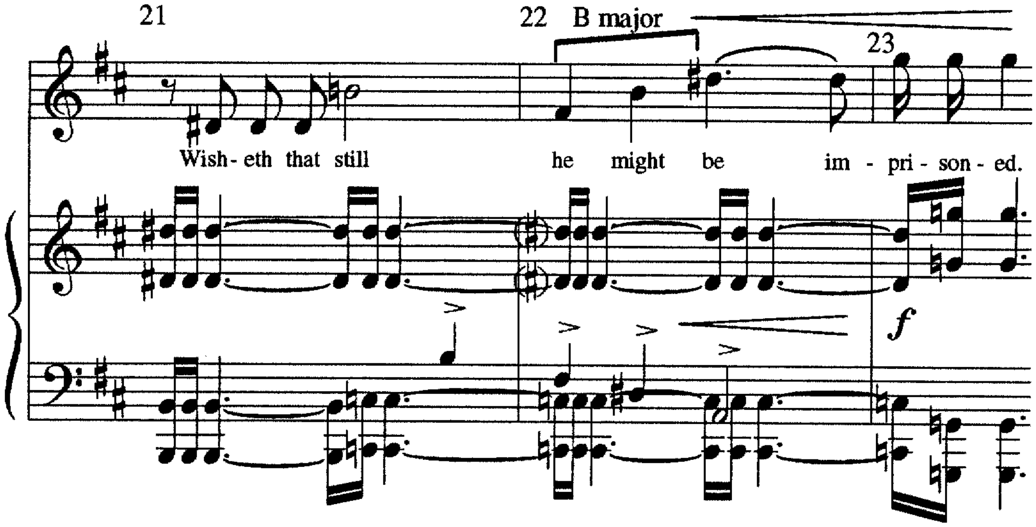
Example 59: "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 9-23.


B
9
meno f ma sempre marcato
F major
10
Thou art like a pil - grim, which a -
pp
11
12
3
pp
broad hath done Trea - son, and durst not turne to
13
14 sempre p
whence hee is fled,
Or like a thiefe, which till

Example 59: "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 9-23, cont.


15
16
death's doome be read, Wish-eth him-
17
18
cresc.
selfe de-liv-er'd from pri-son; But
19
20
damn'd and hal'd to ex-e-cu-ti-on,

Example 59: "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 9-23, cont.

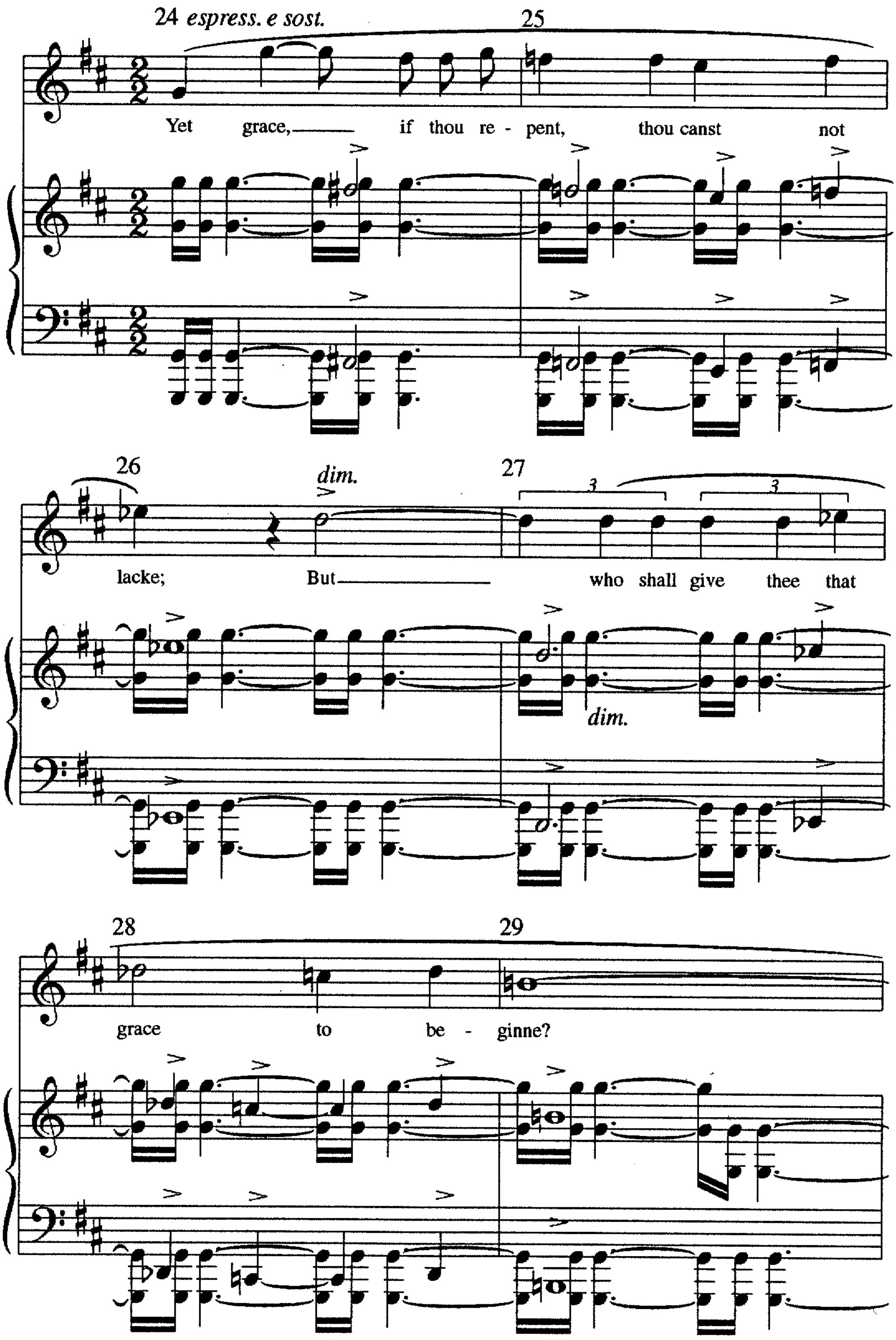


The role of the F# receives attention again in mm. 15-16 in the vocal line. The pitch F# moves to an E, suggesting an interpretation in the context of B, but then a return to F# initiates a move to E#, which again asserts F# as a tonic. This pattern of whole steps and half-steps returns at prominent structural pillars in the remainder of the song, all of which make a contribution to a resolution of the question of the function of the F#. When the scale fragment arrives on D in m. 18, the left hand of the accompaniment takes up the whole step/half-step pattern – now reversed– from the vocal line in mm. 15-16, but at the level of D. As the octave D moves to an E♭ in m. 19, the bass line begins a second transposition of the inverted pattern at the level of C. The linear juxtaposition of D and E♭ presents a conflict that has only been hinted at previously. In the first section, D was used as the minor third in the context of B and as the fifth of a G-major triad; E♭, which is D# in its enharmonic spelling, was seen in the context of C, but also in a B-major context in the first part of this second section. Here, the E♭ is again placed into the context of C, but in m. 21, it is respelled as D#, the third of a B-major triad. This subtle interplay between B-major and B-minor gives the F# a definite function.

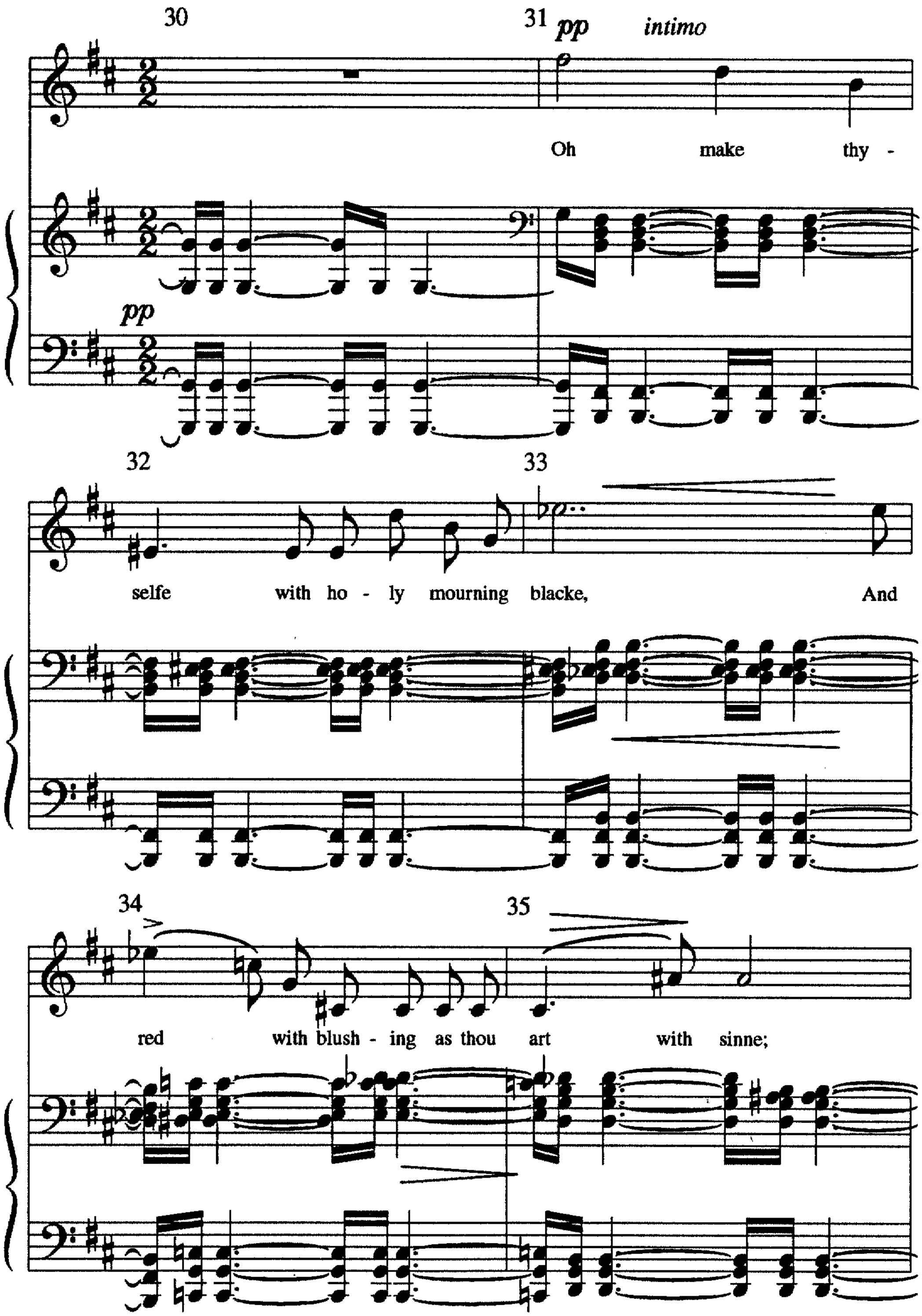
At m. 21, when the E♭ is respelled as D♯, Britten places it within the context of a B-major triad that is outlined in the vocal line. Underneath the triad in the accompaniment, the right hand persists with a D♯ against C in the left hand. The dual definition of E♭/D♯, then, is placed into conflict. This conflict resolves into another one, however, as all elements move a G♮, a pitch that had received attention in the melodic line of the first section and in the unfolding of the scale fragment. Britten prolongs the G♮ in the accompaniment for eight measures as the vocal line gradually unfolds a descending chromatic scale through a four-note pattern based on the vocal line at mm. 15-16 (see Example 60). After the vocal line reaches B♮ in m. 29, the octave Gs persist for one measure more, and finally resolve as an upper tendency tone to F♯, coinciding with the return to the *A* section and the absorption of the F♯ into a B-minor triad, thus clarifying B minor as the tonal reference (see Example 61). The important dissonances in the vocal line from the first section, as well as some that occurred in the second, are now placed into the B-minor triads of the accompaniment as well as the vocal line, highlighting their discord. In the final measures, as F♮ resolves to F♯ in the vocal line, two important resolutions occur in the accompaniment: G to F♯ and C to B, giving the G and C triads outlined in the first section a context as upper tendency tones in B. In the end, only the B and F♯ remain, solidifying the role of F♯ within the B context and bringing to an end what has been a large-scale dominant-to-tonic gesture in the song.

The chief protagonists in the unfolding of the tonal conflict of the song, D♯/E♭, and E♯/F♮ are also used to create a network of relationships between certain key words of the text. With the E♯/F♮, Britten gathers words referring to the speaker's soul or its condition: "Soule" (*l.* 1), "read" (*l.* 5), "damn'd and hal'd" (*l.* 7), "selfe" (*l.* 11), and "soules" (*l.* 14). The association of "read" must be considered in the context of the line from which it is taken. In line 5, the speaker refers to his soul as a thief, or a sinner, who will forever be

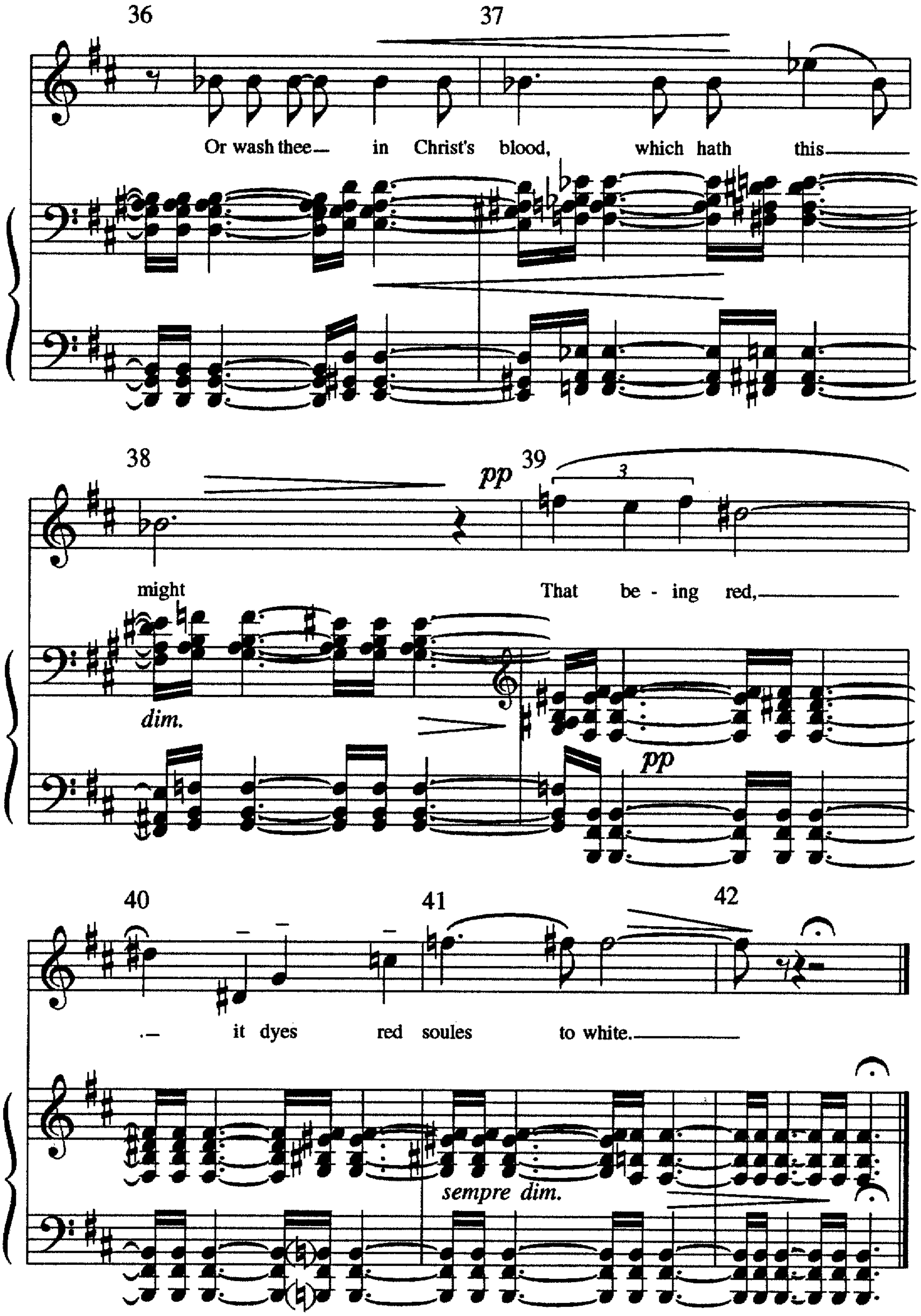
Example 60: "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 24-29.


24 espress. e sost.
25
Yet grace, if thou re - pent, thou canst not
26
dim.
27
3
3
lacke; But who shall give thee that
dim.
28
29
grace to be - ginne?

Example 61: "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 30-42.


30
31
pp
intimo
Oh make thy - selfe with ho - ly mourning blacke,
And red with blush - ing as thou art with sinne;
pp
32
33
34
35

Example 61: "Oh my blacke Soule," mm. 30-42, cont.


36
37
Or wash thee— in Christ's blood, which hath this—
38
pp
39
3
might
That be - ing red,—
dim.
pp
40
41
42
.— it dyes red soules to white.—
sempre dim.

designated as such. Britten sets the words "sicknesse" (*l.* 2), "death" (*l.* 2), "blacke" (*l.* 11) and "red" (*l.* 12) on the pitch E♭, and the word "red" from *l.* 14 on D♯. These relationships seem rather disjointed until the contexts of the words are considered. In the first couplet, the "blacke Soule" is brought to the fore by "sicknesse" and "death," signifying the sinful soul. In line 11, the word "blacke" is associated with the idea of "holy mourning," which suggests the act of repentance, or the death of the sinful soul: the soul must regret its sin in order to repent. First the soul must make itself "red with blushing" (*l.* 12) because of its sin, which is associated via the common E♭ with sin and sickness and death. Christ's blood, or the act of Communion, also is red (*l.* 14), so that the act of ruing one's sins and partaking in an act of contrition, dissolves the sin. In a symbolic gesture at the end of the song, as the "red" of Christ's blood counters the "red" of the sinful soul, rendering the soul "white," the D♯ vanishes, leaving only empty fourths and fifths on B and F♯, signifying purity.

Britten's musical form shuns the traditional views of Donne's structure in his sonnets (see Table 24). Whereas most Donne scholars allow for the co-existence of a Petrarchan (six-line) and Shakespearean (two-line) resolution to the conflict of the octave, Britten sets this sonnet with a completely different view of the point of resolution, and, indeed, of the inner divisions of the sonnet. First, he divides the octave, traditionally broken into two quatrains, into two unequal sections: lines 1-2 comprise the *A* section of the form, and lines 3-8 constitute a large portion of the *B* section. To complete the *B* section, Britten uses the first two lines of the sestet (*ll.* 9-10), leaving the final four lines for the return of the *A* section. This treatment of the sestet defies convention, as generally only two possible internal divisions are allowed: four lines plus two, or three lines plus three. Clearly, then, Britten's division of the text reveals a conscious effort to allow the musical form to carry the meaning of the text, with the portrayal of the central image and the association of certain words playing important, but supportive roles.

TABLE 24

TEXT OF OH MY BLACKE SOULE AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Musical Scheme
Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned By sicknesse, death's herald, and champion;	*A*: functions almost like an introduction, but since it returns, is a section in its own right
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled, Or like a thiefe, which till death's doome be read, Wisheth himselfe deliver'd from prison; But damn'd and hal'd to execution, Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.	*B*: unfolds a linear progression that takes the tonal center from F# to G
Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke; But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?	the conflict of the text and climax of the song; traditionally would be considered the resolution
Oh make thyselfe with holy mourning blacke, And red with blushing as thou art with sinne; Or wash thee in Christ's blood, which hath this might That being red, it dyes red soules to white.	*A′* return to the opening indicates that the speaker remains in the desperate state he was in at the beginning of the poem

Britten's setting emphasizes the role of the first two lines of the poem – to present the conflict to be explored in the octave – by the use of very vivid images in the music. The rhythm of the opening, pictorializing a funeral knell, persists throughout the song as a reminder of the death that awaits the soul that does not repent of its sins. The statement, addressed to the soul itself, becomes a confrontation – the battle of reason and faith – through Britten's angular vocal line and the conflict of the vocal line with the F# of the accompaniment both tonally and rhythmically.

The outset of the *B* section softens the charge by moving away from the F#, although the rhythm remains. Britten rightfully connects the metaphor of the pilgrim with that of the thief in this section, offering these comparisons as indicating the nature of the soul's sickness: being without God because of sins committed and being unable to face the consequences of sin, but not wishing to give up the sin that causes his punishment. Britten uses the section of the poem comparing the soul to a thief, the second quatrain, to build to his idea of the textual conflict, the first two lines of the sestet, by gradually introducing more dissonance between the vocal line and the accompaniment, leading toward the climax of the musical conflict, the prolongation of the G♮ in mm. 24-29. These two lines (9-10) emphasize the crux of the soul's battle, the problem of grace. Grace, or faith, cannot be achieved by man himself, but must come directly from God. In order to repent, man must have faith, but man cannot have faith unless he repents. By setting these lines at the height of the musical conflict, the point at which the G♮ has little definition or view of resolution, Britten captures the element of doubt that has crept into the poem, doubt that the very origins and sanctuary of the soul – God – will not save him from himself. Unlike the tension in the poem, the musical tension found in the G♮ has to resolve.

The resolution of the G♮ occurs simultaneously with a reinterpretation of the F# into B minor and the speaker's decision to purify himself through Communion for possible justification and sanctification if he receives grace. The correspondence of this decision with the melodic return is also significant: the soul has not advanced from the state that was causing the despair in the beginning. In other words, it is still in a state of sin, but the return of the material in B minor instead of F# portrays a soul at peace with its decision to do something to deserve the grace, however futile the attempts may be. Britten retains a disturbing factor, however, by not resolving the rhythm of the accompaniment to the rhythm of the vocal line. Indeed, the syncopated accents of the accompaniment are the final musical gesture heard in the song. So, despite the resolution of the F# into a B-minor context at the return of the melodic material, the unsettled atmosphere caused by the rhythm of the accompaniment and coupled with the introduction of the dissonance from the vocal line, indicates that the speaker remains a sinner.

Batter my heart

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurpt towne, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.

Yet dearely I love you and would be loved faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemie:
Divorce mee, untie, or breake that knot againe,
Take mee to you, imprison mee,
For I except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

In Britten's setting of Donne's fourteenth sonnet, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God," he is both consciously and obviously portraying through the four-note motive that permeates the accompaniment and the melody the physical action of battering called for in the text (see Example 62). Despite Britten's seemingly naïve exploitation of a pictorial element, the motive proves to be not only a device for creating atmosphere or evoking a particular image, but also the seed – or metaphor – that generates every element of the music, accomplished by its domination of the accompaniment to its equal control of the melody and hence, the tonal direction.[30]

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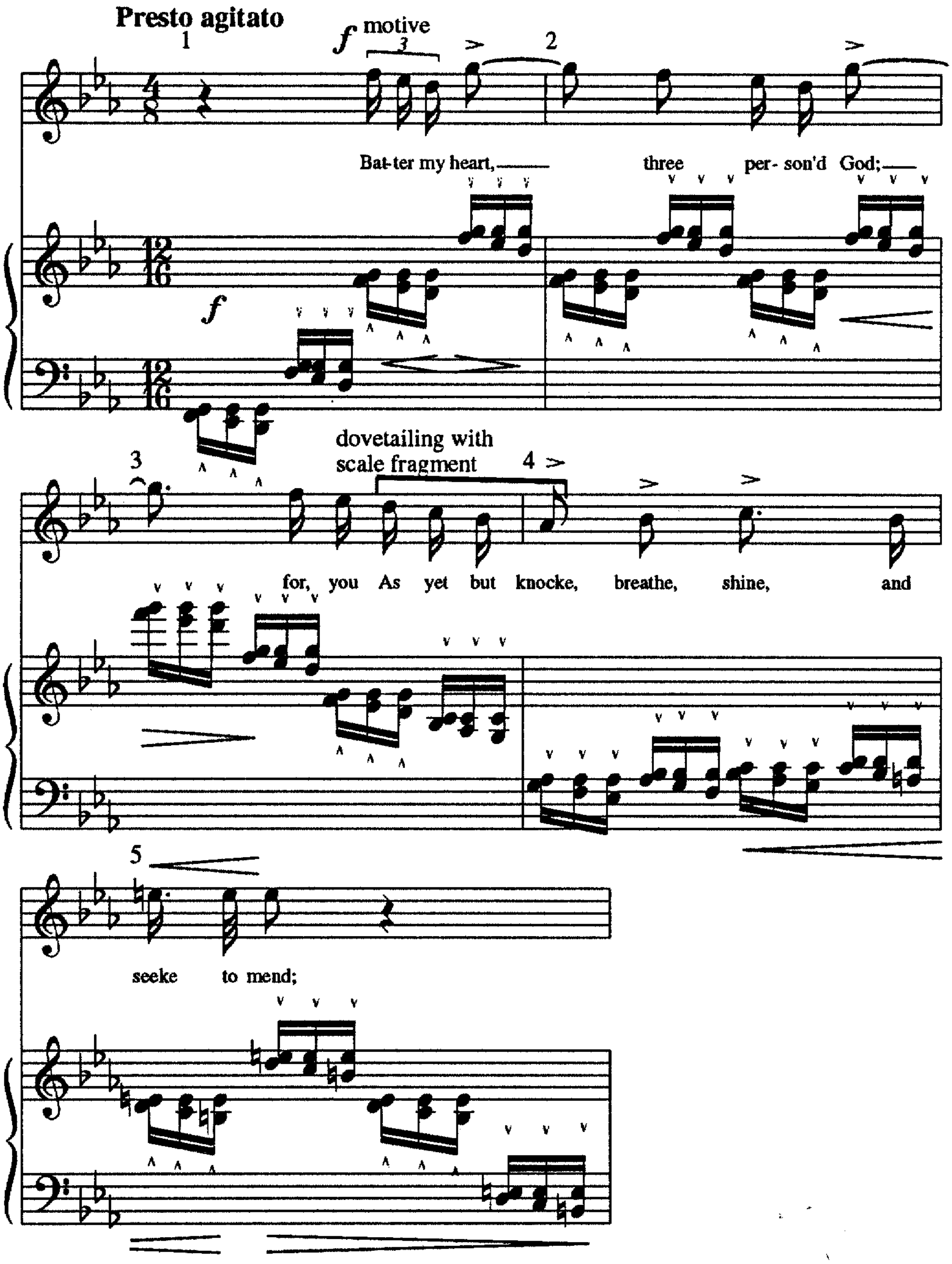
[30] Only two of the authors commenting on this song venture to describe the motive as anything other than a depiction of the action of battering. Graham Johnson asserts a very poetic idea: that the motive ". . . represent[s] the palpitations of ecstatic fear." "Voice and Piano," 292. Rembert Herbert sees the motive more as an analogy to the "three person'd God" of the text. "Analysis of Holy Sonnets," 22. This seems unlikely since although the accompaniment figure is executed in a three-note rhythmic figure, it actually contains four notes, an anomaly to the concept of three. In a surprising statement, Herbert also claims that ". . . the triplet is moved around so quickly that the ear loses track of its identity

Example 62: "Batter my heart," mm. 1-5.


Presto agitato
motive
dovetailing with scale fragment
Bat-ter my heart, three per- son'd God;
for, you As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and
seeke to mend;

. . .[and] Unless we listen very carefully or see the score, we are not likely to realize, as we do in the first sonnet, that we're hearing a repetition of exactly the same figure throughout." Ibid., 23-24. Statements such as this, which abound in Herbert's essay, render his approach to the music, and indeed, his musical knowledge, suspect.

The motive as used in the accompaniment consists of a pattern of three sixteenth-notes that express successively the interval of a second, a third and a fourth, with the top note remaining the same. The top note provides a tonal context for the motive as the root of a dominant-seventh chord, the significance of which is discussed further in this study. The vocal line, in contrast, presents the motive in a linear fashion, manipulating it by expansion, retrograde, inversion, with various methods of linking the motive with its transpositions. There are two germinal elements which the motive contains in both its manifestations: 1) the descending scale fragment (x) that encompasses the interval of a third, taken from motive excluding the top repeated note, and 2) the interval of the perfect fourth from the lowest note to the top repeated note (y) without the intervening scale members.

Each melodic phrase, with the exception of two, begins with the same linear unfolding of the accompaniment motive – the descending scale fragment followed by an upward leap of a fourth to the top note, a gesture that is analogous to the motto in a so-called motto aria.[31] After the motive is stated in the melodic line, Britten extracts the two elements and subjects each to several procedures in order to generate his phrases. For example, the scale fragment of the motive may be transposed or elided with another scale fragment (refer to Example 62), or the empty fourth may be expanded or contracted, depending upon the needs of the tonal direction (see Example 63).

The treatment of the motive creates variety in the melodic line and alleviates the repetitious feeling that the motive lends to the song. The malleability of the motive, seen in the manipulation of the motive to create the melody, allows the melody to take over and

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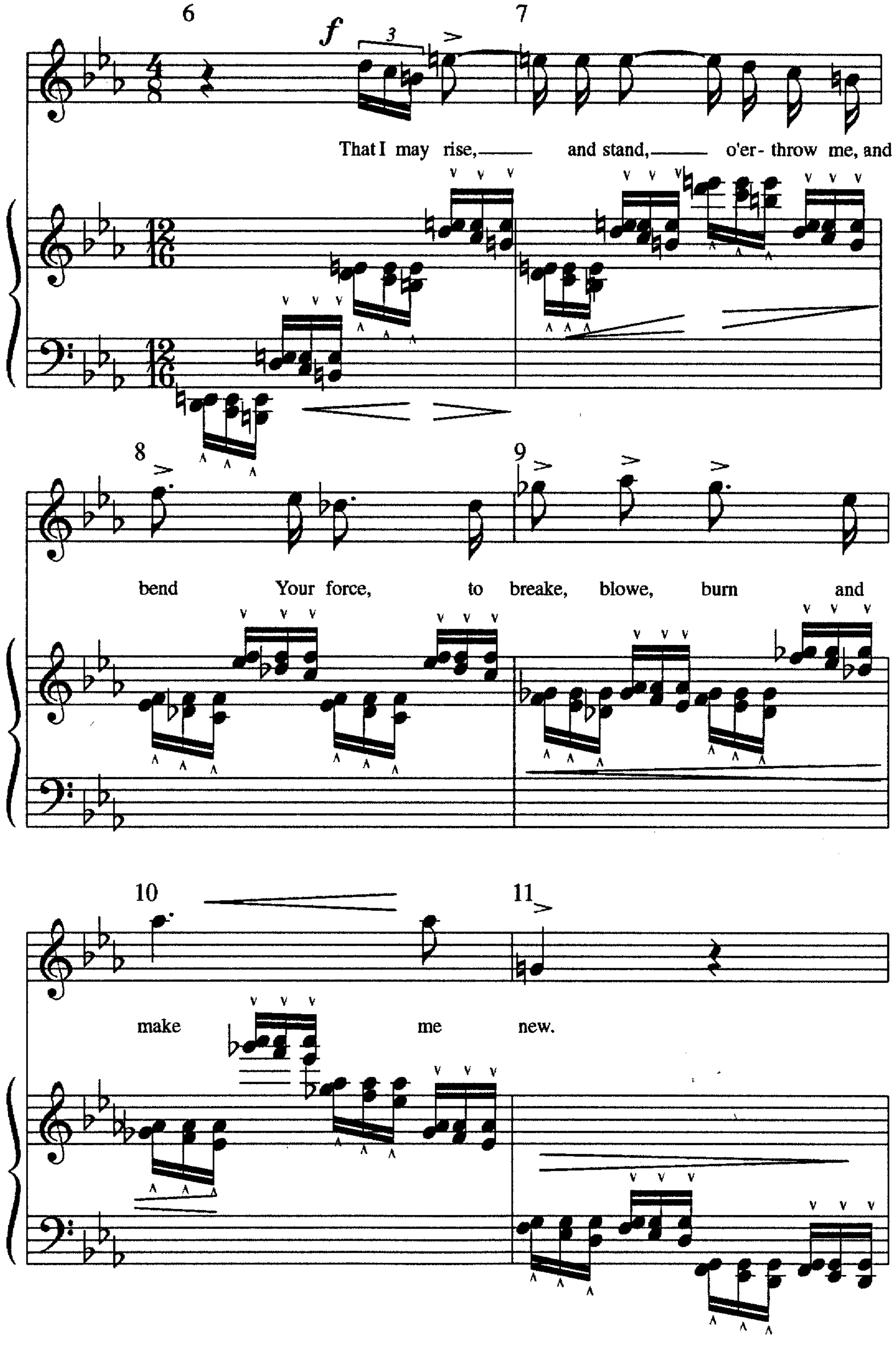
[31] In the second phrase that does not begin with the motive, the motive is stated after only two notes, so that it still maintains a relationship to the other melodic phrases.

Example 63: "Batter my heart," mm. 6-11.


6
f
3
7
That I may rise,
and stand,
o'er- throw me, and
8
9
bend
Your force,
to
breake,
blowe,
burn
and
10
11
make
me
new.

govern the tonal direction of the song, despite the rather confined appearance of the motive in the accompaniment. Although the accompaniment introduced the motive in the first place, after the melody enters, that part is relegated to the role of imitating the notes of the melody and following it as it presents the motive at new tonal levels. While the melodic motive changes tonal focus through manipulation of both the *y* motive and the scale fragment (*x*), the motive in the accompaniment either hovers at one tonal level or moves to the next by stepwise motion in response to a change in focus precipitated by the vocal line.

The effect of the motive on the interpretation of the text through the form is significant. The melody is constructed using the variation principle, with the motive as the unifying factor or "theme" to be varied. Use of the term variation principle assumes both unity through a returning element – in this case the motive – and contrast through manipulation of that element and other factors. After the grouping of poetic lines 1-2 and 3-4 for the first and second variations, respectively, each melodic manifestation of the motive encompasses one complete line of text, corresponding exactly with Donne's punctuation. Britten, then, uses the variations of the motive to articulate Donne's thoughts into a coherent scheme – his melody functions within the principles of variation technique in its relation to the text.

The setting of the first quatrain, which encompasses the first two variations of the motive in the melody, begins essentially in C minor, with the motive at the level of G, dominant of C minor (refer to Example 62). The motive outlines the dominant-seventh of C – G, F, E (passing tone), and D – with all elements present except for the leading tone, B♮. After two repetitions of the motive in the vocal line, Britten dovetails the scale fragment (F-E♭-D) with another scale fragment (C-B♭-A♭) that leads toward the level of E♮, accomplished by the leap of a tritone, B♭ to E♮ – an expansion of the fourth, motive *y* – in mm. 4-5 at the end of the first melodic phrase. The piano, which follows any movement to a new tonal level, moves to E♮ via a stepwise transposition of the motive through a dominant-seventh configuration on C – A to B♭ to C, D and finally E♮.

The second phrase begins at E♮, and through a second expansion of *y* to a tritone, B♮ to F, moving a statement of the motive at the level of F, dominant of B♭. The E♮, then, functions as a leading tone to the F. Following the lead of the melody, the motive in the accompaniment moves through G♭ and A♭, arriving back on G, dominant of C, as the vocal line descends a ninth from A♭ to G. The G♭, enharmonically F♯, functions as the leading tone to the G, with the A♭ essentially being the upper leading tone to G. The return to the dominant-seventh figure on G marks the end of a section of the musical form.

The close correspondence of the melodic gestures for the setting of lines 1-2 and 3-4 serves to unite the similar images contained in each syntactical unit (refer to Example 62 and Example 63). In lines 1-2, the speaker asks God to batter him because God's previous, less violent methods of trying to mend his soul are not working. Lines 3-4 expand on this concept, presenting an intensification of the trio of verbs from line 2 and an expansion of the word "mend" to "make . . . new." In his setting of lines 3-4, Britten breaks what first appears to be a mere transposition of the opening melodic line at the word "bend" in m. 8 with an expansion of *y* from a perfect fourth to a tritone – an interesting use of word painting.[32] He portrays the idea of the need for intensification and the resulting desperation in the tone of the speaker by pushing the vocal line to its highest point at the three verbs in line 2, and then follows this with a descending leap of a ninth as the speaker implores God to make him "new" (refer to Example 63). The images, then, are unified by the inclusion of the motive in the melodic lines, but their relationship to each other – the second set as an intensification of the first – is also shown through a change in the melodic line that intensifies it by pushing higher, producing contrast with the first gesture.

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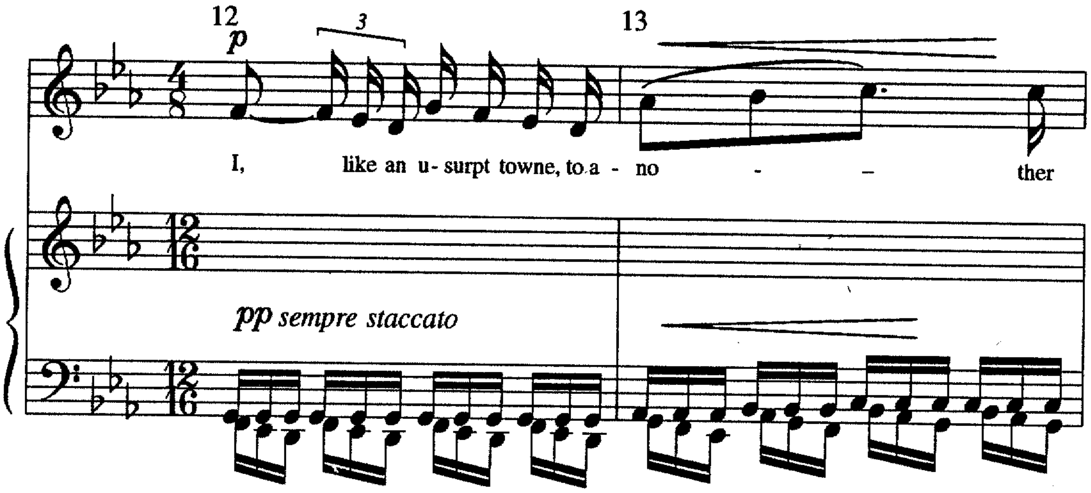
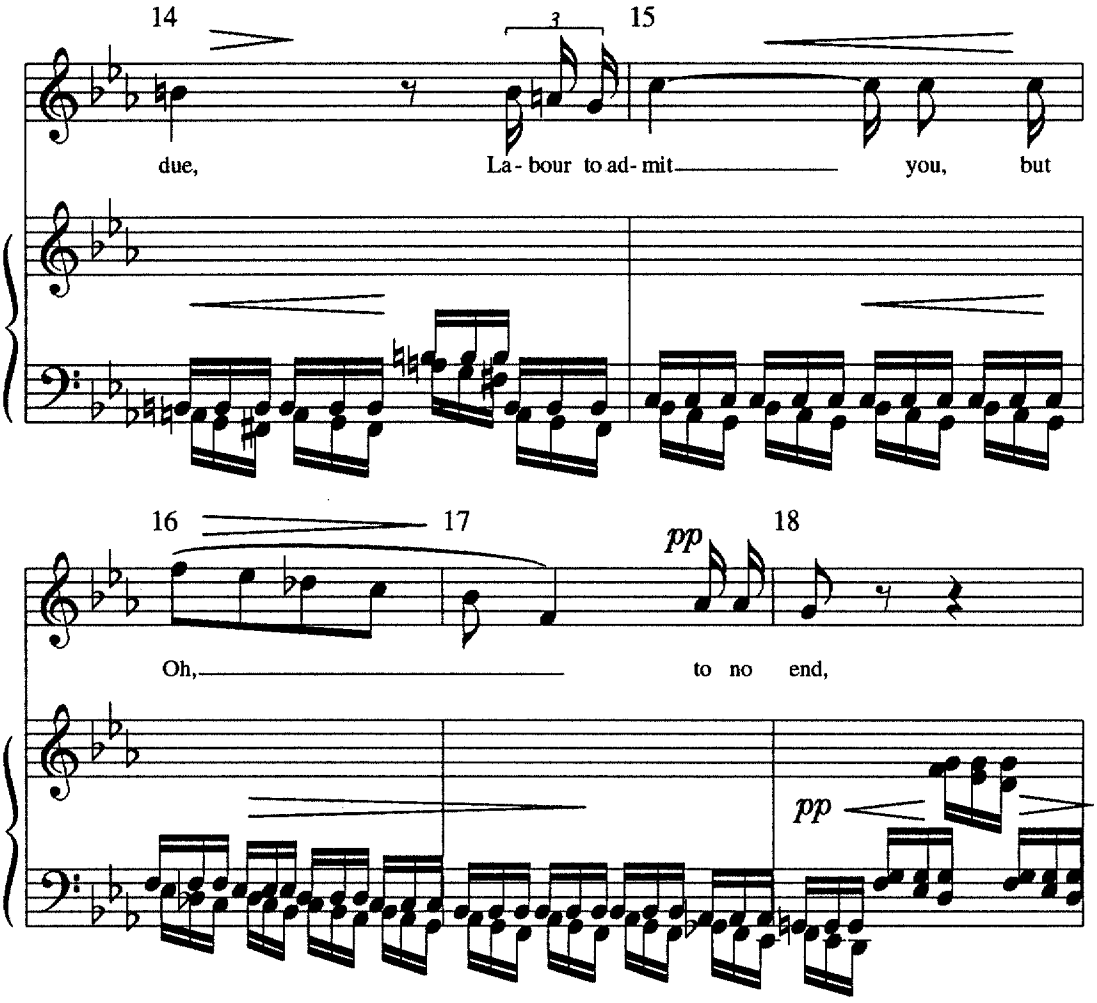
[32] Britten also uses word painting at the word "rise" in line 3, setting as the goal of the ascending perfect fourth of the motive.

The second quatrain of the octave begins with a third melodic variation of the motive in setting line 5 of the poem. Britten transfers the motive down an octave from its first appearance and places it at the dynamic level of *piano*, articulating Donne's change of imagery and the division between the first and second quatrains (see Example 64). The subject of this line, however, relates back to the beginning of the poem, signalled by the presentation of the motive at the same tonal level of C minor, albeit an octave lower. This gesture gives the impression of a return. The focus of the poem is redefined at this point from a call to God for action to an explanation of why the action is needed. Britten captures the essence of line 5, "I, like a usurpt towne, to another due," by sending his melodic line via a different ending from G through A♭, B♭ and C, only to end at B♮ at the word "due" – thus, the centering of the melody around G, the dominant-seventh of C, is "usurpt" by the B♮, the dominant-seventh of E♮.

Example 64: "Batter my heart," mm. 12-18.



Example 64: "Batter my heart," mm. 12-18, cont.



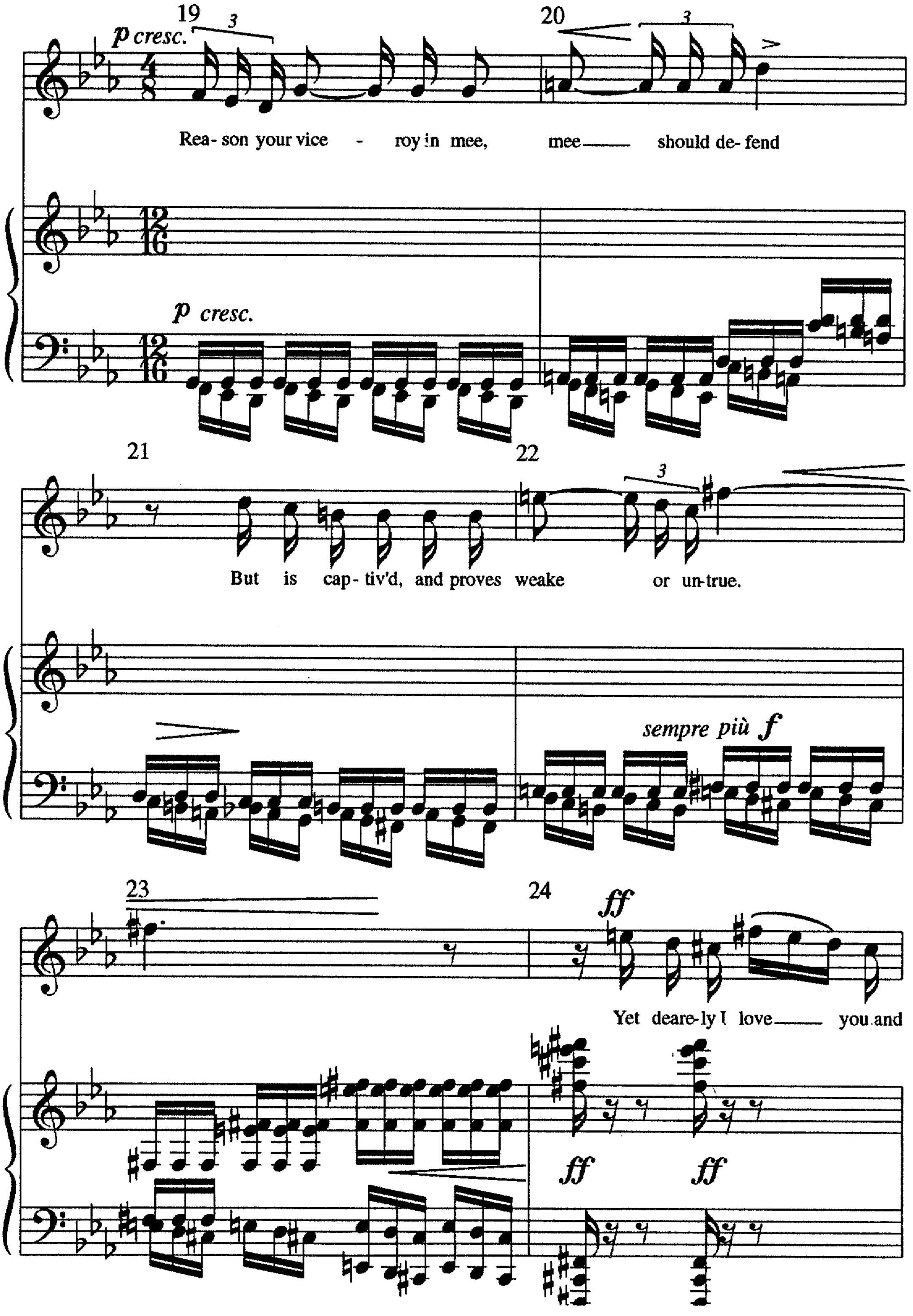
The arrival on B♮ in m. 14 corresponds to the arrival on E♮ at m. 5 in the first section. The B♮, then, gives that change in tonal focus a sense of definition. Indeed, the C to B♮ motion in both the accompaniment and the vocal line can be regarded as a ♭VI to V progression. At the start of the next phrase, the B♮ is reinterpreted as the leading tone to the motive on C, dominant of F minor, but this is quickly abandoned as the C becomes the bottom note of the motive at the level of F, dominant of B♭. The bass moves stepwise with the vocal line in a descending scale from F to G to return the tonal focus to C minor at the words "to no end" (mm. 17-18). The start of this second section, then, recalls all the tonal areas referred to in the first section, although with the E♮ replaced by its dominant B♮.

The quick change of tonal levels during these two phrases pictorializes the text, which states that the speaker is trying to let God into his life, but without success ("to no end"), at which point the melody returns to the initial tonal area, C minor. A melisma on the word "Oh" beginning in m. 16, starts with a descending scale fragment that is broken in m. 17 by a downward leap of a fourth, so that Britten prefigures the idea of "no end" before those words appear. The melodic gesture for these words returns to the level of G through an A♭ – a return that possibly signifies the resignation of the speaker which is also implied in the cry "Oh" and by the *pianissimo* dynamic marking.

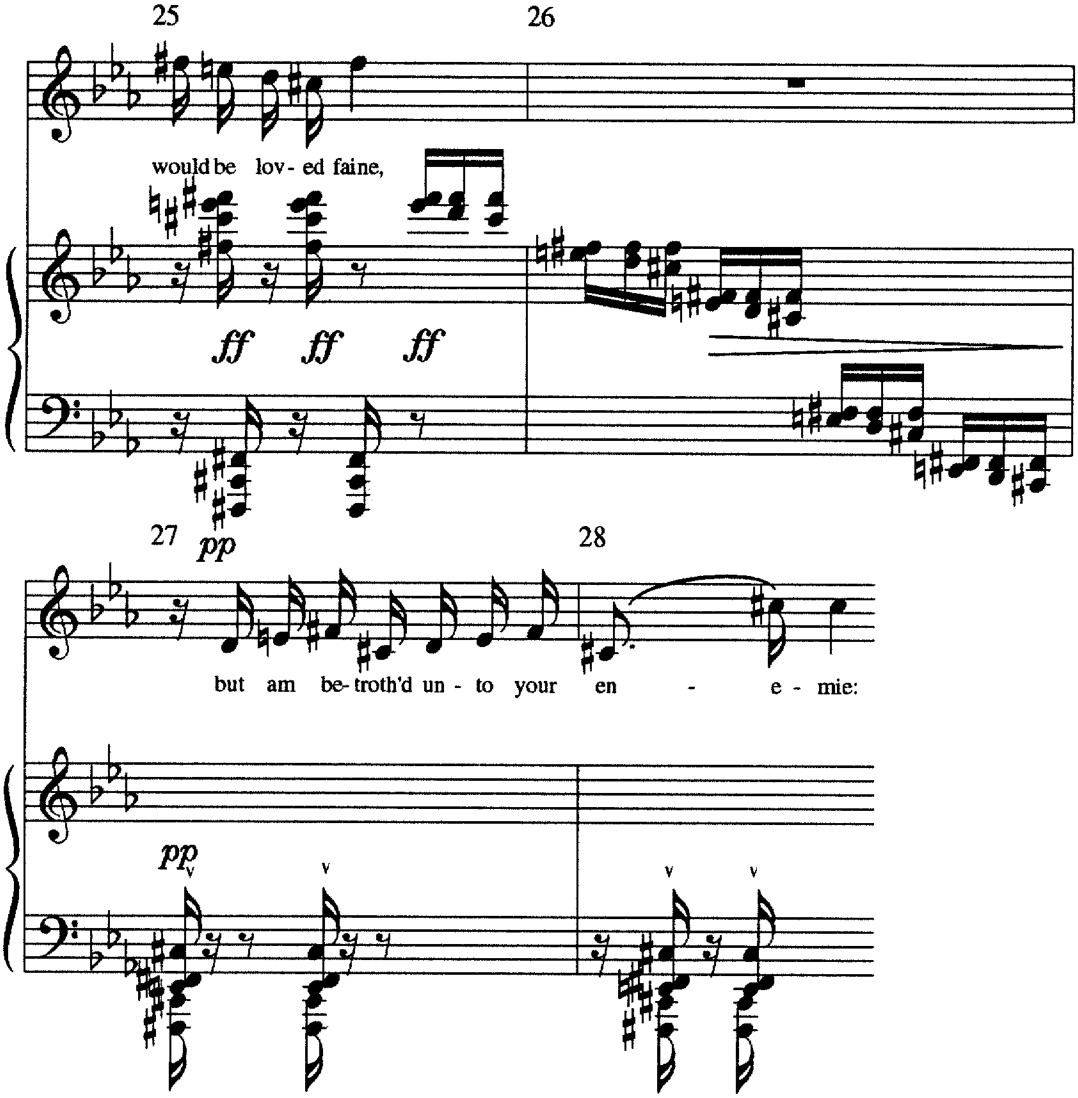
For the start of the contrasting section of the form, Britten returns to the same pitch level, G, and register and dynamic level with which he began the second section (m. 12), showing that the thoughts in lines 7-8 are related to that in line 5, and that the images result from a common theme, that of captivity by an enemy (see Example 65). The tonal direction differs, however, initiated by a portrayal of the words "should defend" with an ascending leap of a perfect fourth (*y*) in a suggestion of a strong dominant-to-tonic cadence from A to D, and thus, shifting the tonal focus from C minor to G major. Britten constructs the melodic line here simply, stepping up from the top note of the motive, G, to an A, which becomes the lowest note of the motive at the D-level.

The move to the pitch D in m. 20 begins a stepwise ascent from D to E to F#. The D is reinterpreted as being part of the motive at the level of E, suggesting A minor, which then leads to F# via an expansion of *y* to a tritone, C to F#. The shift in tonal levels, accomplished through dovetailing two tonal levels of the motive, parallels the text in which the speaker asserts that his reason is "untrue" – the point at which the melodic line reaches

Example 65: "Batter my heart," mm. 19-28.


19
20
21
22
23
24
p cresc.
Rea- son your vice - roy in mee, mee— should de- fend
p cresc.
But is cap- tiv'd, and proves weake or un-true.
sempre più f
ff
Yet deare-ly I love— you and
ff
ff

Example 65: "Batter my heart," mm. 19-28, cont.


25
26
would be lov- ed faine,
ff
ff
ff
27
pp
28
but am be- troth'd un - to your en - e - mie:
pp

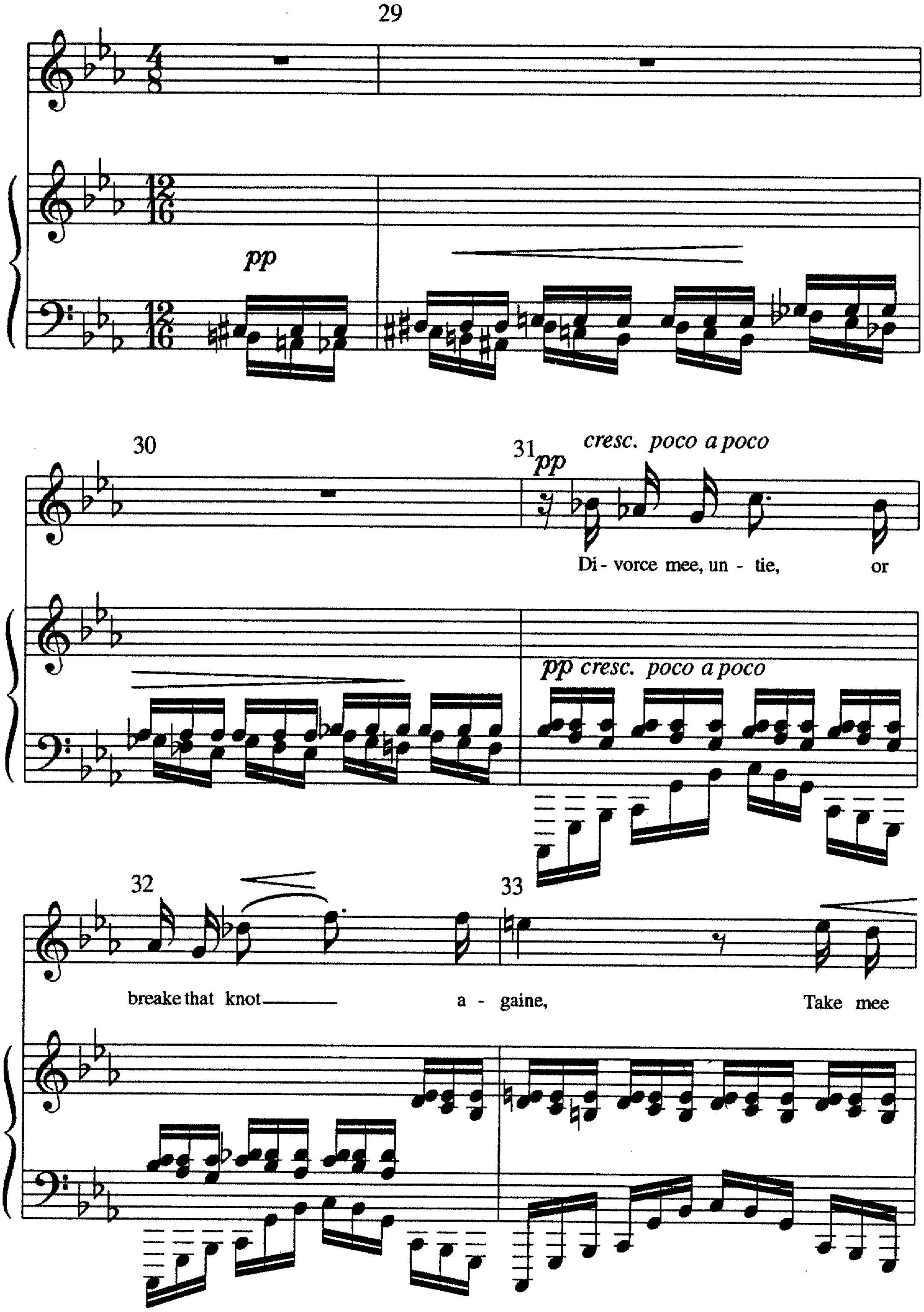
F♯. In other words, the melodic line, which began as a repetition of the *A'* section, does not remain "true" to its original tonal focus.

After the move to F♯ in m. 22, the piano reiterates the motive at the pitch level of F♯, dominant of the B♮ that figures prominently in the first and second sections. The vocal line enters again in m. 24 and consists of three repetitions of the motive at the pitch level of F♯, executed at the loudest dynamic level of the song, *fortissimo*. The use of the motive three times may be a reference to the "three-person'd God" of line 1 in the poem, but this symbolism potentially would be lost in the fast tempo. The repetitions are punctuated by *fortissimo* chords that are constructed from the motive on F#: F#, C# and E, with the D omitted in order to preserve the dominant-seventh qualities of the motive.

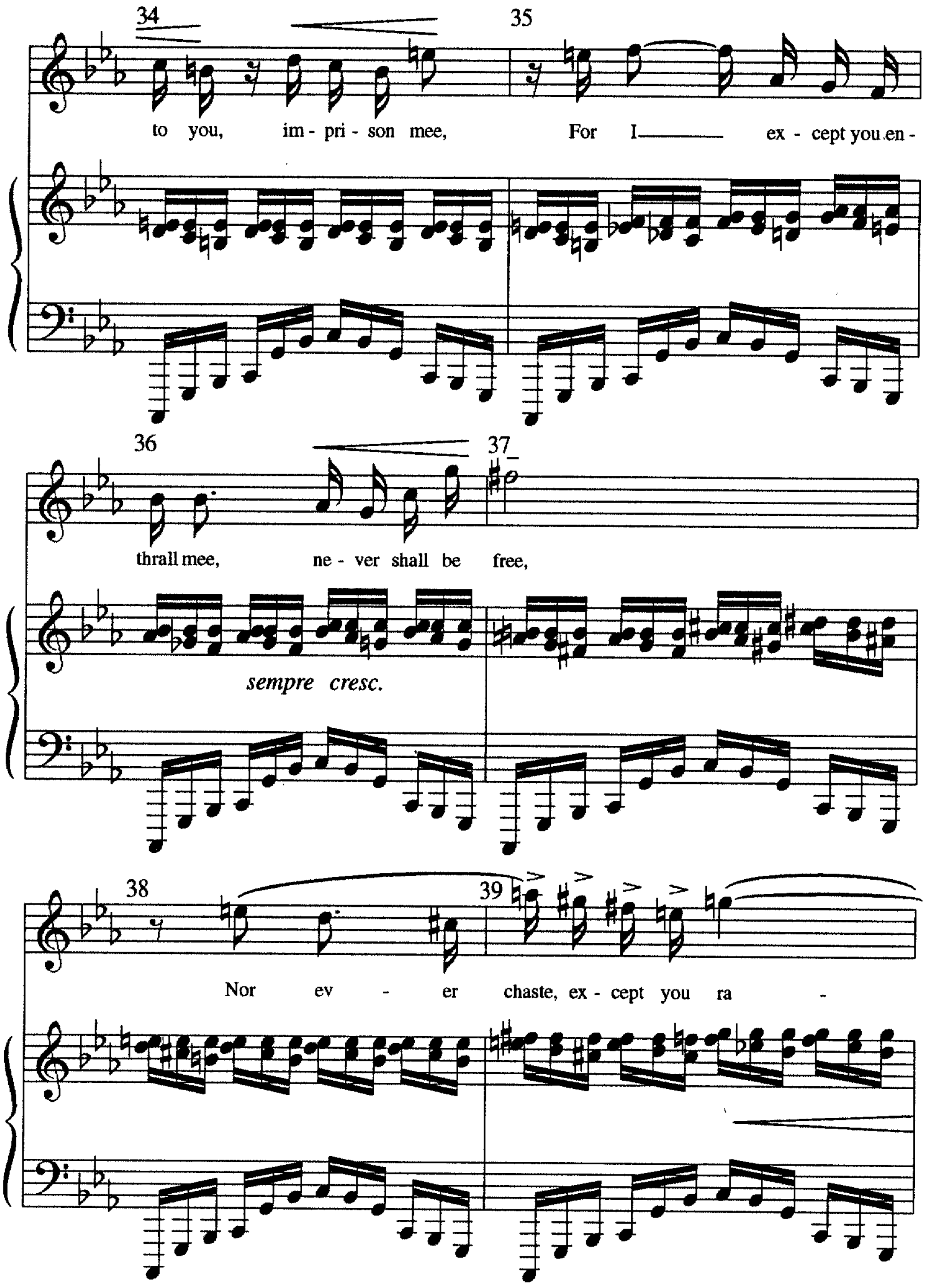
The text at the musical climax, line 9 of the poem, indicates a turn in the speaker's thoughts with the first word "Yet." In the octave, he has explained how God's actions have had no effect on him; and although he has tried to come to God, he has been unable to do so. At the start of the sestet in line 9, he explains that his true desire is God, even though his efforts have been in vain. In line 10, the speaker gives the reason for the failure of his attempts to come to God: he is "betrothed unto [God's] enemie." The correspondence of the text of line 9 and its musical phrase (mm. 24-25) becomes clear *after* Britten's setting of line 10 is heard. Immediately following the climax, the motive is presented in retrograde at the level of F#, with a particular emphasis on the bottom note of C#. The chords which punctuated the setting of line 9 remain, but are refigured so that C# is the highest pitch. The phrase also ends on a C#, which is reinterpreted as the top note of the motive in the accompaniment, suggesting the dominant-seventh of F#. The motive in its purest form, then, is associated with the speaker's desire for God: "Yet dearely I love you and would be loved faine," while the inversion shows that he is unable to free himself of sin, the real reason behind the need for extreme action by God. The move to F#, dominant of B, for this portion of the text, also has significance in the grand scheme of the setting.

The return to the motive in m. 31 (see Example 66) at the level of C, suggesting the dominant-seventh of F, represents a true desire to return to God, despite the speaker's exhortation in line 11 for God to sever his relationship with him. The breaking of the

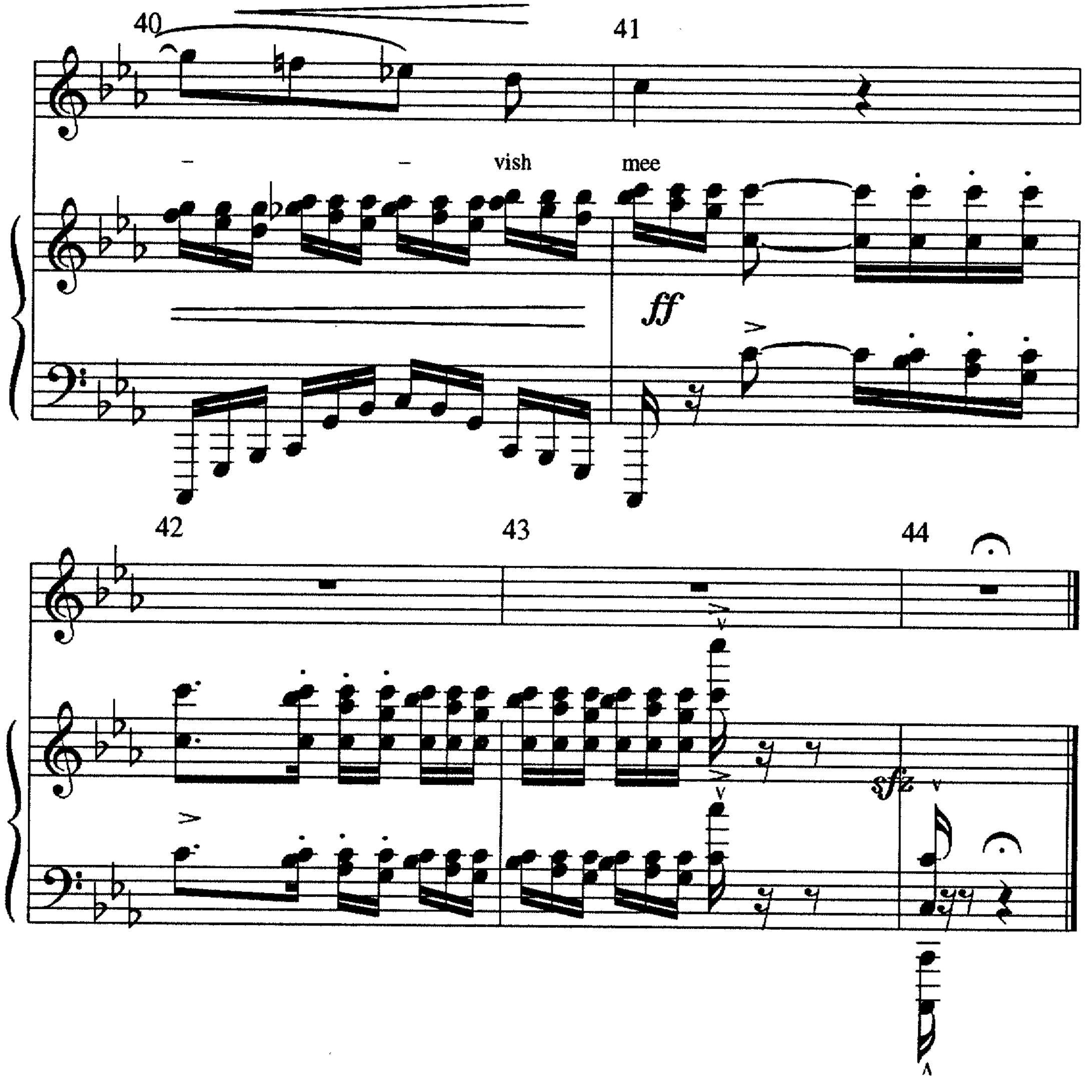
Example 66: "Batter my heart," mm. 29-44.


29
pp
30
31
pp
cresc. poco a poco
Di - vorce mee, un - tie, or
pp cresc. poco a poco
32
33
breake that knot a - gaine, Take mee

Example 66: "Batter my heart," mm. 29-44, cont.


34
to you, im - pri - son mee,
35
For I ex - cept you en -
36
thrall mee, ne - ver shall be
37
free,
sempre cresc.
38
Nor ev - er chaste, ex - cept you ra -
39

Example 66: "Batter my heart," mm. 29-44, cont.



"knot," synchronized with a breaking of the motive via an expansion of *y* to a tritone from G to D♭, leads to the level of E♮, dominant of A, begins the setting of line 12, which sets an opposing plea to line 11. Instead of severing his relationship with God, the speaker now wants to be imprisoned by God. The melodic gesture for this phrase consists of two repetitions of the motive at the level of E♮, after which the E♮ lead to F as part of the motive at the F level, which suggests the dominant of B♭ as in the opening section of the song.

The F in m. 35, at the start of the setting of line 13 is left hanging as the melodic line descends to an A♭ for a presentation of the motive at the level of B♭. This descending leap marks the first radical departure from elements of the motive in the construction of the melody. Until this point, Britten has used step motion or expansions of the perfect fourth (*y*) to connect statements of the motive at differing tonal levels. One may consider that the reason lies within the text. The F coincides with the word "I," while the turn to the motive at the B♭ level sets words which refer to a need for God's action. Thus, there is a chasm between the speaker and his need for God. This is further portrayed in Britten's association of the word "free" at the end of this line with the impassioned cry in line 9: both are set within the level of F♯, suggesting B. The text leading to the word "free" indicates the belief that unless God acts upon him, he never will be free of sin, and thus leads the speaker back to the desperation that caused him to desire God in the first place. Interestingly, Britten also sets the word "never" to the pitches A♭ to G, recalling the melodic gesture at the words "to no end" (*l.* 7 in mm. 17-18). Not only, then, will the speaker never be free of sin, he will not reach his spiritual goals.

This sense of unsettledness continues in the final phrase, encompassing line 14 (refer to Example 66). The fourth of the motive (*y*), which is now at the level of E♮ after a short transition, is first expanded to an A with a leap of a minor sixth – a gesture that is not followed in the accompaniment – and then contracted to a minor third from E to G, which ultimately descends by scalar motion to the final C. Britten associates two words by expanding and then contracting the *y* portion of the motive: "chaste" and "ravish." Not only does Britten set the paradox of this final statement, he also shows the despair of the speaker through distortion of the motive.

Tonal returns and departures mark important structural pillars in the musical form and define large-scale divisions that the variations of the motive in the melodic line do not articulate. There are two compatible structures at work in the song: the variations of the motive in each phrase, and a broader structure delineated by the return to or departure from tonal levels, as seen in Table 25. The return in the form, at m. 31, shows the use of a large-scale dominant-to-tonic motion, C to F, that is played out at through the dominants to these pitches. Tonally, the song operates in the two halves of the circle of fifths: the G - C - F - B♭ side, or the C# - F# - B - E - A direction.

TABLE 25

MACRO- AND MICRO-STRUCTURE OF BATTER MY HEART

Measure nos.	Macro Form	Micro Form	Poetic Form	Tonal Levels
1-5	*A*	*Variation 1*	*ll.* 1-2	C (G) - A (E)
6-11		*Variation 2*	*ll.* 3-4	E - B♭ (F) - C (G)
12-14	*A '*	*Variation 3*	*l.* 5	C (G) - E (B)
14-18		*Variation 4*	*l.* 6	F (C) - B♭ (F)
19-20	*B*	*Variation 5*	*l.* 7	C (G) - G (D)
21-23		*Variation 6*	*l.* 8	B (E) - B (F#)
24-26		*Variation 7*	*l.* 9	B (F#)
27-28		*Variation 8*	*l.* 10	B (F#) - F# (C#)
29-30	*Transition*			linear by step
31-33	*A "*	*Variation 9*	*l.* 11	F (C)
33-34		*Variation 10*	*l.* 12	F (C) - B♭ (F)
35-37		*Variation 11*	*l.* 13	B♭ - C - B (F#)
38-41		*Variation 12*	*l.* 14	F (C)
41-44	*Postlude*			F (C)

Britten uses the concept of variation in the song to unite the lines of the poem into a coherent whole while expressing the idea of antithesis found in the poem. The progression of the speaker's thoughts can be seen in the variation of the motive. He pleads with God to act upon him to give him the grace that he realized he needed in the first sonnet of the cycle, expressing these demands as a pair of opposites. Any movement away from the motive which begins almost every phrase generally takes place at the word or action in opposition to the beginning of the sentence. Hence at the words "seeke to mend" (*l.* 2), which contrast with the statement, "Batter my heart" (*l.* 1), Britten moves to a new tonal level, using a variation of the original motive (refer to Example 62). As the speaker calls for a new action in each line of text, Britten constructs his melodic phrases so that they become further removed from the motive, showing the speaker's desperation.

The climax of the text comes at the retrograde presentation of the motive, at the words "But am betroth'd unto your enemie" (*l.* 10). This statement follows the speaker's most impassioned cry, "Yet dearely I love you and would be loved faine" (*l.* 9), and gives the reason for his failure to respond to God's grace with a repentance of sin. Both lines are set in B minor, with the motive at the level of F#, the farthermost tonal point from the level of F (motive at C) that ultimately becomes the level of the return.[33] Britten's treatment of these two lines is the climax of the concept of antithesis in the text. The setting of line 9 consists solely of the motive repeated three times at the dynamic level of *fortissimo.* In contrast, the next line uses the motive in retrograde at an octave lower than the previous phrase, and at the dynamic level of *piano.*

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[33] This tritone relationship is reminiscent of the Lydian sharp-fourth relationships in the Michelangelo sonnets.

The macrostructure, or the *A A' B A"* form, articulates a division of the sonnet that is much like the first song of the cycle, but with some important changes (see Table 26, and refer to Table 24). The first quatrain is left intact, sealed by a return to C through the

TABLE 26

TEXT OF BATTER MY HEART AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Macro Form
Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;	*A*: This functions almost like an introduction, but its repetition and return deems it a section; call for action
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.	Call for further action by God to heal his sins
I, like an usurpt towne, to another due,	*A'*: This section is a series of one-line statements regarding the problem of sin that the speaker finds himself in
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,	
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend	*B*: This section leads to the crux of the problem: his ability to reason regarding God's love for him is failing him
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.	
Yet dearely I love you and would be loved faine,	The crux of the problem: he wants and needs God's love, but he is so sinful that he will not receive it
But am betroth'd unto your enemie:	
Divorce mee, untie, or breake that knot againe,	*A"*: This section sets up a series of opposites: only by extremes can God return him to the state of sinlessness
Take mee to you, imprison mee,	
For I except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,	
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.	

motive at G after a brief departure toward A through E.[34] This corresponds to Britten's use of similar melodic gestures in Variations 1 and 2 to bind the images in lines 1-2 and 3-4 together because of their relationship. The *A'* section inverts the tonal scheme of the *A* section in a departure from C toward E through B. It functions primarily to reiterate the importance of G and to provide a springboard for the upcoming exploration of the motive at other tonal levels. Textually, it groups two congruent images and associates them with the text of the first section. But, the variation structure had connected these two thoughts with the start of the next section as well. This appears to put the macro- and micro-structures somewhat at odds. The *B* section, however, begins as though it were parallel to both the *A* and *A'* sections, but moves off in a new direction. The relationship between the texts of the *A* and *A'* sections with the *B* section is established in the first few measures, but musical coherence is not abandoned in favor of textual unity. Rather, Britten achieves the unity that the text needs for comprehension through the motive, but also gives the song the tonal departure that is needed for variety.

Britten's moves to new tonal areas are accomplished by means of dovetailing the scale fragment of the motive (*x*) or by expanding the element of the fourth (*y*), so that although he moves away from his original tonal level, his unifier is still, more or less, intact. Eventually, his changes lead to the musical and textual climax, lines 9 and 10, which are set at a level that is a tritone away from the level of the return. In setting these two lines at this point in the musical form, Britten underscores their importance in the conflict of the text, showing their subject – the desire for God and the inability to act on that desire because of sin – to be the central subject of the poem, not the calls for action. The tonal levels of the melodic gestures, F#, or B, and C#, or F#, also have significant roles in the drama that is unfolding, for they represent the speaker's innermost thoughts. The F# and C#, and hence the B and F#, are the tritones to the primary tonal levels of the song, C for the beginning and F for the ending. The speaker goes to the fatherest point away from these levels to confess his spiritual problem: he cannot approach God because he is still sinful.

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[34] The E♮ then becomes the leading tone to F, which suggests B♭.

Now that the speaker has enlightened himself as to the problem, he can ask God for action again. The speaker returns to his call for action, but he has been changed by his confession, hence the restoration of the motive at a new tonal level, and the new erotic twists to the images. Now he asks for God's love to cleanse him rather than for utter destruction by God. Britten leaves the text with a reiteration of the motive figure in C in the accompaniment, ending finally on octave Cs. The speaker has come full-circle, but in the place of his need for destruction because of his sinfulness is his need for God's love.

O might those sighes and teares

O might those sighes and teares returne againe
Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
That I might in this holy discontent
Mourne with some fruit, as I have mourn'd in vaine;
In mine Idolatry what show'rs of rain
Mine eyes did waste? What griefs my heart did rent?
That sufferance was my sinne; now I repent
'Cause I did suffer, I must suffer paine.

Th' hydroptique drunkard, and night scouting thiefe,
The itchy lecher and selftickling proud
Have the remembrance of past joyes for reliefe
Of coming ills. To poore me is allow'd
No ease; for long, yet vehement grief hath been
Th' effect and cause, the punishment and sinne.

Britten effects a complete change of character from the first two songs in the third song of the Donne cycle, but with some allusions to their desperation. David Brown describes the song as "intensely inward," an attribute that Britten reflects through the melodic range by seldom extending beyond a tritone, and the figures in the accompaniment.[35] The intensity set up in the previous songs remains, but the overall tone of this song is much quieter and more detached from the outside world. When the poetry in the sestet reaches beyond the speaker's own inner world, the character changes, approaching the impassioned anguish of the other songs, but as the speaker turns inward again, the song eventually returns to its introspection.

One of the ways in which Britten achieves the introspection is through an oscillating Phrygian half-step between B and C♮ in the piano introduction that becomes the generative motive for the entire song, and influences both melodic and accompanimental gestures, as seen in Example 67. On the surface, the motive blatantly expresses the "sighes" from the text; on a deeper level, it becomes a symbol of the discontent and regret that the speaker feels, particularly as the C♮ comes into conflict with C♯.

The motive is earthbound: continually moving but never advancing, with the result that it creates a sense of heaviness when it is present. Britten organizes his melody around the motive, which interacts with and reacts to the same motive in the accompaniment, so that the text is constantly charged with the deep sense of remorse that the half-step creates by means of both the unresolved dissonances between voice and accompaniment and the attempt of the rhythmic patterns to break free without success.[36] It becomes, in effect, a nagging reminder of the speaker's sin – in effect, his whole reason for mourning.

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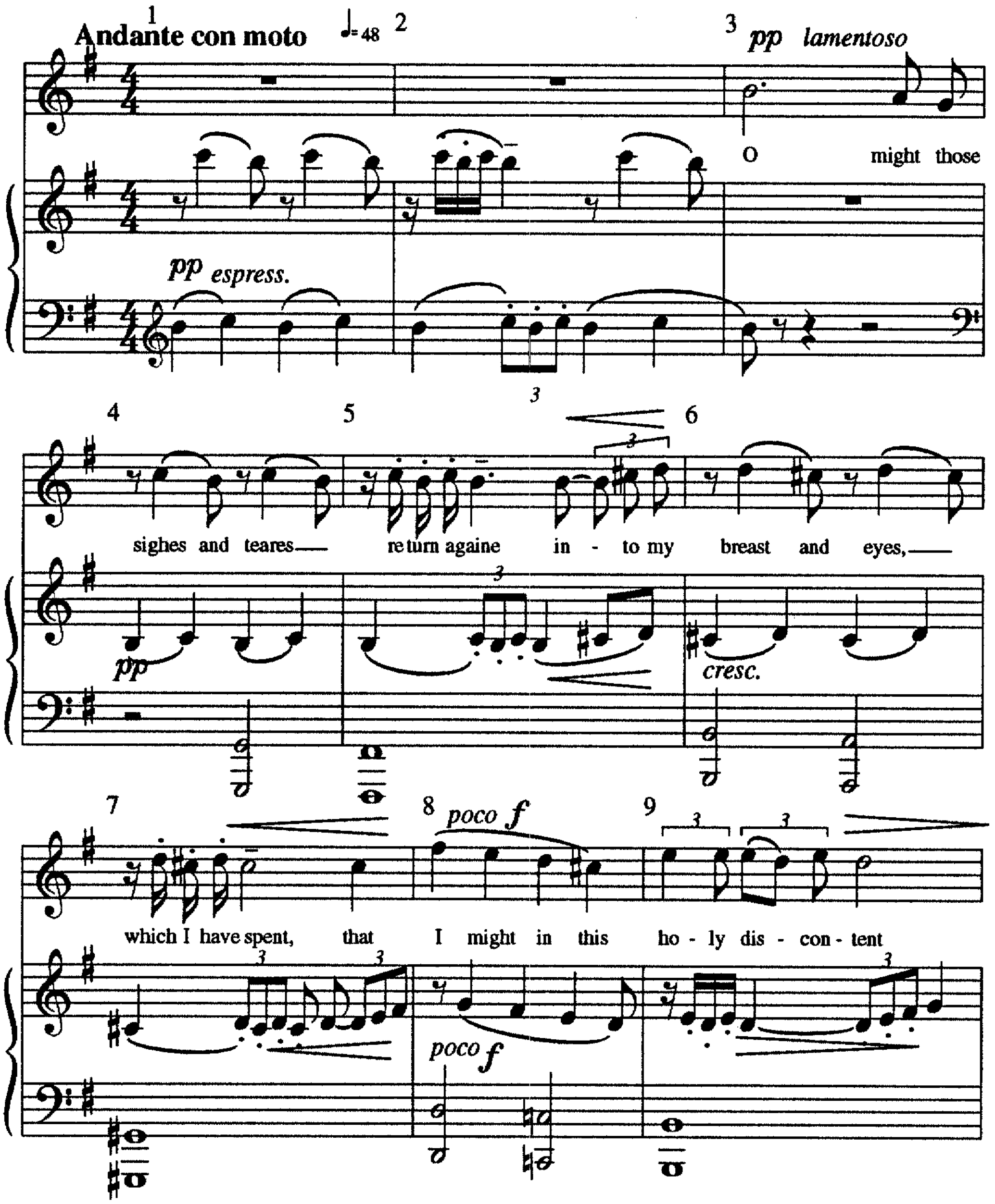
[35] Brown, "Stimulus and Form," 222.

[36] Peter Pears and Paul Gaston both make references to the similarity of this song and Elizabethan lute songs, with Gaston citing the echoes of the vocal line in the accompaniment as particularly characteristic. The echo begins much sooner than in the measures that Gaston describes (refer to Example 67, mm. 5 and 7), occurring in the second measure with the left hand of the piano echoing the right hand (refer to Example 67). This figure, which starts with the upper note of the half-step oscillation, recurs also without echoing the vocal line (refer to Example 67, mm.9 and 11), and also it recurs in the

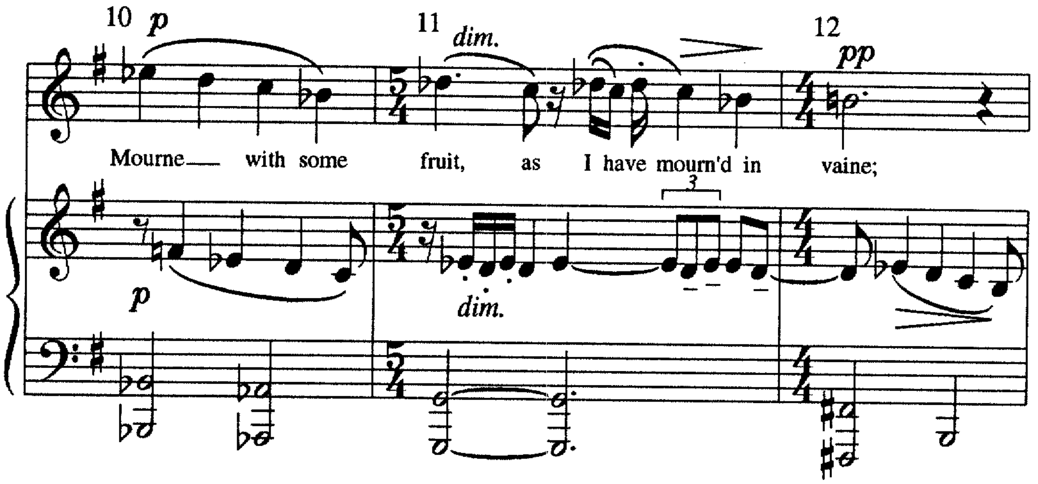
Example 67: "O might those sighes and teares," mm. 1-12.


Andante con moto
♩.=48
1
2
3
pp lamentoso
O might those
pp espress.
4
5
6
sighes and teares
return againe in - to my
breast and eyes,
pp
cresc.
7
8 poco f
9
which I have spent, that
I might in this
ho - ly dis - con - tent
poco f

---

vocal line without echo in the accompaniment (refer to Example 68, mm. 14 and 15, and Example 69, mm. 31 and 32). Pears, "Vocal Music," 70; Paul Gaston, "Britten's Donne and the Promise of Twentieth-Century Settings," in The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 209. To be fair, Pears's reference is more subtle.

Example 67: "O might those sighes and teares," mm. 1-12, cont.



The heaviness created through the motive is further underscored by the shape of the melody. The first two phrases comprise an ascent from B to the F# of the third phrase through sequencing the motive within the context of a Phrygian scale on B. In the ascent only the pitch C# – the result of transposition of the motive for the sequence and the antithesis of the lowered second scale degree, C♮ – deviates from the scale (refer to Example 67). Britten breaks the melody through careful placement of rests, which also gives weight to the text.

Indeed, it seems that Britten's speaker is so wracked with guilt and regret that he can scarcely utter the words for his plea. The ascent of the first two phrases is answered by a descent from F# back to B in the two subsequent ones for the setting of lines 3-4 (refer to Example 67). For a brief moment, C♮ and C# come into vertical conflict: a C♮ in the bass resolves to B♮ as the vocal line leaps from C# to E as part of the step progression that comprises the descent from F# to B. The brief turn to the flat side in beginning in m. 10, apart from being required by the sequence, balances the ascent on the sharp side in the second *a* phrase (beginning m. 6), and places C# (spelled D♭) into a linear conflict with C♮.

The use of pitches outside of the Phrygian context may suggest an attempt on the part of the speaker to rid himself of the burden of the despair he is now experiencing. A return to the pitch B from the gesture D♭ (C♯) to C to B♭, however, occurs simultaneously with the words "in vaine," suggesting that the sequence that tries to liberate the melody from the B-C♮ oscillation, and hence, the Phrygian context, was also fruitless.

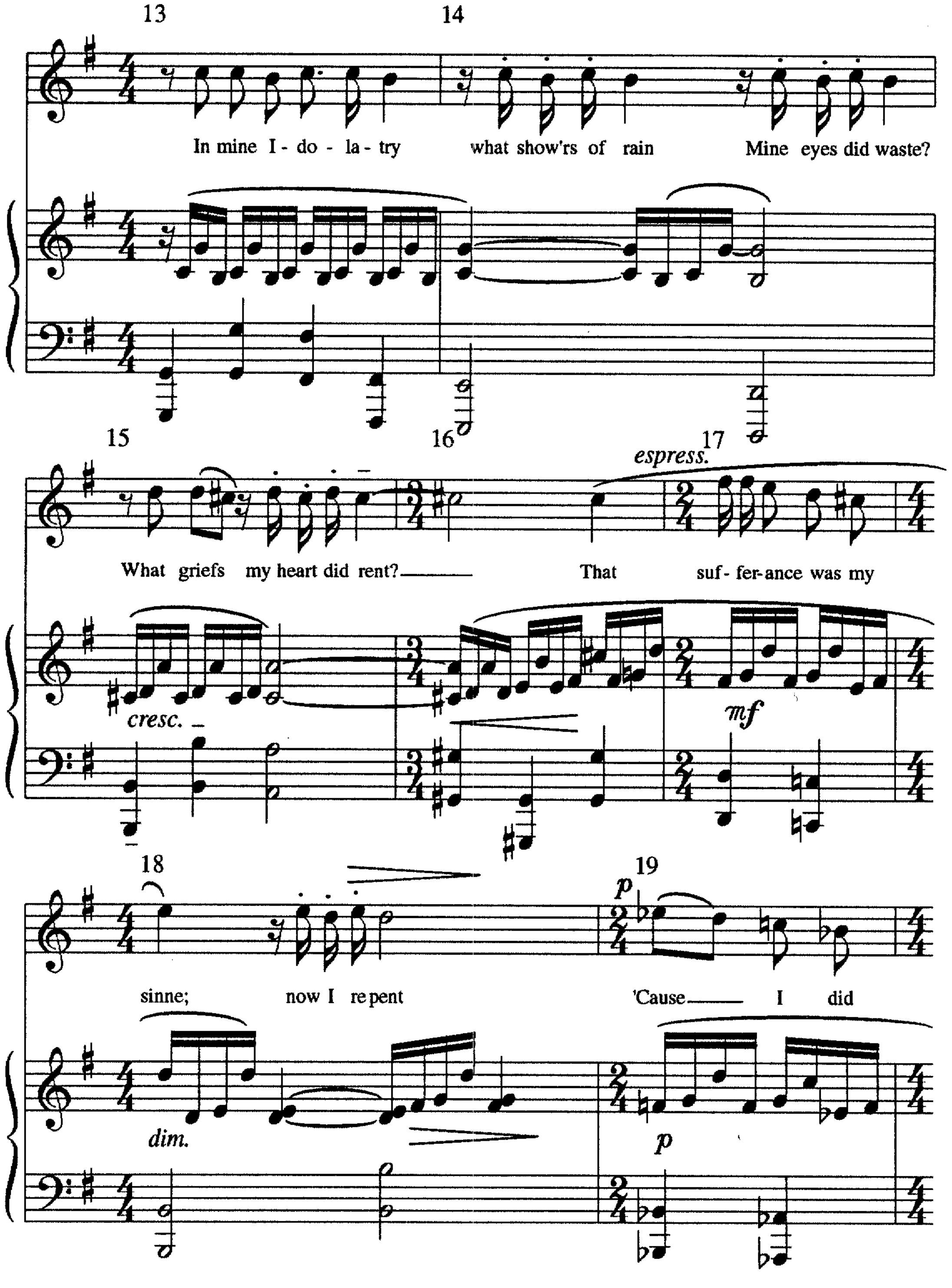
The bass line in this first section becomes the foundation for the bass line of the next two sections. Moving stepwise predominantly, the bass emphasizes the B Phrygian scale through two leaps from F♯ to B (mm. 5-6 and mm. 11-12) and through using the lowered seventh and second scale degrees, A and C, respectively. Following the lead of the vocal line, it makes a brief turn toward the flat side (B♭ - A♭ - G) in mm. 10-11 before returning to F♯ for a dominant-to-tonic cadence (mm. 11-12). The ending of the bass line, G - F♯ - B (a repeat of the opening three notes), occurs immediately after the resolution of the B♭ to the B♮ in the vocal line, giving that resolution a sense of delay in keeping with the text, "in vaine."

The use of sequence in the melodic line creates associations in the portions of the texts that occur with the statements of the sequence. These musical associations, in turn, mirror the intricate design in Donne's text. In the first two phrases, the words "sighes and teares" are set in parallel to "breasts" and "eyes," whence they respectively emanate from the body. The words "returne againe" and "which I have spent" – conflicting ideas – are similarly juxtaposed as petition and cause. In the second set of phrases, the words "holy discontent" and "I have mourn'd in vaine" are linked as effect and cause. The sequences not only accomplish a musical end – the generation of a tightly-organized section of music – but capture the complexities of the text as well. The fact that the sequence comprises the motive also establishes a network of relationships in the text that continues from line to line within the first quatrain. Thus, the "sighes and teares" are equally associated with "holy discontent" and mourning "in vaine."

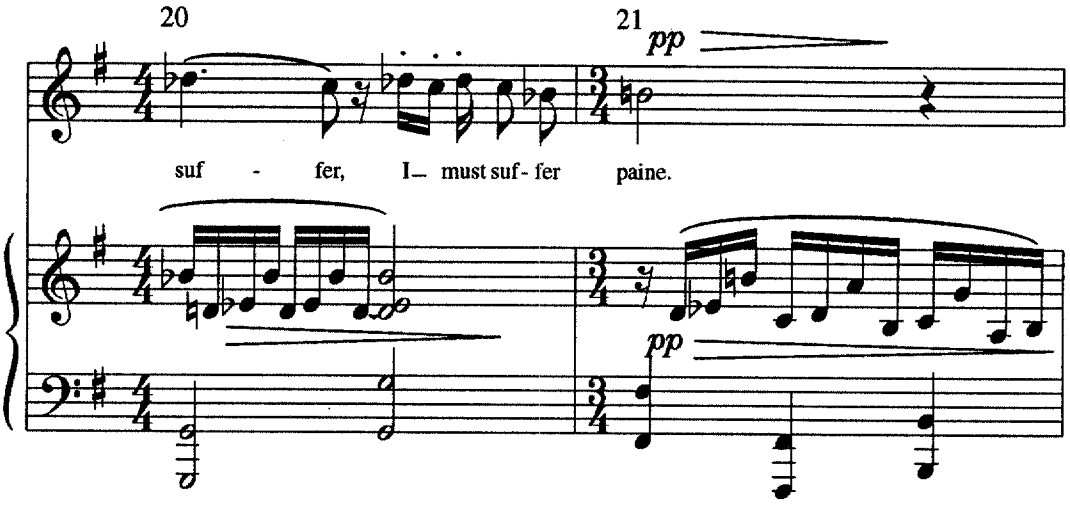
The network of connections and conflicts set up in the first quatrain among ideas in the text is carried over into the next section which encompasses the second quatrain of the octave (see Example 68). The section is essentially a repetition of the first, but with some of the links between the parts of the ascending sequence abandoned, which makes the motive even more prominent in the melodic line. The text describes the speaker's reason for the state of "holy discontent" that he is now experiencing: he regrets his past life in which he did nothing to prohibit his promiscuity. In a paradoxical statement, Donne says that because he thought he was suffering or grieving over lost physical loves in his past life, now he must suffer spiritually because of those loves. Britten's motive not only relates this section (which explains the cause of the despair) to the first section (which explains the effect of the despair), but also establishes a series of relationships within the section itself.

The motive is used exclusively for the setting of lines 5 and 6 of the poem and links the lines musically into the grammatical unit that Donne intended: "In mine Idolatry what show'rs of rain / Mine eyes did waste? What griefs my heart did rent?" This part of the sequence, the ascent, has been considerably shortened as compared to its manifestation in the *A* section because of the absence of the introductory idea and the connecting ideas between the statements of the sequence. Although the ascent is more abrupt, the section has a more forward motion, which is also echoed in the increase in activity in the right hand of the accompaniment and the bass line. Instead of leading or following the vocal line in canonic fashion as it did in the *A* section, the accompaniment now consists of sixteenth notes that rotate a three-note, decorative figure that incorporates the generative motive (refer to Example 68). The bass line, a repeat of that in section *A*, now includes the pitches E to

Example 68: "O might those sighes and teares," mm. 13-21.


13
14
In mine I - do - la - try
what show'rs of rain
Mine eyes did waste?
15
16
17
espress.
What griefs my heart did rent?
That suf- fer-ance was my
cresc.
mf
18
19
p
sinne; now I re pent
'Cause I did
dim.
p

Example 68: "O might those sighes and teares," mm. 13-21, cont.



D (m. 14) before the first move to the pitch B (m. 15), thus filling in the leap from F♯ to B. This insertion softens the impact of the F♯ to B motion and the bass at that point.

In contrast to the *a* phrases in this second section, the *b* phrases from the second sequence in the first section remain fairly intact, with some metric changes to accommodate the accentuation of certain words in the text. The first part of the phrase takes on a greater role in the connection of ideas from the text, however, by relating the "sufferance" (*l.* 7) and the suffering (*l.* 8) from the speaker's profane days. The motive, of course, still generates relationships, linking repentance with the suffering of pain caused by the remembrance of sin, which he needs for repentance, and relating it to the cause: the speaker's past life. The meter changes also stress particular words – "sufferance," "sinne," "suffer" and "paine" – further solidifying the relationships established by the motive and the sequence.

As the introduction generated the melodic material for the first two sections, so the accompaniment figure of the second (*A'*) section generates the melodic material of the third section, which sets the first four lines of the sestet. The basic motive – the B to C♮

oscillation – can be found embedded in the accompaniment of the *A′* section, but with an extra note decorating it (refer to Example 68). The pattern is essentially a three-note figure (C - G - B) placed into a four-note rhythmic grouping, with the result that the intervallic relationships are constantly rotating. For the melody of the *A″* section, Britten reverses the order of the figure, breaking the mold of starting on C (see Example 69).[37] The gesture is repeated a half-step higher, corresponding to the sequence found in the second phrase of both the *A* and *A′* sections. This is followed by a descent from F♯ to B, parallel to the third and fourth phrases of the two previous sections (compare to Example 67, mm. 8-12 and Example 68, mm. 17-20).

The conflict between C♮ and C♯ that briefly arose during the first two sections receives greater emphasis in the third. The two notes come into direct conflict with the melodic arrival point at m. 23. The vocal line ends on a B, over a chord that contains C♯ as the bottom note and C♮ as the top. The vocal line then moves to the second statement of the sequence, at the D-C♯ level, with C♯ and G♯ in the chord at the arrival point in m. 25. Once the C♮ and C♯ are sounded together in confrontation at m. 23, the conflict never arises vertically again, only occurring as the result of the sequence in the *b* phrase at m. 28.

On the surface, the melodic phrases and the bass line of this section are variations of those in the *A* and *A′* sections. There is one important difference, however, that must be considered in a discussion of the form: the accompaniment and the character that it lends to the section. Britten manipulates the accompaniment figure (refer to Example 67) gradually, decorating it for the *A′* section, and finally arriving at the form that it takes in the *B* section

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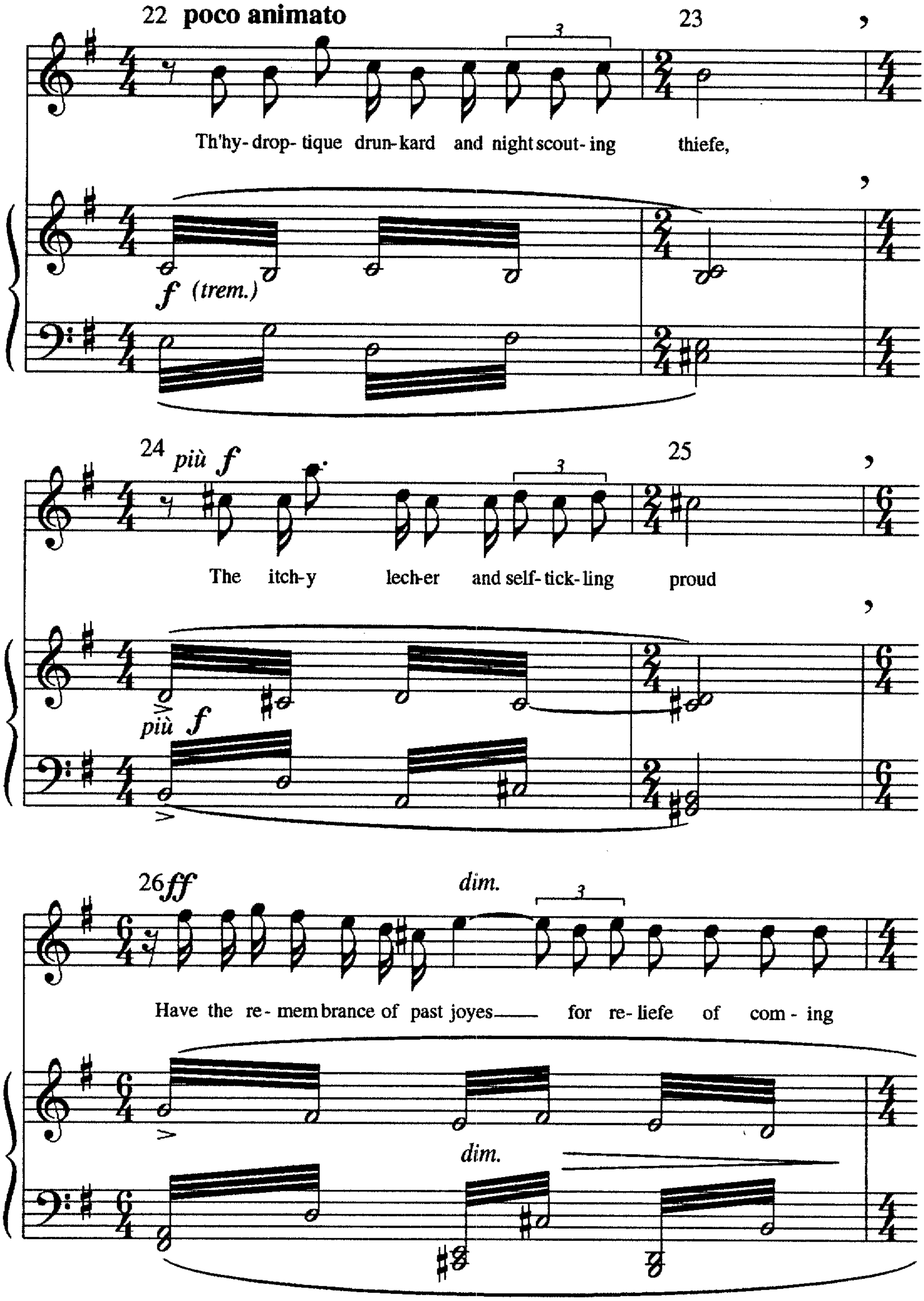
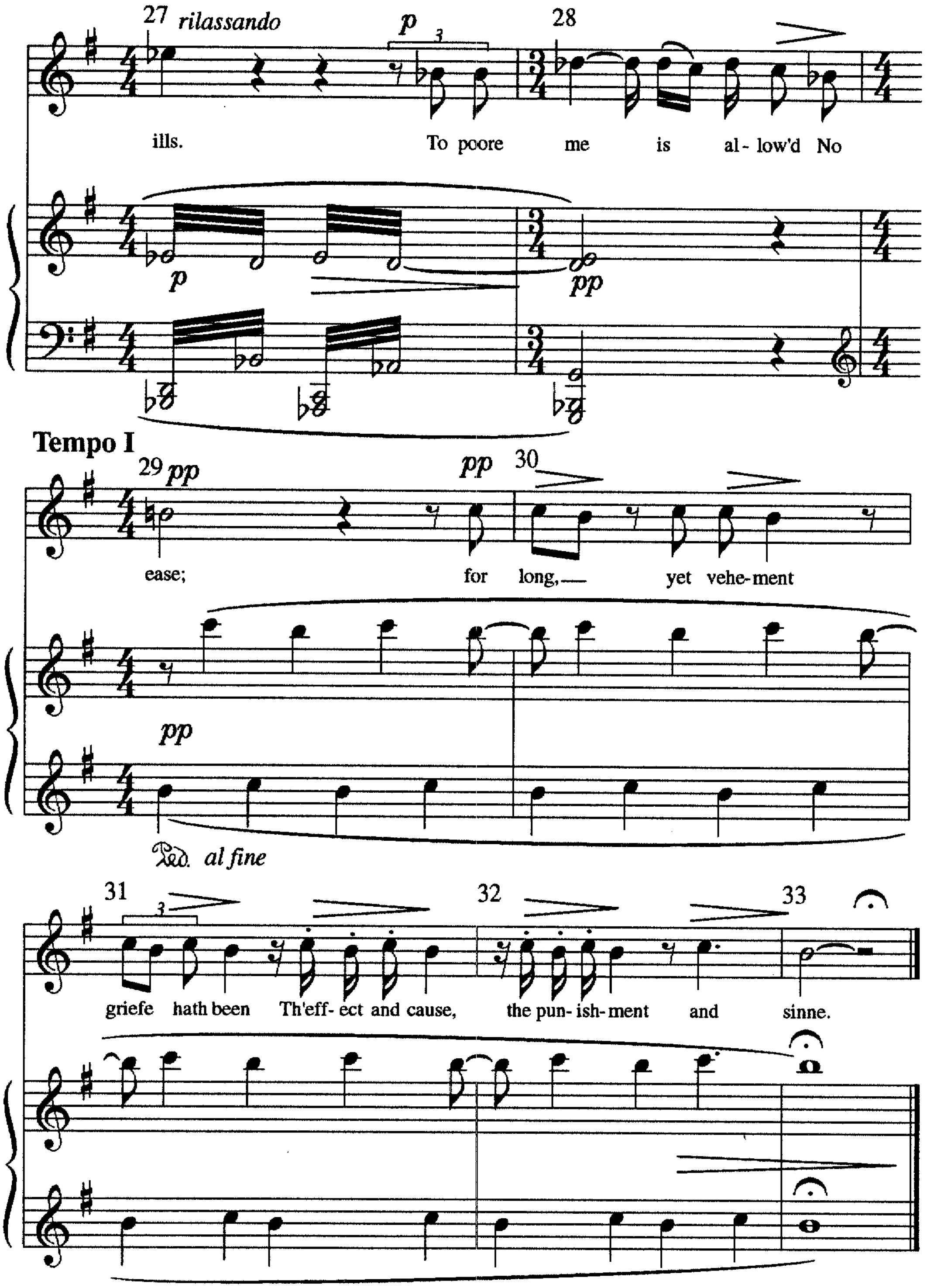
[37] The first measure of the vocal line in section *A* (refer to Example 65) is more of an introduction to the first phrase because of the leap from its lowest note, G, to the C of the next measure, which gives the sense of a dominant to tonic gesture.

Example 69: "O might those sighes and teares," mm. 22-33.


22 poco animato
23
Th'hy-drop-tique drun-kard and night scout-ing thiefe,
f (trem.)
24 più f
25
The itch-y lech-er and self-tick-ling proud
più f
26 ff
dim.
Have the re-membrance of past joyes for re-liefe of com-ing
dim.

Example 69: "O might those sighes and teares," mm. 22-33.


27 rilassando
p
3
28
ills.
To poore me is al- low'd No
p
pp
Tempo I
29 pp
pp
30
ease;
for long,— yet vehe-ment
pp
Ped. al fine
31
3
32
33
griefe hath been Th'eff- ect and cause, the pun- ish-ment and sinne.

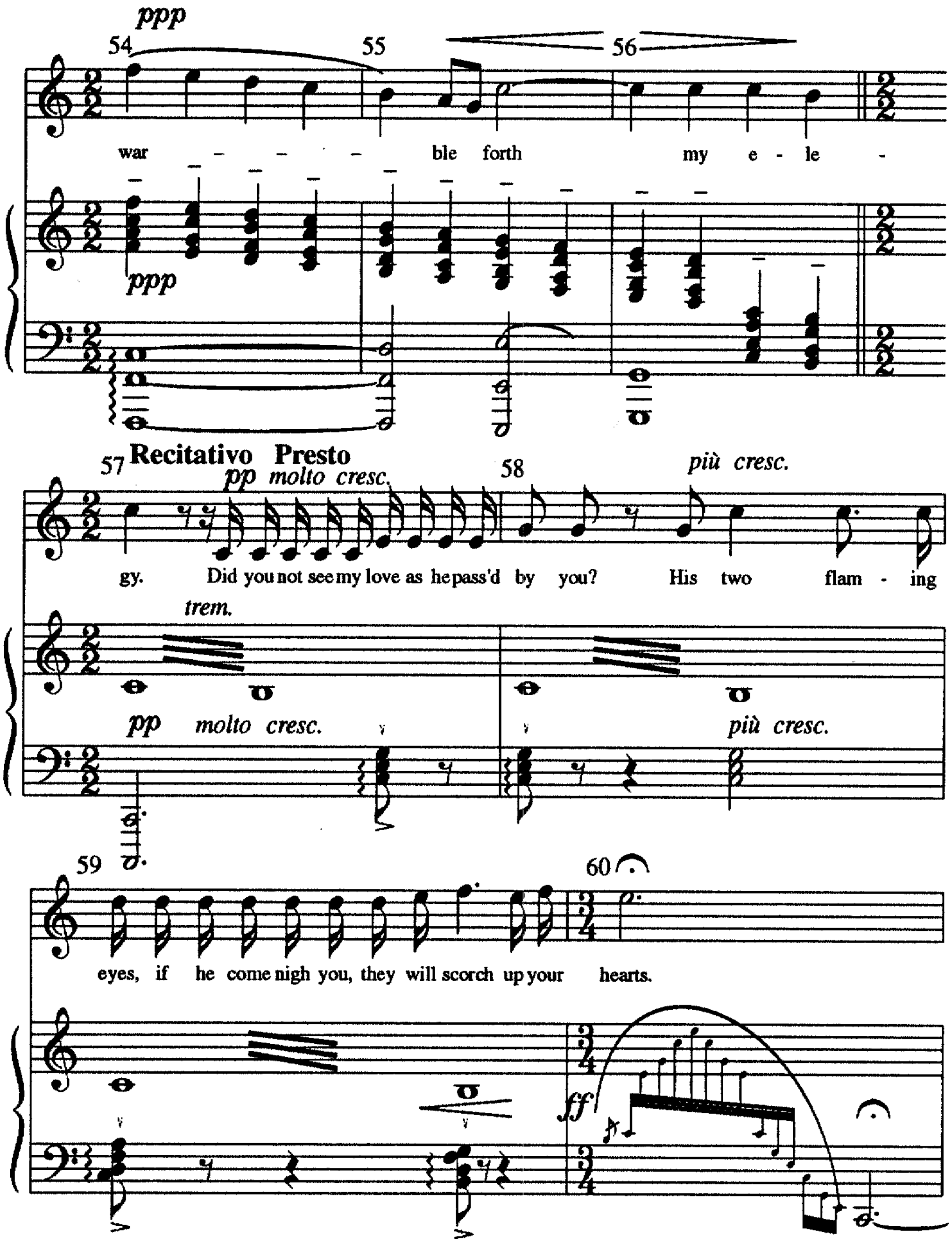
(refer to Example 69). With the introduction of this new version, which is much more active and rhythmically charged, the entire character is changed from introspection to extroversion, if only for a brief moment. This change heightens the sense of return at m. 29 when the simple accompaniment figure of the introduction recurs followed by its imitation in the melody, shown in Example 69.

The bass line also undergoes some changes in the third section. The germinal line, seen in Example 67, is embedded in the tremolo, occurring sometimes as the bottom note and sometimes as the top. The first F♯ to B cadence is nullified by the chord in m. 23, which results from the descending stepwise motion of the left-hand tremolo and the simultaneous presentation of the oscillating B♮ - C♮ motive in the right hand. The F♯ to B cadence that has characterized the end of each section thus far does not take place: the bass line ends on the antepenultimate G, and the vocal line carries on, resolving B♭ to B♮ without the ensuing bassline cadence. This gesture emphasizes the text, as "no ease" is given in the bass line.

The text of the *A″* section, essentially the first four lines of the sestet plus two words of line 13 due to enjambment, calls for a change in character because the speaker turns away from his own problems briefly. He recites a list of sinners who overindulge themselves in physical pleasure and who can turn to their memories of this pleasure to aid them when their desire is unsatisfied. Although Donne does not indicate this either by rhythm or giving the words a sense of forward motion, Britten's accompaniment and recitative-like vocal line paint the sinners as desperate men. The tremolo creates the tension that the sinners feel in their addictions, and the melodic line, which emphasizes unaccented syllables by agogic accents (refer to Example 69), shows the speaker's frustration at their ability to find pleasure. Britten's use of recitative may be modelled after some of Purcell's songs in which lyrical sections alternate with recitative. One example is Purcell's "Mad Bess," for which Britten had provided a realization of the continuo (see Example 70).

The *b* phrases of this section, which set line 12 plus two words from line 13 (due to enjambment), recalls the motive in the melodic line as the speaker returns to his grief over his own despair: "To poore me is allow'd / No ease." On the words "No ease," a B♭ moves to a B♮, a resolution which seems to conflict with the idea of the text, although the lack of the F♯ to B resolution in the bass provides a sense of disquietude. At the B♮, the accompaniment also has a B♮, furthering the sense of resolution. Britten brings in a C♮ a half-beat later, however, showing that there is, indeed, no ease allowed as the return to the *A* section occurs (refer to Example 69).

The final section consists solely of the half-step motive at the B - C♮ pitch level, so that the C♮/C♯ conflict is abandoned. This section also uses rhythms from the previous sections in both the accompaniment and the melodic line, thus associating the text with the text of the earlier sections. The motive is not transformed in any way, so it may be considered that Britten asserts the speaker returns to his initial despair over the sins he has committed. This despair is both the punishment for the sins and a sin because he despairs, which shows that he has no faith. There is no real resolution then, because the music does not stray from the motive that has been associated with the "holy discontent" and "paine." The final two lines of text, in fact, are an intensification of these concepts. The speaker now feels "vehement griefe" as opposed to mere "holy discontent" and because of this grief must endure mental "punishment and sinne" in comparison to suffering "paine," which Britten portrays through a recapitulation of the rests between segments of the text, giving this final section a heaviness. The motive gradually fades into a resolution in which C♮ and B in the vocal line coincide with C♮ and B, respectively, in the accompaniment. The effect, Example 70: Henry Purcell, "Mad Bess," mm. 54-60.[38]


ppp
54
55
56
war - - - - ble forth my e - le -
ppp
57 Recitativo Presto
pp molto cresc.
58
più cresc.
gy. Did you not see my love as he pass'd by you? His two flam - ing
trem.
pp molto cresc.
più cresc.
59
60
eyes, if he come nigh you, they will scorch up your hearts.
ff

---

[38] Purcell, Orpheus Britannicus: Six Songs, ed. Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1948). Copyright 1948 in U.S.A. by Boosey & Co., Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

however, is of continuance despite the fact that the music has ended – the speaker's despair, then, does not abate, but continues, unresolved.

As in "Oh my blacke Soule!" Britten uses certain pitches to create associations among words. Words concerning the parts of the body, as in "breast and eyes" (*l.* 2) and "heart" (*l.* 6), or references to conditions of the body, as in "itchy lecher" (*l.* 10), are all connected by the use of D to C♯, part of the melodic sequence. As well, the words "vaine" (*l.* 4), "paine" (*l.* 8), "ease" (*l.* 12) and "sinne" (*l.* 14) are all set on a B♮. Granted, their positions in the poem – the last word of the three quatrains in the case of the first three and the last word of the poem in the case of the fourth – makes their association appropriate, but by no means obligatory. The words "vaine" and "ease," until one considers the words preceding them, seem to have little in common with "paine" and "sinne," whose connections are self-evident. The fact that the speaker considers that something he has tried is "in vaine" and that he finds "no ease" makes the connection with "sinne" and "paine" more apparent: the fact that he has sinned has rendered all efforts futile.

In the literature, there have been several approaches to a description of the form of this song. In many ways, the perceptions are very different, and yet they are similar. Peter Evans describes the form as three quatrains set strophically, with the final two lines of the poem comprising a coda.[39] Although this description is satisfactory from a simple standpoint, it is not entirely true: the quatrains of the octave (*ll.* 1-4 and 5-8) are set strophically, but the setting of the first four lines of the sestet, constituting the third quatrain, is different in character, although there is some attempt at unification melodically. Moreover, the term strophic suggests more rigid approach to the melody than actually occurs. Peter Pears calls the song a variation form, which is, again, satisfactory, but not wholly accurate.[40] The variations of the melodic line are very subtle, making the similarities stand out over the differences. Only in the third section, comprising the first four lines of the sestet, is the variation of the melody more noticeable.

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[39] Evans, Music of Britten, 352.

The description fartherest afield is by Robert Brewster, who, in his attempt to categorize the form of all the songs, labels this form as a bar form, thus failing to account for a brief return of the *A* section.[41] On the whole, Pears's idea of the form comes closest to what is taking place musically, but none of the authors addresses the musical form in relation to the different character of each of the textual sections. In my opinion, the form is *A A' A" A'''*, featuring a short return preceded by a contrasting section that although it contains many ideas from the *A* section, exhibits a very different emotion (see Table 27).

TABLE 27

MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF O MIGHT THOSE SIGHES AND TEARES

Measure nos.	Musical Form	Phrases	Poetic Form	Tonal Areas
1-12	*A*	*a a' b b'*	Octave *ll.* 1-4	B Phrygian
13-21	*A '*	*a" a''' b" b'''*	Octave *ll.* 5-8	B Phrygian
22-27	*A" (B)*	*a'''' a'''' b''''*	Sestet *ll.* 9-11	B Phrygian
27-29	*Transition*	*b''''*	Sestet *ll.* 12-13frag	B Phrygian
29-33	*A '''*	*a'''''*	Sestet *ll.* 13-14	B Phrygian

---

[40] Pears, "Vocal Music," 70.

[41] Brewster, "Relationship Between Poetry and Music," 79-80.

The result of the similarities between the *A″* section and the previous sections is the infusion of the form with a high degree of integration between the sections. The change of character of the text, however, has a significant impact on our sense of the contrast in the *A″* section. If this were instrumental music, the return might be justified as a coda as Evans calls it, but given the importance of the text and the interaction of text and music, it must be seen as a true return, however brief.

Oh, to vex me

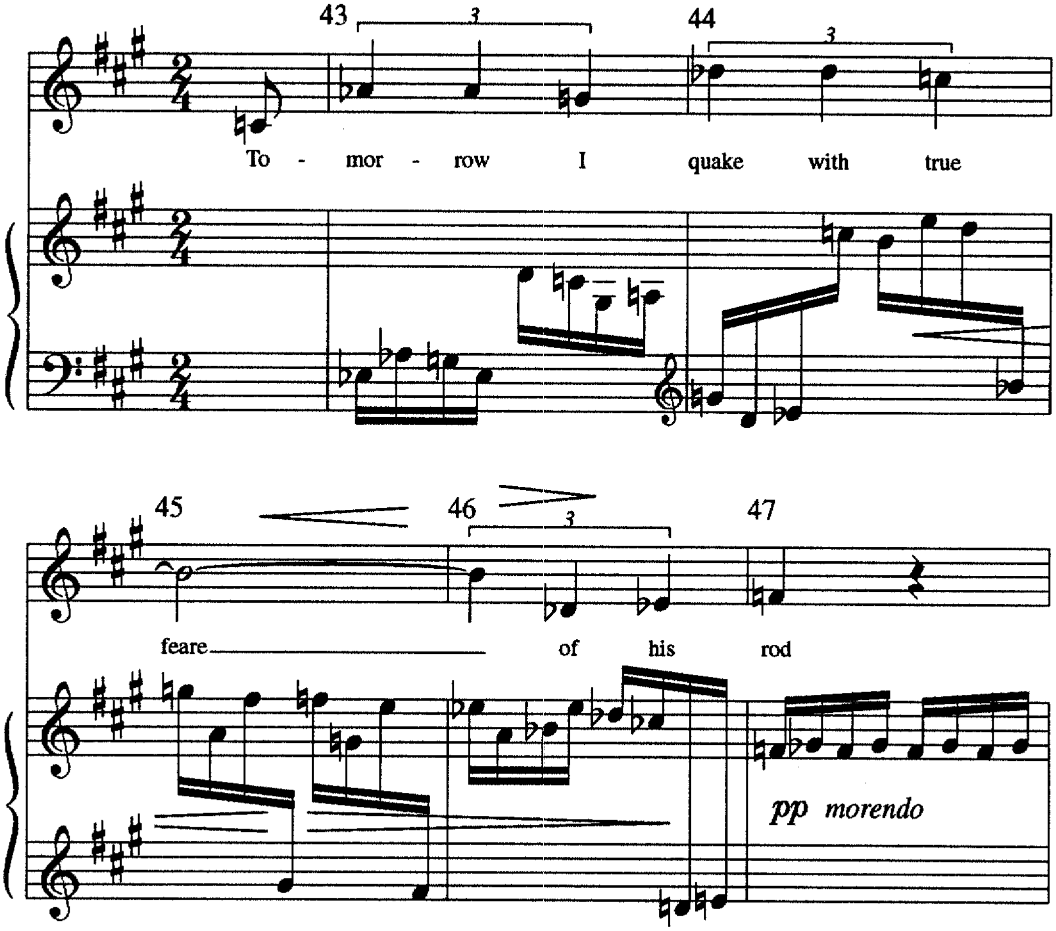
Oh, to vex me, contraryes meet in one:
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott
A constant habit; that when I would not
I change in vowes, and in devotione.
As humorous is my contritione
As my profane Love and as soone forgott:
As ridlingly distemper'd, cold and hott,
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.

I durst not view Heav'n yesterday; and today
In prayers, and flatt'ring speaches I court God:
Tomorrow I quake with true feare of his rod.
So my devout fitts come and go away,
Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.

In the fourth poem of the Donne cycle, there is no emotional change such as was noted in "O might those sighes and teares": it remains tension-charged and extrospective, in stark contrast to the prevailing inwardness of the previous text. The key image in the poem is that of "contraryes." Donne builds the poem around this concept, with almost every image set against its opposite. Britten captures this idea of antithesis in the elements of the form, creating a maze of relationships. The relationships are accomplished in various ways: 1) through word painting; 2) through "contraryes" in the melodic line; 3) through "contraryes" in both micro- and macro-structures of the accompaniment; and 4) through "contraryes" in the tonal material. These factors work together to create an interpretation of Donne's text that operates on several levels, each of which may come to the fore during the song.

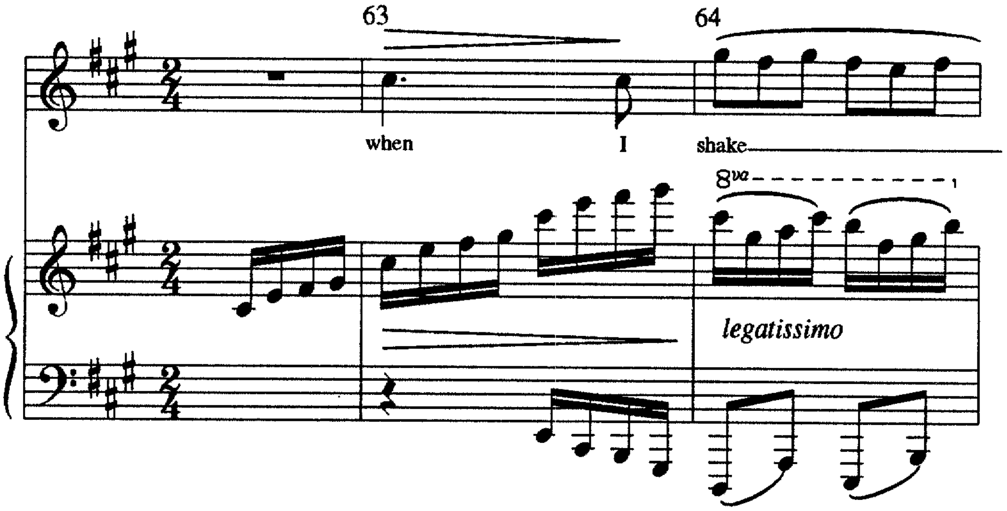
As in the previous songs, Britten creates an atmosphere for the text through word painting, which functions solely at the surface level. Several descriptive words are singled out for this treatment, which Britten accomplishes in a Purcellian fashion. To depict the word "quake" from line 11, he uses a vocal line that features two repeated notes followed by a descending half-step and a clash of two opposing metrical divisions of the duple meter between the accompaniment and vocal line (see Example 71). The word "shake" from line

Example 71: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 43-47.


43
3
44
3
To - mor - row I quake with true
45
46
3
47
feare of his rod
pp morendo

14 receives a more elaborate treatment (see Example 72), a three-note turn figure that is repeated and sequenced (descending), and because it is essentially written with as eighth-note triplets, clashes with the sixteenths of the simple duple meter in the accompaniment. Britten seems to have drawn directly from Purcell for the turn figure and for the placement of the melisma. In Purcell's song "Turn then thine eyes," for which Britten realized the figured bass, the turn figure, corresponding to the word "turn," permeates the entire first section and is subject to repetition and descending sequence (see Example 73).[42] Britten may have been tempted to place a lengthy melisma on this word because of his familiarity with some of Purcell's songs. In "Sweeter than roses," another song from Orpheus Britannicus that Britten realized, a melisma is placed on the antepenultimate syllable of a poetic line, shown in Example 74. Britten, consciously or unconsciously, is clearly imitating Purcell in this melisma.

Example 72: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 63-71.



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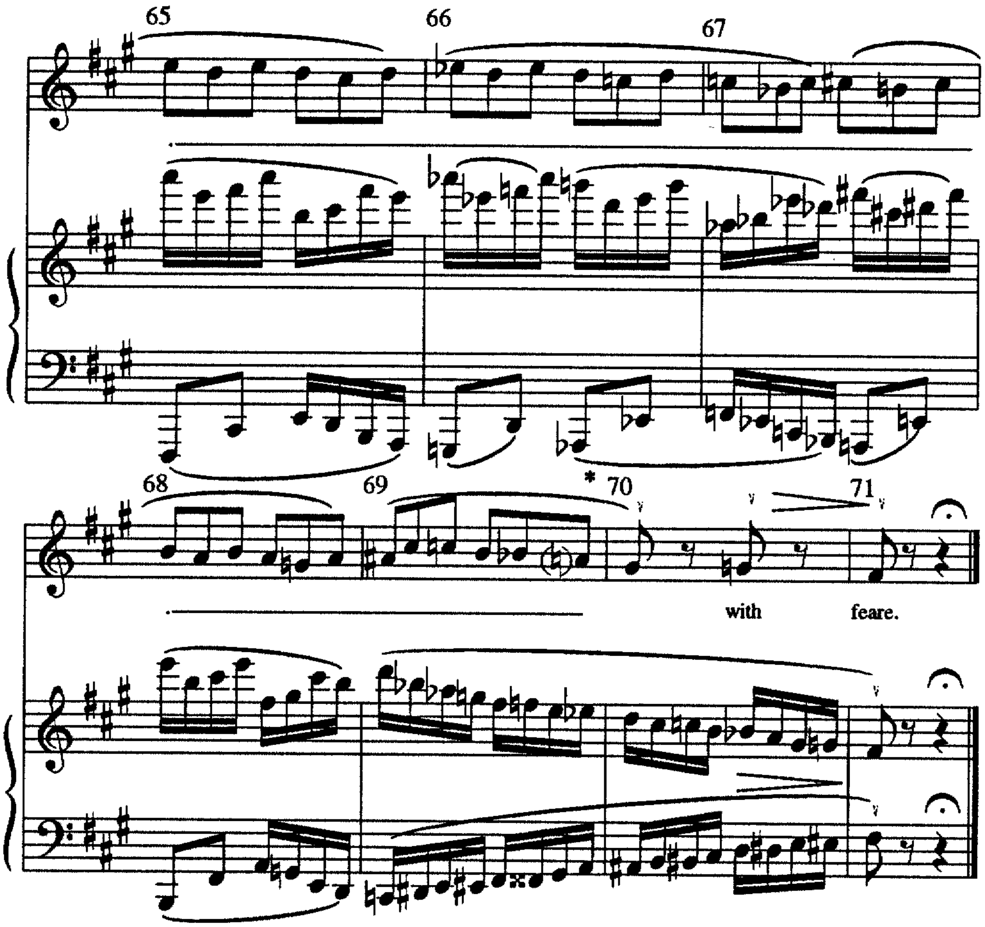
[42] There are many instances in the songs of Purcell for which Britten provided realizations of this same figure being sequenced in an ascending line.

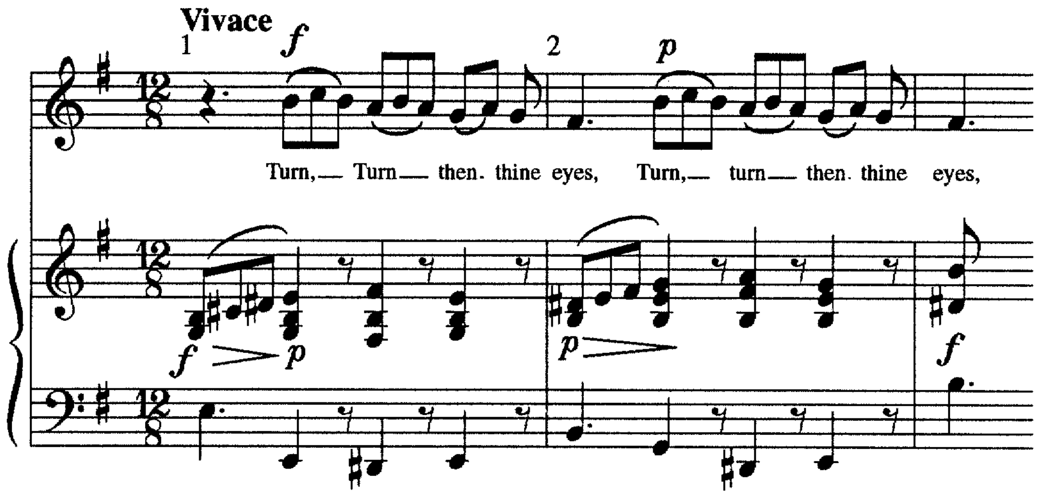
Example 72: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 63-71, cont.



*Peter Pears sings an A-natural on the 1960 London recording. The absence of the natural in the printed score is obviously an error.

Functioning at a deeper level in the depiction of opposites, as Donne's text includes opposites, so Britten seeks to portray the concept of opposites both aurally and visually in the overall shape of the melodic line. For example, the grammatical unit in line 2, which runs over into line 3 through enjambment, reads "Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott / A constant habit," throwing the words "inconstancy" and "constant" into opposition. Britten's melodic line reveals a pattern that readily expresses the concept of antithesis without becoming obvious and predictable (see Example 75, mm. 7-11). An ascending scale fragment leads up to the word "unnaturally" – which is set to an "unnatural" triplet

Example 73: Henry Purcell, "Turn then thine eyes," mm. 1-2.[43]


Vivace
1
2
f
p
Turn,— Turn— then. thine eyes, Turn,— turn— then. thine eyes,
f > p
p >
f

that clashes with the meter – followed by a short ascent to the first syllable of the verb. The verb itself, "begott," is broken by an descending leap of a seventh, which leads back up for a descending scale fragment at the words "A constant habit." The melodic design for this sentence is essentially very simple – an ascending scale fragment answered by a descending one; but the inclusion of a large leap at an unanticipated moment in the text, breaks the simple pattern and creates tension to set up the opposing statement which follows in the text. Even the beginnings and endings of the phrases are set up so that opposites arise: if a phrase ends on a high pitch, the next one starts on a low pitch, and vice versa (refer to Example 75, mm. 11-12). Phrases also begin on a particular pitch (i.e., E♮ in the first phrase) only to end a major or minor second above or below the starting pitch (i.e., D at the end of the first phrase). Britten continues this technique of using simple, opposing melodic

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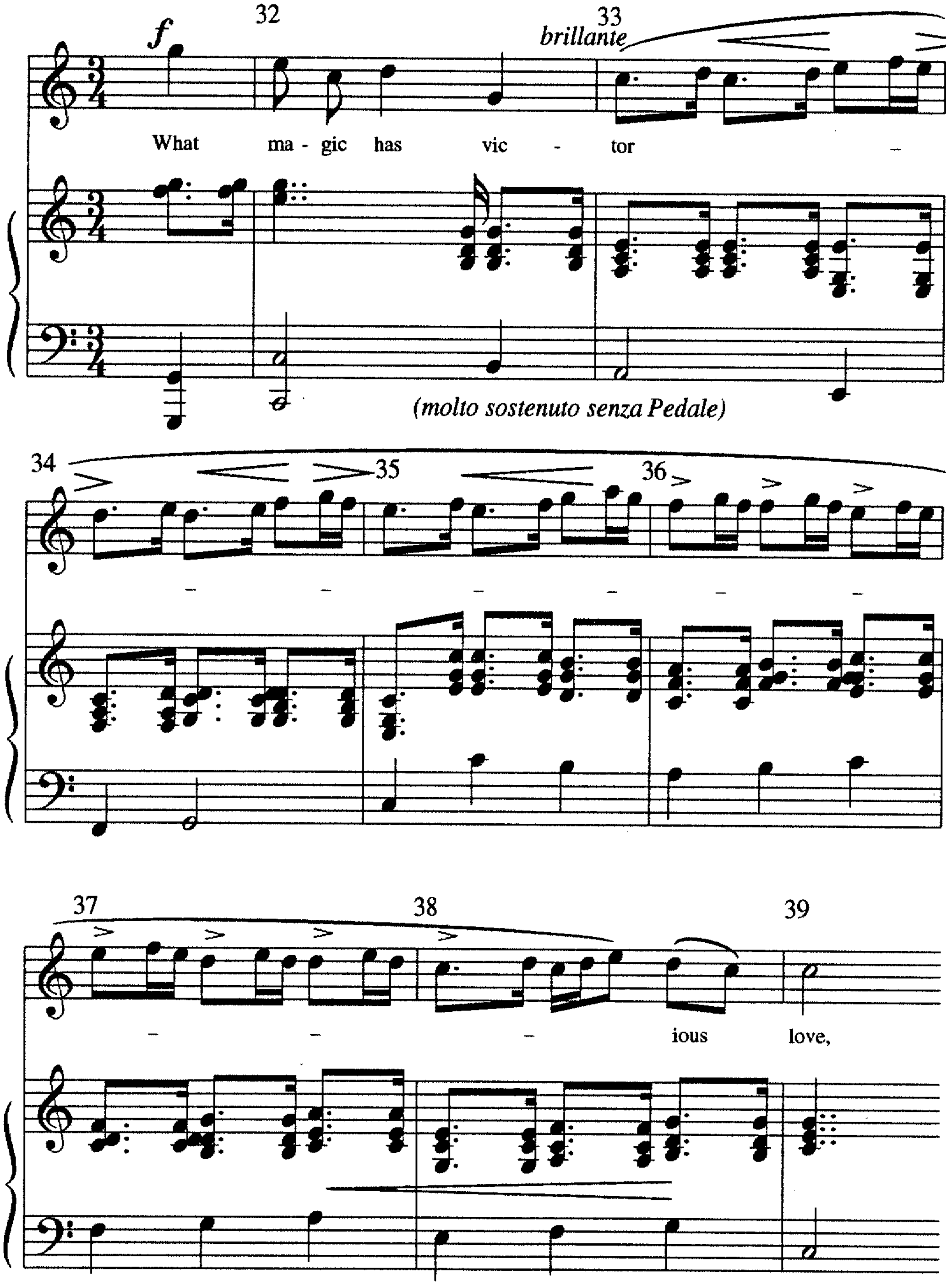
[43] Henry Purcell, Orpheus Britannicus: Seven Songs, ed. Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947). Copyright 1947 in U.S.A. by Boosey & Co., Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

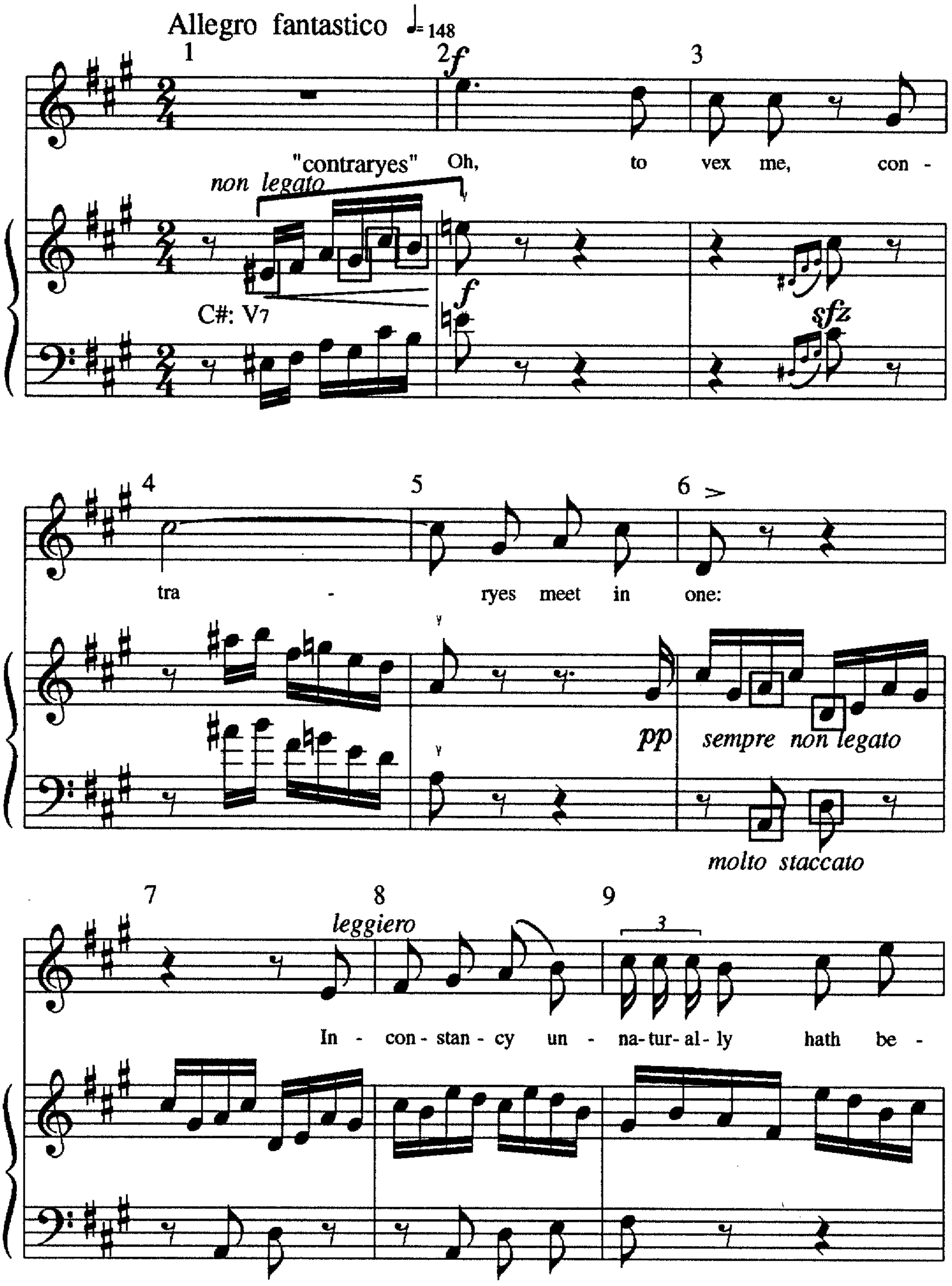
Example 74: Henry Purcell, "Sweeter than roses," mm. 32-39.[44]


f
32
33
brillante
What ma - gic has vic - tor
(molto sostenuto senza Pedale)
34
35
36
37
38
39
ious love,

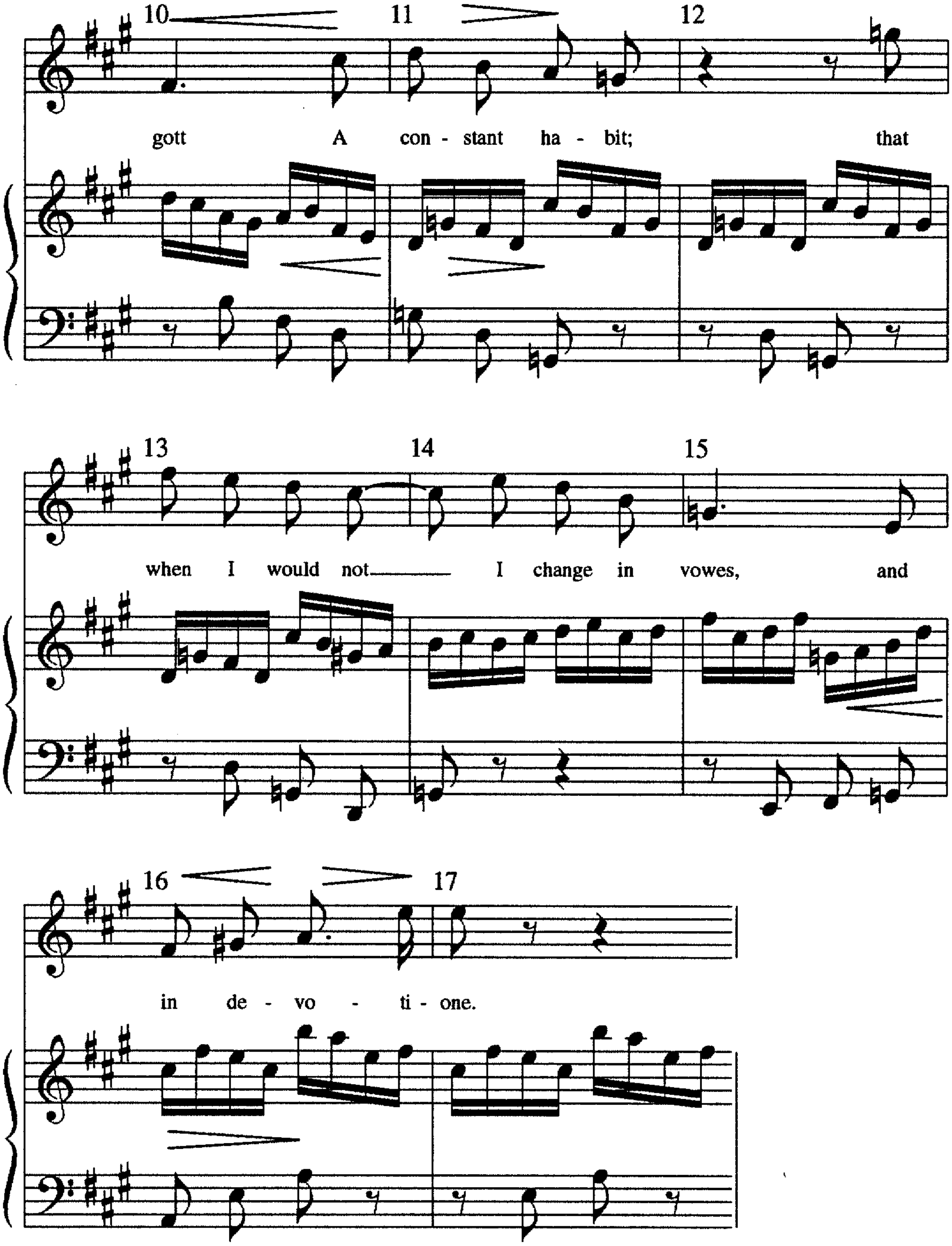
---

[44] Purcell, Orpheus Britannicus: Six Songs, ed. Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1948). Copyright 1948 in U.S.A. by Boosey & Co., Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

Example 75: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 1-17.


Allegro fantastico ♩.=148
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
f
"contraryes"
non legato
C#: V7
sfz
pp
sempre non legato
molto staccato
leggiero
3
Oh, to vex me, con - tra - ryes meet in one:
In - con - stan - cy un - na - tur - al - ly hath be -

Example 75: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 1-17, cont.


10
11
12
gott A con - stant ha - bit; that
13
14
15
when I would not I change in vowes, and
16
17
in de - vo - ti - one.

figures that are infused with unpredictable elements to convey the idea of opposites or "contraryes" throughout the song.

Britten's use of continuous variation to generate the melodic material, gives the melodic line impetus, propelling it always to the next phrase so that resolution, when it does occur, tends to be short-lived, leading onward rather than providing a point of repose. To counteract the forward motion caused by this technique, Britten also constructs phrases in the first section with internal stopping points on held notes, often in syncopation, giving the phrases a disjointed feel, and setting another "opposite": motion versus stasis. In the second section, he further breaks the motion of the phrases by dividing them with rests (refer to Example 75, mm. 8-11 and Example 76, mm. 27-33, in particular).[45] Both the rests and the held notes break the melodic and textual phrases into asymmetrical units – or opposites – challenging the notion of balanced phrasing. The held notes occur on accented syllables for the most part (m. 18 is a rare exception), but not necessarily on the strongest accent of the grammatical unit or on the accented part of the measure. For example, in lines 3-4, "that when I would not / I change in vowes, and in devotione," Britten sets the word "not" as the strong accent by means of lengthening it, but places it on the final eighth note of the measure (refer to Example 75, mm. 13-17). The word "change," on the other hand, which carries the central meaning of the sentence and which would be given the strongest accent, is hardly accented at all, although it occurs on beat 2 of the 2/4 measure. Britten uses this disjointed phrase motion to give the melodic line a sense of spontaneity, as well as a sense that things are not as they should be – a world turned upside down.

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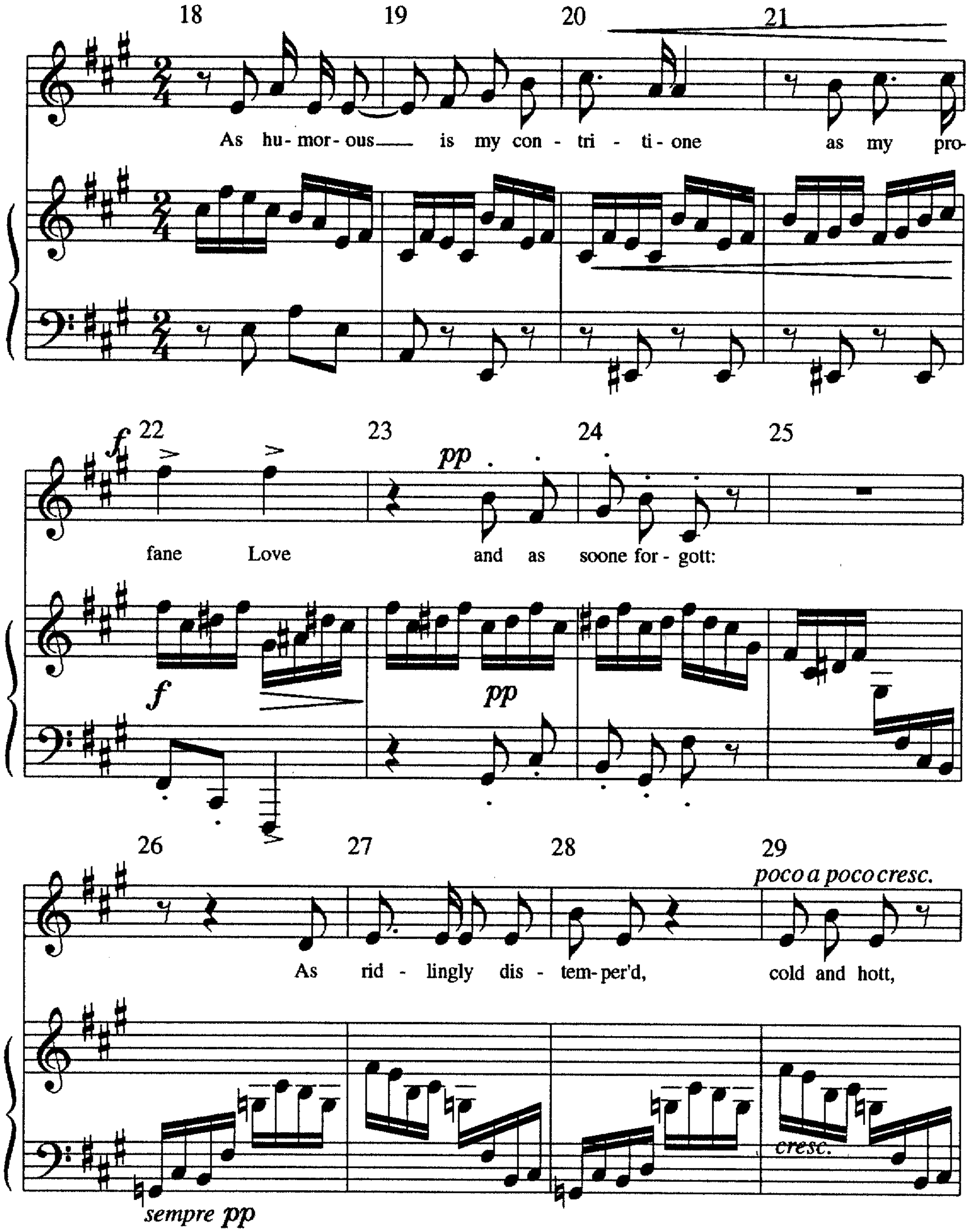
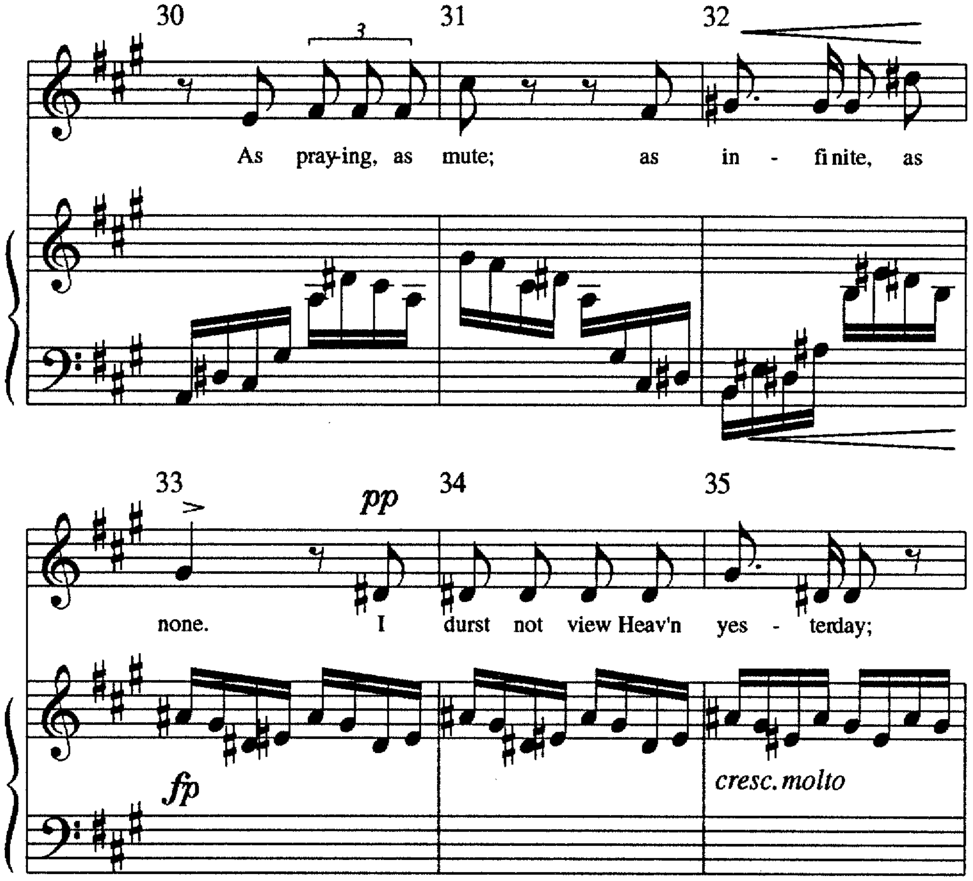
[45] The reason behind this is clearly inherent in the nature of the text itself, which is broken by frequent punctuation marks.

Example 76: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 18-35.


18
19
20
21
As hu- mor- ous is my con - tri - ti - one as my pro-
22
23
24
25
f
pp
fane Love and as soone for - gott:
f
pp
26
27
28
29
poco a poco cresc.
As rid - lingly dis - tem- per'd, cold and hott,
cresc.
sempre pp

Example 76: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 18-35, cont.


30
3
31
32
As pray-ing, as mute; as in - fi nite, as
33
pp
34
35
none. I durst not view Heav'n yes - terday;
fp
cresc. molto

The disjunct rhythm of the vocal line, which is closely aligned with natural speech patterns, is highlighted by the quick alternation of dynamic levels, which also creates tension through unexpected changes (see Table 28). A phrase which is set *pianissimo* may be followed by another phrase that is also *pianissimo* or that is *forte* or louder, but without very little sense of building to these dynamic levels gradually. Britten's crescendos and decrescendos to set up each phrase occur at the very end of the phrase in the accompaniment, with the result that the changes seem chaotic and unplanned, capturing the speaker's own frenetic and incongruous feelings over his inconsistency in his relationship with God. Donne's voice in this poem has often been described as witty because of the

TABLE 28

DYNAMIC LEVELS IN OH, TO VEX ME

Measure nos.	Phrase number	Dynamic level	Poetic form
2-5	*A* 1	*f*	Octave *l.* 1
7-11	*A* 2	*pp*	Octave *ll.* 2-3 (frag)
12-17	*A* 3	*pp*	Octave *ll.* 3-4
18-22	*B* 1	*pp* - *f*	Octave *ll.* 5-6 (frag)
23-24	*B* 2	*pp*	Octave *l.* 6
27-29	*B* 3	*pp*	Octave *l.* 7
30-33	*B* 4	*cresc.* to *p*	Octave *l.* 8
34-35	*B* 5	*pp*	Sestet *l.* 9 (frag)
36-41	*B* 6	*f*	Sestet *ll.* 9-10
43-47	*B* 7	*p* - *pp*	Sestet *l.* 11
53-57	*A'* 1	*f*	Sestet *l.* 12
58-59	*A'* 2	*p*	Sestet *l.* 13 (frag)
60-62	*A'* 3	*p cresc.*	Sestet *ll.* 13-14 (frag)
63-71	*A'* 4	*p* - *pp*	Sestet *l.* 14

intellectual exercise of the paradoxes,[46] but Britten's speaker tends more toward paranoia and hysteria – evident in the sudden shifts in dynamics – as he examines his inability to remain sinless.

The opposites in the melodic line are, perhaps, the most readily perceived due to the focus that the text naturally brings to the melody. Such a blatant representation of an organizing principle might tend to lead to repetitive figures and designs in the melody, but this is not the case with Britten, whose prowess at melodic invention was well-established by this time. The melody is composed of figures that are similar, but constantly reordered, expanded or contracted intervallically, providing little room for resolution as each gesture generates familiar, but new, material in a series of twists and turns.[47] Further, the disjointed rhythms that stress normally unstressed words in the line, imitates Donne's frequent use of commas and changes of meter. Britten's melodic line, then, closely parallels Donne's approach to the text, which also consists of similar grammatical gestures with unexpected twists in logic and direction due to his juxtaposition of an adjective and its opposite in each line or across two lines.

In a less obvious fashion, Britten also depicts the concept of "contraryes" throughout the song by designing opposing structures in the accompaniment. The first example occurs at the start of the perpetual accompaniment figure, in m. 6 (refer to Example 75), where the descending fifth from A to D in the treble (taken from the melodic line at mm. 5-6) is set against an ascending fourth, A to D, in the bass. In the same measure, Britten sets up an

---

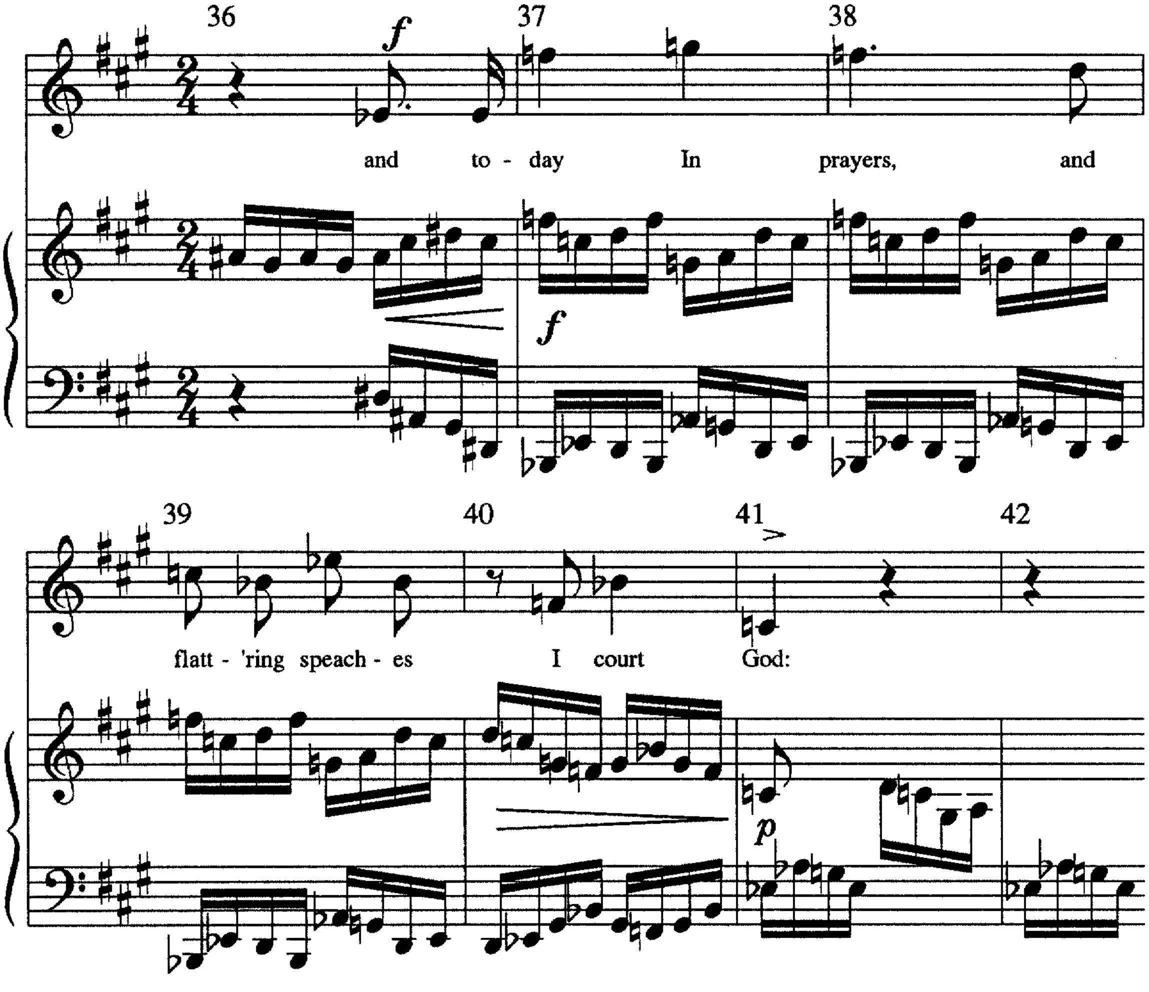
[46] David Novarr, The Disinterred Muse: Donne's Texts and Contexts (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 122.

[47] Only at the point of return and in the last measure of the song are there any strong feelings of resolution, and that at the point of return is fleeting.

"opposites" pattern for the figuration that continues for most of the song: if the figure descends and then ascends, it is answered by a figure that ascends and then descends.

In the central section of the song, Britten sets the figure against itself in the treble and bass of the accompaniment, and in doing so uses mirror images (see Example 77, mm. 36-40).[48] The same principle governs the final eight measures of the piece, but the design is

Example 77: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 36-42.


36
f
37
38
and to - day In prayers, and
f
39
40
41
42
flatt - 'ring speach - es I court God:
p

---

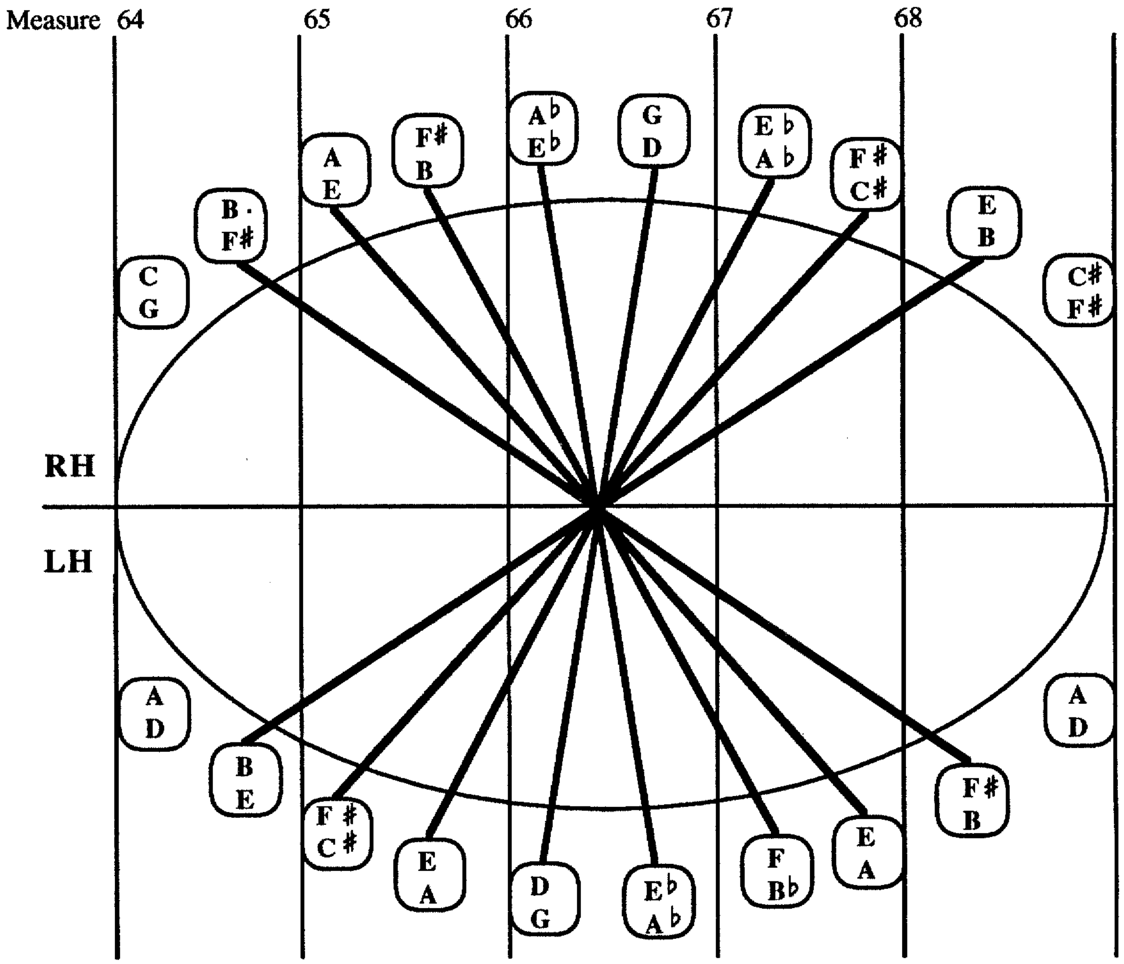
[48] The figures set against each other are inversions but do not start on the same note.

much more elaborate (refer to Example 72). The bass line consists of fifths and scale fragments that run contrary to the figuration in the treble, with the most obvious point being the opposing chromatic scales in mm. 69-71. The plan behind mm. 64-68, however, reveals an intricate mirror image that involves retrograde, or horizontal mirroring, as well as the vertical mirroring that was seen previously. The center of the design is m. 66, in which the outline of the first figure in the right hand becomes the second figure in the left hand, and the first fifth of the left hand is elaborated in the second figure of the right hand. As one moves outward from this point, this pattern continues, allowing for chromatic alterations of pitches, as seen in Table 29. Further, each measure contains a small mirror, with the exception of m. 64. For example, in m. 65, the A to E fourth in the right hand on beat one is answered by an E to A fifth in the left hand on beat two, and the F# to C# fifth in the left hand of beat one is answered by a C# to F# fourth in the right hand on beat two. This structure accompanies the elaborate melisma on the word "shake," creating a feeling of chaos in what, in actuality, is a highly organized passage that sets the most enigmatic paradox of the entire poem: "Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare."

The tonal focus changes rapidly, giving the impression that it is failing to commit to one tonal area or another. In fact, the melodic line, which initiates moves to new tonal areas, and accompaniment stress two particular tonal regions in a further exploration of the idea of opposites on two levels. In establishing a tonal area, however temporary it may be, Britten uses an ascending fourth or descending fifth in gestures that suggest a dominant moving to its tonic. The two most important tonal areas, C# (the focus of the beginning and the return) and F# (the focus of the ending), also share that dominant-to-tonic relationship, so that the song may be seen as a large-scale, dominant-to-tonic motion, with the two areas considered to be opposites.

TABLE 29

MIRROR STRUCTURE IN MM. 64-68 OF OH, TO VEX ME


Measure 64
65
66
67
68
RH
LH
C G
B F#
A E
F# B
A♭ E♭
G D
E♭ A♭
F# C#
E B
C# F#
A D
B E
F# C#
E A
D G
E♭ A♭
F B♭
E A
F# B
A D

The accompaniment figure, which persists throughout the song, is taken from the vocal line at m. 5 (refer to Example 75), and the opening upward gesture, which superimposes an F#-minor triad with its dominant-seventh, also cycle of fourths. It provides a sense of tonal progression in the song in conjunction with a bass line that suggests traditional dominant-to-tonic cadences through the upward leap of a fourth or downward leap of a fifth, as well as quartal sonorities. The right-hand figure is composed essentially of a fifth or fourth decorated by a second above or below, in other words, a cycle of fourths. This figure is rotated, transposed, reordered and subjected to inversion throughout the course of the piece. The gesture suggesting dominant-to-tonic in the bass line, taken from the right-hand figure, which is then coupled with the same expression imbedded in the right-hand figuration, emphasizes the goal pitch of these fourths and fifths as a subsidiary tonal focus, seen in m. 6, Example 75. Britten, however, constantly shifts the fourths and fifths to new tonal levels, with the result that no one subsidiary pitch is allowed to create a lasting impression.

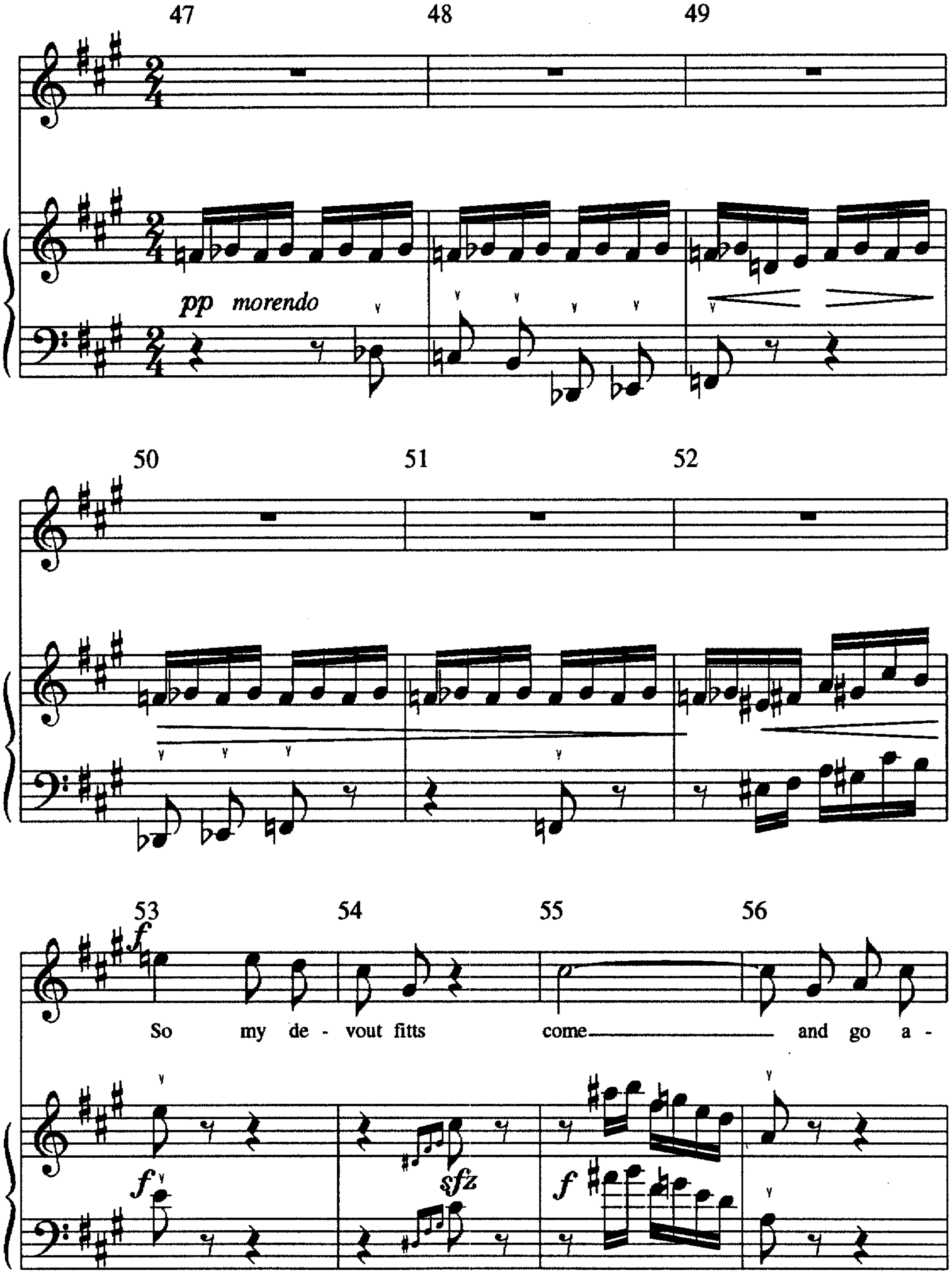
The first gesture in the section, which corresponds to the first quatrain of the sonnet, sets C♯ into opposition with F♯. In the gesture, F♯ is asserted by means of its leading tone, E♯, and the outlining of a dominant-seventh chord on C♯. The pitch C♯ is defined through the motion from G♯ to C♯, embedded in the gesture and the appearance of E♮ as the goal note of the gesture and opening pitch of the vocal line. The first vocal phrase, however, clearly asserts C♯ through centricity and a repetition of the G♯ to C♯ gesture. The vocal phrase ends on the pitch D, the opposite of its starting point, the pitch E, and the tonal focus in the accompaniment shifts to D briefly via a reiteration of A to D ascending fourths in the bass line. The next vocal phrase, however, which sets the enjambment from line 2 to line 3, returns to the F♯/C♯ conflict. By the end of the phrase, bass line and vocal line are in agreement when the focus shifts again, to the note G. As has become a pattern, the third phrase begins around the G, but shifts to A at the end, corresponding with a return to the opening pitch and the F♯/C♯ conflict in the right-hand of the accompaniment. The return provides a sense of closure and articulates the end of the first section, although the bass line does not follow the lead and return to C♯.

The contrasting second section, which comprises the second quatrain and the first tercet of the sestet, begins from the level of A, but moves quickly at the end of the first phrase and beginning of the second (setting the enjambment between lines 5 and 6) to F♯, established by both its leading tone in the bass line and dominant-to-tonic motion in the vocal line (see Example 76). The continuation of the second vocal phrase turns the C♯ to F♯ motion around, so that F♯ now leads to C♯ (see mm. 23-24). The bass line, however, presents a mirror image of the vocal line, which ends on F♯ against C♯ in the voice. This mirror structure in which the relationship of F♯ and C♯ becomes somewhat confused, leads into a sequence that sets a series of opposites that generate lines 7-9 of the text.

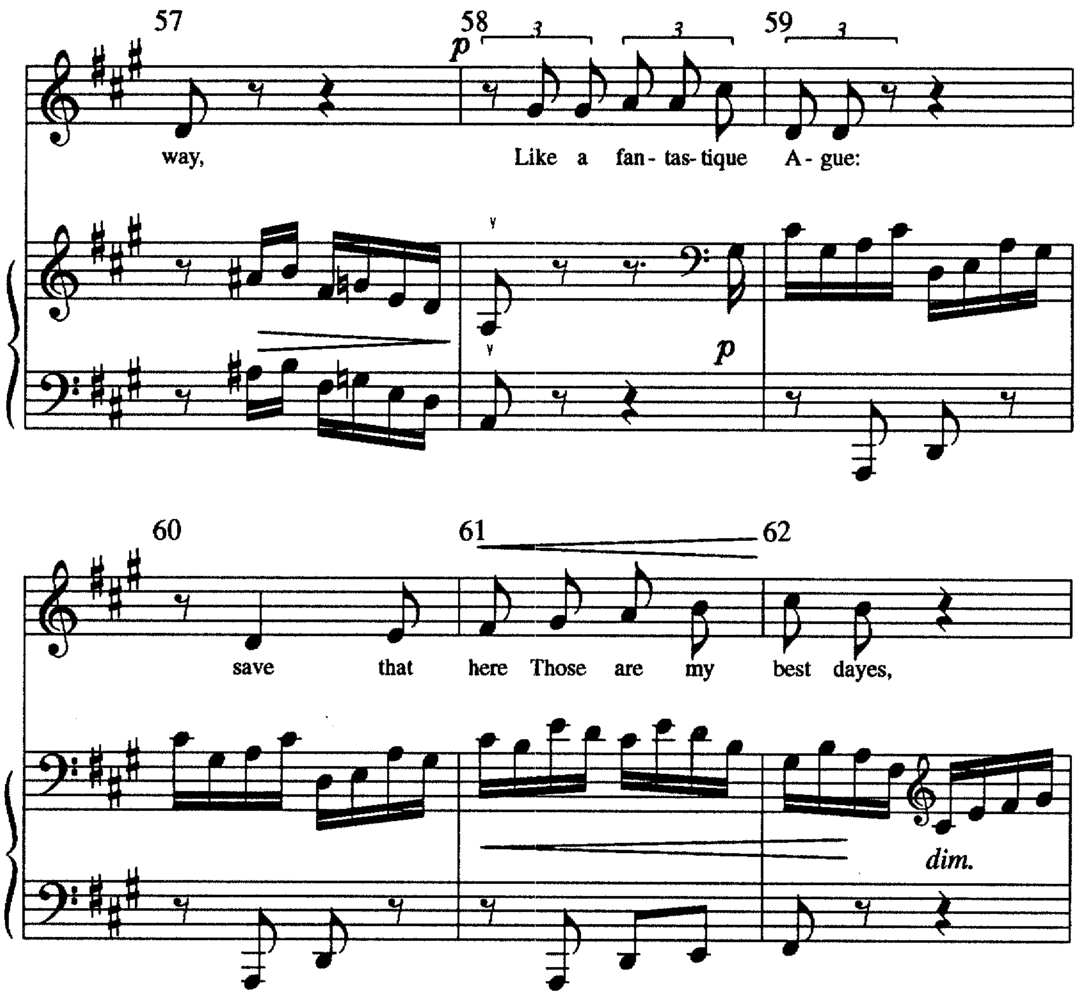
The material of the sequence consists of the retrograde of the fourths that have been used to establish pitch centricity; in other words, the motion is now tonic-to-dominant. The sequence sets out from the level of E and moves by ascending steps through F♯ and G♯. After it reaches G♯, the fifths turn back into the fourths for the setting of the ninth line. The D♯ from the G♯ area is respelled as E♭, leading to a temporary focus on that tonal region in the setting of the final words of line 9 and most of line 10. The motion from G♯ to E♭ (the enharmonic spelling of D♯) is a small-scale inversion a major second higher of the C♯ to F♯ motion of the song. This gesture at once captures two of the "contraryes" found in the music: 1) the fourth/fifth relationship between pitches which constantly alternates between dominant-to-tonic and tonic-to-dominant, and 2) the opposition of a pitch with another pitch a second away, found at the ends of melodic lines, and in the sequence.

The E♭ section leads to a brief focus on A♭, followed one on D♭, or G♯ to C♯, in a restoration of the dominant-to-tonic motion for the setting of line 11. By the end of the phrase, the emphasis on D♭ has shifted to G♭ (or F♯) in a transposition of the ascending fourth from A♭ to D♭. Britten uses an oscillation between F♮, the final pitch of the melodic phrase, and G♭ as material for a transition, respelling them as E♯ and F♯ to begin the return, setting the final tercet (see Example 78, mm. 47-52). Until the elaborate mirror

Example 78: "Oh, to vex me," mm. 47-62.


47
48
49
pp morendo
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
f
So my de - vout fitts come and go a -
sfz
f

Example 78: "Oh, to vex, me, mm. 47-62, cont.


57
58
59
p
3
3
3
way,
Like a fan- tas- tique A - gue:
p
60
61
62
save that here Those are my best dayes,
dim.

design begins in m. 64, the recapitulation merely brings back elements of the *A* section but in a truncated fashion. For example, the first phrase is brought back intact, but the second phrase is a conflation of ideas, accompanied by a brief focus on D in the bass line that moves immediately to F#.

The mirror design from mm. 64 to 71 is a summary of the elements of the tonal material. Every ascending fifth in the bass line – the tonic-to-dominant relationship – is opposed by a descending fourth in the right-hand – the dominant-to-tonic relationship, and vice versa. The bass line moves by step, both whole and half-steps, which recalls the relationship of the beginnings and ends of phrases. The bass line finally reaches B-F# on the first beat of m. 68. On the second beat, the right hand reaches F#-C#. At this point, Britten abandons the mirror design and unfolds two chromatic scales, descending in the right hand, and ascending in the left, finally reaching F# – without the help of C#.

In his formal design, Britten joins the final quatrain of the octave and the first tercet of the sestet, although they could stand on their own grammatically (see Table 30). His use of a large central section is not unusual in this cycle, such as was noted in "Oh my blacke Soule" and "Batter my heart." The reason for such a central section in those cases had to do with the need for a crisis before the textual resolution and the appearance of the word

TABLE 30

TEXT OF OH TO VEX ME AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Tonal Areas	Musical Scheme
Oh, to vex me, contraryes meet in one:	C#	*A*: The speaker finds himself in a state of sinfulness that is full of contradictions: he is able to be constant in his sinfulness, but not in his vows to God
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott	D/F#	
A constant habit; that when I would not	G	
I change in vowes, and in devotione.	A	
As humorous is my contritione	A	*B*: The series of metaphorical clauses in the first quatrain pushes it into the first tercet of the sestet, helping to build to the crisis of the text in which the speaker realizes that he may be doomed to sin forever.
As my profane Love and as soone forgott:	F#/C#	
As ridlingly distemper'd, cold and hott,	E	
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.	G#	
I durst not view Heav'n yesterday; and today	G# E♭	
In prayers, and flatt'ring speaches I court God:	A♭-D♭-G♭	
Tomorrow I quake with true feare of his rod.		
So my devout fitts come and go away,	C#	*A'*: This is more of a summary than a resolution; Britten portrays this through the recapitulation of and complication of several devices used previously
Like a fantastique Ague: save that here	D-F#	
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.	mirror-F#	

"yet" which signals that crisis. Here the reason seems to be based largely upon the enigmatic grammatical structure of the lines 5-8 which consists of nothing but metaphorical clauses, although the need for a crisis is present as well. The rests which Britten uses to break up the clauses work with the ascending and sequential melodic line in providing a sense of *accelerando* that also exists in Donne's text. As the value of the rests between clauses decrease, the melody rises, paralleling the rush created by Donne's reduction of the clauses to their essential syntactical elements. Through these methods both musical and grammatical, the quatrain is pushed into the next section, lines 9-11, which returns to a complete grammatical structure – an unusual division of the sestet in an English sonnet. Both Britten and Donne build up to the textual crisis: the speaker was not sinless in the past, although he is trying to merit grace in the present, but he fears that he will lack God's grace when the Day of Judgment comes. In other words, the speaker is worried that he will never receive God's grace to become sinless, that he is doomed to sin forever.

Britten's musical setting provides a bridge between the octave and sestet of the poem that is not present in the poem itself. That Donne clearly intended for the sections to elide is evident in his fragmentation of the clauses which pushes the structures forward. Donne was bound syntactically, however, to use an indication of a stop at the end of line 8 at the completion of the sentence, with little control over how long that stop should last. Musically, Britten's "stop" between line 8 and line 9, an eighth rest, goes almost unperceived because of the quick tempo. Moreover, his use of the same basic melodic gesture for the first part of line 9 as for several of the "as" clauses, illuminates the relationship of this phrase with the previous lines in a way that could not be done with the words themselves. In this manner, Britten's musical setting accomplishes what the text alone could not do, so the structure of the text is clarified by the music.

Having expressed his fear, the speaker can now either move on to a resolution of his fears or come to some sort of conclusion based on his experiences. Donne's last three lines are more of a summary than a resolution, and Britten's recapitulation of the first phrase and subsequent discontinuance of the melodic line from the *A* section seem to solidify this. The mirror design (mm. 64-71) which sets the final words of the final line of the poem, "I shake with feare," accomplishes several purposes (refer to Example 72). The first is to portray the word "shake," which Britten does through a metrical conflict between compound duple in the vocal line and simple duple in the accompaniment and the sequential figure that comprises the melody. The second is to set the central paradox of the poem: the speaker knows that even though he feels very far from God, he is actually closer because he realizes that there is a problem in his relationship with God – that he is still a sinner. Britten's third purpose is to summarize the concept of opposites which has been the governing principle for both the music and the poem. The mirror, which is an elaborate structure involving retrograde and inversion on both the vertical and horizontal planes, elucidates the entire process that has guided Britten's method in the melody of setting the text. Each phrase or phrase unit contains a gesture and its opposite, although not necessarily with the same rigor as is found in the mirror structure. The mirror is the epitome of paradoxes in its design, and in it, Britten shows that he is fully aware of Donne's methods of construction and of Donne's textual meaning.

What if this present

What if this present were the world's last night?
Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether that countenance can thee affright,
Teares in his eyes quench the amazing light,
Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell.
And can that tongue adjudge thee into hell,
Which pray'd forgivenesse for his foes fierce spight?

No, no; but as in my idolatrie
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pitty, foulnesse onely is
A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde.

Britten's setting of Donne's sonnet on the Last Judgment is constructed out of seemingly disparate elements which weave in and out of synchronization. Much of the perceived chaotic and confused atmosphere of the song[49] arises from a lack of cognitive harmonic and melodic elements, giving it the sense of being through-composed. The unstable sensibility of the harmony and melody, however, is kept in control by figures in the accompaniment that recur, but, in keeping with the general character of the song, do so with little or no sense of order. The melody and the tonal scheme, however, are very tightly and economically organized, even if based upon a seeming wealth of material, and both contribute to a very well-defined interpretation of the song on a deeper level, as well as creating a sense of atmosphere on the surface.

The chief image of the poem is suggested by Donne's first line of text: "What if this present were the world's last night?" Britten sets up this question through accompaniment figures that represent certain images from the Book of Revelations: the trumpet that announces the end of the world (motive *a*); the death march that occurs when the dead rise from their graves (motive *b*); and the chaos that will reign on earth after those in Christ have been taken (motive *c*). The images that the motives generate recur with the motives throughout the song, reminding the soul of the possibility of complete destruction if atonement is not accomplished.[50]

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[49] Brown, "Stimulus and Form," 222.

[50] See Appendix B for examples of the motives and their transformations in the accompaniment.

Britten's setting of the first line of the poem draws directly on the first gesture in the accompaniment (see Example 79). The tonal implications are unclear, especially considering the move to a G♭ in the fourth measure that initiates the "chaos" motive (*c*). The ambitus seems to suggest an emphasis on D, but the D to G ascending fourth formed by the first two notes suggest a G focus. The G♭ reference in mm. 4-5, initially approached from C in the accompaniment and E in the voice, only confuses the issue, which is not resolved until the beginning of the next section. The first line, in effect, acts as an introduction to the poem, providing all the necessary scenery for the meditation that follows. Britten sets it as such, and draws much of his musical material for the remainder of the song from it.[51] The melodic line is both an announcement of the impetus of the poem, as it is based on the trumpet fanfare from the accompaniment, and an impassioned cry for help, seen in its ascending leap to G♭.

The second section of the song, which corresponds to the remaining lines of the octave, begins with the right hand of the accompaniment presenting motive *y* over G-minor triads in the left hand (see Example 80). This provides a context for the first melodic gesture of the song, and defines the G♭ area as a prolonged leading tone to G. The melodic phrases for this section consist of many repetitions of pitches, and are more akin to lyrical recitative than to traditional concepts of melody.

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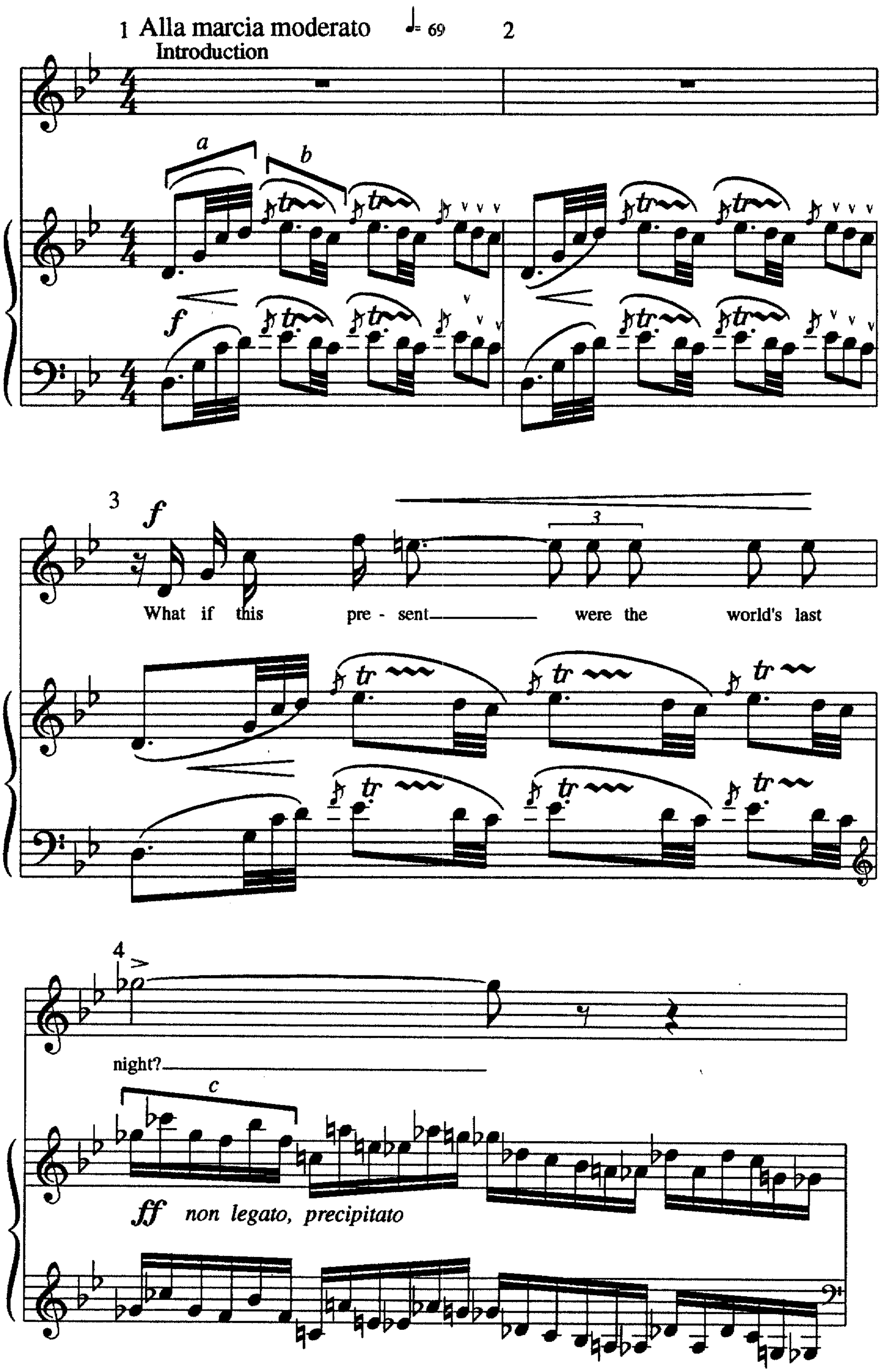
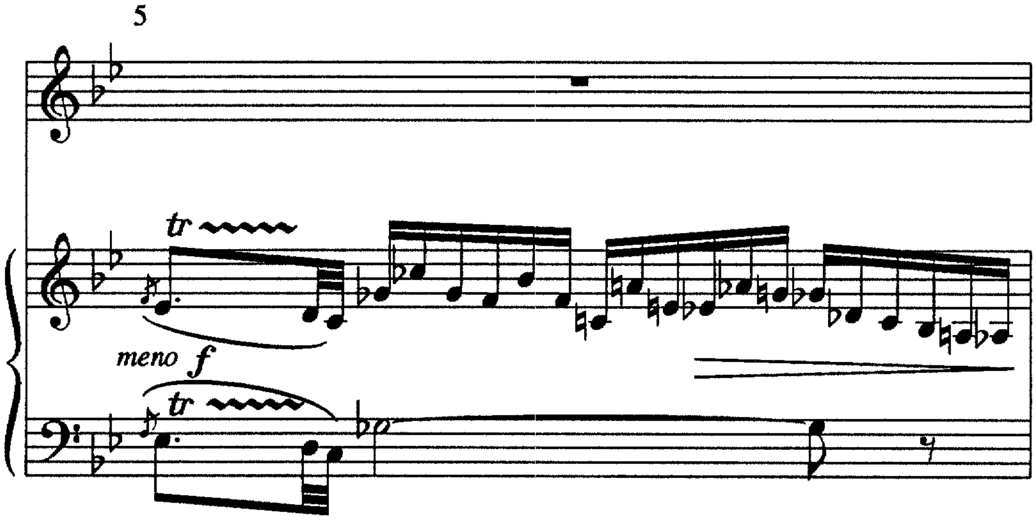
[51] I do not mean to imply that the accompaniment generates the entire song from its materials as Robert Brewster asserts. To a certain extent his generalization about the relationship of the first and fourth measures to the whole of the song is true, especially for the accompaniment itself, but this is less true of the melody and completely incorrect for the harmonic direction of the song. Later in his essay, Brewster claims that the melody is completely independent from the accompaniment, a statement that is surprising in view of his earlier assertion. Brewster, "Relationship Between Poetry and Music," 85 and 95.

Example 79: "What if this present," mm. 1-5.


1 Alla marcia moderato ♩. = 69
Introduction
2
a
b
f
tr
3
f
What if this pre - sent were the world's last
4
night?
c
ff non legato, precipitato

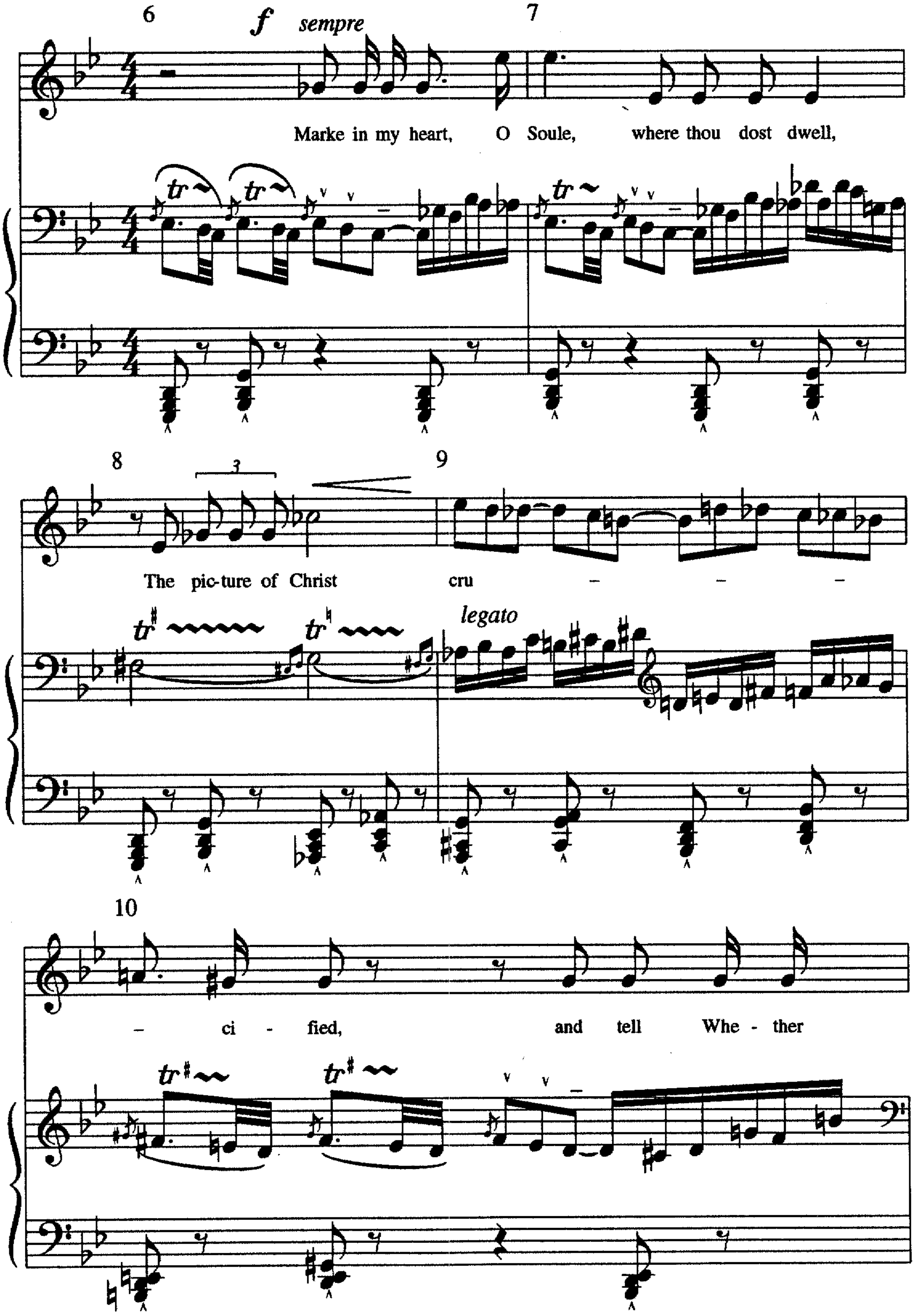
Example 79: "What if this present," mm. 1-5, cont.



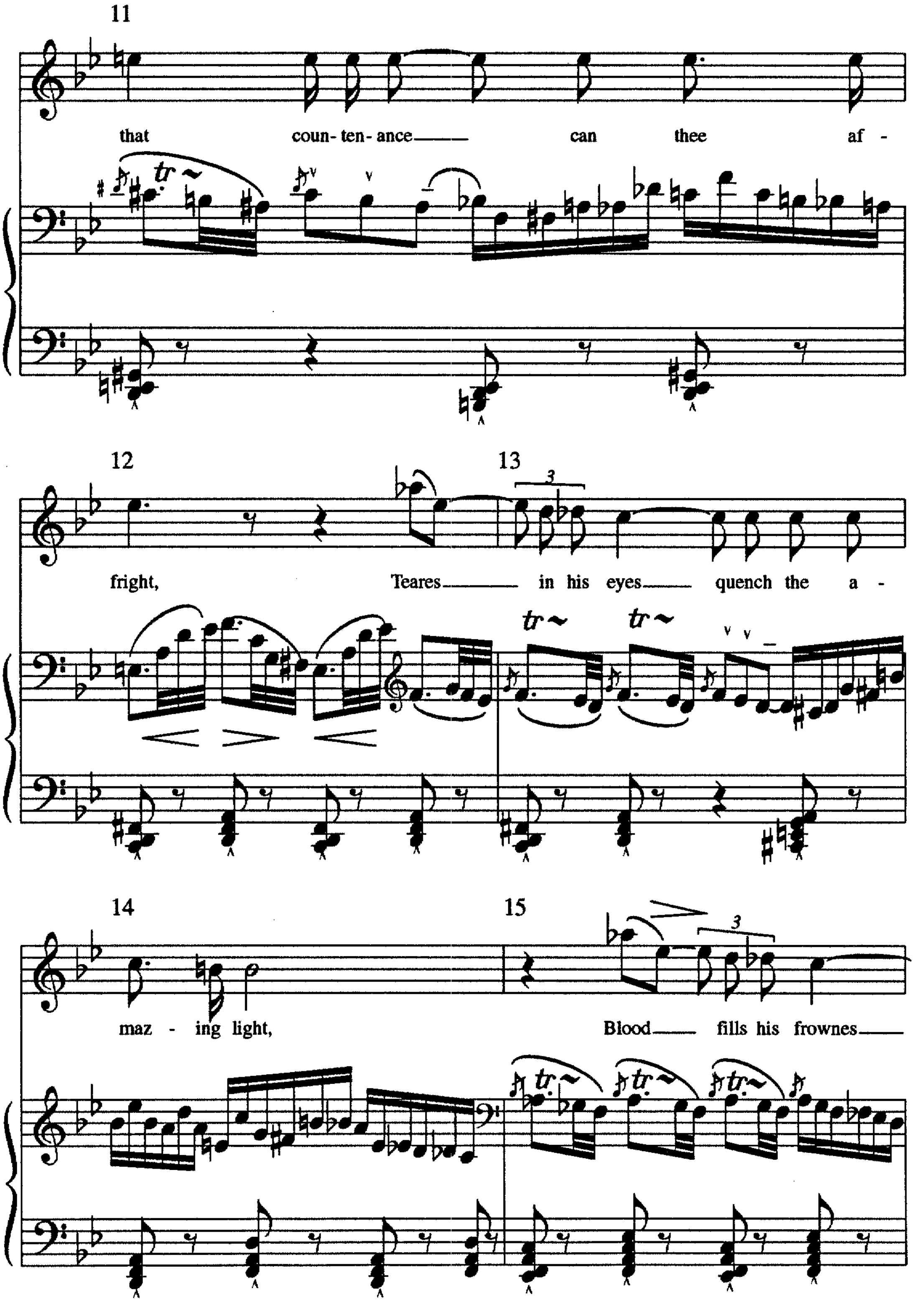
For the setting of line 2, Britten's melody begins on G♭ and leaps to E♭. The accompaniment retains the G-minor chords in the left hand, but alternates between the *b* motive at its original pitch level and a transformation of the *c* motive that still emphasizes G♭. Britten's use of these two pitches for this line of text, which asks the soul to examine where its allegiances lie, is significant, for they are tendency tones to the G and D from the opening measures and from the triads in the left hand. The E♭, which is taken from the *b* motive, has not yet resolved clearly to D. Although the G♭ has moved to G previously, it is put into conflict with G.

With lines 3 and 4 of the text, in which the soul is asked to contemplate the image of the crucified Christ, Britten initiates a move away from G in the chords in the right hand. His first motion is by half-step, from G to A♭ to A and B♭, but he breaks it with a leap to E♮ during an elaborate and descending, chromatic melisma on the word "crucified," that is in eighth-note triplets against sixteenths in the accompaniment (see mm. 9-10). The E♮ of the vocal line, accompanied by an E major/minor-seventh chord in the left hand, moves

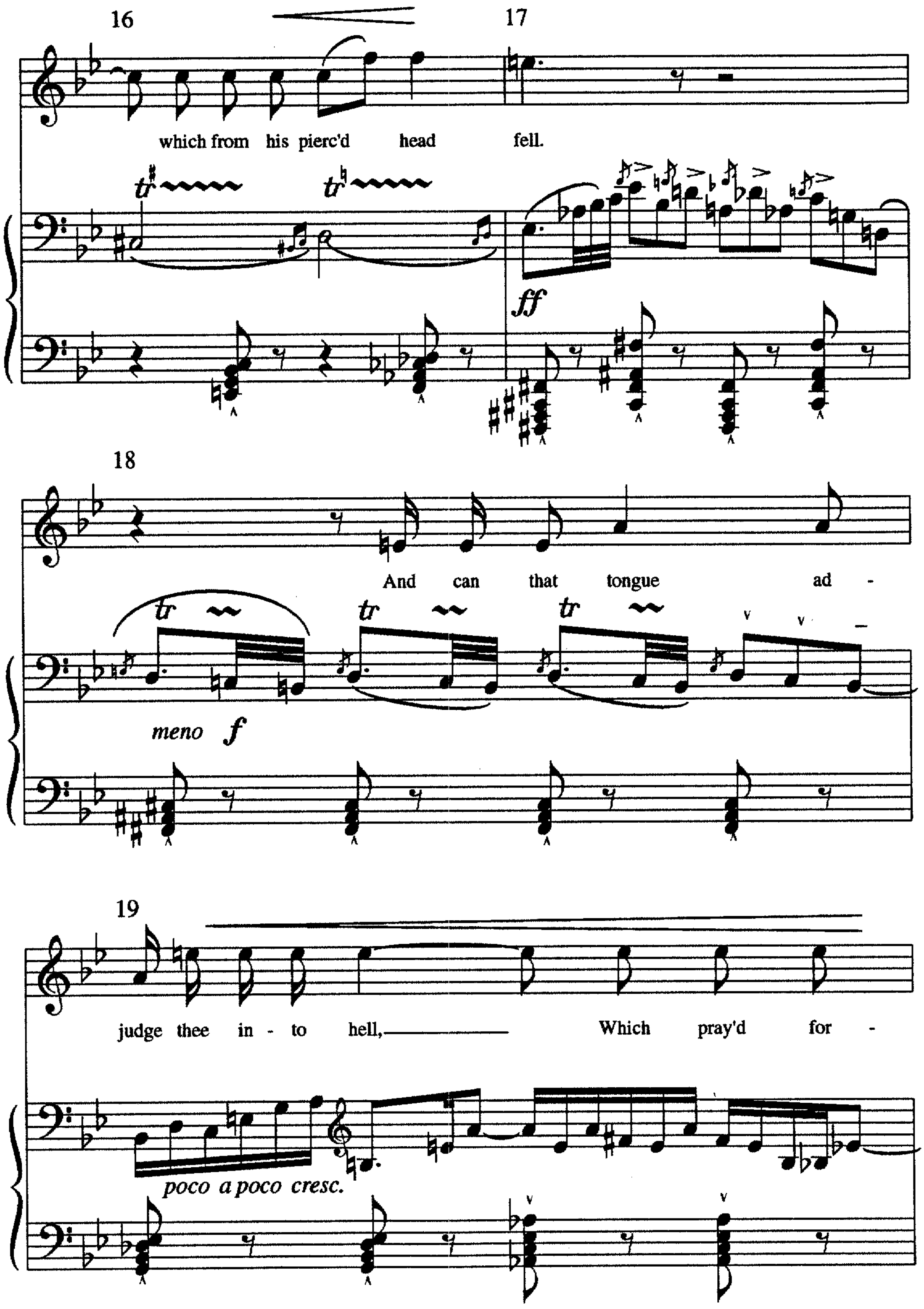
Example 80: "What if this present," mm. 6-21.


6
f sempre
7
Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,
tr
8
3
9
The pic-ture of Christ cru - - -
legato
10
- ci - fied, and tell Whe - ther

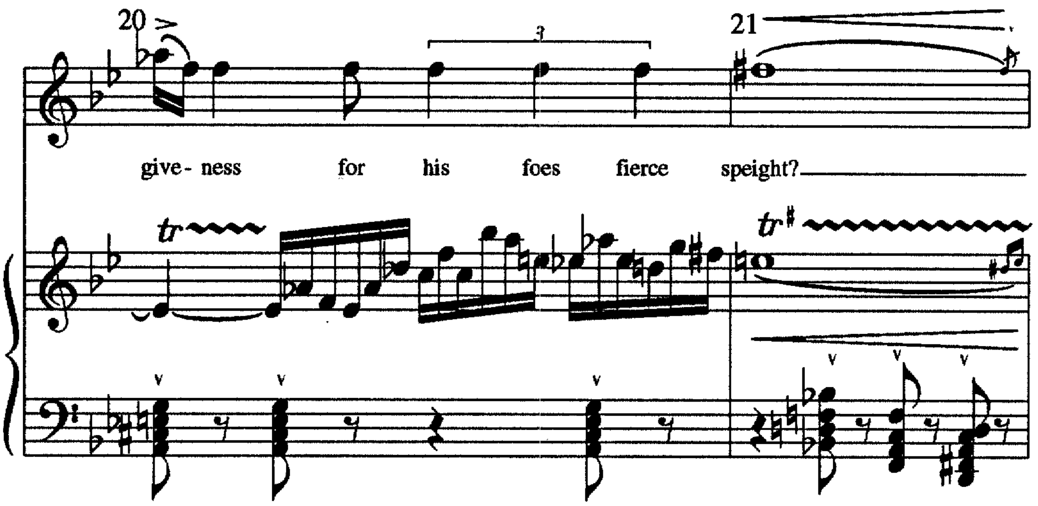
Example 80: "What if this present," mm. 6-21, cont.


11
that countenance can thee af-
12
13
fright, Teares in his eyes quench the a-
14
15
maz - ing light, Blood fills his frownes

Example 80: "What if this present," mm. 6-21, cont.


16
17
which from his pierc'd head fell.
tr
tr
ff
18
And can that tongue ad -
tr
tr
tr
meno f
19
judge thee in - to hell,
Which pray'd for -
poco a poco cresc.

Example 80: "What if this present," mm. 6-21, cont.



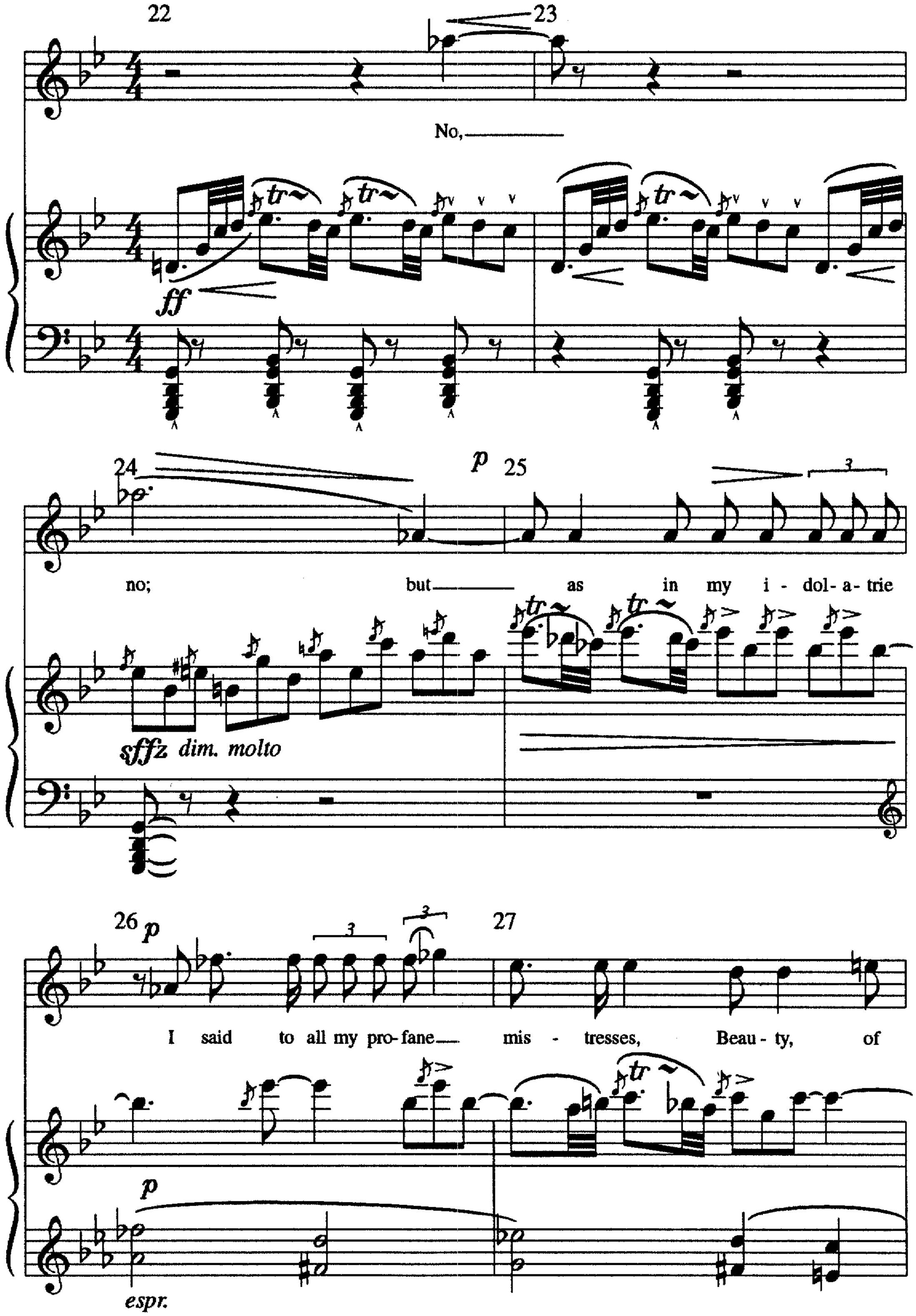
to an E♭ at the crucial word, "affright," coinciding with a move to D major/minor-seventh chord in the left hand. By moving to E♮ rather than E♭ in m. 10, Britten avoids a sense of resolution from B♭ to E♭, and from E♭ to D in mm. 11-12. Instead, E♭ is placed into conflict against the pitch to which it should lead, D, which keeps the tension established at the beginning of the section intact.

The move to the D major/minor-seventh chords sets the first in a series of images of the crucified Christ: the tears (*l.* 5), that as a human, Christ must have shed in reaction to the intense pain and the realization of his sacrifice and union with God (see mm. 12-14). Again, the E♭ is prominent in the vocal line, but Britten avoids a clear resolution to D by emphasizing C, resolving it to B♮. A move to D minor via its dominant-seventh chord forms a bridge between the D-major area and the F area that sets the second image of the crucified Christ – the blood that flowed from his head as the result of the crown of thorns (*l.* 6). Britten uses basically the same melodic gesture, but with a slight twist at the end that pushes the triads of the left hand toward F♯ major from a D♭ dominant-seventh chord (see mm. 16-17).

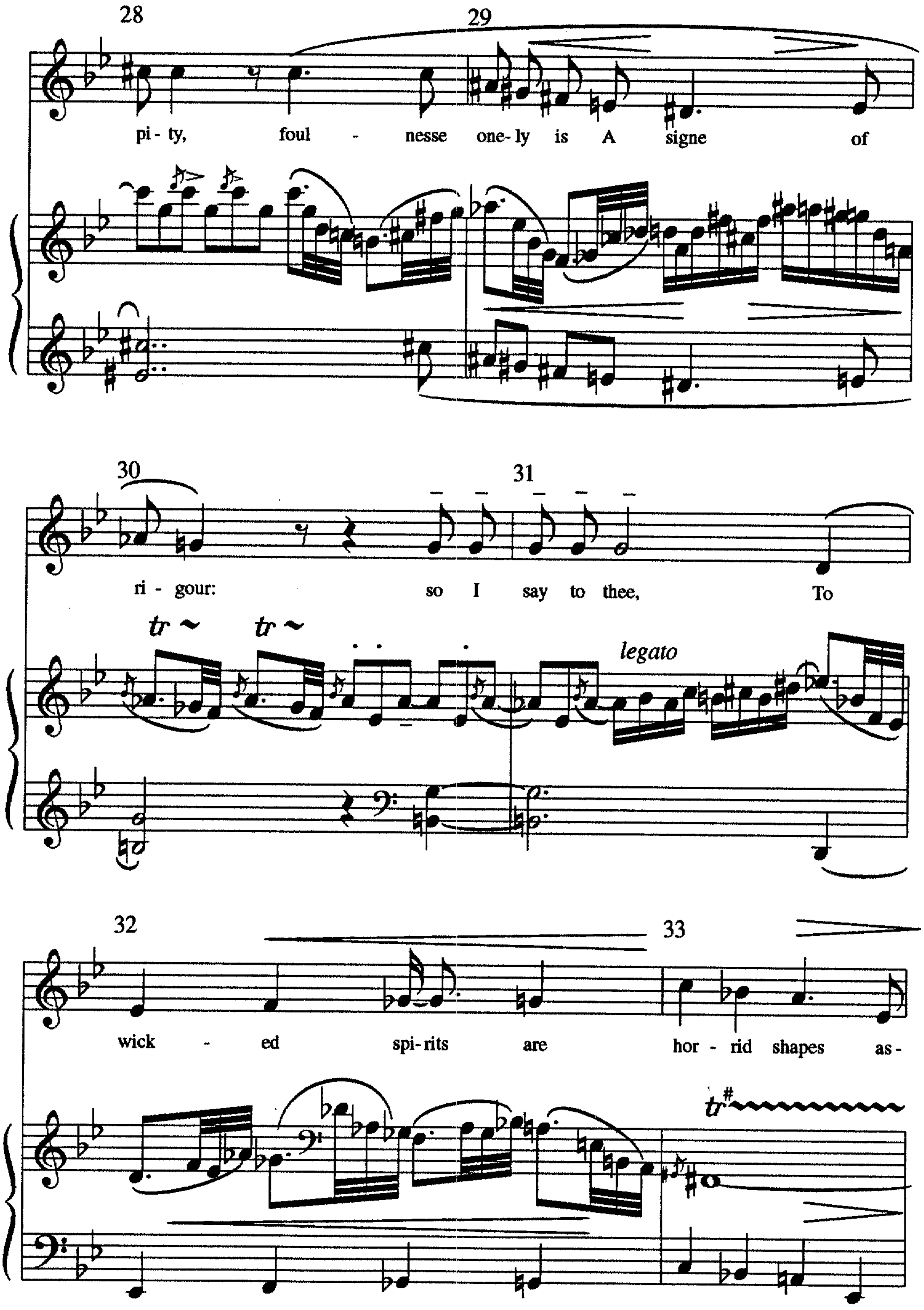
The F♯ reference persists for two measures before cadencing on A♭ major under an E♮ in the melody. It then moves to an A♮ major/minor-seventh chord under an F, followed by a B♭-major triad and an F-major triad, coming finally to a D dominant-seventh chord under an F♯. The move to F♯ in the vocal line and a D dominant-seventh in the accompaniment resolves the G♭ of the accompaniment in the fourth measure of the song. Britten associates the G♭ with F♯ in mm. 16-17 in which a D♭ dominant-seventh resolved to an F♯-major triad – the result of an enharmonic change. In m. 21, the F♯ of the vocal line is now interpreted as the third of a D dominant-seventh chord that leads to G minor in the following measure, thus resolving the G♭ of the vocal line from m. 4 (see Example 81). This harmonic resolution is significant in an interpretation of the text as well. Line 7-8 contain the central paradox of the poem: how could Christ, who even asked God to forgive those who crucified him, not forgive the sins of this soul? Thus, as the F♯ finally resolves to G within a G context, the speaker reaches an important conclusion: Christ is merciful, and offers his salvation to anyone.

Britten returns to a reference to G-minor for the start of the sestet through a presentation of the opening accompaniment gesture over G-minor triads and a dominant-seventh-to-tonic cadence (refer to Example 81). This return is short-lived, however, as the speaker returns to his promiscuous days in order to understand the image of Christ that he is contemplating. Britten sets these lines of the poem, 9-12, over planed major sixths in the left hand of the accompaniment that phase in and out of consonance with the vocal line, finally making his way back to G, now major, at the word "rigour" in m. 30. Although it seems that he has digressed in this section, there is no pitch used that has not occurred previously. The difference is that the pitches are sometimes combined differently, implying other harmonies.

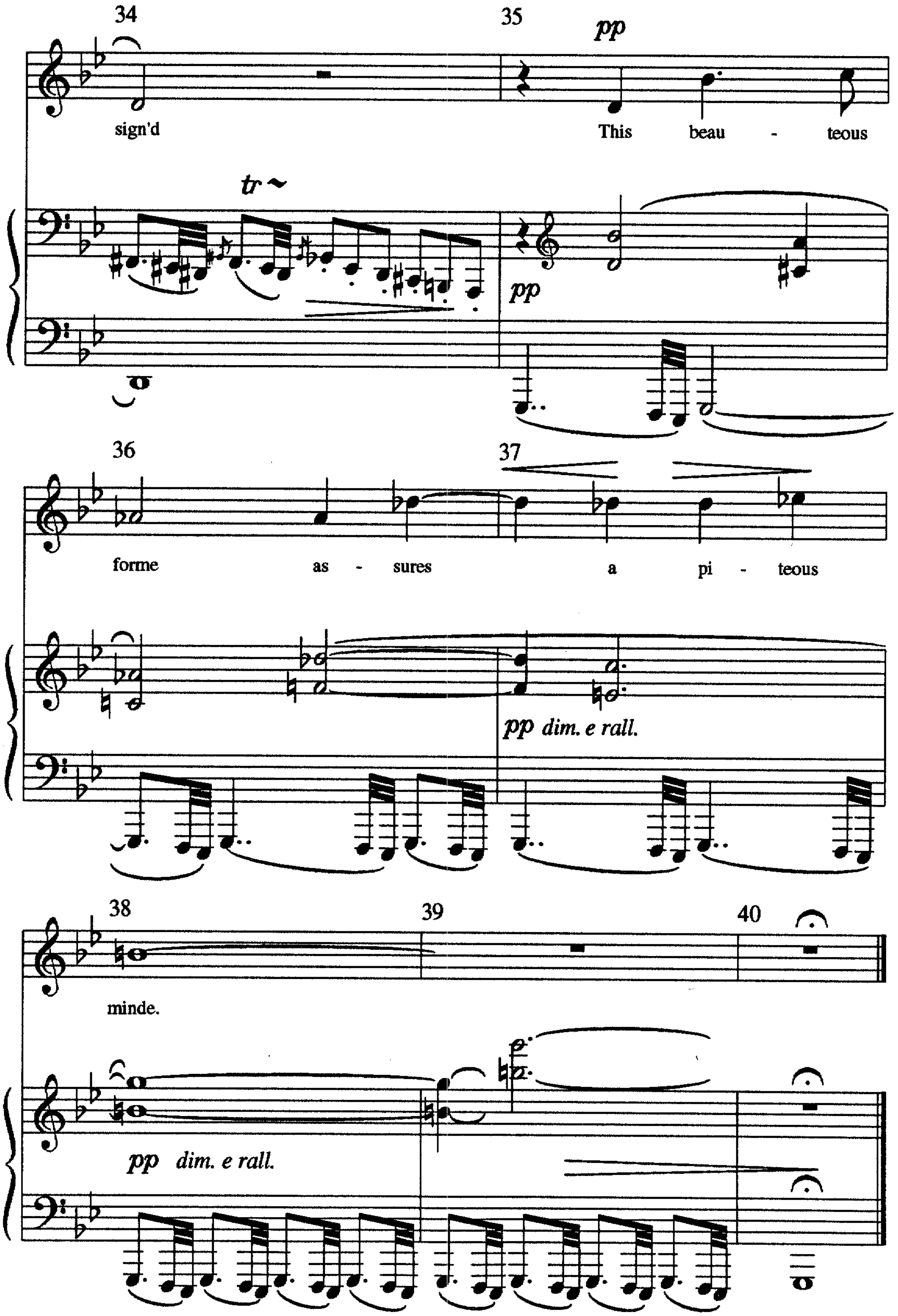
Example 81: "What if this present," mm. 22-40.


22
23
No,
ff
24
p
25
no; but as in my i - dol - a - trie
sffz dim. molto
26 p
27
I said to all my pro-fane mis - tresses, Beau - ty, of
p
espr.

Example 81: "What if this present," mm. 22-40, cont.


28
29
pi- ty, foul - nesse one- ly is A signe of
30
31
ri - gour: so I say to thee, To
tr
tr
legato
32
33
wick - ed spi- rits are hor - rid shapes as-
tr#

Example 81: "What if this present," mm. 22-40, cont.


34
35
36
37
38
39
40
pp
sign'd
This beau - teous
tr
forme as - sures a pi - teous
pp dim. e rall.
minde.
pp dim. e rall.

Even though there is a resolution of sorts to G major in m. 30, the conflicts between G♭ and G, and E♭ and D are not entirely resolved until a setting of the enigmatic thirteenth line of the poem: "To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd." In his melodic line, which occurs simultaneously in the bass line, Britten resolves G♭ to G (m. 32) and finally, E♭ to D, before using the D to move back to G in the bass line. In his setting of the final line of the text, he returns to some of the pitches that occurred following the recapitulation, A♭, D♭ and E♭ over a descending G-F-E♭ bass line, finally cadencing E♭ to B♮, which is interpreted as the major third of G.

In constructing his musical form for this sonnet setting, Britten was bound by the constraints of Donne's punctuation and network of images in the poetic form. Because of these limitations, it more closely reflects the traditional octave/sestet division of the sonnet. The first line of the poem is marked off by a period, but then there is no other definitive closure until the end of line 6. Donne's grammatical structure fails to delineate the traditional division of the octave into two quatrains. The images in lines 2 through 6 are all related to the same subject, the "picture of Christ crucified" from line 3. Moreover, the two remaining lines of the octave, numbers 7 and 8, refer to the Christ of the cross, even though they are set apart from the rest of the octave grammatically. The sestet begins with an answer to the question in the final line of the octave, but then moves to a different, but related, idea in which the speaker relates images that he understands from his sinful days with the image of Christ on the cross.

With few notable exceptions, Britten has set the previous sonnets so that there is a closed first section that encompasses the first quatrain of the octave. After that, he articulates the poem in a variety of ways, depending upon his interpretation and the confines of the grammar. Here, Britten sets the first line as an introduction, setting it apart from the body of the poem, and uses the remaining lines as his first section even though it is quite large (see Table 31). In the sestet, again the lines are all linked grammatically and refer to the same subject, forcing Britten to set it as another large section. To confuse matters, Britten recapitulates the first two measures of the accompaniment at the beginning of the sestet, reharmonizing the figures in reference to G minor, but does not bring back any overwhelmingly recognizable portions of the vocal line afterwards. Reasons for this are two-fold: 1) the vocal line consists primarily of four phrases that are subjected to several techniques of variation, with the result that elements of the vocal line are present at all times; and 2) the vocal line is closer to recitative than to memorable melody, making it difficult to effect a solid recapitulation.

TABLE 31

TEXT OF WHAT IF THIS PRESENT AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Musical Scheme
What if this present were the world's last night?	Introduction: announces the subject of the poem
Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell, The picture of Christ crucified, and tell Whether that countenance can thee affright, Teares in his eyes quench the amazing light, Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell. And can that tongue adjudge thee into hell, Which pray'd forgivenesse for his foes fierce spight?	*A*: Britten gathers the lines dealing with Christ's sacrifice: the speaker contemplates the Day of Judgment and his soul's relationship with God; he uses his fear of Christ's crucifixion to judge where his soul stands
No, no; but as in my idolatrie I said to all my profane mistresses, Beauty, of pitty, foulnesse onely is A signe of rigour: so I say to thee, To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd, This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde.	*B*: Further contemplation of the image of the crucifixion; no real resolution although the accompaniment is recapitulated; no real problem has been solved because the speaker's sinfulness continues

Britten's use of four generative melodic figures deserves special mention, particularly since these figures create connections between the lines of text that they set.[52] Britten sets portions of two other lines of the poem with melodic phrases that are generated from the first melodic gesture, which sets the first line of the poem. The two ideas are related to line 1 through the images presented in each and in their emotional content (refer to Example 80). Line 3, "the picture of Christ crucified," contains the central image of the poem's conflict: the crucified Christ is horrid to those who have not accepted God's sacrifice for humankind, and beautiful to those who have. In relating this to line 1 musically, Britten establishes the connection between the speaker's thoughts of the Day of Judgment and Christ's role in the life of man. The second line which this melodic phrase sets, "And can that tongue adjudge thee into hell" (*l.* 7), also fits into the images of the Last Judgment and Christ's relationship to man. Emotionally, all three lines are charged with Christian guilt or fear, or both. Britten's setting of the first line shows a soul out of balance with its Creator. The image of the Crucifixion is a reminder that man himself caused the death of Christ by his sin, a guilt which Britten shows through a descending chromatic line in triplets against the subdivided duple meter of the accompaniment. The third line is a complex of emotions and thoughts. On the one hand, the speaker wants to believe that Christ would take pity on him and would not damn him eternally, but on the other, the speaker fears that his sin, the same that caused Christ's horrible death, will triumph over his soul in the end.

The *b* phrase is used in the octave to set the speaker's questions and directives to his soul regarding its relationship with Christ (refer to Example 80). The first appearance of the phrase is at the second line, "Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell." By setting line 4, "and tell / Whether that countenance can thee affright," with a related phrase, Britten aligns two grammatically similar lines, while capturing their connection in the logical procession of thoughts. Line 4 provides the "where" of line 2: basically, the soul is to decide whether it is fearful of the Crucifixion or whether it sees it as a covenant of God's forgiveness. The texts for these two appearances seem to exhort the soul to make an atonement by questioning its relationship with God. Considering the directive tone of these lines, the voice combined with the *b* phrase and its manifestations come across as sinister and frightening, due largely to the repeated notes of the melodic phrase that remove all traces of lyricism. The monotone-like nature of the melodic phrase shows the seriousness of the situation in which the soul finds itself, and the exclusive use of the *y* and *z* accompaniment figures underneath confirms it.

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[52] For phrase *a* see Example 79; for phrases *b* and *c* see Example 80; and for phrase *d* see Example 81.

In the sestet, however, the phrase family takes on a new role as the preparation for the answer to the problem of guilt that the Crucifixion has imposed upon the speaker: "No, no; [that tongue cannot adjudge me into hell because Christ forgives me] but as in my idolatrie I said to all my profane mistresses" (*ll.* 9-10). Britten's use of the phrase here is guided more by musical needs than textual considerations. The *b* phrase, with its repeated notes is versatile and can have meaning within any mood. The first two words of line 9, "No, no," clearly belong to the previous lines. Britten places the recapitulation, which occurs solely in the accompaniment at this point, and punctuates it with the addition of G minor triads to define the tonality of the accompaniment figures. As the triads fade, the mood of the music and text gradually changes to a more reflective state of mind, which Britten expresses through the repeated notes of the *b* phrase and the parallel sixths in the left hand of the accompaniment.

The *c* phrase only occurs with text from the octave of the poem. The first two occurrences unite images from "the picture of Christ crucified," the "teares" (*l.* 5) and "blood" (*l.* 6) Britten's third use is at the line "which pray'd forgiveness for his foes fierce spight?" (*l.* 8). These seemingly disparate images – tears, blood and forgiveness – have much in common. The most obvious connection is between the shedding of Christ's blood and his forgiveness which are an allusion to the sacrament of Communion during which man receives God's grace. That Christ shed tears and blood points out that he was human, and as a human had weakness both mental and physical. That Christ could forgive those who had caused him the harm, however, shows his extensive capacity for mercy, or his God-like side. Donne set these two images one against the other in the poem as the central Christian paradox – that Christ was man and God. Britten unites them through the variation of a melodic phrase, possibly aiding in an understanding of Christ's dual nature.

The remaining generative melodic material, the *d* phrase, is reserved solely for part of the summary text of the poem, lines 11-13. It is associated with the concepts of "foulnesse" and "horrid shapes," although its own shape is very simple. The original phrase is a descending scale fragment that rises at the end through leaps, and its variation is an inversion of that. The ideas of "foulnesse" and "horrid shapes" is expressed more in the dissonances that are formed between the right hand of the accompaniment and the melody (refer to Example 81). The accompaniment is generally a half or whole step above or below the melodic line on each beat of the measure, with only a few concurrences of pitch or consonant interval. The interpretative implications are obvious.

The final line of the text is set to a tag from the final variation of the *b* phrase, which becomes the most lyrical melodic gesture of the song. As with the three lines previous to this one, the interpretative element is evident from the lyricism of the phrase in which the text, "This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde" is set. The change of mood initiated by the sixths in the accompaniment is complete as this phrase occurs over sixths in the right hand of the accompaniment and the accompaniment figure *b* in the left which has settled into G. The Last Judgment, to which the left hand of the accompaniment clearly alludes, no longer seems the threat that it did in the first melodic gesture.

Britten's return to the accompaniment figures from m. 1 for the start of the sestet allows him to establish a connection between the two octave and sestet in the poetic form, even though Donne's text reveals a change of mood and focus. As the speaker progresses in his thinking about the Day of Judgment and his soul's relationship with God, he uses the image of the crucified Christ to determine that relationship. When in the sestet the speaker comes to his own conclusions about the image, that the foulness of it suggests Christ's strength and that seeing the beauty in it is a step toward contrition, the Last Judgment no longer carries the same fear that it did at the beginning of the poem. Britten uses the accompaniment motives in this new light after the return. They remind the speaker that the event will occur, but that his own relationship with God can be repaired. The recapitulation, then, becomes the height of the conflict, as the speaker rejects the idea that Christ would not forgive him, as he thought in lines 7 and 8. The return of the opening measure conjures up the images of the end of the world to emphasize the importance of the speaker's thoughts and his rejection of eternal damnation at this point. The turn toward a more peaceful and reflective state of mind coincides with a *decrescendo* and a reduction of the texture to vocal line and right hand of the accompaniment only. The transformation is complete when parallel sixths appear in the left hand of the accompaniment (refer to Example 81). After the final phrase ascends toward God in representation of the "piteous mind" of the text, it cadences on G major instead of G minor, a Baroque conceit to show that all is well in the speaker's mind. The postlude, however, betrays some doubt, however, as the *b* figure of the accompaniment remains with a G minor inflection. Thus, although the speaker has reached a conclusion, realizing that God's sacrifice of Christ should reassure him about his own state of sin, no actual contrition has taken place. The speaker has only dispelled his fear of the Day of Judgment, not solved the ultimate problem of his sinfulness and need for grace.

Since she whom I loved

Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her Soule early into Heaven ravished,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.
Here the admyring her my mind did whett
To seeke thee God; so streams do shew their head;
But though I have found thee and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett,

But why should I begg more love, when as thou
Dost wooe my soul for hers: off'ring all thine:
And dost not only feare least I allow
My love to Saints and Angels thing divine,
But in thy tender jealosy dost doubt
Least the world, Fleshe, yea, Devill putt thee out.

As with the third song of this cycle, Britten effects a complete change of mood from the previous songs in this setting of "Since she whom I loved." Compared to the setting of "What if this present," this song gives the immediate impression that the speaker has achieved a sense of peace, largely because of the consonance between the melody and the accompaniment, and because of the more fluid melodic line. This peace, however, is deceptive, for the text deals with the conflict between secular and sacred love.

The musical form articulates the traditional division of the sonnet into four quatrains and a final couplet (see Table 32). The quatrains are each considered as contrasting sections, defined by the nature of their melodic lines and the tonal activity. Quatrain 1 is closed tonally, but quatrains 2 and 3 feature movement from one tonal level to another. The final couplet comprises the return to both the tonal level and melodic elements of the first section, but with some changes that reflect the images of the text.

TABLE 32

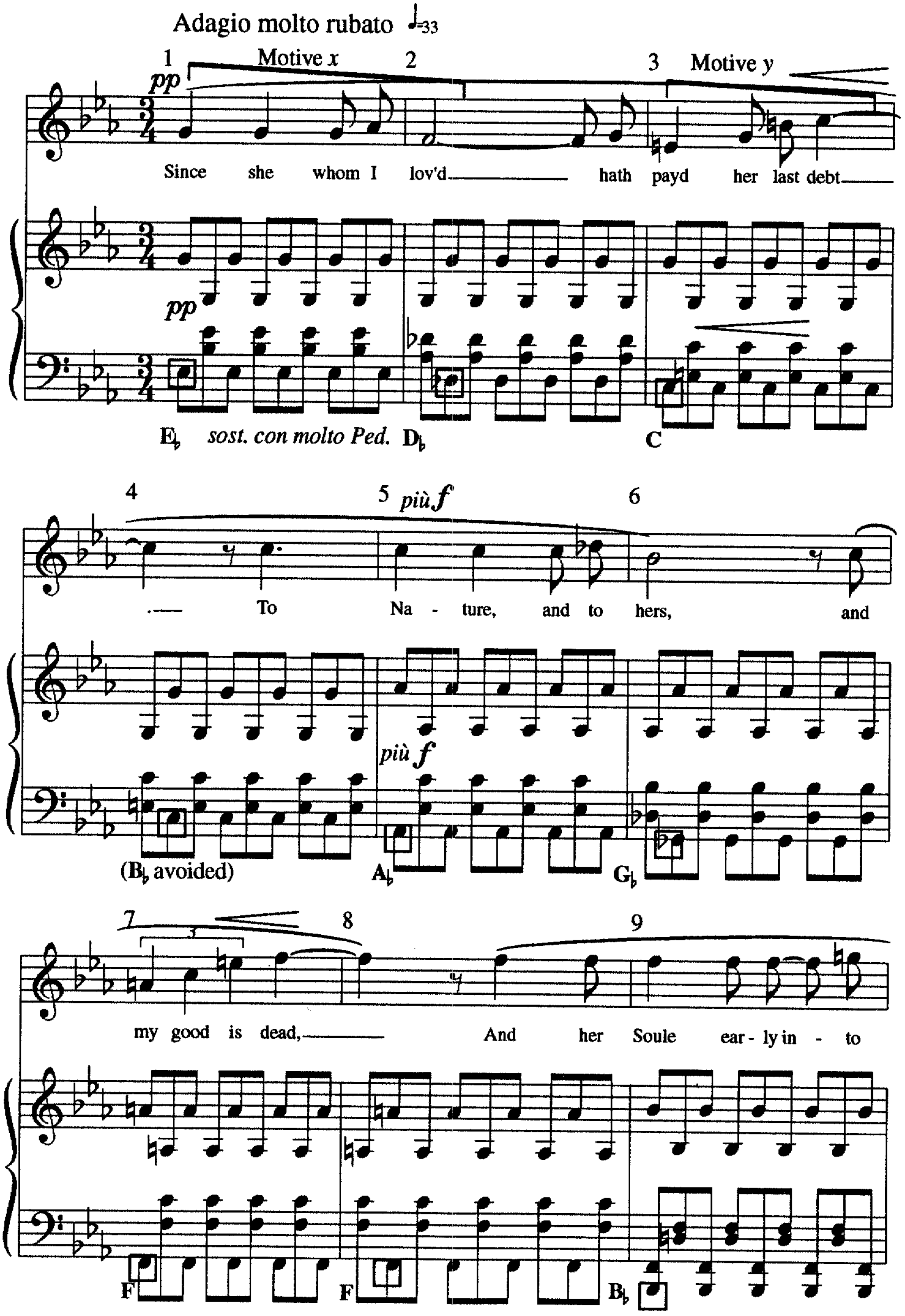
MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF SINCE SHE WHOM I LOVED

Measure nos.	Musical form	Phrases	Motives	Poetic form	Tonal Centers
1-4	*A*	*a*	*x x y*	Octave *l.* 1	E♭ M - C M
4-8		*a trans.*[1]	*x x y*	Octave *l.* 2	C M - F M
8-12		*a trans.*[2]'	*x x*	Octave *l.* 3	F M to G♭ M
13-16		*a'*	*x x xro* *	Octave *l.* 4	E♭ M
17-19	*B*	*b*	*yr yr*	Octave *l.* 5	E♭ M
20-22		*c*	*x yr*	Octave *l.* 6	E♭ M - D♭ M
23-24		*b trans.*	*yr yr*	Octave *l.* 7	A♭ M
25-26		*d*	*xro, xi*	Octave *l.* 8	modulatory - A♭
27-29	*C*	*e*	*xro*	Sestet *l.* 9	C M
29-32		*e'*	*xro*	Sestet *l.* 10	C M
32-36		*f*	*xro, xi*	Sestet *ll.* 11-12	modulatory - E♭
36-39	*A'*	*a''*	*x x x*	Sestet *l.* 13	E♭ M - B m
40-42		*a'' trans.*	*x x*	Sestet *l.* 14	A M - E♭ M
42-45	*Postlude*				E♭ M

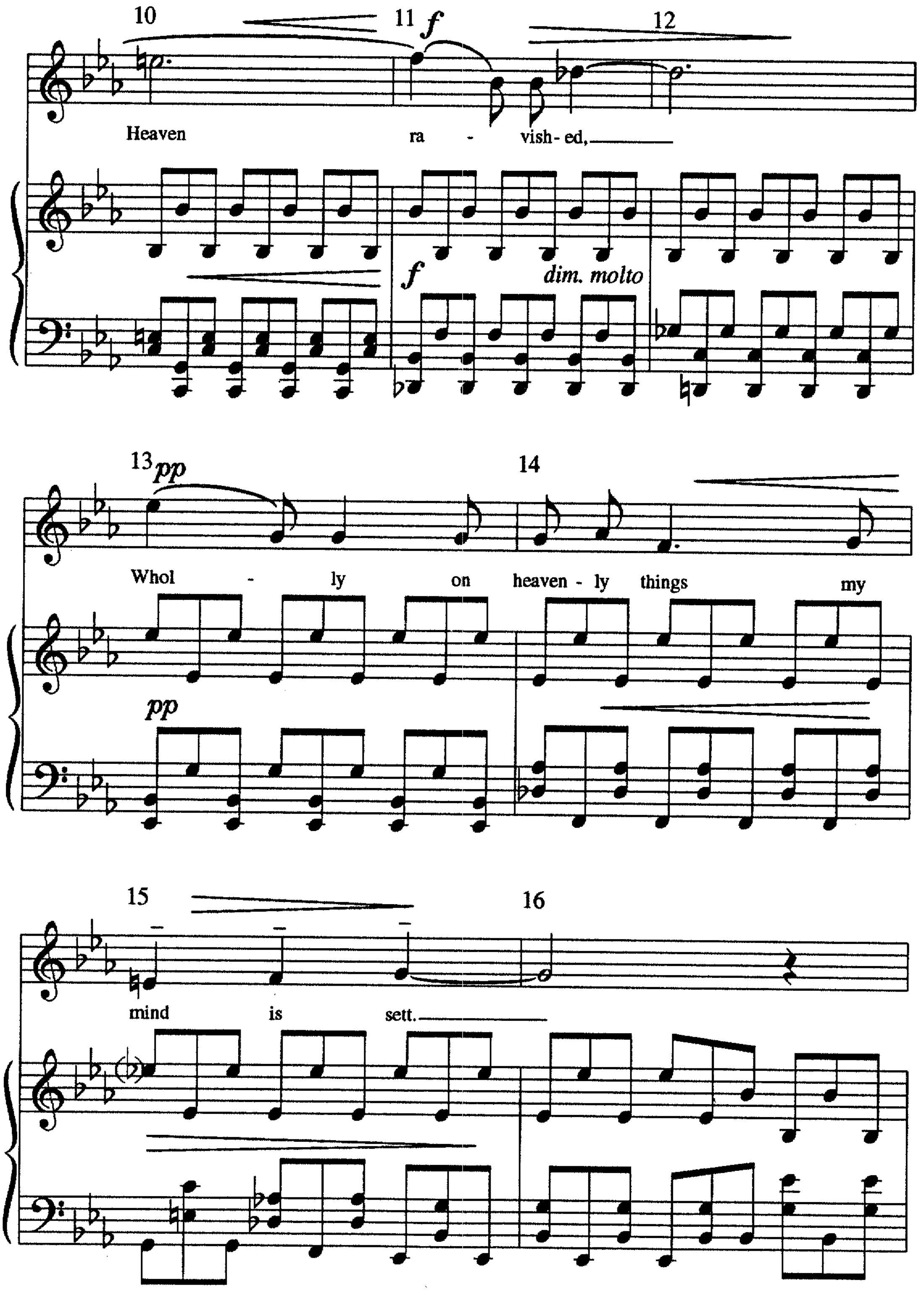
* r = retrograde; ro = rotated; i = inversion

The first section, which sets the first quatrain of the octave, begins with the voice and piano entering simultaneously, foregoing the creation of atmosphere by the accompaniment that the previous songs have all had, however brief. Britten's backdrop for the text comes from the lack of rhythmic congruence between the vocal line in 3/4 meter and the accompaniment notated in 9/8 against it (see Example 82). This conflict continues

Example 82: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 1-16.


Adagio molto rubato ♩=33
Motive x
Motive y
pp
Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt
To Na - ture, and to hers, and
my good is dead, And her Soule ear - ly in - to
più f
E♭
sost. con molto Ped.
D♭
C
(B♭ avoided)
A♭
G♭
F
F
B♭

Example 82: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 1-16, cont.


10
11
12
f
Heaven ra - vish - ed,
f
dim. molto
13
pp
14
Whol - ly on heaven - ly things my
pp
15
16
mind is sett.

throughout the song, lending a sense of unsettledness to the text as the conflict between secular and sacred love is examined.

The melodic content of Section *A* is very tightly organized around motives *x* and *y* (refer to Example 82). Each of the four phrases contains the *x* motive: the first and last phrases use the motive at original pitch, while the middle two phrases begin with transpositions of the motive a perfect fourth higher than the previous statement.[53] The *y* motive is abandoned after the first two phrases, presumably because of its role in the next section, which uses its inversion (motive *z*). Britten states the *y* motive twice – the second time transposed – in order to establish its identity. Having accomplished this, he ends the remaining two phrases with manipulations of the *x* motive: phrase 3 ends with a variation – one note is added between the notes of the ascending third; and phrase 4 ends with a rotation.

In a very subtle portrayal of the text, the melodic material for the first three lines is organized into a gradual ascent at the interval of a fourth (from G to C to F), as "she whom I lov'd" is taken "early into Heaven." Britten breaks the ascent at the fourth line, "Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett," with a descending leap of a sixth that returns the phrase to the beginning pitch of the song. With this gesture, both musical and interpretative needs are met. Musically, Britten had to break the sequence that generated the ascent in the first place, as well as provide a balance to that ascent, and round out the section for the sake of structural articulation. A return to a variation of the first phrase accomplishes this. In setting the text, Britten is able to both pictorialize the text and establish a connection between the fourth line and the subject of the poem as announced in the first line. In other words, the woman represents the "heavenly things" that the speaker contemplates.

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[53] The E♭ which begins the fourth phrase relates to the second note as part of an inversion of the *x* motive, transposed up an octave.

Against the ascent in the vocal line is a descent that unfolds stepwise from E♭ in the bass line, coupled with a gradual ascent from G to B♭ in the treble. At first, each note of the scale is harmonized as the root of a triad, but the quality of the triad does not necessarily arise from the E♭ scale. This unfolding scale presents much of the tonal material that will be explored in the remainder of the song, and establishes one of the resolution patterns that is used to define subsidiary tonal levels as well as the main area of E♭ major.

Britten breaks the pattern of the bass line at m. 4 by prolonging the arrival on C major, and then omitting reference to B♭ (i. e., no dominant). Once the bass line arrives on F in m. 8, it is answered in the following eight measures by an ascent from B♭ to G, which can be seen as the continuation of the ascent from G to B♭ in the right hand. In following this scalar pattern, Britten avoids a dominant to tonic arrival in mm. 9-10, setting up a trend which persists throughout the song, although he cadences from F major to B♭ major in mm. 8-9. Rather than resolving strongly on E♭, Britten precedes it with a stepwise motion from B♭ to C to D♭ to D, harmonizing these as members of a B♭-major triad, a C-major triad, a B♭-minor triad, and G♭-diminished triad with an added fourth (C) respectively. The E♭-major arrival is approached by step – D resolving to E♭, C resolving to B♭, and G♭ resolving to G.

Britten organizes the *B* section, which corresponds to the second quatrain of the octave, differently in terms of the relationship of the phrases of the melody.[54] The *A* section is constructed on the principle of variation with transposition being a factor as well. The four phrases in the *B* section function as a standard double period, having the pattern *b c b' d* (see Example 83). The second phrase, *c*, is somewhat awkward, for the first part encompassing motive *x* sounds like it belongs to the previous phrase, leaving the second portion, motive *z*, unanswered. This half of the phrase, the descending scale, sounds incomplete because the first phrase set up a pattern of repeating part of the scale fragment once to round out the phrase. The awkwardness of the phrase seems to have arisen from Donne's cumbersome line of poetry (*l.* 6), which includes enjambment with the previous line and a statement that does not have a clear reference point.

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[54] There has been some discussion about the exact origins of the motives which comprise these phrases. Peter Pears concludes that the descending bass line in the left hand is the model for the descending scale occurring in the first phrase. "Vocal Music, 70. Peter Evans sees the scale as the filled-in retrograde of motive *y*. Music of Britten, 353. In my opinion, Evans's explanation is more plausible for several reasons: 1) the descending

Until the final phrase, the tonal direction of section *B* explores harmonies which were introduced in the *A* section, sometimes combining them into quartal sonorities. From an E♭-major triad, the section moves to an A♭-major from a D♭-major triad, but with quartal sonorities providing parallel-fourth voice leadings (see mm. 17-19). After D♭ major is reached in m. 20, it is reinterpreted within the level of A♭ for an arrival in m. 23. Although A♭ is strongly established via the descending fourth from D♭, dissonant pitches are introduced into the A♭ major triad at m. 24 that lead briefly through G-major, B♭-major and A-major triads, finally resolving a G♭-major triad to an A♭-major triad – triads that are all consonant with the vocal line (see mm. 25-26). Indeed, the bass line follows the vocal line

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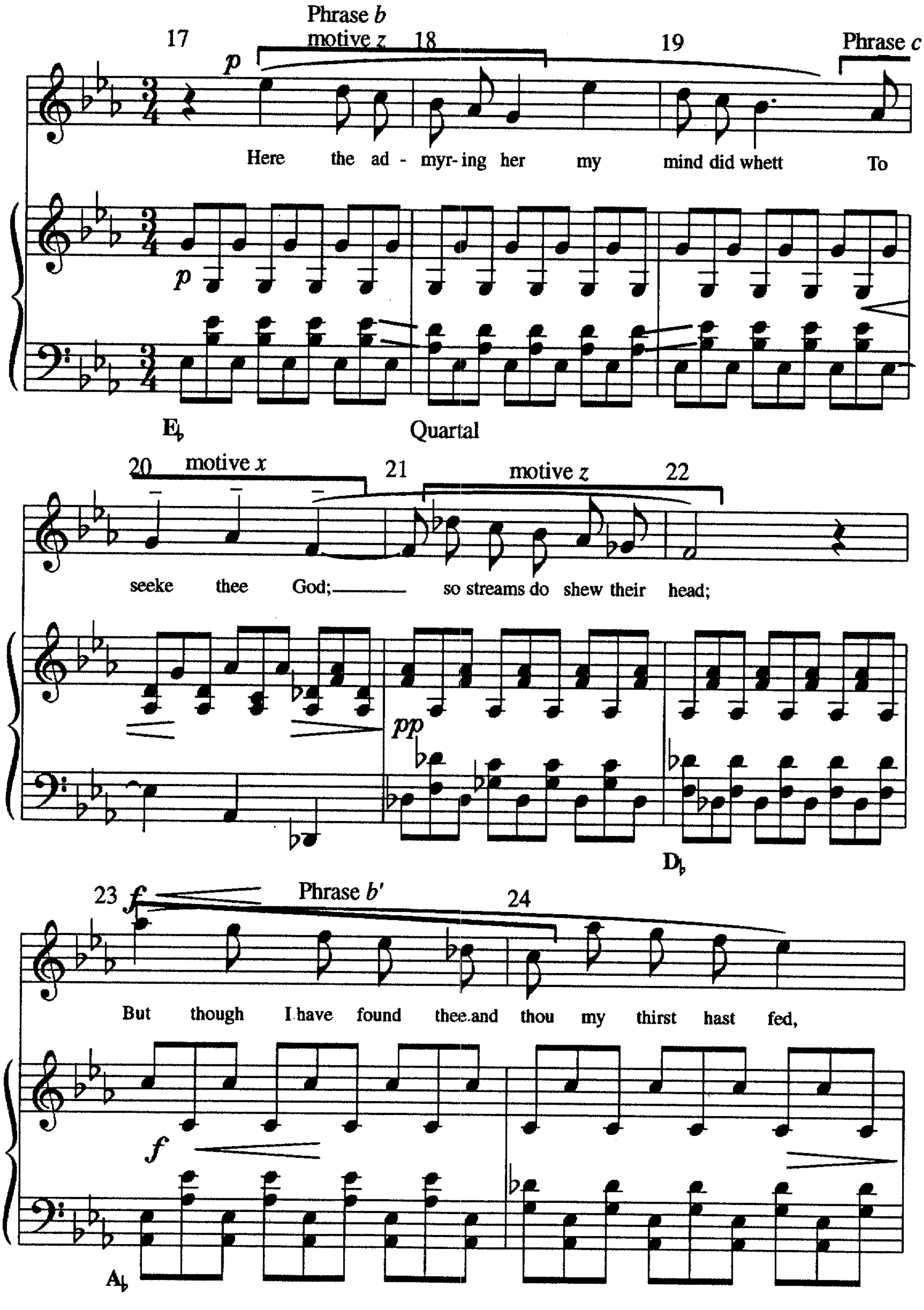
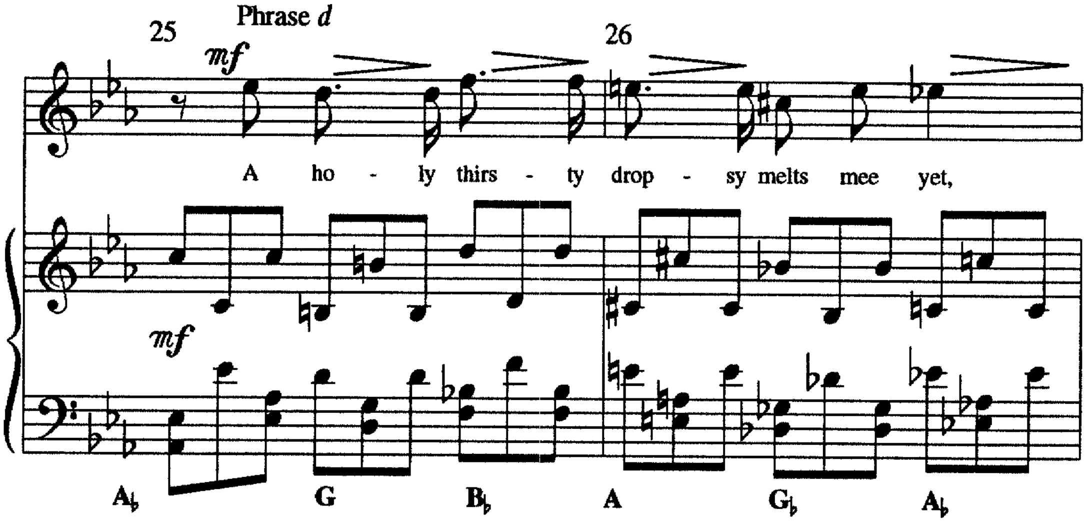
scale in the bass line of the *A* section extends over the interval of a seventh, not a sixth; 2) the intervals of the *y* motive – a minor third (notes 1-2 and 2-3), a major third (notes 3-4), a minor second (notes 4-5), a perfect fifth (notes 2-4) and a minor sixth (notes 2-5) – are maintained in the new phrase in the proper order for a retrograde; 3) the intervals of the *y* motive are not in the proper order in the bass line; and 4) the second phrase of the section, which begins with the *x* motive and concludes with the so-called retrograde of the *y* motive, and the fourth phrase are constructed so that the relationship with the first two phrases of the *A* section is apparent. Thus, there is a melodic connection between the *A* and *B* sections, but it is not easily perceived.

Example 83: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 17-26.


17
Phrase *b*
motive *z*
18
19
Phrase *c*
p
Here the ad - myr- ing her my mind did whett To
p
E♭
Quartal
20
motive *x*
21
motive *z*
22
seeke thee God;—— so streams do shew their head;
pp
D♭
23
f
Phrase *b'*
24
But though I have found thee.and thou my thirst hast fed,
f
A♭

Example 83: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 17-26, cont.



at a fifth below. The arrival on A♭ in m. 26 is on a weak beat, but Britten follows it with a full measure devoted to the new tonal level and rounds out the section.

The *B* section functions as a bridge between the first quatrain of the poem, which announces the subject of the poem, and the sestet, which seeks to resolve any conflicts set forth in the octave. Britten's melodic material for this section, which has its origins in the first section, but contains new ideas as well, provides both the means to connect the text with that of the first quatrain and to link the entire octave with the remaining sestet. The arrival on A♭ major from D♭ at the words "But though I have found thee and thou my thirst hast fed, / A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett," (*ll.* 7-8) shows that the speaker is removed from God through tonal distance from the original tonic. The use of consonant triads with the reference to his realizing that he feels a need for God, shows that he is not unsalvageable. But, the introduction of a new melodic phrase (*d*) with line 8 confirms that he is falling out of grace because his relationship with God no longer satisfies him.

The third section of the song, which sets the first four lines of the sestet, explores the tonal level outlined in the first phrase of the song, C major. The C is approached through its dominant seventh which follows an A♭ major triad.[55] This progression accompanies a gesture in the melody that is related to the *x* motive, but barely recognizable as being so because of octave displacement and rotation (see Example 84). Indeed, the melodic gesture can be seen as arising from a succession of fourths, G to C to F, in imitation of the sequence from the *A* section. To solidify the key, Britten repeats the gesture, including a move through a C major triad to an A minor triad before getting back to A♭ major for a progression to the dominant of C. Britten repeats the dominant-to-tonic cadence at the level of C for emphasis, a motion that he avoided at the E♭-level.

After the second arrival at C in mm. 31-32, Britten moves away from the area via ascending scale fragments in every element. The third melodic phrase originates from the *x* motive, but the correlation is more evident, and it includes a gradual ascent from B♭ through B and D to E♮ (refer to Example 82). This phrase also seems to be a companion phrase to the final one in the *B* section as it uses the same manipulations of the motive – rotation and inversion – but at a different pitch level and expanding over a greater number of beats (refer to Example 83).

The chords which "harmonize" the melody at this point arise out of a mirroring of the melodic line rather than a concern for logical progression. Movement from chord to chord is accomplished by means of a common tone, so that the chord roots are generally a third apart, but with stepwise progressions in the right hand, and bass and alto lines of the left

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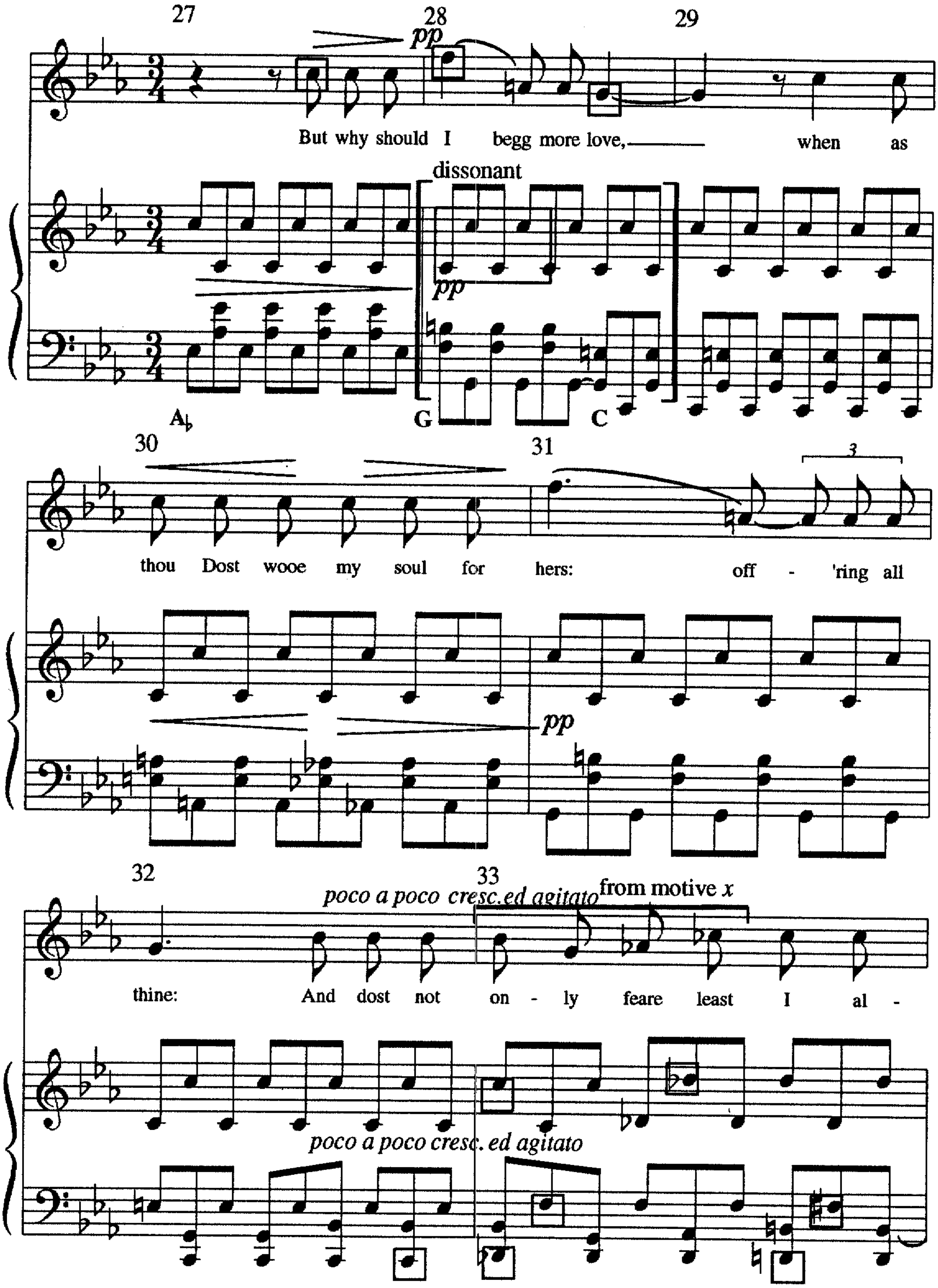
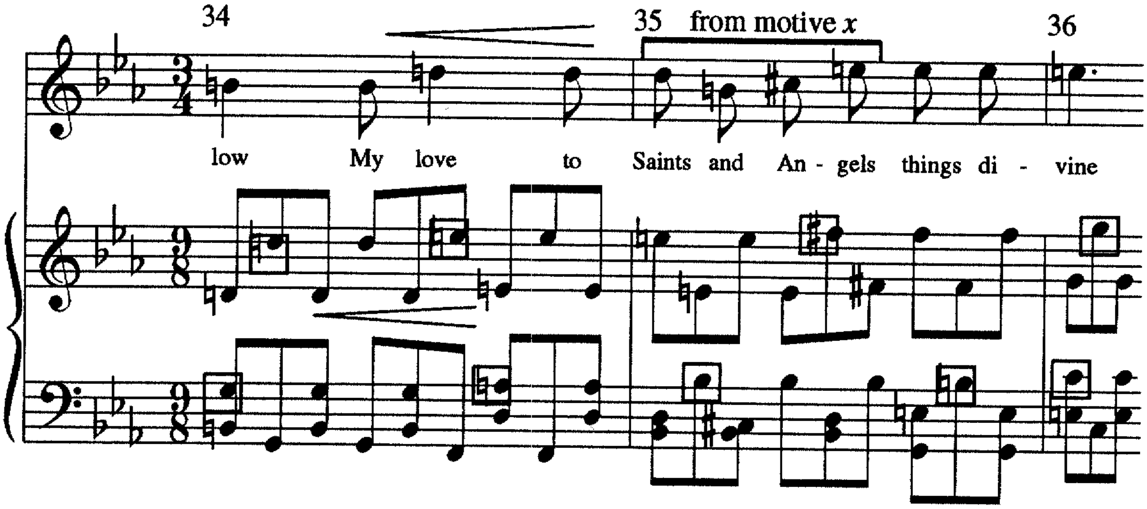
[55] Peter Pears has said that this cadence ". . . is an ordinary dominant-tonic one, but how beautifully placed. . . ." "Vocal Music, 70." Arnold Whittall does not see this modulation as being of great importance in the song, and indeed, considers the cadences as fleeting. "Tonality in Britten's Song Cycles with Piano," Tempo 96 (Spring 1971): 5.

Example 84: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 27-36.


27
28
29
pp
But why should I begg more love, when as
dissonant
pp
A♭
G
C
30
31
thou Dost wooe my soul for hers: off - 'ring all
pp
3
32
33
poco a poco cresc.ed agitato
from motive x
thine: And dost not on - ly feare least I al -
poco a poco cresc. ed agitato

Example 84: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 27-36, cont.

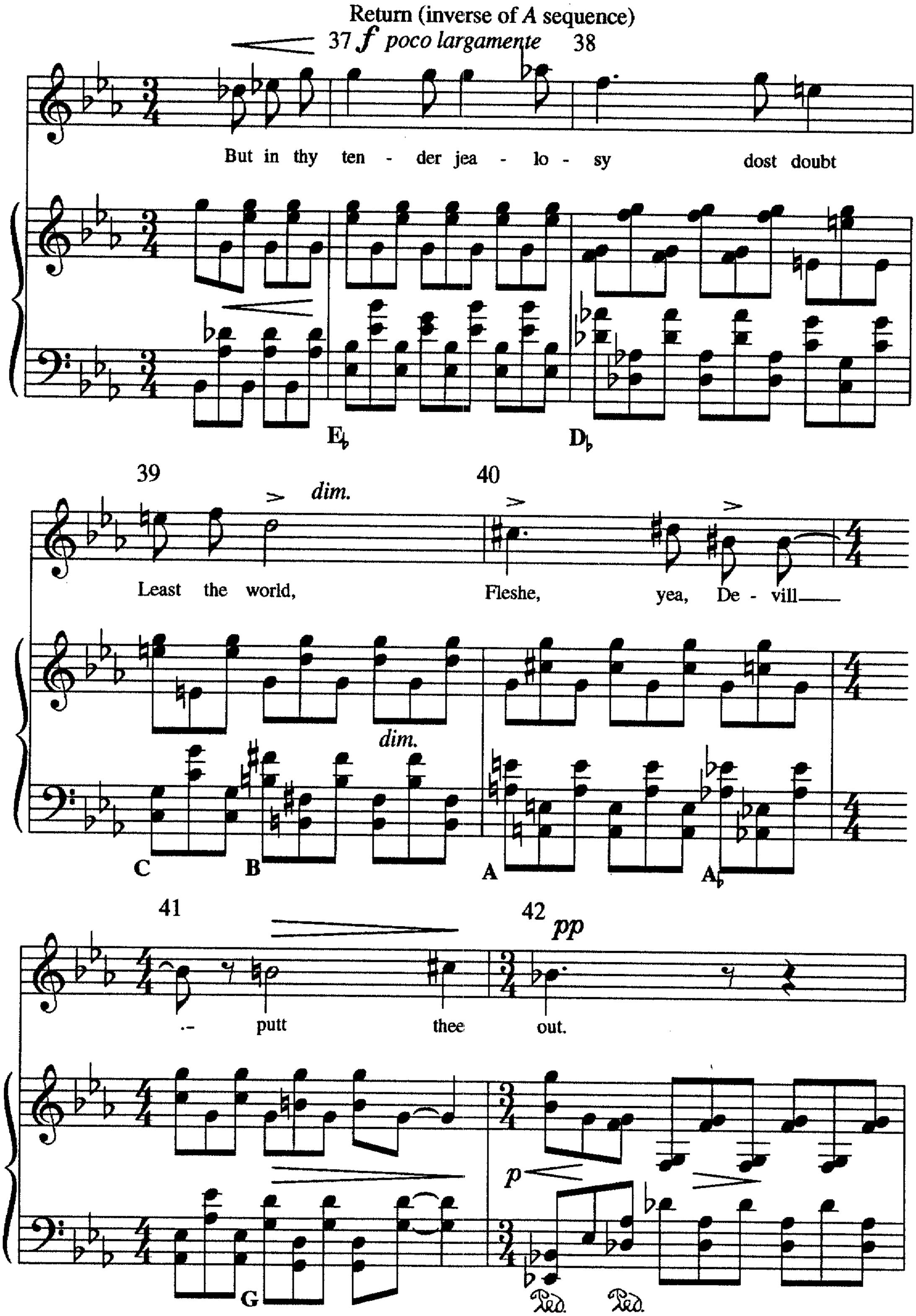


hand. The chords, however, waver between elements of E♭ and elements of C, with a final arrival on C in m. 36. Further, there is an abundance of clashing minor seconds between the right hand and left hand that undermine the triads. These seconds resolve as the voice reaches an E♮, leading the harmony back to C major to give the section a sense of closure as the next section begins.

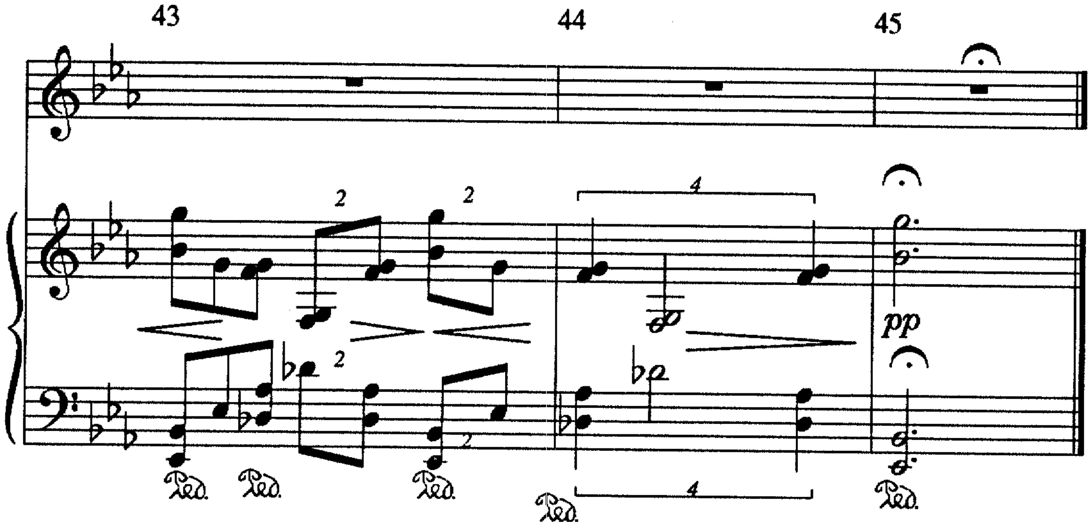
The text for the *C* section finds the speaker trying to talk himself away from the problem of feeling that God's love is insufficient for him. He asks why he should ask for more love since God has already given him His. The repetitive melodic gesture that accompanies his question suggests that he is unable to move to a resolution of it. As the dissonance increases between the vocal line and accompaniment and the right and left hands of the accompaniment, the speaker becomes further entrenched in his beloved, as he essentially tells God that he will continue to love the woman who is now in heaven with "things divine."

Using a B♭ to E♭ gesture in m. 36, Britten returns to the original version of the *x* motive an octave higher to accompany the final couplet of the poem (see Example 85).

Example 85: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 37-45.


Return (inverse of *A* sequence)
37 *f* *poco largamente*
38
But in thy ten - der jea - lo - sy dost doubt
E♭
D♭
39
dim.
40
Least the world, Fleshe, yea, De - vill
C
B
A
A♭
41
42 *pp*
- putt thee out.
G
p
Ped.
Ped.

Example 85: "Since she whom I loved," mm. 37-45, cont.



Although the *y* motive does not return, this section recalls several other elements of the *A* section, but with different approaches to the material. In the melody, Britten creates a mirror image, of sorts, to the transpositions of the *A* section. Each time the *x* motive returned in that section, it was a fourth higher than the previous statement. Here in the return, Britten uses transpositions of the *x* motive, but each statement is a third lower, as though instead of rising to heaven and God, where the woman is, the speaker is asserting his wish to remain on earth with an earthly love.

The other element that Britten recalls is the descending scale fragment in the bass line, but with a few new twists. The dominant to E♭, B♭, is still avoided, with a B♮ used in its stead.[56] In moving to B♮, Britten sets up a descending pattern of a whole step followed by two half steps. In order to maintain this pattern, after the B♮ he moves to an A♮, turning the scale toward C major, an important key in the previous section. The A♮ then proceeds to an A♭, putting the scale back into the realm of E♭ major for the final measures. The resolution to E♭ for the last word of the text again avoids references to the dominant, and is approached through a G-major triad – the F that led to B♭ previously is missing – with the G♮ as a common tone. The G♮ then persists for the final four measures, infiltrating the D♭ triad which effects the final cadence (mm. 44-45).

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[56] In the *A* section Britten avoided any nominal reference to the dominant altogether by moving directly to A♭ from C.

The closing section and postlude of the song are imbued with a musical symbolism that affects an interpretation of the text. First, Britten recalls every tonal reference or harmony that he explored in the previous sections, which provides a musical summation for the harmonic scheme, much as the text is a summary for entire poem. The correspondence of the return of A♭ major with the word "Devill" seems to be no accident, as the level of A♭ major was associated with the speaker's contradictory statement that although the love of the woman led him to contemplate the love of God, he is not satisfied with that love. The recapitulation of the opening melodic gesture, placed into a descent rather than an ascent, further shows his rejection of God in favor of an earthly love. The invasion of the final resolution of D♭ to E♭ by an added sixth in the D♭ chord also shows the speaker's malaise. Although he has made his decision to remain apart from God, it is a troubled resolution.

As in the previous songs, the point of return in the musical form has significance with regard to an interpretation of the poetry (see Table 33). In first quatrain, the speaker has lost his lover to death and thinks that God has taken her. Therefore, he now sets his own sights upon Heaven, but not in contemplation of God – rather, he thinks of her. By the second quatrain, he makes an attempt to seek God, because when he thinks of his lover, it leads him to God as the source of love. Although he found God, he was not satisfied by the relationship in the way he was satisfied with his lover. He wonders that he still has this

TABLE 33

TEXT OF SINCE SHE WHOM I LOVED AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Musical Scheme
Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead, And her Soule early into Heaven ravished, Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.	*A*: The speaker's lover has died, so now he thinks upon her in Heaven; tonal movement from E♭ to E♭
Here the admyring her my mind did whett To seeke thee God; so streams do shew their head; But though I have found thee and thou my thirst hast fed, A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett,	*B*: The speaker uses his lover as a means of finding God, but he is still unsated; tonal movement from E♭ to A♭
But why should I begg more love, when as thou Dost wooe my soul for hers: off'ring all thine: And dost not only feare least I allow My love to Saints and Angels thing divine,	*C*: the speaker contemplates why he does not feel satisfied with only God's love; tonal movement from A♭ to C
But in thy tender jealosy dost doubt Least the world, Fleshe, yea, Devill putt thee out.	*A'*: The speaker contends that God has doubts about loving him because he is sinful; tonal movement from E♭ to E♭

feeling of need although God offers everything to him. Despite God's pursuit of him, he still loves his lover above all. In the end, the speaker begins to realize that the reason why he still feels unsatisfied by God is because he is sinful and has chosen to remain apart from God; but he places the blame on God's jealosy of the lover, and thus, negates his chance for resolution with God.

At the round earth's imagined corners

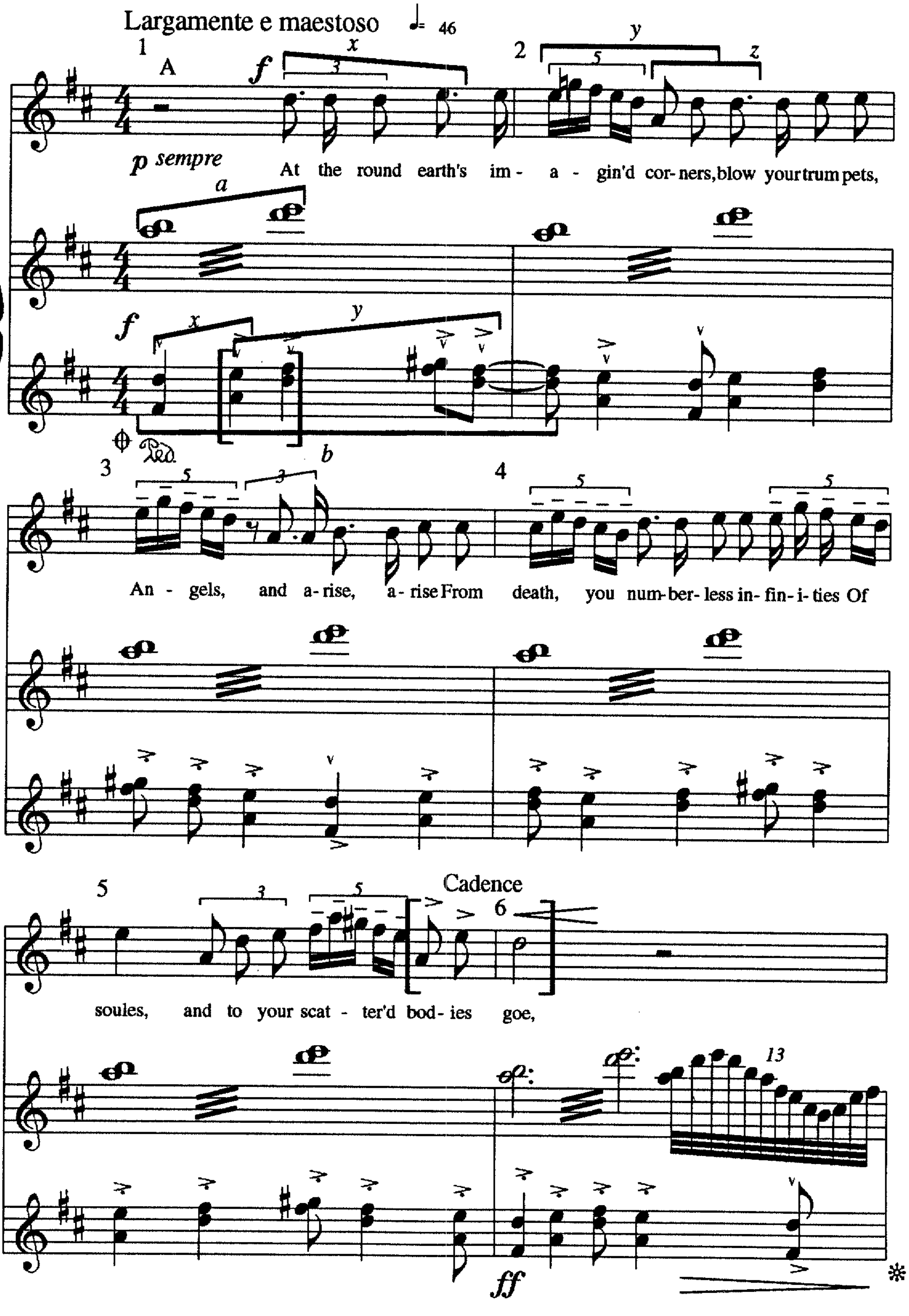
At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of soules, and to your scatter'd bodies goe,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despaire, law, chance hath slaine, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.

But let them sleepe Lord and mee mourne aspace,
For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,
When we are there, here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

Britten approaches his setting of "At the round earth's imagined corners" on several levels. The first level is the aural depiction of the central image of the text, the Last Judgment. On a second, deeper level, is Britten's intricate design of the melody and accompaniment in which motives serve to unify the entire song and provide a psychological undercurrent to the text. On the third and deepest level is the form through which the material is organized and the principles that govern its design.

In comparison to his setting of "What if this present," the other sonnet in this cycle with the Last Judgment as its theme, Britten supplies this text with a much brighter and positive view of the Day of Doom, implying that the speaker may have reached some sort of resolution (see Example 86). He accomplishes this in a variety of ways that are almost entirely opposite to his manner of creating atmosphere in the fifth song. First, the opening of the song, which presents "trumpet fanfare" and "tremolo drum-roll" motives in the accompaniment, has a clear basis in D major, although there is one element outside that scale, G#, the Lydian sharp-fourth in the left hand in the second measure. The "trumpet fanfare" is a use of traditional horn fifths, but with a G# neighbor tone. The second element that paints a different picture of Judgment Day is the use of consonant intervals – sixths, fifths and thirds – in the accompaniment. The tremolo figure in the right hand, composed of two harmonic intervals of a major second sounded a fourth apart (A to D), serves to add to the general activity and tonal sensibility rather than create dissonance. Throughout the song, as well, the vocal line and accompaniment remain much more consonant with each other than they did in "What if this present." The final element that

Example 86: "At the round earth's," mm. 1-6.


Largamente e maestoso
♩. = 46
1
2
3
4
5
6
A
f
p sempre
ff
x
y
z
a
b
Cadence
3
5
13
At the round earth's im - a - gin'd cor-ners, blow your trum pets,
An - gels, and a-rise, a-rise From death, you num-ber-less in-fin-i-ties Of
soules, and to your scat - ter'd bod-ies goe,
Ped.
※

Britten draws upon to infuse this song with a brighter outlook is the use of the treble register in the accompaniment.

The melodic material arises from three motives, which, in turn, are elaborations of the opening fanfare in the accompaniment that depicts the trumpet and drums announcing the Last Judgment (refer to Example 86). Each motive has its own distinct shape and rhythm, which, while injecting variety into the texture, also gives it a sense of consistency. The *x* motive is based upon the seconds in the tremolo in the accompaniment, and in the top line of the left hand intervals. The *y* motive is suggested by the opening gesture in the left hand of the accompaniment, although its exact design is not present. The final motive, *z*, comprises an ascending perfect fourth, which is the interval between the two seconds of the tremolo figure. Within the course of the song, motives *x* and *z* are subjected to more change – including expansion, combination and rhythmic alteration – than motive *y*, which is only augmented rhythmically at the very end of the song. Indeed, motive *y* , because it retains its identity both rhythmically and melodically throughout the song, provides a stable element through which the song is unified, even when a change of mood occurs with the beginning of the sestet.

The accompaniment also consists of three distinct figures which arise from a depiction of the trumpets of the text or the drum rolls, and each of which has its own function in the form and rhythmic character (refer to Example 86). The "tremolo" and "fanfare" motives, *a* and *b* respectively, permeate the texture throughout, but appear most frequently as a foundation over which the text is sung. Indeed, the "fanfare" motive presents a conflict with its manifestation in the vocal line: G♯ in the accompaniment and G♮ in the voice. The *c* motive, on the other hand, occurs only in the *Interlude* passages, clearly identifying it with the process of moving from one section to the next.[57] All three motives are altered during the course of the song, primarily for purpose of moving from one tonal level to the next; but, because of their distinct rhythms and shapes, each remains recognizable. The "tremolo" motive undergoes the most transformation, expanding from the interval of a fifth to an octave. Britten keeps the rhythm of the "fanfare" motive constantly changing, presumably to keep the syncopations from becoming routine and predictable. Likewise, the elements of the motive itself are often rotated, but without significant effect on the motive's original properties: the motive is ever changing, but ever constant in its elements.

The ever-present motives in the melodic line and accompaniment, which are continually recombined to generate new, but familiar, material, do not underscore a particular scheme of word connection as he accomplished in "Oh my blacke Soule" with specific pitches and pitch levels. Rather, they work against a sense of progression that the sonnet form implies, keeping the speaker ever mindful of the Last Judgment scene that they depict. The effect of the motives on the musical form is significant in light of the text: as the speaker's emotions progress with his thoughts, the figures remain essentially the same but change in their relationship to one another.[58] The musical form can primarily be considered a three-part, strophic variation with a coda, featuring some departure in the middle section and a mood change in the third section (see Table 34). The combination of the darkening of mood with the pervasiveness of the motivic gestures destroys the possibility of an eventful recapitulation, which, in many ways, would have equally destroyed the sensibility of Donne's poem. Britten was, again, bound by Donne's punctuation in the sonnet form, so that both quatrains of the octave and the sestet are clearly articulated by piano interludes. The use of the variation principle, however, serves to unite the speaker's images across the divisions imposed by the elements of the poetic form.

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[57] Britten often uses a flourish in this manner. Refer in particular to the "Sea Interludes" from Peter Grimes and to the War Requiem.

[58] The motives are altered slightly during the course of the song, but retain enough of their basic shape to be identifiable.

TABLE 34

MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF AT THE ROUND EARTH'S IMAGINED CORNERS

Measure nos.	Musical Form	Melodic motives	Poetic Form	Tonal Levels
1-3	*A*	*x y z*	Octave *ll.* 1-2a	DM
3-5		*x y x y*	Octave *ll.* 2b-4a	
5-6		*z x z'*	Octave *l.* 4b	
6	*Link*	*acc. a b c*		
7-8	*A' (B)*	*x y z x y*	Octave *l.* 5	AM
8-11		*z x z x x*	Octave *ll.* 6-7	AM-B♭M-BM
11-13		*x y z"*	Octave *ll.* 7-8	C#M-DM
13-15		*z" x z'*	Octave *l.* 8	DM
15-18	*Interlude*	*acc. a b c*		
19-21	*A"*	*z x y z y*	Sestet *l.* 9	DM/m
21-23		*z z y*	Sestet *l.* 10	Am
23-26		*x y z" y z"*	Sestet *ll.* 11-12a	linear B♭ - D
27-28	*Coda*	*z y z y (aug)*	Sestet *ll.* 12b-13b	DM/m
29	*Link*	*acc. a b*		
30-32		*x y z'*	Sestet *ll.* 13b-14	DM

In the first section of the musical form, which sets the first quatrain of the octave, the elements of D major are clearly at work, with the sixths and third of the left hand of the accompaniment constructed from D and F#, implying tonic, and the fifths from A to E, implying the dominant, complete with a dominant-to-tonic cadence (refer to Example 86). This gesture follows the traditional nature of horn fifths. The juxtaposition of G# in the accompaniment and G♮ in the vocal line, however, which Peter Evans has called a "brilliant pendulum,"[59] creates a slight disturbance because the G# does not reach its goal of A within this section. The two melodic phrases, which are difficult to determine because of the extensive enjambment between the lines of the poem and the nature of the motives, emphasize either D major or a movement from A to D. The first phrase, which extends from m. 1 to through the first beat of m. 3, essentially centers around the pitch D. The second phrase, beginning at the second beat of m. 3 and ending in m. 6, begins in the area of A, over D major elements in the accompaniment, but centers around E before resolving that E with a cadential figure (A up to E down to D) that recurs at strategic points in the song. The use of G# in the melodic line at m. 5, coinciding with its appearance in the accompaniment, foreshadows a movement to A at the next section.

Britten's decision to keep this section within the area of D major with little variation of either the melodic or accompaniment motives unifies the text for this section. The speaker is calling for a start of the Day of Judgment. He asks the angels to go to the four corners of the earth to blow their trumpets, and the dead to rise from their graves so that their souls may be reunited with their bodies. He manipulates the *x* motive for both tonal and word-painting purposes at the word "arise" in m. 3, expanding it to three ascending pitches a step apart instead of two. Also, the appearance of G# in the melodic line also corresponds to the word "scatter'd," in a more subtle use of word painting.

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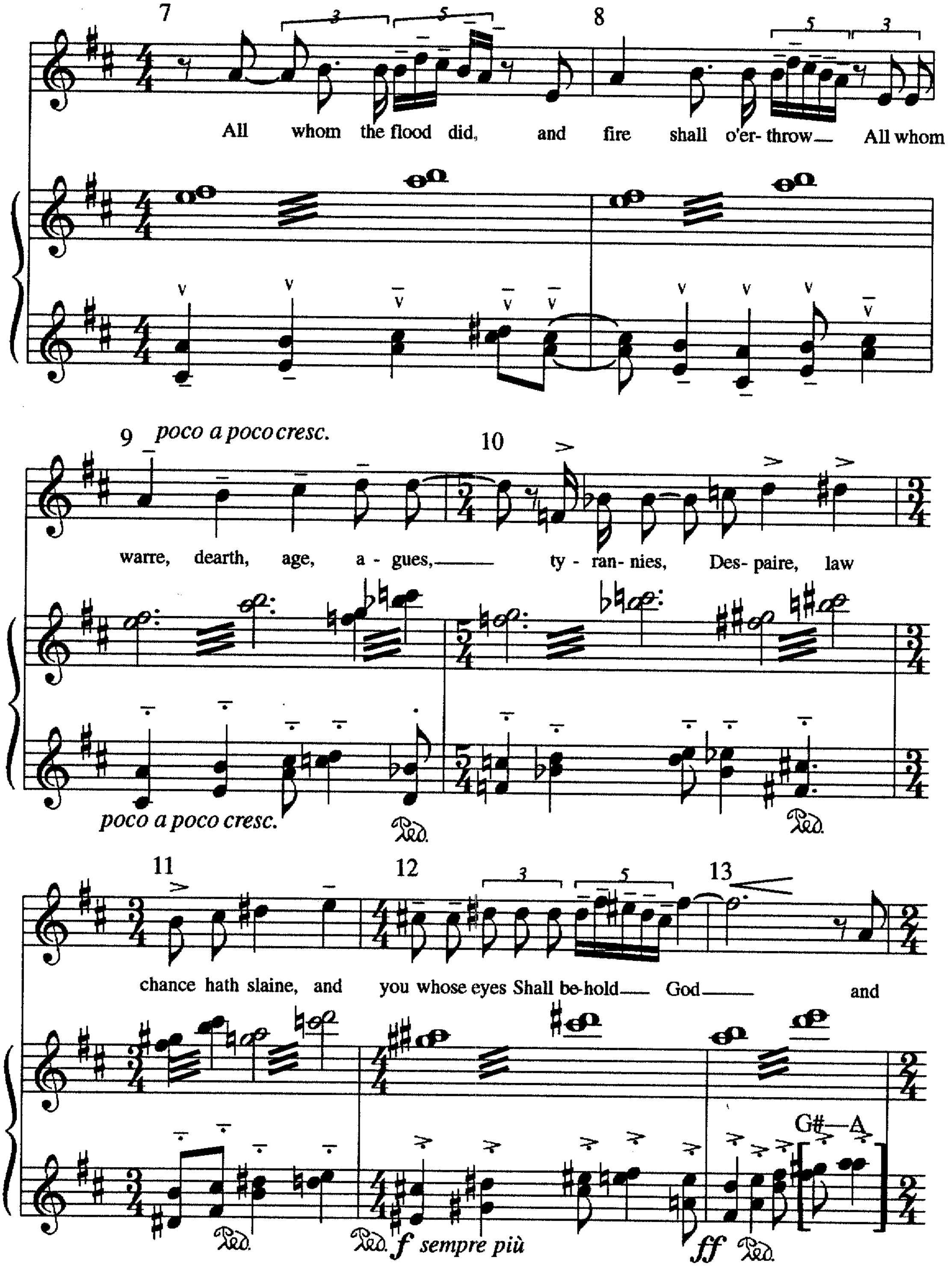
[59] Evans, Music of Britten, 353-354.

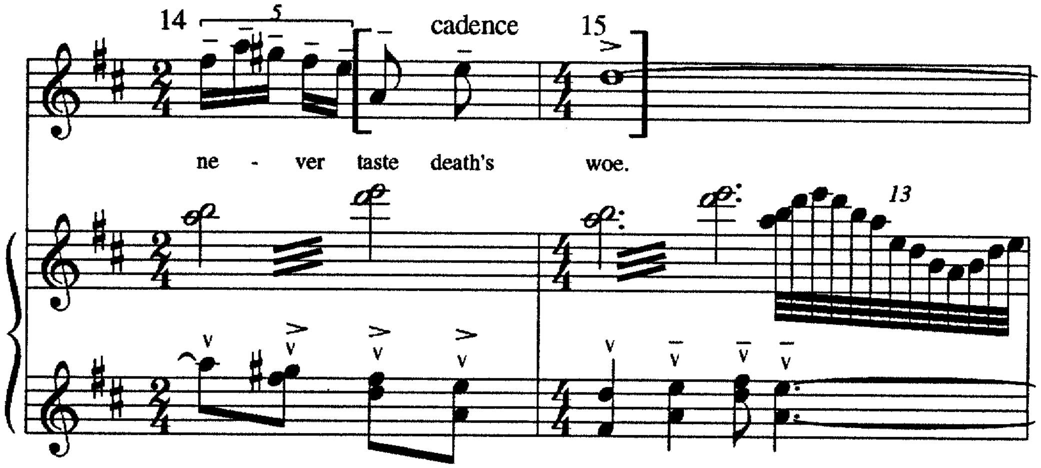
The second section, which corresponds to the second quatrain of the octave, begins at the level of A major, but abandons it in response to images in the text (see Example 87). The vocal line enters much sooner than its counterpart in the first section, after only an eighth-rest instead of a half-rest, creating a sense of disturbance. After the transposition of the opening measures to the level of A – with slight rhythmic changes in the melodic line – the vocal line initiates an ascent by half-step from A through B♭ to B, accompanied by a gradual ascent in the accompaniment, from A to B♭ to B. Britten combines the *x* and *z* motives of the melody, expanding the *x* motive to four pitches, and now uses both whole steps and half-steps. When he reaches B in m. 11, Britten breaks the half-step pattern of the ascent and moves by step to C# in both the vocal line and accompaniment, then moves them up to D where the section remains for closure. The move to C#, which has significance with regard to the text, also fills a void that existed in the first section. The leading tone to D, C#, occurred twice only in the first section, and not within the area of D. Thus, this resolution of C# to D is particularly strong. After the move to D, Britten also resolves the G# of the accompaniment to A, then brings back the cadential figure at the end of m. 5 – which restores G# – to close the section.

In the poem, the speaker enumerates the various ways in which men die – flood, fire, war, famine, age, sickness ("agues"), autocracies ("tyrannies"), suicide ("despair"), law, and chance – in a three-fold series of 2 + 4 + 4. Britten sets each series a step higher than the previous, and couples that with a gradual crescendo. When he reaches the level of C#, the speaker addresses those who will be taken to Heaven on the Day of Judgment without having died. At the words "behold God" (mm. 12-13), the end of the *y* motive and the beginning of the *z* motive are dovetailed so that the word "God" occurs on F#, scale degree

Example 87: "At the round earth's," mm. 7-15.


7
8
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'er-throw— All whom
9 poco a poco cresc.
10
warre, dearth, age, a - gues,— ty - ran- nies, Des- paire, law
poco a poco cresc.
11
12
13
chance hath slaine, and you whose eyes Shall be-hold— God— and
f sempre più
ff
G#—A

Example 87: "At the round earth's," mm. 7-15, cont.



4 in C#, which is then reinterpreted as the third in D major. The arrival on D major in m. 13 accomplishes several purposes: 1) the C# to D resolution, which marks the first significant appearance of the leading tone to D, sets the words "behold God," so that these words are associated with the notion of resolution; and 2) the return of the *b* motive of the accompaniment to its original pitch, with the G# resolving to A (m. 13).[60]

The end of the setting of the octave and the beginning of the setting of the sestet are separated by a short interlude in which the motives of the accompaniment gradually descend from the treble register to the bass (see Example 88). In marked contrast to the beginning of the song, at the beginning of the sestet, the accompaniment is in the bass register, and the motives are inverted from the original positions. For the first three measures, the *a* motive is expanded to an octave D, and now occupies the left hand, while the *b* motive, now in the right hand, alternates between D major and D minor, using cross

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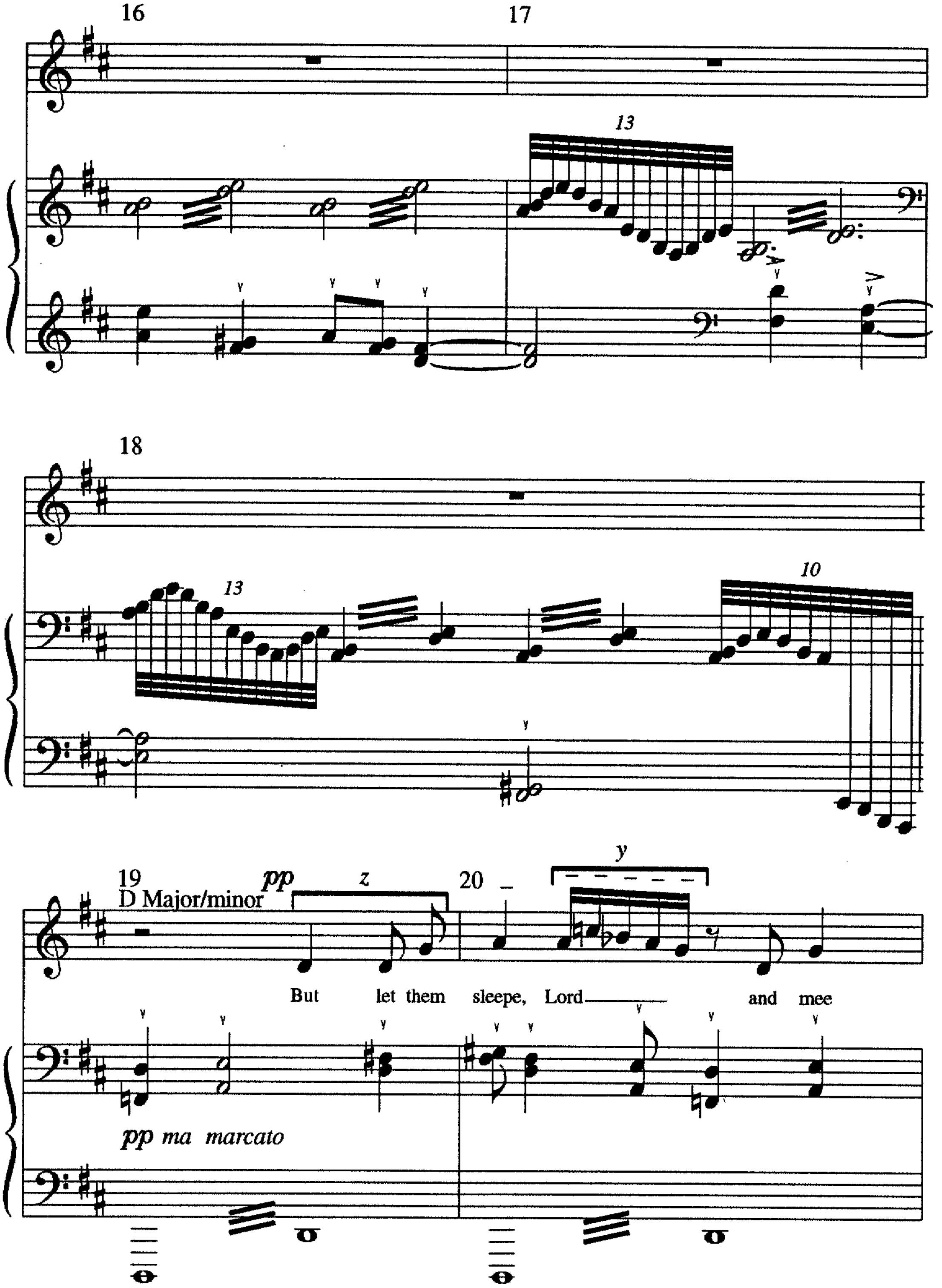
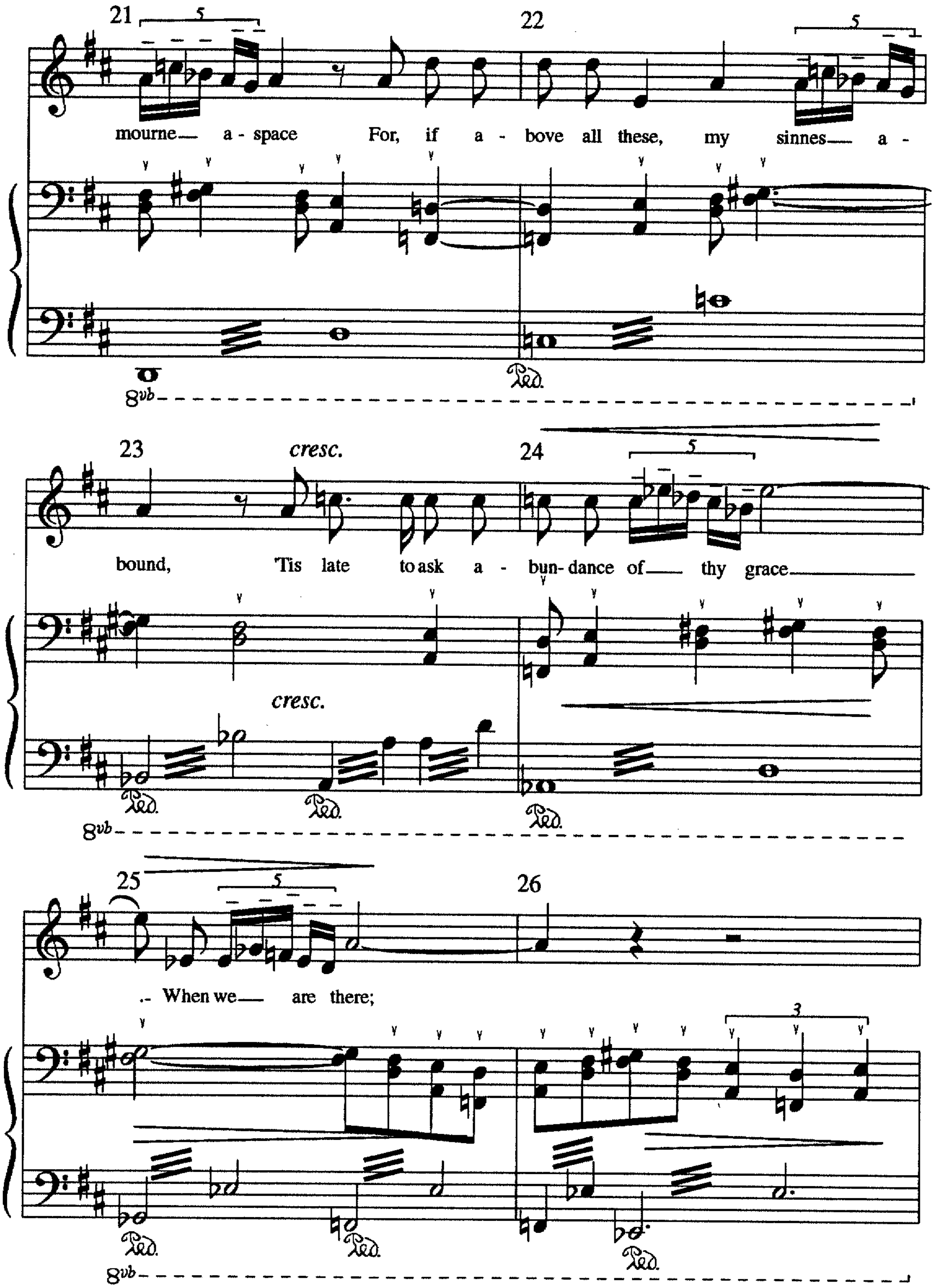
[60] Peter Pears has written that ". . . the trumpet is not allowed to reach its top A until 'God is beheld'. . . ." "Vocal Music," 70.

Example 88: "At the round earth's," mm. 16-26.


16
17
13
18
13
10
19
D Major/minor
pp
z
20
y
But let them sleepe, Lord and mee
pp ma marcato

Example 88: "At the round earth's," mm. 16-26, cont.


21
5
mourne— a - space For, if a - bove all these, my sinnes— a -
22
8vb
23
cresc.
24
bound, 'Tis late to ask a - bun- dance of— thy grace—
cresc.
8vb
25
26
3
.. When we— are there;
8vb

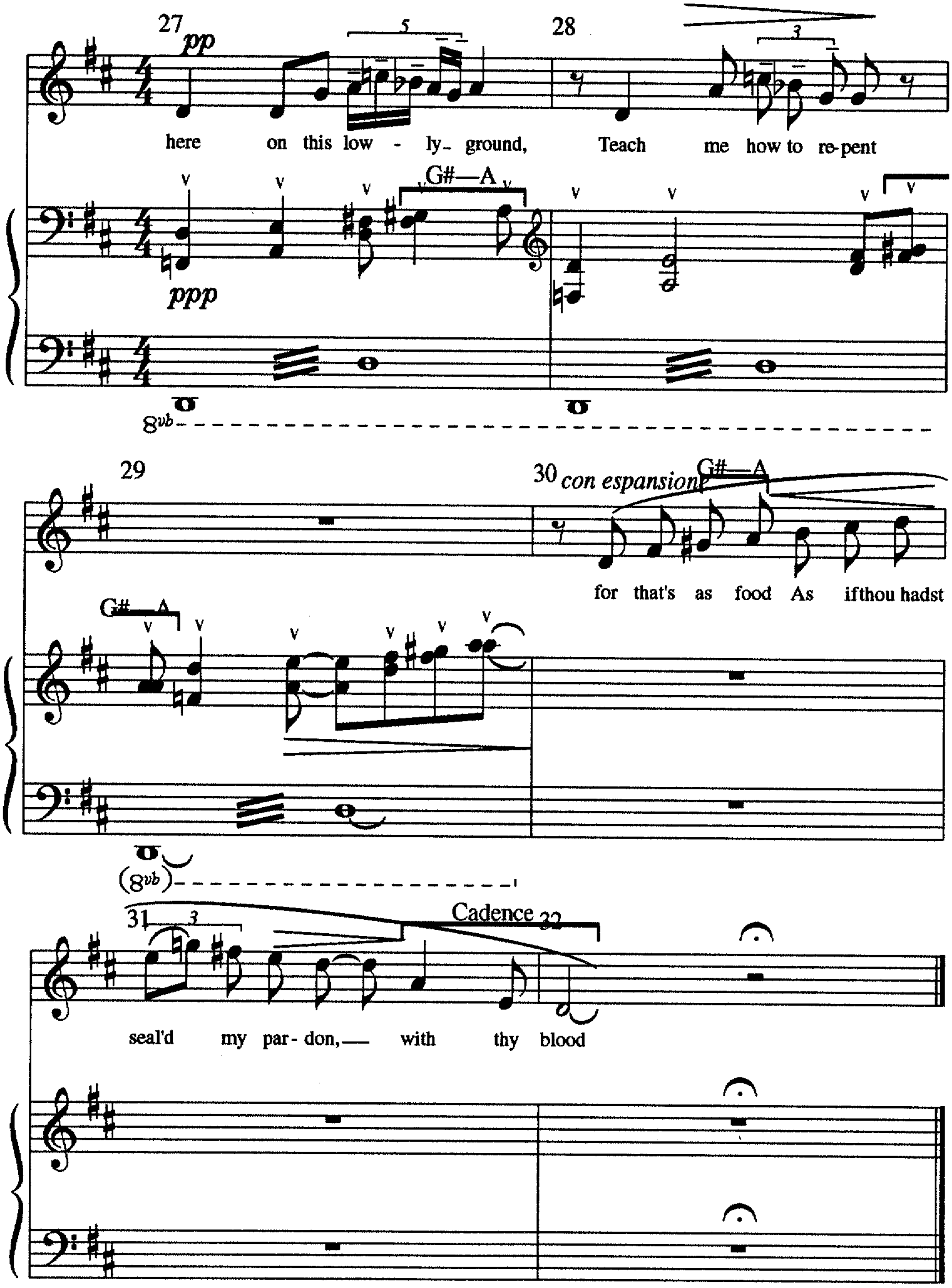
relations in the horn fifths. The vocal line for these three measures operates within D minor, but centers primarily around A.

In m. 22, while the vocal focus remains on D minor and the right hand within D major/minor, the bass line begins a stepwise descent through C♮ and B♭, arriving on A at the second half of m. 23, at which point the vocal line shifts toward A minor. This is short-lived, for in m. 23 the bass line moves to a tritone between A♭ (enharmonic spelling of G♯) and D. This interval gradually expands through a descending step motion in the bass line (A♭ to G♭ to F♮ to E♭), with the D in the upper voice moving to an E♭, arriving on an octave E♭ in m. 26. Although the right hand retains its D major/minor alternation, the vocal line abandons its A minor focus in m. 25, transposing the *y* motive to the E♭ minor level. Britten dovetails the end of the *y* motive, which reaches the pitch D, with the beginning of the *z* motive, expanding the *z* motive to a fifth, D to A.

At the start of the *Coda*, the octave E♭ in the bass line resolves to an octave D, and the vocal line returns at the level of D minor (see Example 89). The right hand, which is still alternating between D major and D minor, begins a gradual ascent that lifts it out of the bass register into the treble, and resolves G♯ to A. After two statements of the *z* and *y* motive in D minor, the right hand of the accompaniment takes over, ascending to a high A. The accompaniment fades on the high A, and the voice sings its final phrase unaccompanied. The cadential motive from mm. 5-6, an A ascending to an E, which falls to D, is inverted for the final resolution.

The changes from D major to D minor and from treble to bass at the beginning of the sestet highlights the psychological implications of the text (refer to Examples 86 and 87). The speaker petitions God not the initiate the last days of the earth as he had requested in the octave, because he realizes that he is still in a state of sinfulness. Britten associates several words with the *y* motive in the same transposition: "Lord" and "mourne" (*l.* 9),

Example 89: "At the round earth's," mm. 27-32.


27
pp
5
here on this low - ly- ground,
G#—A
ppp
8vb
28
3
Teach me how to re-pent
29
G#—A
(8vb)
30 con espansione
G#—A
for that's as food As ifthou hadst
31
3
Cadence 32
seal'd my par- don,— with thy blood

"sinnes" (*l.* 10) and "lowly" (*l.* 12). These disparate images, which reflect the speaker's journey in this song, come together in the speaker's final request that God teach him what to do to repent.[61]

In his settings of lines 10-12a, Britten creates three tonal spheres each of which conflicts with one or both of the others – the vocal line, bass line, and right-hand. In this portion of the text, the speaker states that his "sinnes abound," and that it will be too late for him to ask forgiveness of them when he reaches Heaven. Britten's dissonant setting suggests two possibilities: 1) the speaker feels more apart from God (his closeness having been inherent in the D major section) than before; or 2) the speaker feels uncertain about his ability to accomplish the degree of sinlessness needed to accomplish eternal life, which is also a form of separateness. The resolution of his feelings occurs only after he asks God to tell him what to do: "here on this lowly ground, / Teach me how to repent." As he does so, the G♯ of the accompaniment resolves, confirming that the speaker has done the right thing in turning to God. Once this resolution has been confirmed, the voice takes up the G♯-A resolution as part of the return to D major in its final *a capella* phrase, in which he comforts himself with the words that knowing how to repent is "as good / As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood."

Britten's choice of key quality in the various sections of this song captures the psychological journey on which the speaker embarks (see Table 35). The D major sections represent his boastfulness: he is so confident of his salvation, that he tries to start the Day of Judgment in the first two sections. He tells the angels to go to their stations at the four corners of the earth to sound the call, and tells to the dead to respond, taking attendance by listing all the ways by which man can die. As for himself, he will be one of those who is taken into Heaven without feeling the sting of death, evidenced by the timely resolution of G# to A. The confidence of the speaker can be seen in a particular cadential figure at mm. 5-6, that is repeated at the end of the second section (mm. 14-15). An A leaps up a fifth to an E, which then descends a step to D, giving the D a strong emphasis.

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[61] Britten also uses word painting at the words "For, if above all these" (*l.* 10). The words "above all" are set a seventh above the word "these."

TABLE 35

TEXT OF AT THE ROUND EARTH'S IMAGINED CORNERS
AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL SCHEME

Text	Musical Scheme
At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise From death, you numberless infinities Of soules, and to your scatter'd bodies goe,	*A*: The speaker calls upon the essential elements of the Day of Judgment – the angels with their trumpets and the dead in Christ – to start it; essentially remains in the area of DM
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow, All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies, Despaire, law, chance hath slaine, and you whose eyes Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.	*A'*: He calls the role of the dead, finally listing those who will not die, but be taken up to Heaven; the tonal movement starts from A, but works back to DM
But let them sleepe Lord and mee mourne aspace, For, if above all these, my sinnes abound, 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace, When we are there,	*A"*: The mood completely changes as the speaker realizes that he is still sinful. Three tonal spheres are at work: DM, Dm, and Am, with a chromatic descent in the bass line.
here on this lowly ground, Teach me how to repent; for that's as good As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.	*Coda*: The speaker asks God to tell him what to do for repentance, which is equivalent to Christ's sacrifice; The area of DM/m gives way to DM

At the sestet, the speaker suddenly becomes very humble as he realizes that he is still sinful, hence Britten's connections of the words "Lord," "mourne," "sinnes," and "lowly." The tonal focus changes from major to minor, but returns to D major for the final phrase in which the speaker understands that his repentance is tantamount to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. As the work comes to a close, the vocal line cadences using a more humble version of the resolution at the end of the first two sections: A descends to E, which descends to D – perhaps he is not so confident in his comparison after all.

Thou hast made me

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dim eyes anyway,
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sinne in it, which it t'wards Hell doth weigh;

Onely thou art above, and when t'wards thee
By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine;
Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.

According to Peter Pears, the impetus for Britten's setting of this sonnet is in the line, "I runne to death, and death meets me as fast." Indeed, the accompaniment, with its persistent eighth-notes and scalar motion, paints a lively portrait of this action.[62] In examining this song, however, one cannot isolate a sole element and state that it contains the key to what the setting is expressing, for the text is complex as is Britten's setting. Each element of both the text and the music needs to be seen on its own terms and then in relation to all other elements.

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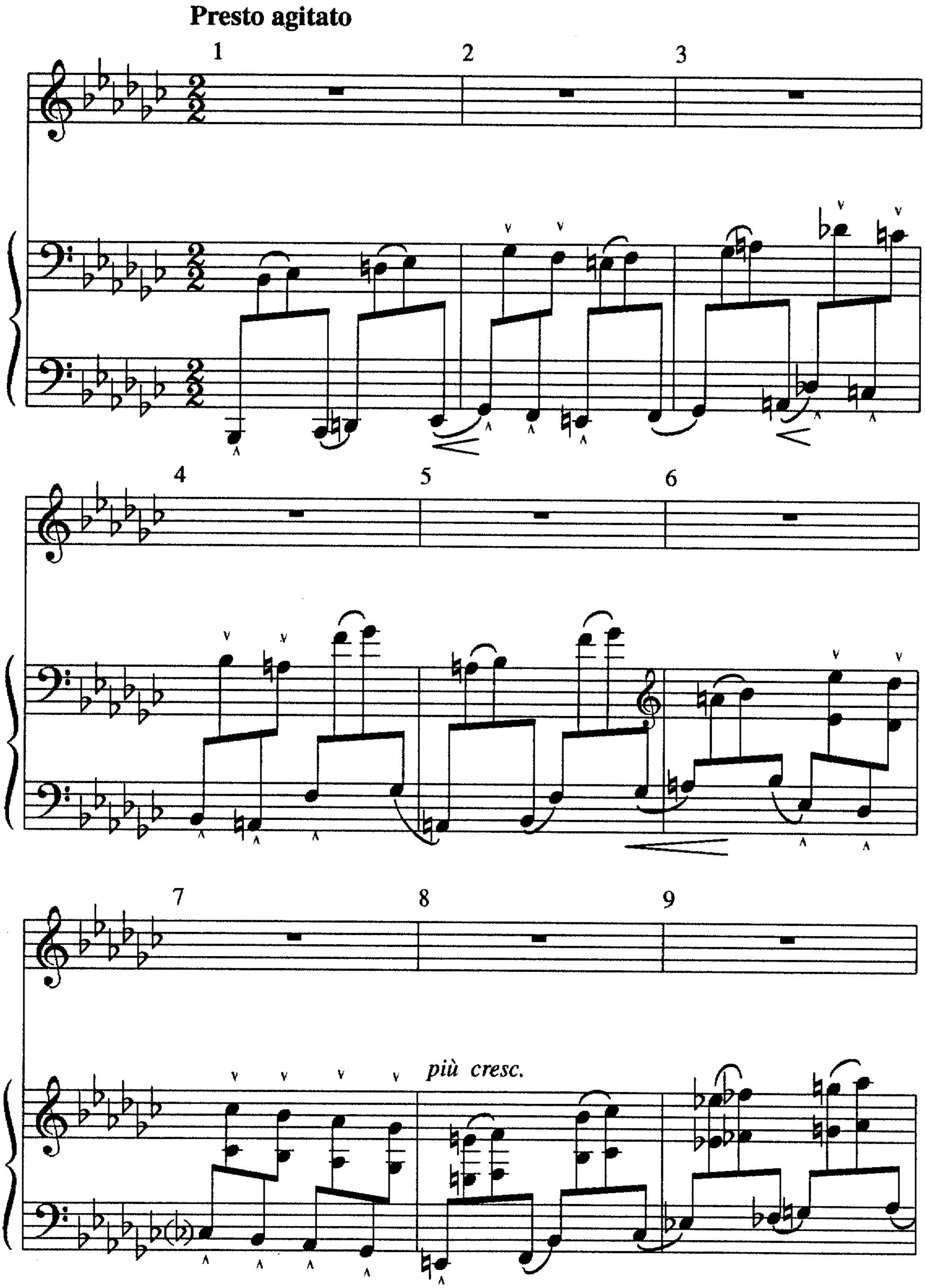
[62] Unfortunately, Pears's observation has caused some misunderstanding about the nature of Britten's interpretation. Two authors, Rembert Herbert and Paul Gaston, consider Britten's music to be a light-hearted attempt at comedy. Herbert calls the accompaniment a "shameless imitation of running and stopping," concluding that "the jokes almost get to be too much." "Analysis of Holy Sonnets," 31-32. Relying heavily on Herbert's opinion, Gaston comments, "the scene painting is so obvious and flamboyant that it becomes comic." "Britten's Donne," 211. Neither author sees beyond the ostinato accompaniment to other aspects of the music. For example, both scholars ignore the fact that the tempo marking reads *Presto agitato*, and that the key quality is minor. These factors belie a very different mood than that considered by Herbert and Gaston.

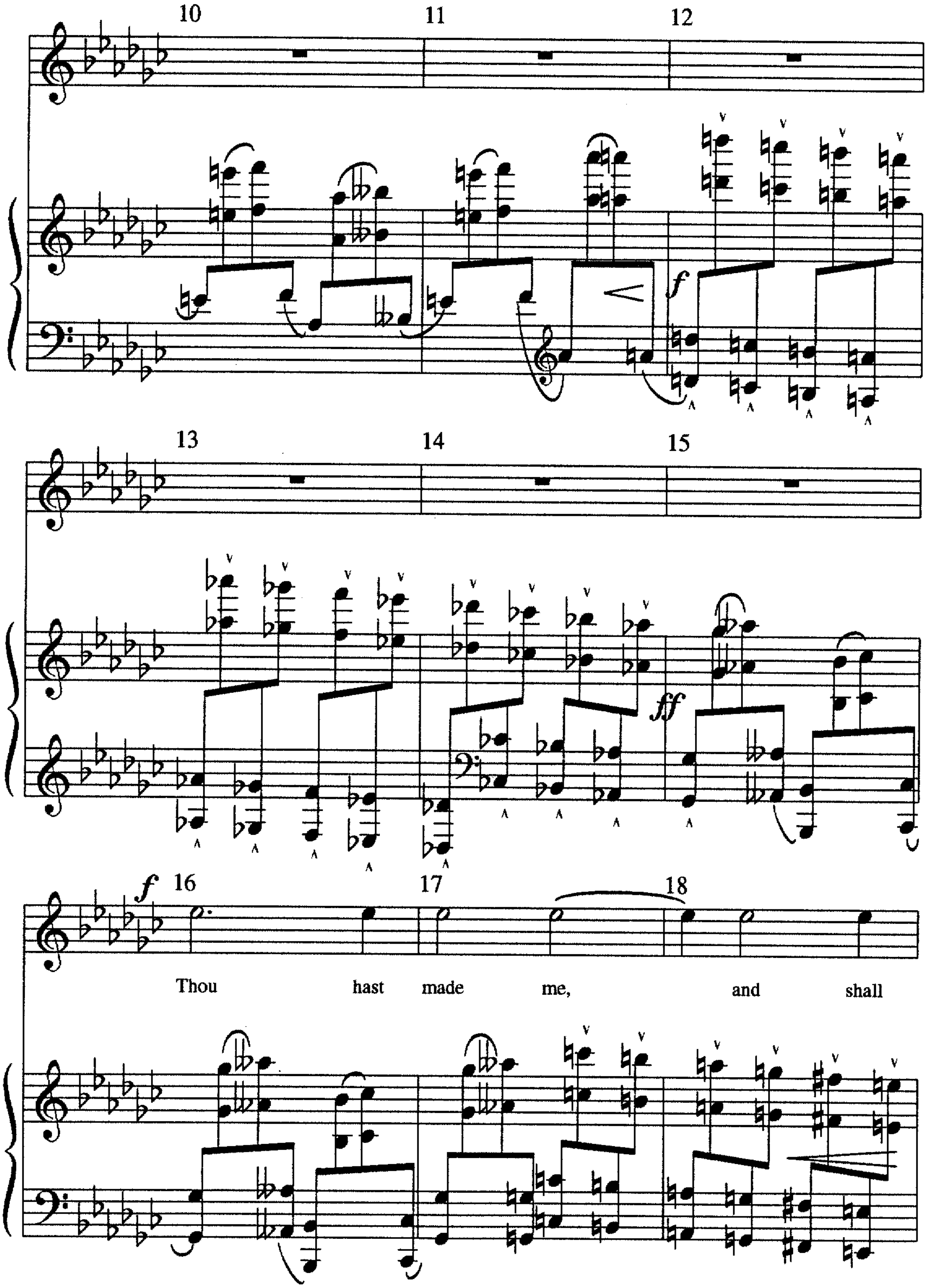
The song begins with an extended piano prelude that sets the tone for the voice's entrance at m. 16 (see Example 90). The passage presents a graphic depiction of the struggle that the speaker is encountering in his attempt to find God: the scalar figures attempt to rise, but keep falling back down. Britten constructs this introduction, and almost the whole of the accompaniment from the manipulation of a four-note figure (see Example 91). Britten frequently rotates or interlocks the pattern with a different transposition to keep the tonal direction uncertain. The retention of the intervals between adjacent members and outer members of the figure (half step, minor third, half step and perfect fourth) appears to be of greater concern to Britten than the route which he takes to arrive at a key, although the outer interval is sometimes expanded to an augmented fourth or perfect fifth. The pattern itself, and its manipulation throughout the song becomes a metaphor for the speaker's desperate search for the answer to his primary question: if God has made him, then why would God let him decay?

The prelude begins from E♭ minor and works its way through various levels, including A♭ minor, A minor and C♭ major via scale fragments, before arriving at the level of G♭ major, dominant of C♭, for the entrance of the voice on an E♭ (refer to Example 90). Under the voice's repeated E♭, the accompaniment reiterates the four-note figure at the level of C♭, finally moving to an E minor descending scale beginning on C♮ which leads at the climax of the phrase to a chord that suggests the vii^{o7} of E♭. The G♭ figure takes on a new tonal meaning with the entrance of the voice, which ultimately shifts the focus from G♭ to the E♭, in that it contains elements of the area E♭, in particular, the major and minor thirds (spelled A♭♭ and G♭, respectively) and B♭, which could be considered as the dominant. The diminished-seventh chord in m. 19, which stops the furious activity in the accompaniment, solidifies the E♭ tonal level. Thus, the tonal movement in this section,

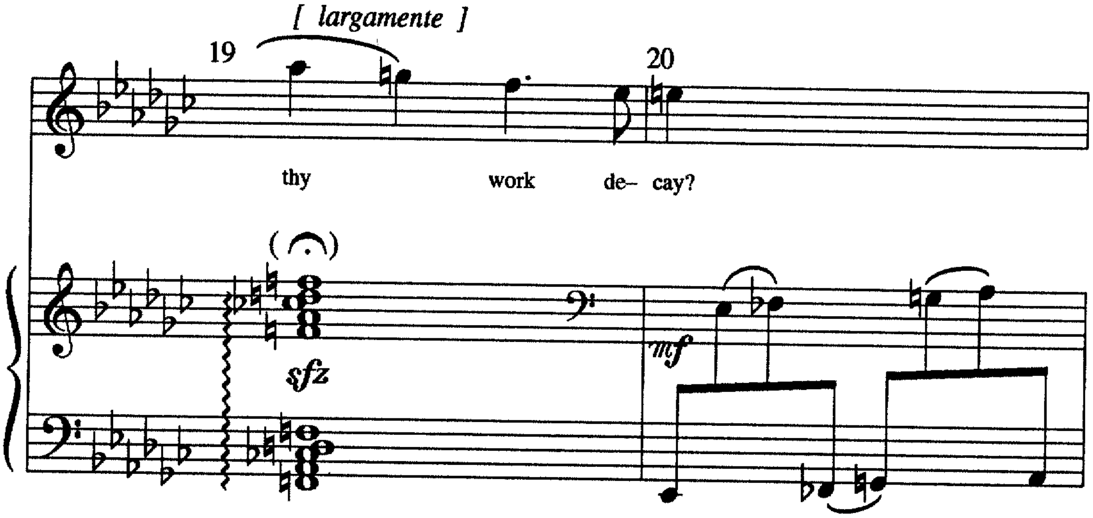
Example 90: "Thou hast made me," mm. 1-20.


Presto agitato
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
più cresc.

Example 90: "Thou hast made me," mm. 1-20, cont.

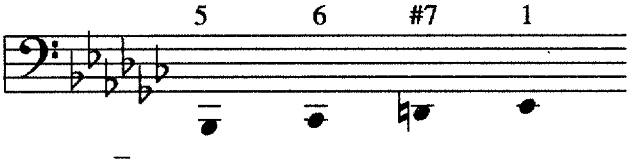

10
11
12
f
13
14
15
ff
f
16
17
18
Thou
hast
made
me,
and
shall

Example 90: "Thou hast made me," mm. 1-20, cont.



although it has endured a great deal of chromatic motion, comprises a large-scale, dominant-to-tonic gesture, from B♭ to E♭, with the generative motive, scale degrees 5 - 6- #7 - 1 placing special emphasis on the dominant.

Example 91: "Thou hast made me," generative motive of the accompaniment.



The E-minor scale fragment is very curious in the context. Although there were several instances of E♮ in the previous passages, Britten never included a clear reference to that level. The note played an important role in maintaining the intervallic integrity of the figure – particularly the minor second – but without any tonal implications. In fact, the note is avoided entirely in the A minor scale fragment at m. 12. Britten rarely emphasizes a tonal area without having referred to it in preceding passages or without intention to explore the key further in subsequent activity. In this case, Britten reserves the E♮ for a special purpose later in the piece.

Britten's first melodic gesture captures both the introductory tone of the first line of the poem and the implied rebuke of God (refer to Example 90). Although the range is very narrow, encompassing only a perfect fourth, Britten's repeated E♭s followed by an ascending leap of a perfect fourth imbues the phrase with a sense of the dramatic that is emphasized by the *largamente* that corresponds with the leap. The sudden stop in the activity at that point, coupled with the fully-diminished seventh chord, gives stress to both the words that coincide with the pause, "thy work" and the entire poetic line, imparting a sense of drama to this introduction to the poem. The repeated notes for the majority of the line entices the listener into a feeling of uncertainty regarding the continuation of the phrase melodically. The ascending perfect fourth which follows these notes is a strong interval because of the harmonic implications associated with it, and it conveys a release of the melodic tension that was built through the repeated E♭s. The fully-diminished seventh chord that corresponds with the top note of the leap, however, destroys this release of tension through its own instability. Only at the very end of the phrase is the tension alleviated with the anticipation of the tonal arrival on E♭ at the word "decay," which is the instigating circumstance of the rebuke. Britten places the emphasis, then, not on the motivation for the speaker's anger, but on the relationship of God and man, God as Creator and man as his creation. This emphasis implies that the "decay" that the speaker is experiencing is of secondary importance to his feelings of betrayal by God which he associates with his decay. This subtle detail in Britten's melodic line ultimately affects his point of return in the musical form.

The end of the first section dovetails with the beginning of the second, which sets lines 2-8 of the poem. The accompaniment, which begins from an E♭ – dominant of A♭ – is an exact transposition of the introduction to the level A♭, until m. 30, when the pattern breaks, leading back to the scale fragments used in the first section. Presumably, this return is to avoid the diminished-seventh chord that would have led to A♭ if the passage were wholly parallel to the introduction (see Example 92). Britten's use of the same accompaniment for the second section sheds new light upon the function of the piano opening. In view of his use of parallel passages in the accompaniment, it appears less likely that Britten considered mm. 1-20 as merely a prelude or introduction to the body of the form. The passage, rather, functions as a section in its own right, even though very little of the text is actually present. Although the piano prelude is the most extensive of any of the songs in the cycle, the use of only the first line of the text in a complete formal section is not unique to this song.

In the second section, Britten continues the use of melodic phrases that are a mixture of recitative and more lyrical outbursts (refer to Example 92). Repeated notes are used judiciously to give emphasis to the word in the text that breaks from them. For example, in Britten's setting of line 2 (mm. 21-23), repeated notes for the words "Repaire me" lead to an emphasis on the word "now" which corresponds with an ascending leap. Similarly, the word "death" in line 3, is emphasized by both repeated notes leading to it and a descent of a minor seventh.[63] Britten uses this text-setting device until the sixth, seventh and eighth lines of the poem, "Despaire behind, and death before doth cast / Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste / By sinne in it, which it t'wards Hell doth weigh." The melodic

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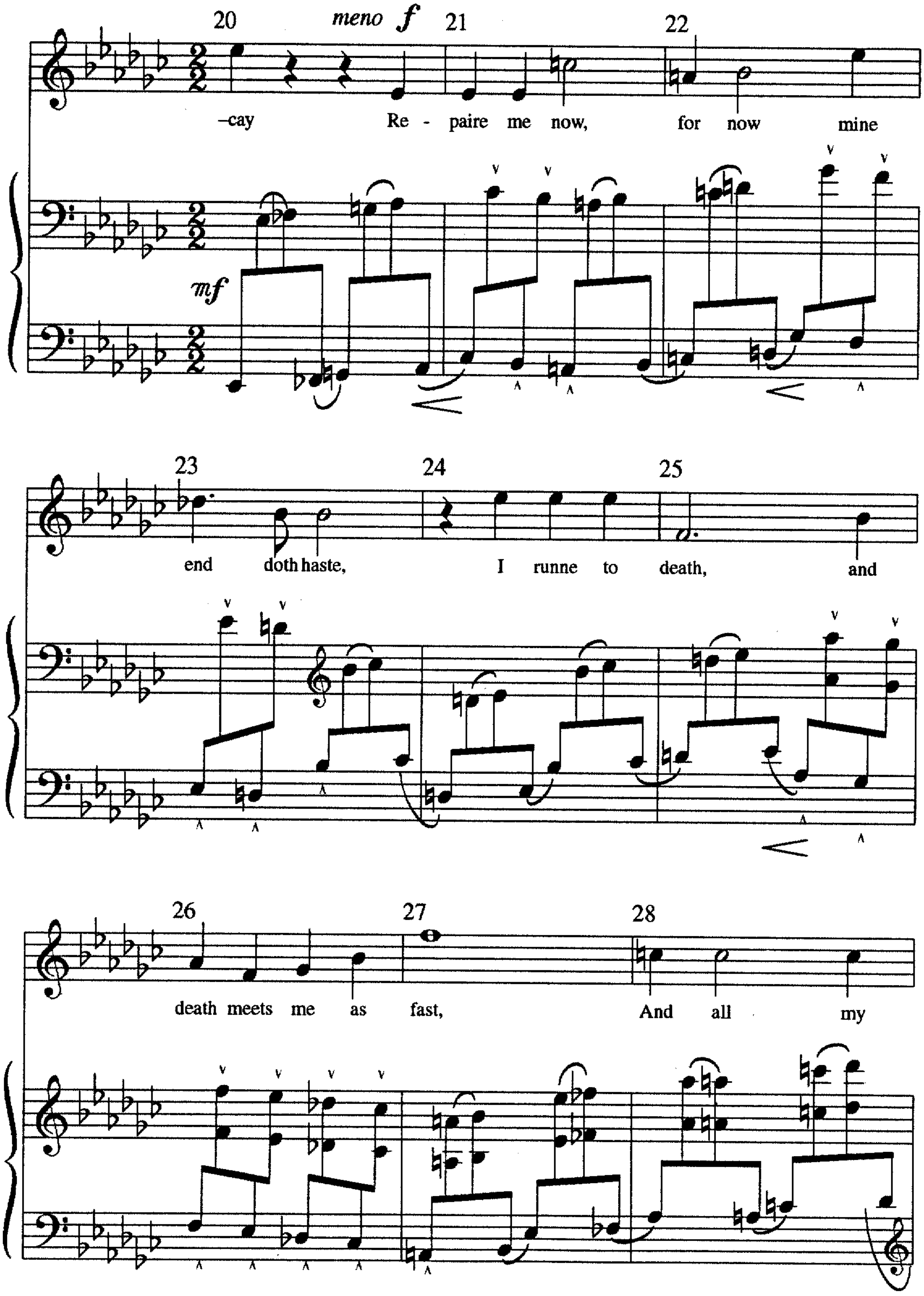
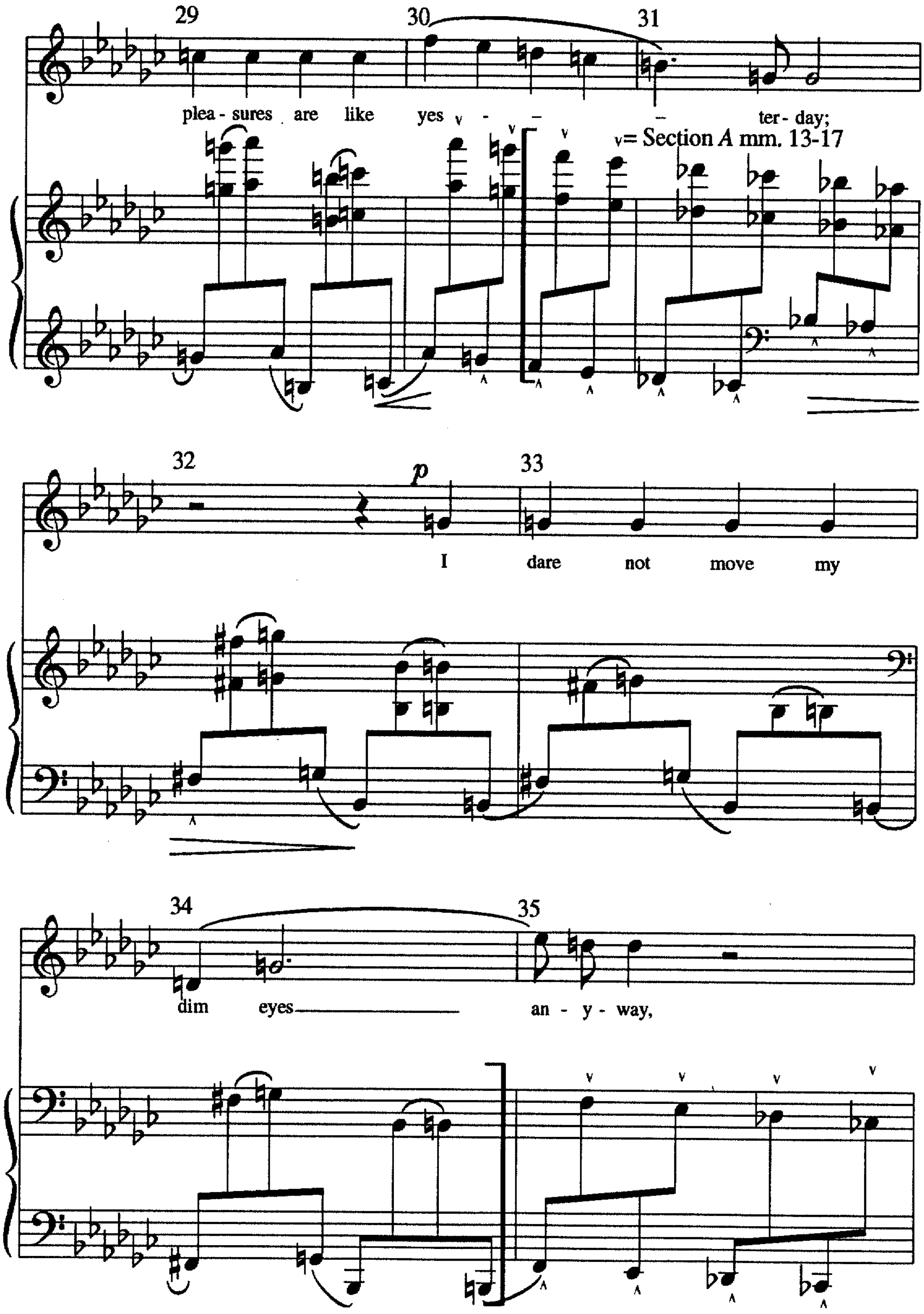
[63] The descending leap of a seventh for the word death is also textual word painting since a religious death would be associated with the death of the soul, or Hell.

Example 92: "Thou hast made me," mm. 20-35.

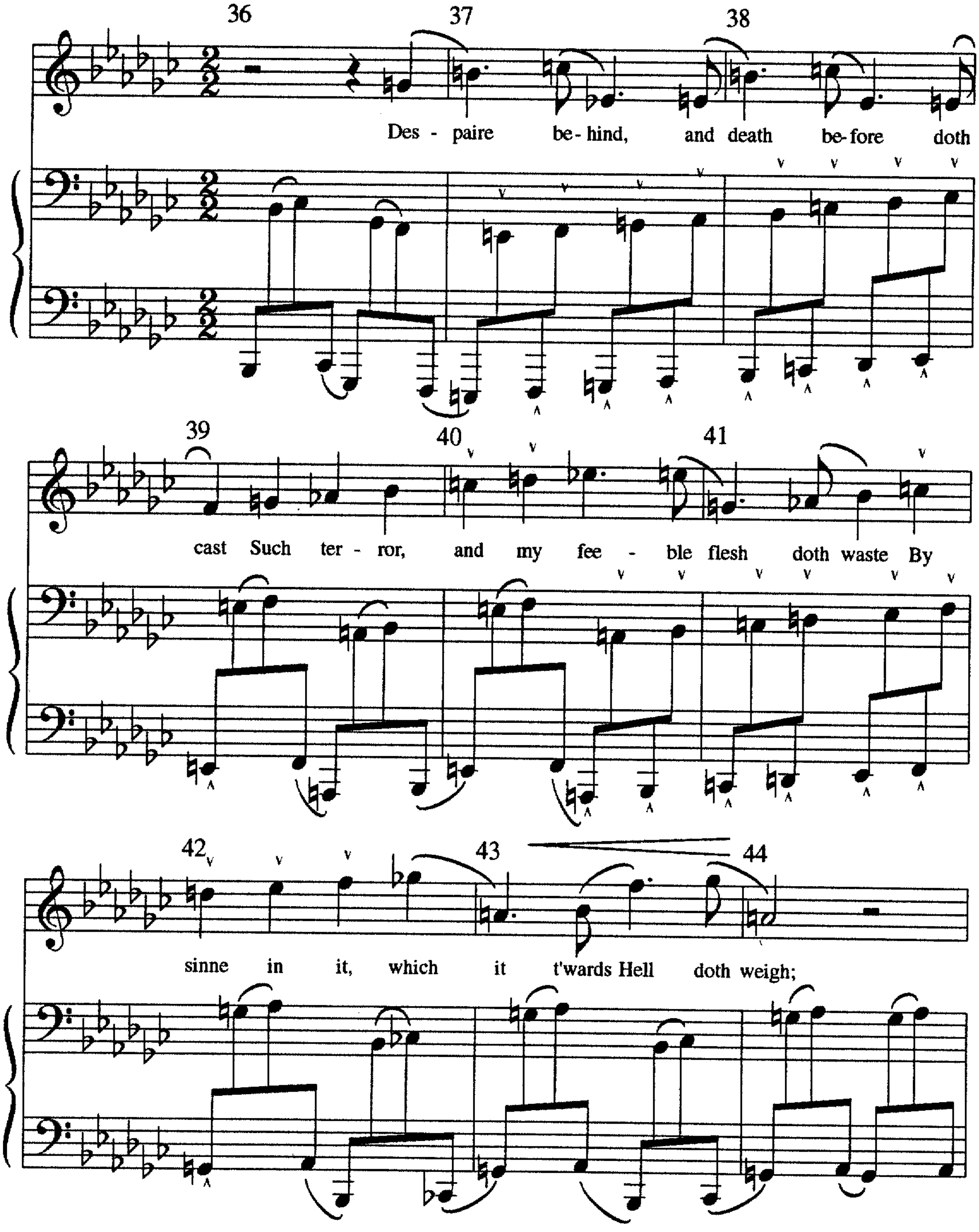

20
meno f
21
22
–cay Re - paire me now, for now mine
mf
23
24
25
end doth haste, I runne to death, and
26
27
28
death meets me as fast, And all my

Example 92: "Thou hast made me," mm. 20-35, cont.


29
30
31
plea - sures are like yes - - - ter - day;
v= Section A mm. 13-17
32
p
33
I dare not move my
34
35
dim eyes an - y - way,

phrases for these poetic lines are generated from the accompaniment motive and the manipulation of that motive as seen most clearly in the first section. (see Example 93).

Example 93: "Thou hast made me," mm. 36-44.


36
37
38
Des - paire be- hind, and death be- fore doth
39
40
41
cast Such ter - ror, and my fee - ble flesh doth waste By
42
43
44
sinne in it, which it t'wards Hell doth weigh;

The tonal directions of the phrases of the vocal line are essentially governed by the accompaniment, which changes its focus rapidly. For example, the phrase which sets line 2 (mm. 21-23) begins at E♭ and outlines an A diminished triad before moving to B♭. In contrast, the fourth phrase (mm. 33-35), is more stable, outlining the area of G; but, this stability is in response to the accompaniment, which hovers around G. The subsequent phrase, which sets line 6, alternates between C major and C minor, while the accompaniment unfolds an ascending C-minor scale that starts and ends on E♮. In short, the vocal line in this section is determined by the accompaniment.

Line 6, which is the textual climax for the section, announces the reason for the speaker's rebuke of God in the first line (see Table 36). He feels despair over his past sins and is unable to forgive himself for them, and since he is unable to atone, he sees death as something to be feared because he is apart from God. The melodic gesture extracts the minor second from the accompaniment motive and couples it with an expansion of the motive's outer interval of a fourth. For the seventh and eighth lines, Britten combines the

TABLE 36

OCTAVE OF THOU HAST MADE ME AND
BRITTEN'S MELODIC SCHEME

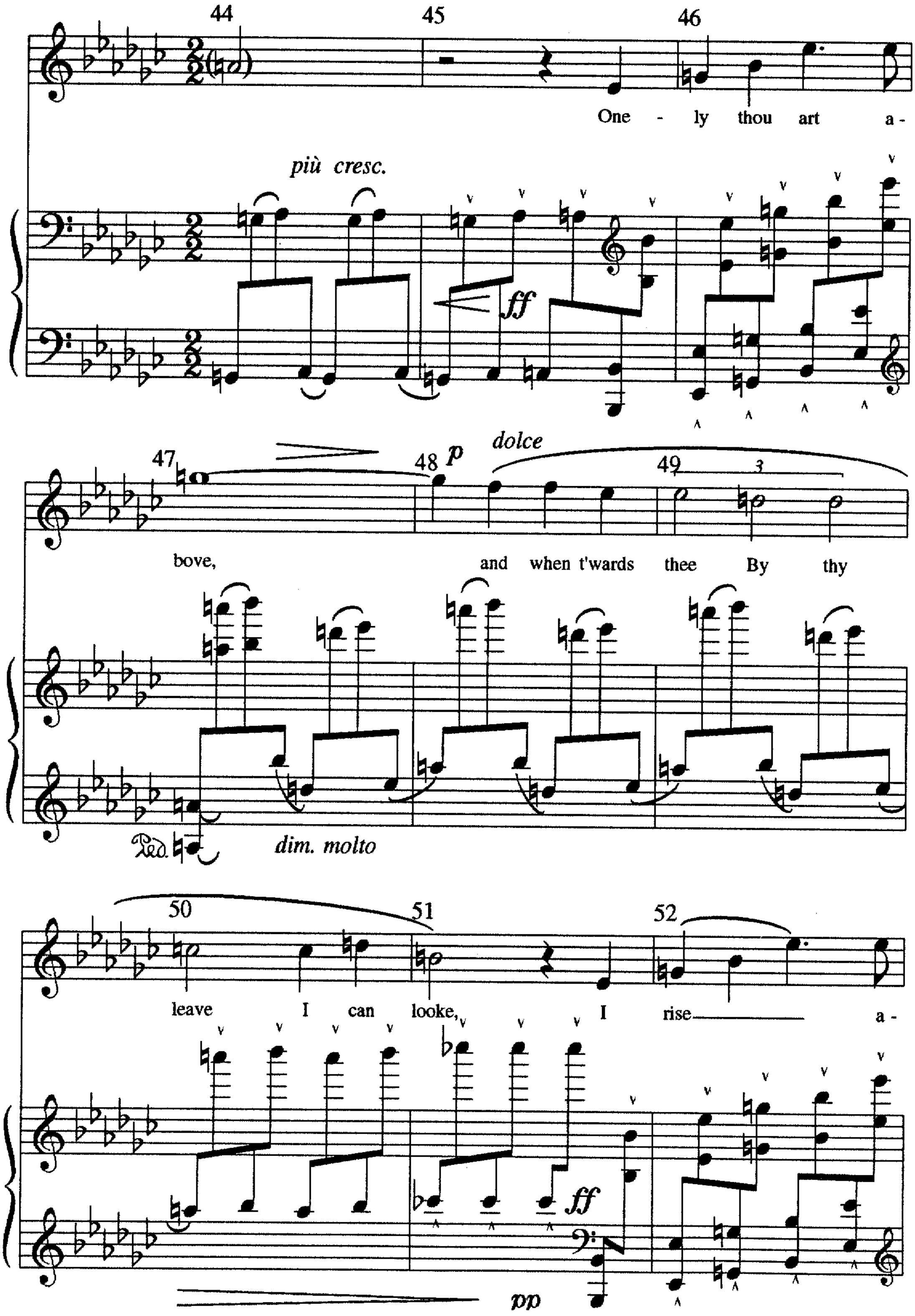
Text	Melodic Scheme
Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?	*A*: *a* E♭ to E♭
Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,	*A'*: *b* E♭ to B♭
I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,	*c* E♭ to Fm
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;	*a'* Cm
I dare not move my dim eyes anyway,	*d* Gm
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast	*e* Cm (taken from accompaniment figure)
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste	*e* + *e'* Cm to A
By sinne in it, which it t'wards Hell doth weigh;	

scalar fragments from the accompaniment and organizes them into an ascending sequence that is a representation of the speaker's attempt to go back to God. He breaks the sequence with the final words of line 8, "t'wards Hell doth weigh," returning to a statement of the accompaniment motive used in conjunction with line 6, but at a higher pitch. He avoids obvious word painting at the word "Hell," depicting it with a descending leap to the word "weigh" instead.

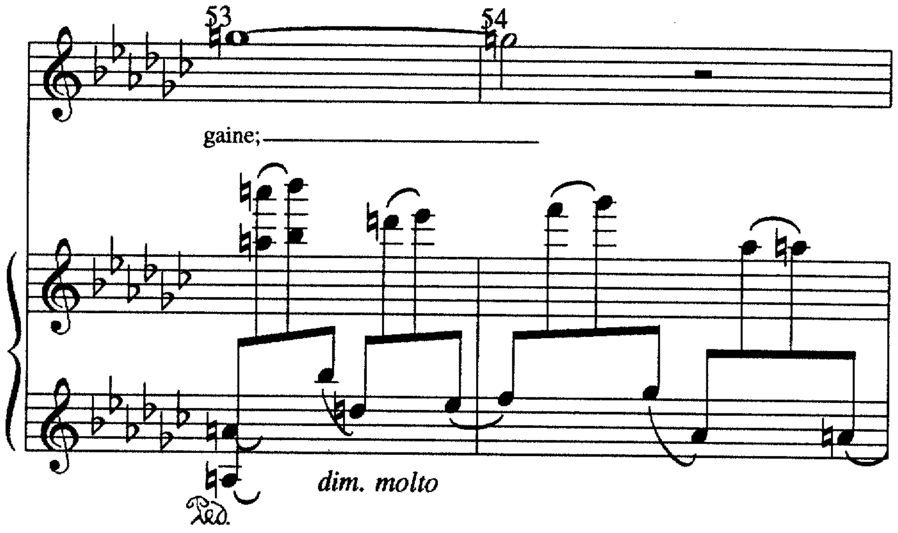
The delineation between the end of the second section and the start of the third is blurred by the lack of a clear resolution at the end of the second section (m. 44). The vocal line ends on an A♮ against A♭ and its leading tone in the accompaniment, interpreted as the raised fourth, fourth and third scale degrees in E♭. The piano's repose on G♮ and A♭ for one and a half measures implies a structural turning point. Indeed, the opening of the third section, which grows out of the half-step oscillation, contrasts very sharply with the previous one both melodically and harmonically (see Example 94). First, the vocal line outlines an E♭ major triad. The ascent, a portrayal of the text, "Onely thou art *above* [emphasis mine]" (*l.* 9) is answered by a linear descent from F to B♮ centering around C, which is, in turn, followed by another ascending portrayal of the text, "Onely thou art *above* [emphasis mine]" (*l.* 9) is answered by a linear descent from F to B♮ centering around C, which is, in turn, followed by another ascending E♭ major triad in a second pictorialization of the concept of heaven: "I rise againe" (*l.* 10).

In the previous phrases, Britten based his vocal line upon the rise and fall of vocal inflection, organizing the highs and lows around a specific tonic, or in a specific tonal direction. The first two phrases of the third section, then, are the first purely melodic utterances. He accompanies this with stasis in the harmony, which is quite unlike the previous two sections which failed to settle harmonically for any length of time. The piano follows the voice up the E♭ major triad, but stops on a figure which presents the dominant

Example 94: "Thou hast made me," mm. 44-54.


44
45
46
One - ly thou art a -
più cresc.
ff
47
48
49
50
51
52
p
dolce
3
bove,
and when t'wards thee By thy
Ped.
dim. molto
leave I can looke, I rise a -
ff
pp

Example 94: "Thou hast made me," mm. 44-54, cont.



and tonic with their leading tones. This gesture continues through the linear descent in C by the voice, with concession to C at the very end in a C♭, enharmonically B♮, the leading tone. As the triad in the vocal line repeats, so does the accompaniment, but it quickly moves off in another direction as the voice fades on its G♮.

This moment of repose and reduced activity places a special emphasis on this section of the text. The tone of these lines, set in major, is completely different to the rest of the song. There is a positiveness and security of mind implied in this section that is clearly missing in the earlier sections. The impetus for this change is in the text, in which the speaker tells God that when God gives him the grace to atone for his sins, he accomplishes that contrition and is able to focus his attention on God. The lyrical melodic lines used to accompany the speaker's statement, coupled with the blatant word painting, are almost a seduction of God, especially when contrasted with the speech-like vocal utterances of the previous sections. The speaker uses the most mellifluous melodic gesture to entice God into giving him the grace that he needs to be saved from his own sinfulness. The speaker's changed interaction with God does not last long, as he falls back into the pattern of repeated notes and unexpected leaps when he explains the reason for his sinful condition: sin still tempts him so much that he cannot remain sinless for very long (see Example 95). The setting of line 12, "That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine," with an emphasis on unexpected leaps and the lack of a resting point can be seen as an attempt to musically portray the visual image implied in the text.

This return to the melodic patterns from the previous sections leads to a recapitulation of the first melodic gesture (refer to Example 95, mm. 64-73). This event is accomplished subtlely in both the accompaniment and the vocal line. The D♮ which ends the final phrase of the third section resolves to an E♭, and the C major scale fragment in the accompaniment dissolves into the E♭ minor figure from the start of section two for the recapitulation. To solidify the return of the tonal level of E♭ minor, Britten repeats mm. 15-19 from the first section beginning in m. 68, complete with the dramatic pause on the diminished-seventh chord of E♭. After the function of the repeated E♭s of the vocal line becomes clear in the recapitulation of the opening melodic line at the held chord, the accompaniment confirms the tonal focus strongly by circling it by its upper and lower leading tones in a contraction of the four-note figure,[64] and definitively when that gives way to repeated, *sforzando* E♭ minor chords.

The return to the repeated E♭s for the recapitulation and the eventual return of the rest of the first melodic gesture marks an association of the final two lines of the poem with the first line (see Table 37). In the first phrase of the song, Britten had stressed the words "thy

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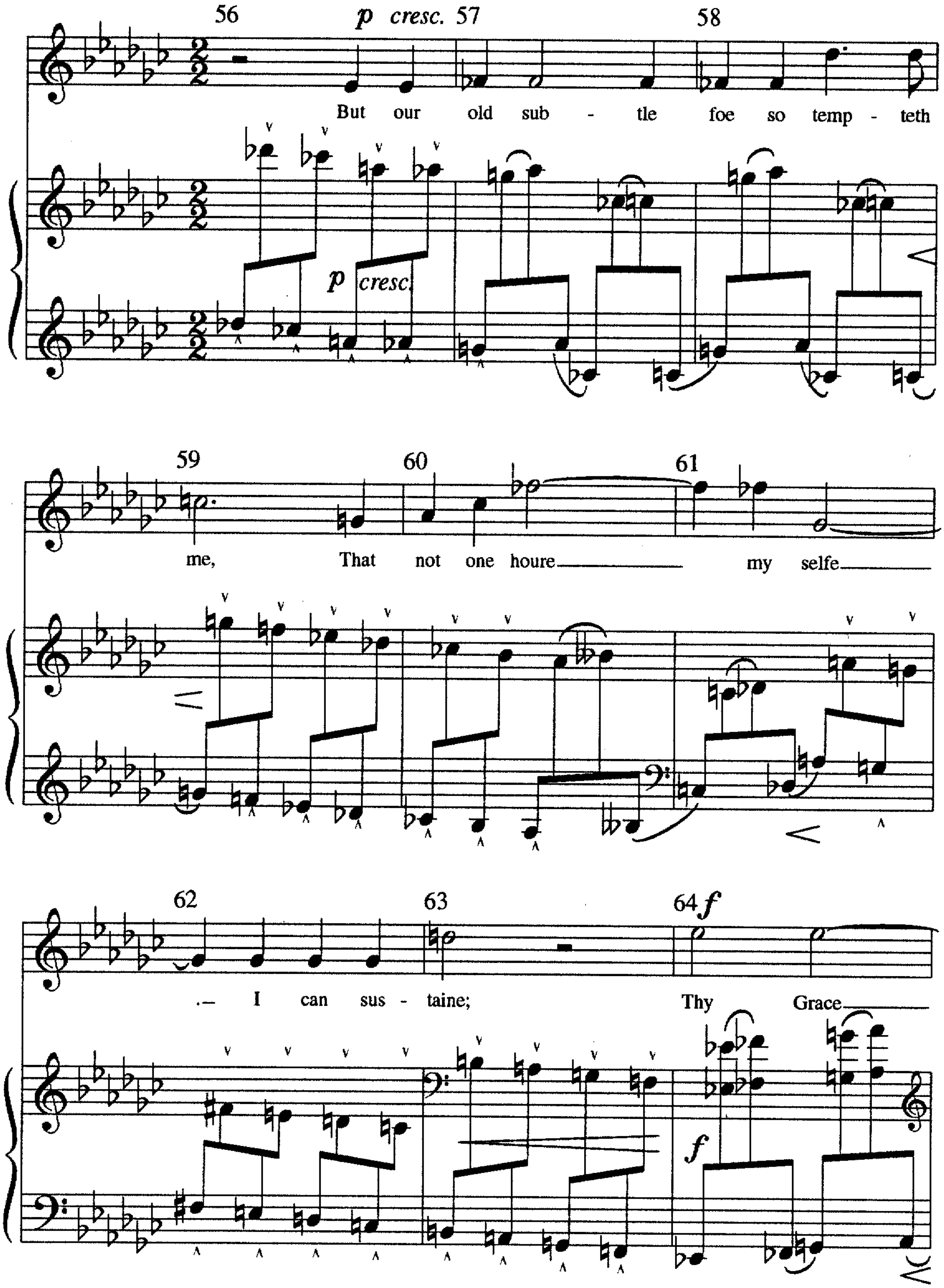
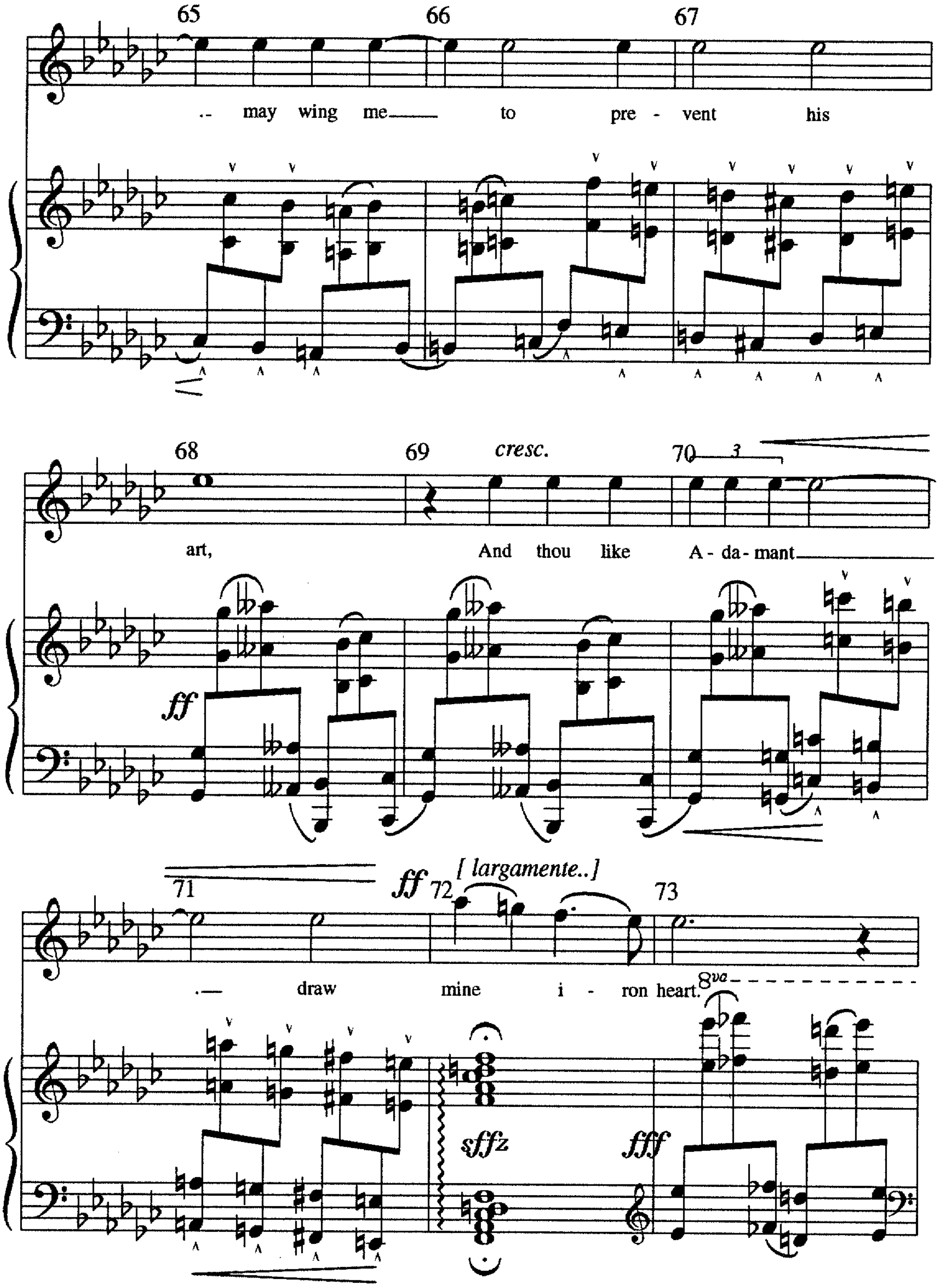
[64] Evans, Music of Britten, 354.

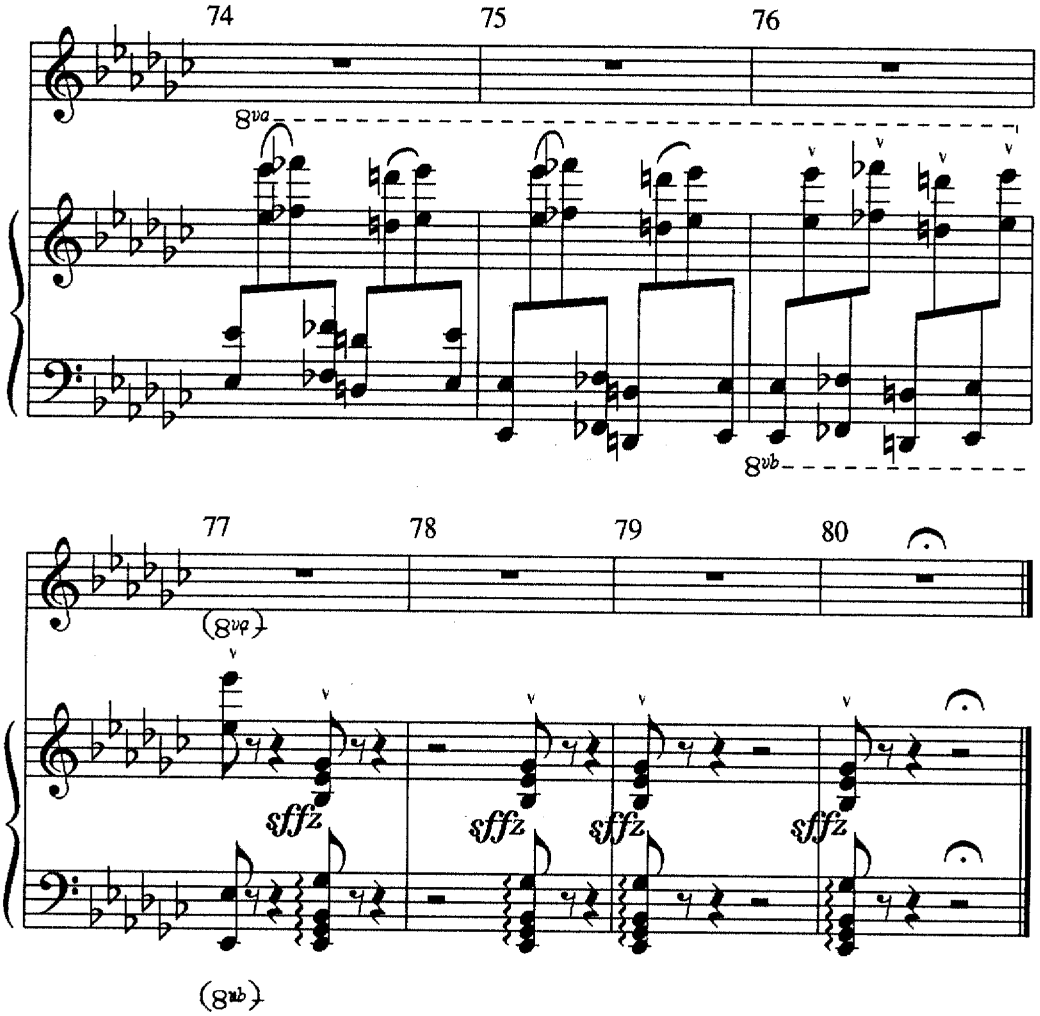
Example 95: "Thou hast made me," mm. 56-80.


56
p cresc. 57
58
But our old sub - tle foe so temp - teth
p cresc.
59
60
61
me, That not one houre my selfe
62
63
64 f
I can sus - taine; Thy Grace
f

Example 95: "Thou hast made me," mm. 56-80, cont.


65
66
67
- may wing me to pre - vent his
68
69
cresc.
70
3
art, And thou like A - da - mant
71
ff
72
[largamente..]
73
draw mine i - ron heart.
8va
ff
sffz
fff

Example 95: "Thou hast made me," mm. 56-80, cont.



work" from the first poetic line, thus emphasizing the relationship between man and God rather than focusing on the motivation for the poem, the speaker's physical and spiritual decay. In the final two lines, the emphasis is again on the man's relationship with God. The speaker tells God that His grace can help him rid himself of his sinful condition, and that God also needs to draw the speaker to Him with great force in order to save him. The extensive use of the repeated E♭s stresses the words at the breaking of the repetition even more so than in the first line. The words "mine iron heart" (*l.* 14) are set to the same notes

TABLE 37

MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF THOU HAST MADE ME

Text	Musical Scheme
Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?	*A*: functions as Introduction; rebuke of God
Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste, I runne to death, and death meets me as fast, And all my pleasures are like yesterday; I dare not move my dim eyes anyway, Despaire behind, and death before doth cast Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste By sinne in it, which it t'wards Hell doth weigh;	*A'*: the speaker fears that death is coming soon and all that he has to show from his past is sin; he asks God to repair him so that he can achieve a state of sinlessness before he dies (indirectly, the cause of his death is sin, so that the death can also be seen as a spiritual one)
Onely thou art above, and when t'wards thee By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe; But our old subtle foe so tempteth me, That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine;	*B*: when God gives him grace, he can be contrite and focus his attention on God, for the desire to sin is so strong that he cannot save himself
Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art, And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.	*A'*: God's grace may save him, but he also needs God to draw him in in order to achieve sinlessness

as "thy work," implying that God has allowed his work to become sinful and hardened against Him. The return of E$^{\flat}$ minor, as opposed to a more positive ending in major, confirms that the speaker has not only not received an answer to his question from the first line, but also has returned to his feelings of despair because his heart is still rooted in sin.

Death be not proud

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou thinks't, thou dost over throw,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do goe,
Rest of their bones, and souls deliverie.

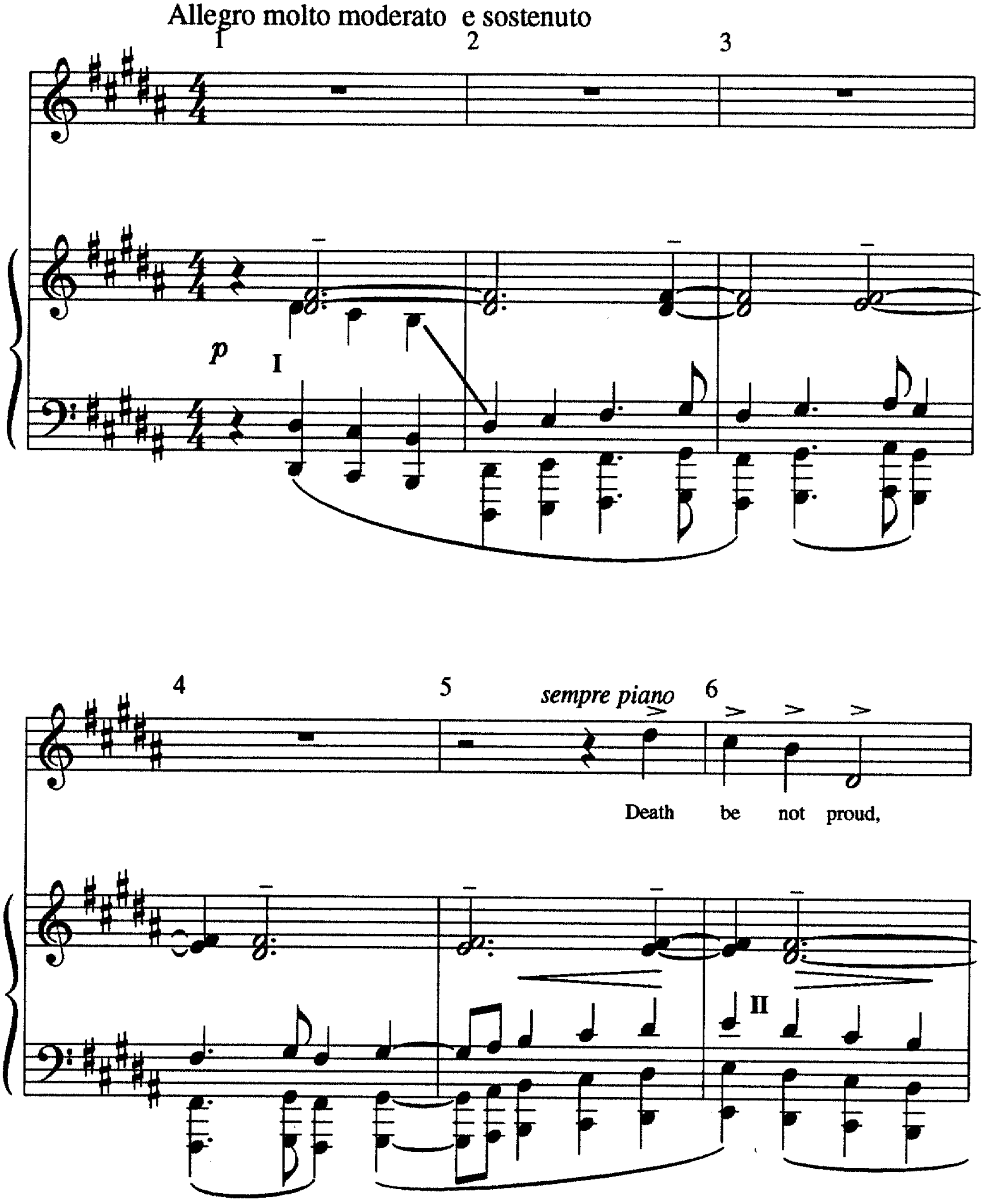
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sickness dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

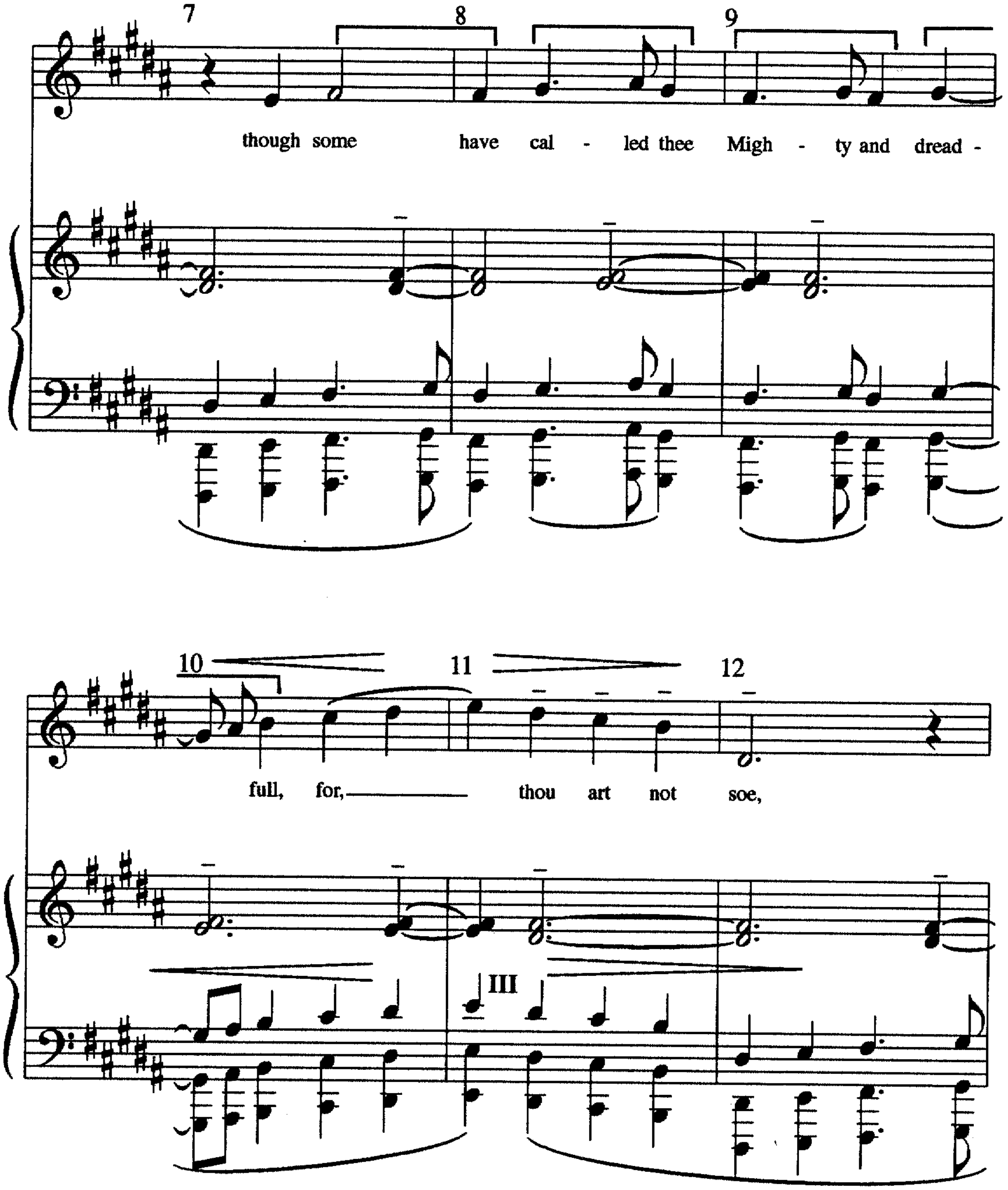
Britten's final song of the cycle, "Death be not proud," is least bound to a particular image of the text, although, like the other songs of the cycle, there is an identifiable generative procedure that brings it closest to Purcell in spirit. The melody unfolds over twelve statements of a ground bass, and is largely derived from that bass, being either an exact statement, or a highly-ornamented variation of it. The bass line, like many of Purcell's, has its completion in the beginning of the following statement, as shown in Example 96.

Britten departs from Purcell by not transposing the ground bass into different keys in the song. Purcell had done this for the sake of variety, but Britten achieves this through irregularities in the meter. Although the ostinato is written in common time in imitation of Purcell, Britten's placement of rhythmic and pitch accents reveals a more complex organization. The bass sets out from beat 2, but is relatively free of the confines of the bar line. In the first statement of the bass, the metrical accents of the first two measures are more in keeping with the 4/4 meter than in subsequent appearances. The first three notes function as pick-ups to the first beat of m. 2, which is accented because of the descending leap of a sixth to its first note (refer to Example 96). The third beat of m. 2 receives an agogic accent, setting up a rhythmic pattern that is repeated three times. At this point, the meter breaks down due to the triple-meter structure of the pattern. The first and third repetitions of the pattern place the accent on weak beats – two and four, respectively – destroying the regular accents of the 4/4 meter. The end of the bass occurs on the first beat of a measure, but since it is harmonized by a dominant-seventh chord that leads to an incomplete tonic chord, it sounds as though it is on a weak beat in order to accent the cadence properly. This puts the beginning of the second statement in a new light. Rather

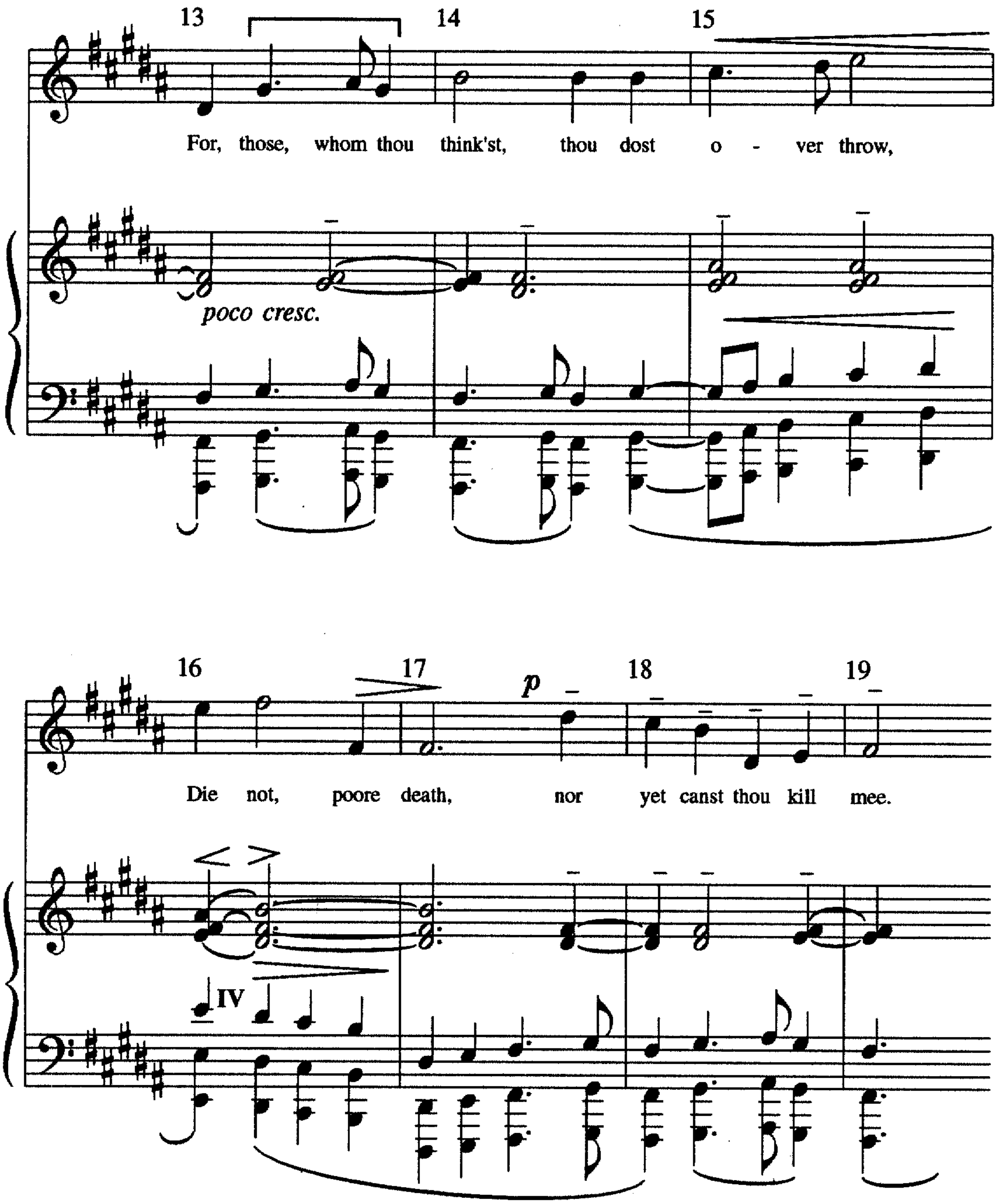
Example 96: "Death be not proud," mm. 1-19.


Allegro molto moderato e sostenuto
1
2
3
p
I
4
5
sempre piano
6
Death be not proud,
II

Example 96: "Death be not proud," mm. 1-19, cont.


7
8
9
though some have cal - led thee Migh - ty and dread -
10
11
12
full, for, thou art not soe,
III

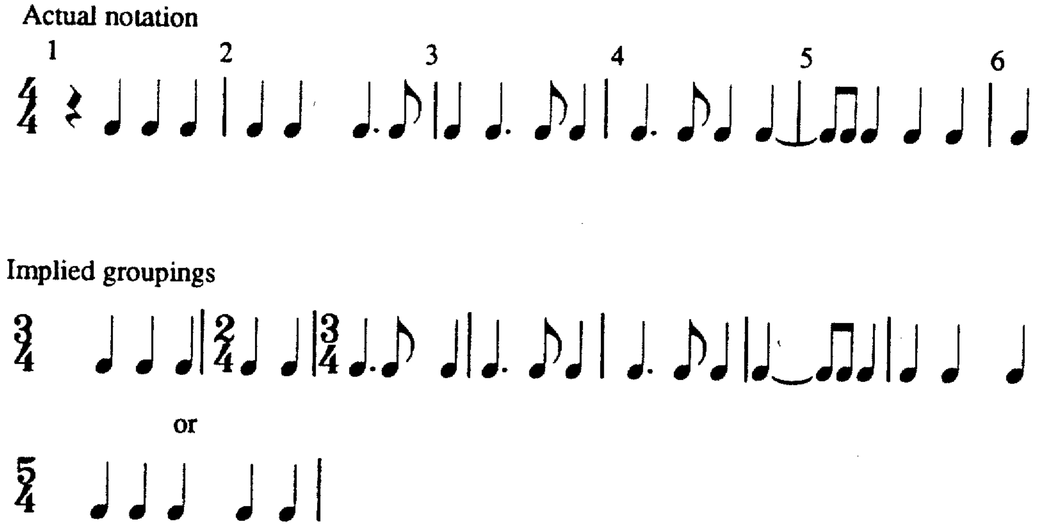
Example 96: "Death be not proud," mm. 1-19, cont.


13
14
15
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost o - ver throw,
poco cresc.
16
17
18
19
p
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
IV

than having the feeling of pick-ups to the next measure, the first three notes of the second statement seem to fall into triple meter as well, which still places the lowest note of the bass on an accented beat.

The chords that periodically punctuate the bass line also serve to distort the meter. The first chord coincides with the first note of the bass, which comes on beat 2 of m. 1. When the second statement of the bass enters, the chord helps define the first note metrically as an accented first beat. The remaining chords alternate between strong and weak beats of the 4/4 meter, but in view of a triple-meter organization of the rhythm, they consistently accent second beats (refer to Example 96). The pattern that the bass falls into, despite the metrical indication in the score, is predominantly triple meter, with one 2/4 measure (or 5/4 or 3+2/4 if connected with the previous measure), as shown in Example 97. Viewed in this light, after the first five notes, the ground bass falls into dance rhythms, particularly those of the sarabande.

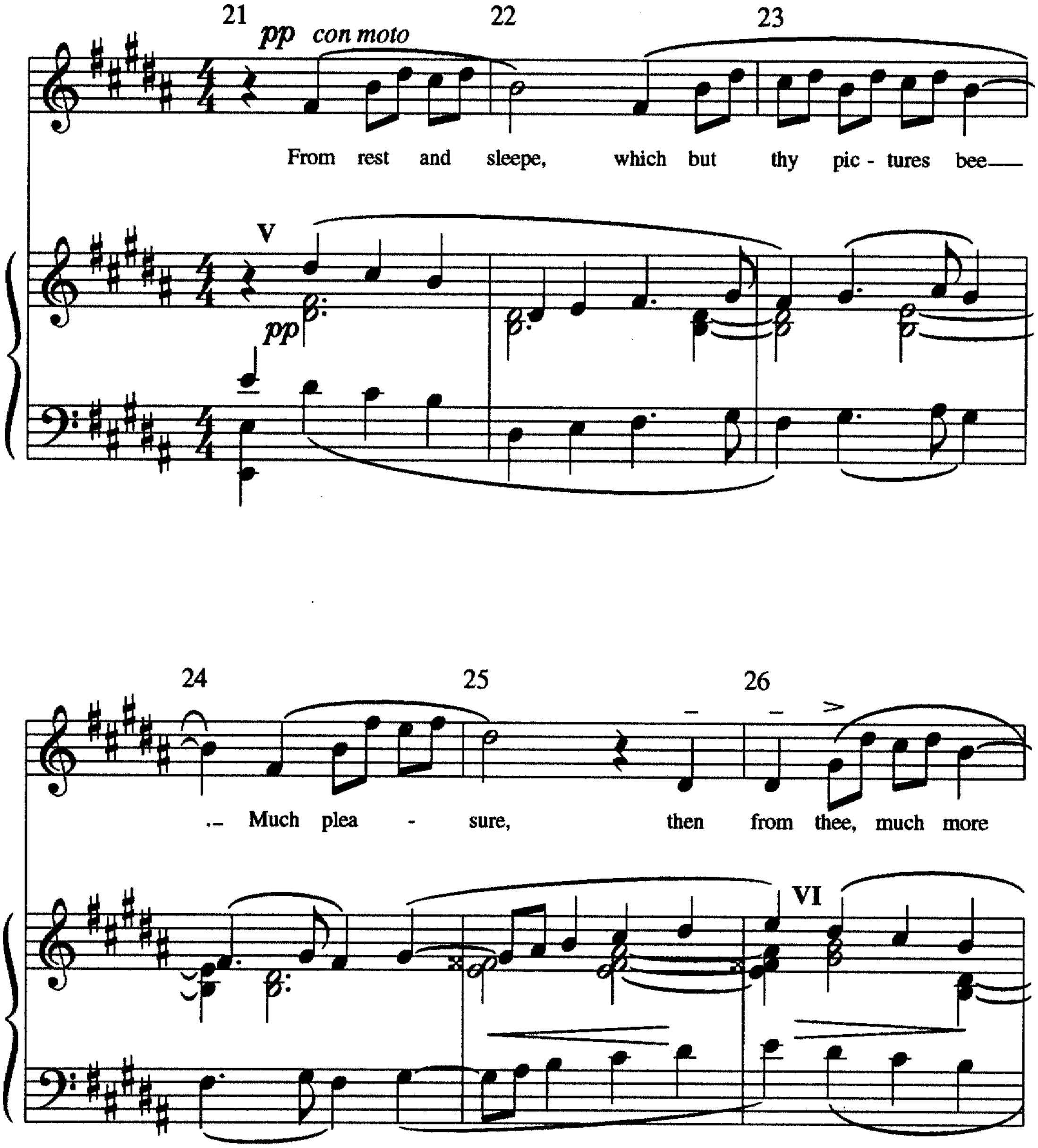
Example 97: "Death be not proud," rhythmic organization of bass line, mm. 1-8.



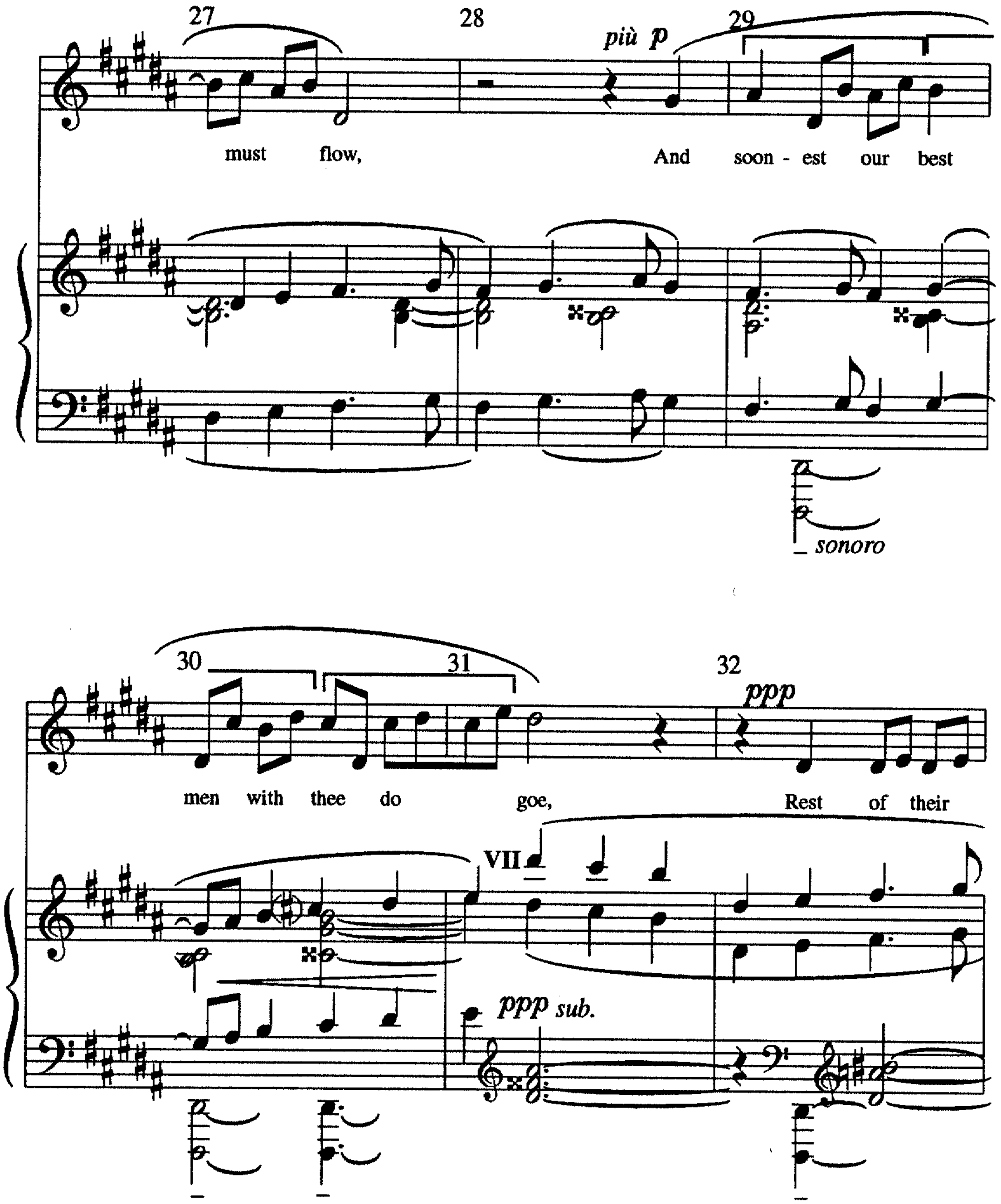
Because the melody is largely based upon the ground bass, Britten also tampers with the metrical sensibilities of it, although this is dependent more upon word accentuation than on pitch and agogic accents. In the vocal line, he indicates several of the triple meter patterns with brackets so that the singer will execute the proper rhythmic accents (refer to Example 96), but he is not entirely consistent. Lines 5-6 of the poem (mm. 21-27) are set with a highly-decorated version of the ground bass (only the outline remains). The text accentuation and rhythmic patterns reveal a mixture of meter, but Britten does not show this in the score (see Example 98). If one compares the text accentuation and the melodic accentuation in the 4/4 meter, sometimes the two coincide, and sometimes they do not (see Example 99). A truer reading of Britten's accentuation, based on melodic concerns combined with textual accents, would be organized much differently, as seen in Example 100. Rather than change meters so often in both the vocal line and the ground bass, which sometimes do not correspond in accentuation, Britten found a common meter and styled his melodic gestures and bass line to express the patterns that would convey the accents that he felt in the text as well as provide the bass with a rhythmic impetus. The result is a melodic style that is freed from both the barline and the bass, but that is a logical vehicle for the text.

The form of the song is generated by the melodic line and its degree of departure from the initial phrase in subsequent phrases. As seen in Table 38, the sonnet form is followed, with musical sections outlining three quatrains and a final couplet. The ground bass, however, serves to dovetail the sections by carrying over the final statement of one section to the next, thus blurring the structural seams that the melody so clearly delineates. The result is structural coherence, although the melodic line explores a variety of expressions of the ground bass, or counterpoints to it. The interaction of ground bass and melody ultimately affects Britten's interpretation of the poetry.

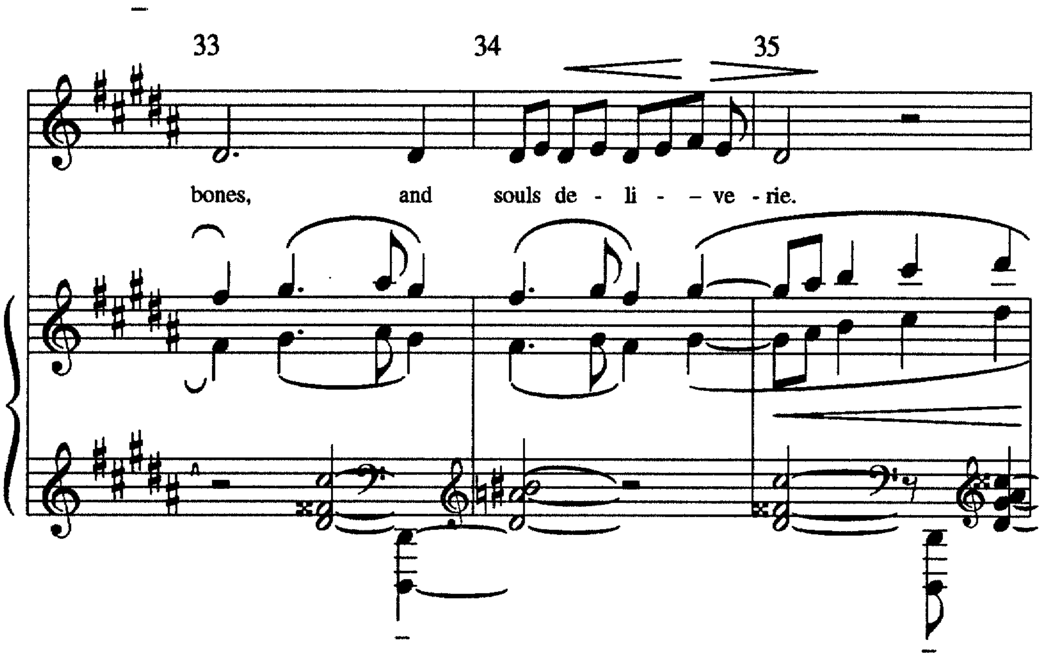
Example 98: "Death be not proud," mm. 20-35.


21
pp con moto
22
23
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pic - tures bee—
V
pp
24
25
26
.– Much plea - sure, then from thee, much more
VI

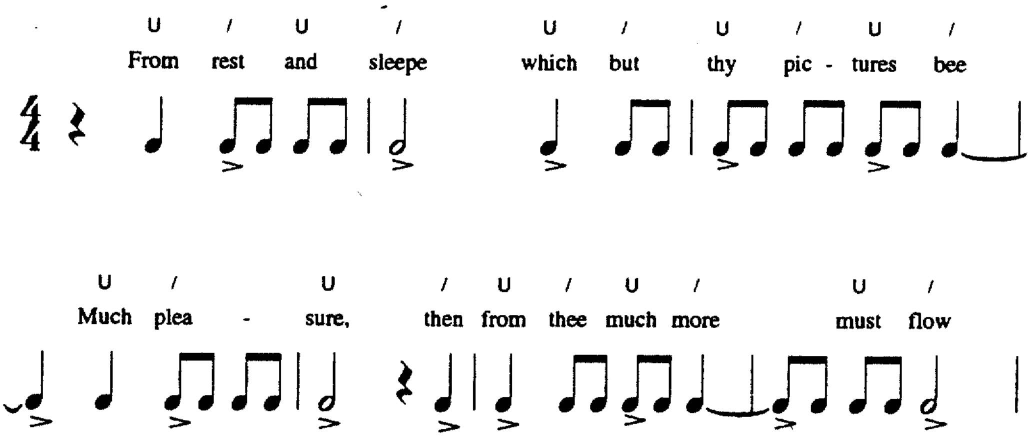
Example 98: "Death be not proud," mm. 20-35, cont.


27
28
29
più p
must flow,
And soon - est our best
sonoro
30
31
32
ppp
men with thee do goe,
Rest of their
VII
ppp sub.

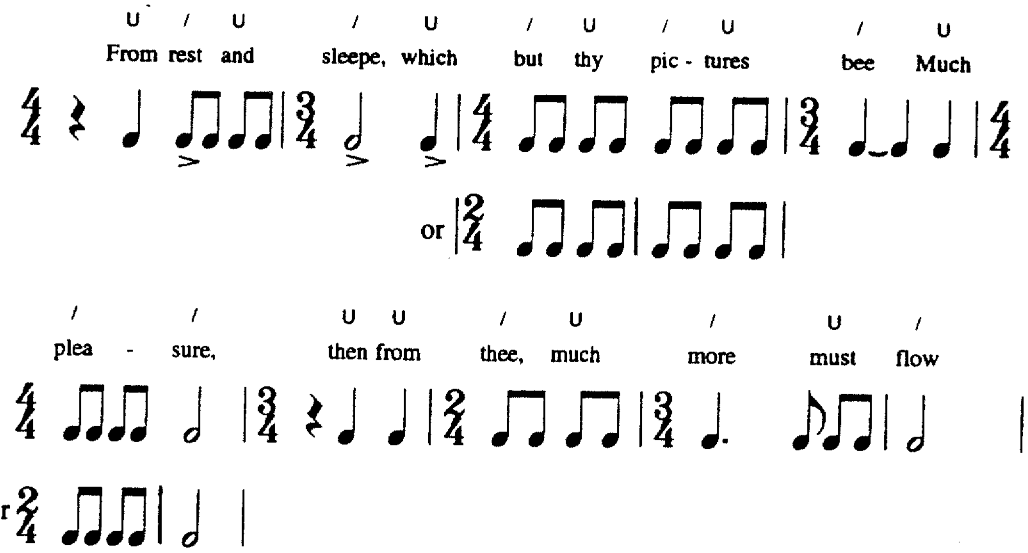
Example 98: "Death be not proud," mm. 20-35, cont.


33
34
35
bones, and souls de - li - - ve - rie.

Example 99: "Death be not proud," accentuation of *ll.* 5-6, based on metrical accents of the quadruple simple meter.


U / U / U / U / U /
From rest and sleepe which but thy pic - tures bee
4/4
U / U / U / U / U /
Much plea - sure, then from thee much more must flow

Example 100: "Death be not proud," accentuation of *ll.* 5-6 based on metrical accents implied by the ground bass.


From rest and sleepe, which but thy pic - tures bee Much
or
plea - sure, then from thee, much more must flow
or

The macro-structure, or the *AA'BA"* form that overlays the twelve statements of the ground bass is based upon the simple principles of departure and return that dominate music in general. Although Britten's musical structure follows the poetic structure closely, the use of departure and return coinciding with certain sections of the text signifies an attempt to organize those portions of the text into a scheme that implies both progression and a sense of retrogression. If we view the form with the concepts of return and departure in mind, we find that Britten's musical form organizes the sonnet according to the concepts and images it contains.

The melodic scheme that generates the musical form imitates Donne's treatment of the text. In the *A'* section, which sets the second quatrain of the sonnet, as Donne expands upon the ideas introduced in the first quatrain, so Britten expands upon the melodic ideas that he uses in the *A* section. This manipulation of material links the two sections of text

TABLE 38

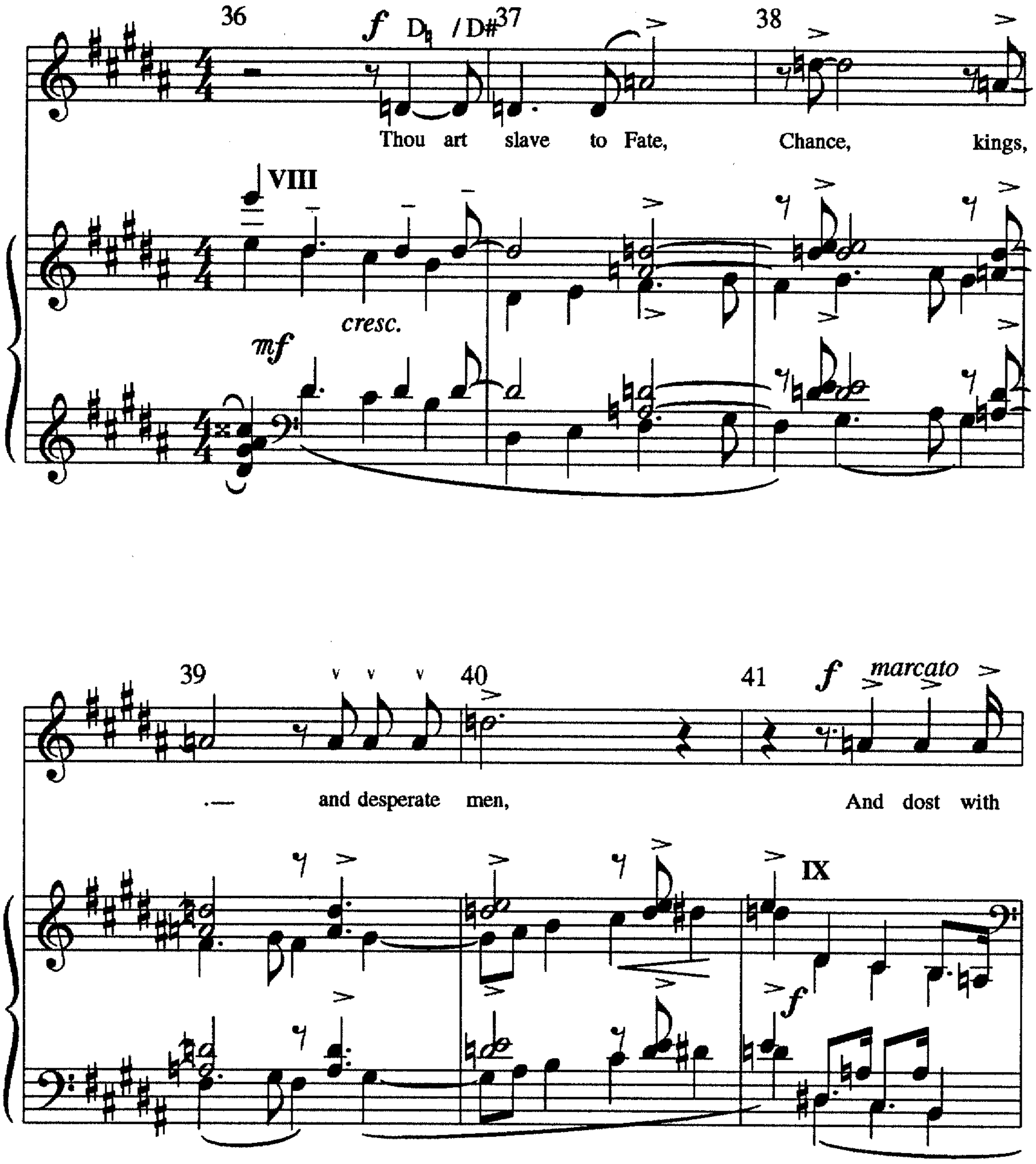
MUSICO-POETIC FORM OF DEATH BE NOT PROUD

Macro Form	Ground Bass	Vocal Line	Poetic Line
Prelude [1-5]	1 [1-6]		
A [(5)-19]	2 [6-11]	*a* [(5)-11]	Octave *ll.* 1-2
	3 [11-16]	a^1 [(12)-15]	Octave *l.* 3
Link [20]	4 [16-21]	*a(frag)* [16-19]	Octave *l.* 4
A' [21-35]	5 [21-26]	a^2 [21-24]	Octave *ll.* 5-6a
	6 [26-31]	$a^{2}{}'$ [(26)-28]	Octave *l.* 6b
		$a^{2}{}''$ [(28)-31]	Octave *l.* 7
	7 [31-36]	*b* (= a^3) [(32)-35]	Octave *l.* 8
B [36-49]	8 [36-41]	*c* [36-40]	Sestet *l.* 9
	9 [41-46]	*c'* [41-44]	Sestet *l.* 10
Interlude [49-51]	10 [46-51]	*d* [(44)-48]	Sestet *ll.* 11-12
A'' [51-63]	11 [51-56]	*a(frag)*^{1}*(aug.)* [51-55]	Sestet *l.* 13
	12 (var.) [56-63]	*a(frag)*^{2}*(aug.)* [(55)-58]	Sestet *l.* 14
		cadence [60-63]	Sestet *l.* 14

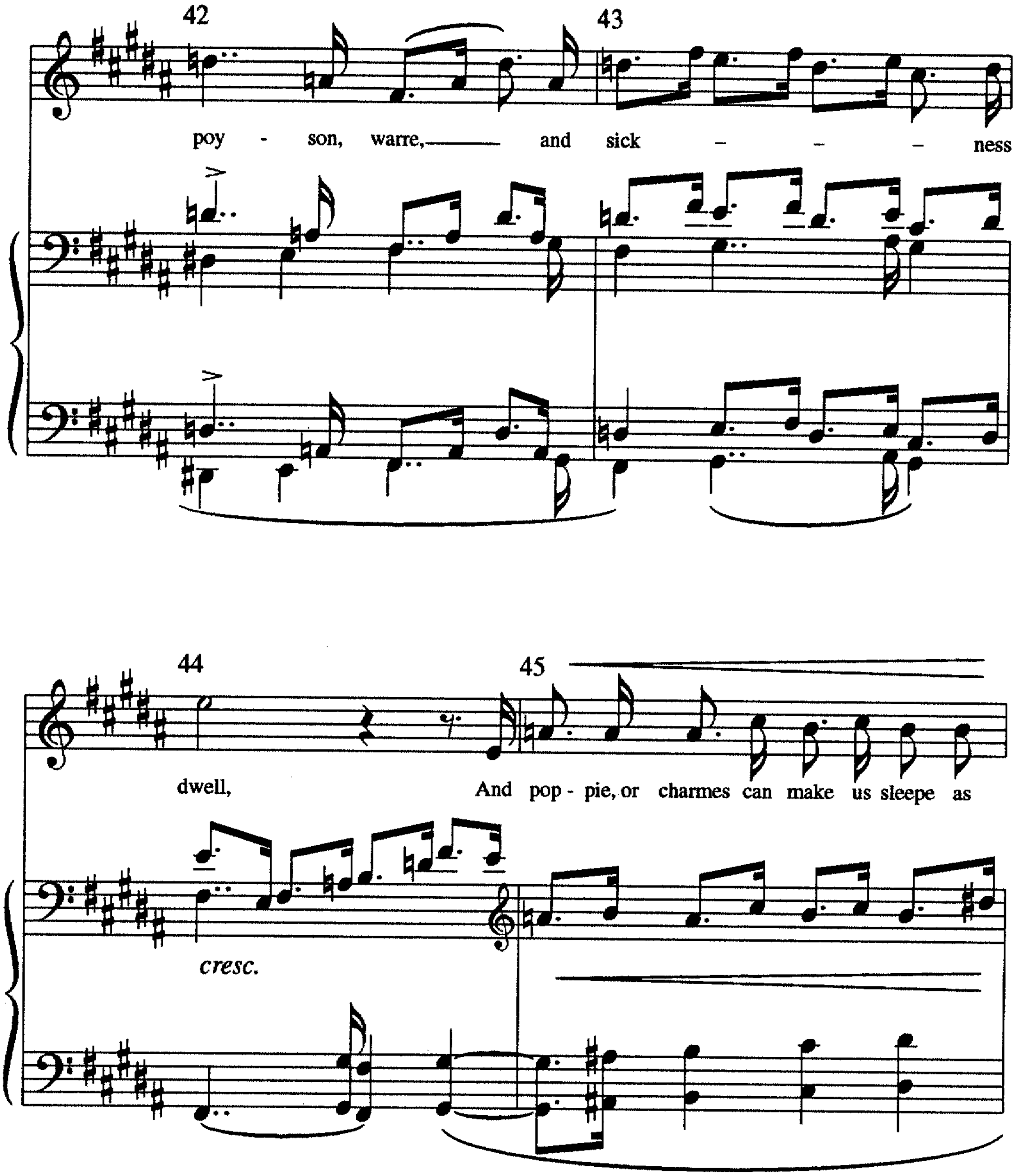
N.B. Numbers in parentheses indicate melodic phrases that do not coincide with the beginning of a ground bass statement.

into a coherent whole above the efforts of the ground bass. As Donne challenges death in much stronger language in the first four lines of the sestet, Britten departs from melodic material of the first two sections and confuses the tonality by presenting D major and D# minor simultaneously (see Example 101). A short recall at a higher pitch level of the opening melodic gesture comes at the end of the *B* section and coincides with the text, "Why swell'st thou then?" (*l.* 12, ending). This "false return" – so called because it occurs

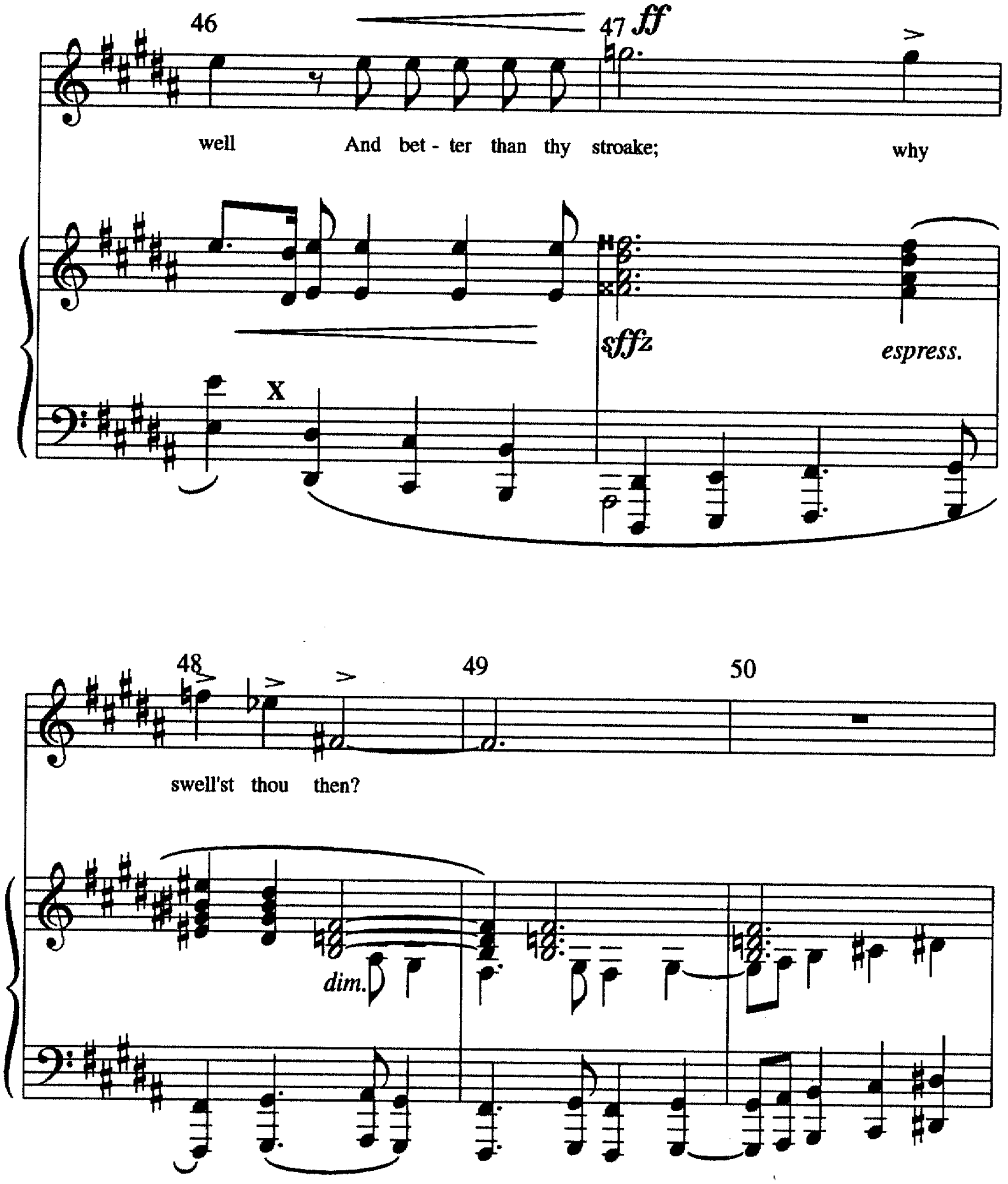
Example 101: "Death be not proud," mm. 36-50.


36
f
D♮ / D#
37
38
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings,
VIII
mf
cresc.
39
40
41
f
marcato
— and desperate men, And dost with
IX
f

Example 101: "Death be not proud," mm. 36-50, cont.


42
43
poy - son, warre, and sick - - - ness
44
45
dwell, And pop - pie, or charmes can make us sleepe as
cresc.

Example 101: "Death be not proud," mm. 36-50, cont.


46
47
ff
well And bet - ter than thy stroake; why
sffz
espress.
X
48
49
50
swell'st thou then?
dim.

at a different pitch – provides the bridge between the final two musical sections, but also ties this particular line of text to the opening line, "Death be not proud," highlighting the Christian fact of man's victory over death.

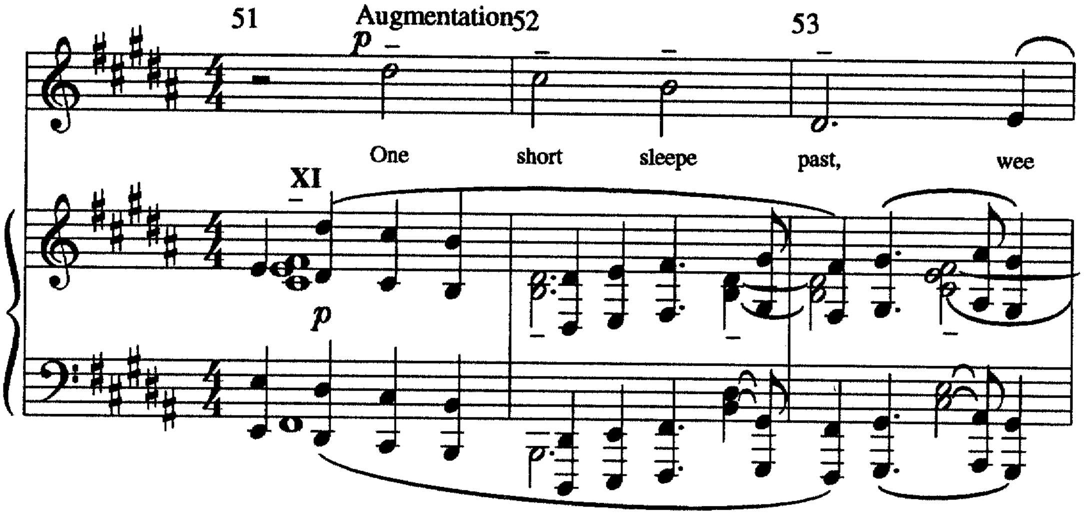
Britten creates a sense of peace and assurance with the final return of *A* section material. The conflict has already been resolved both textually and musically in the final words of line 12, so that the final couplet can be both a musical and textual return to the ideas expressed in the first quatrain and a show of the speaker's/singer's progress after having worked through the challenge of death (see Table 39). Britten sets the final couplet, "One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally, / And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die," to the opening melodic gesture, but with augmented note values, giving these lines weight and importance (see Example 102). The idea that death cannot conquer man has been explored throughout the sonnet, so the assertion in line 13 and the first part of line 14 is only clarification and confirmation of the victory of Christian faith over death. Britten's timing of the return with this portion of the text shows the fruit of the speaker's thoughts as he has worked through his own understanding of the role of death in his life. The surprising statement of the final couplet comes with the speaker's exhortation, "death, thou shalt die." After the speaker has resolved in his own mind the question of life after death, to which Britten gives a peaceful setting, he turns back and gives death his final words: death itself suffers the fate that it attempts to bring upon man. Britten uses this line to effect the strongest vocal cadence of the entire song, and to bring the ground bass to an end with a cadence (refer to Example 102). The song ends in the key of B major, a positive and bright ending to an otherwise dark song cycle.

TABLE 39

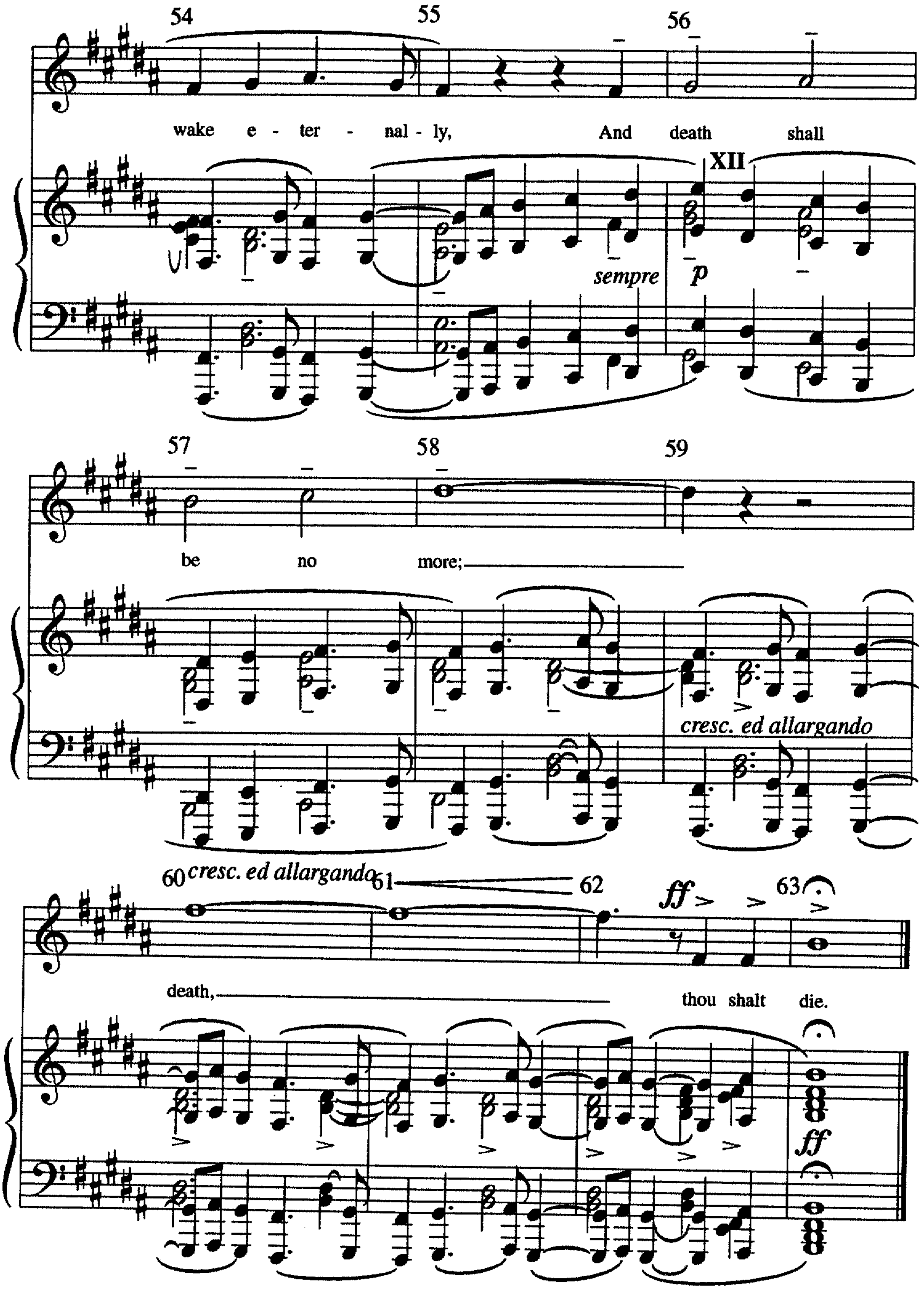
TEXT OF DEATH BE NOT PROUD AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORM

Text	Scheme
Death be not proud, though some have called thee Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe, For, those, whom thou thinks't, thou dost overthrow, Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.	*A*: idea that death cannot kill man's soul; sets up idea of death as sleep
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow, And soonest our best men with thee do goe, Rest of their bones, and souls deliverie.	*A'*: continuation of idea that death cannot kill man's soul although it excludes no one, and expansion of sleep metaphor
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men, And dost with poyson, warre, and sickness dwell, And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?	*B*: departure from previous ideas; death is actually the slave of man or of things over which man or death has no control, and lives in degenerate things that man has created; challenges death's "sleep" as being less than those types of sleep that man has created
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally, And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.	*A"*: return to idea of death as sleep, and final assertion that death cannot kill man

Example 102: "Death be not proud," mm. 51-63.



Example 102: "Death be not proud," mm. 51-63, cont.


54
55
56
wake e - ter - nal - ly, And death shall
XII
sempre
p
57
58
59
be no more;
cresc. ed allargando
60
cresc. ed allargando
61
62
63
ff
death, thou shalt die.
ff

Conclusions

Techniques and Procedures

In the Michelangelo cycle, a tonal problem was set up as the generative idea. In each of the Donne poems, with the possible exception of the final sonnet of the cycle, Britten finds a central image and uses that image to generate the melodic and accompanimental material for his setting (see Table 40). By doing so, he establishes a musical image that not only depicts the imagery of the text, but also creates a psychological undercurrent that affects the form of the poem as it is presented by the form of the music. Britten's image

TABLE 40

THE CENTRAL IMAGES OF DONNE'S SONNETS AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL METAPHORS

Image of Sonnet	Musical Metaphor
1. Death	persistent funeral knell rhythm
2. Physical depiction of battering	triplet figure
3. Sighs and Tears	oscillation between B and C
4. "Contraryes"	opposites used in every aspect
5. Fear over Day of Judgment	Trumpet fanfare, death march, chaos
6. Sacred vs secular love	duple meter over triplets
7. Welcoming of Day of Judgment, with a change of heart at sestet	Trumpet fanfare, drum rolls in D M, with change of heart in D m
8. Fear of death because of sinfulness	four-note figure that rapidly ascends or descends
9. Victory over death	ground-bass technique

appears as an accompanimental figure that relentlessly prevails throughout the song as a sort of ostinato. The figure, akin to a poetic metaphor, holds the key to the setting, and makes connections within the poem that cannot be accomplished within the words themselves.[65]

Unlike the Michelangelo sonnets, the vocal lines in the Donne cycle arise from the natural rhythms and speech inflections of the poetry. They are, therefore, much more like recitative. The contents of the melodic lines can be found in the generative motive of the song, with the result that the presence or absence of the motive in a melodic line articulates matters of form. By setting disparate lines of text to the same or similar melodic gestures, or even portions of lines to similar motives, Britten achieves connections within the text that could not be achieved in the poetry. Likewise, setting lines of text to conflicting or differing melodic gestures reveals a sense of disconnectedness (refer to Britten's setting of "Oh, to vex me").

Although Britten does not use a common key in this cycle for his tonal areas as he did in the Michelangelo, several of the songs are constructed out of the same relationships between tonal areas (see Table 41).[66] The relationship of two tonal areas a fifth or fourth apart seems to be an important governing force in this cycle. Several of the songs comprise a large-scale dominant-to-tonic movement, as in the case of "Oh my blacke Soule," "Batter my heart," "Oh, to vex me," and "Thou hast made me." The seventh song, "At the round

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[65] Britten was very much interested in the works of Schoenberg and his students Webern and Berg. In particular, he sought to study with Berg, but his parents refused his request based upon the opinion held by his teachers at the Royal College of Music that Berg would be a bad influence.

[66] Arnold Whittall has observed that all the tonal references fit into either a B-major scale or a C-minor scale, with E♭/D# being the common element between the two. "Britten's Song Cycles," 4.

TABLE 41

TONAL MOVEMENT IN THE SONGS OF THE DONNE CYCLE

Sonnet	Tonal Movement
Oh my blacke Soule	F# - B
Batter my heart	C - F
O might those sighes and teares	B/C
Oh, to vex me	C# - F#
What if this present?	G/G♭
Since she whom I loved	E♭ - C - E♭
At the round earth's imagined corners	DM - AM - Dm - D
Thou hast made me	B♭ - E♭
Death be not proud	D#/B - D#/D♮ - B

earth's imagined corners," also has a movement from D to A and back to D, again emphasizing the fourth/fifth relationship. A conflict between two pitches a second apart occurs in "O might those sighes and teares," "What if this present?" and "At the round earth's imagined corners" (a conflict between D major and D minor as seen through an alternation of F# and F♮). Finally, in two of the songs, "Since she whom I loved" and "Death be not proud," there is some conflict between the main tonal area and a level that is a third away.

Musico-Poetic Forms and The Interpretation of the Poetry

Although he follows traditional concepts of sonnet form in four of these poems, dividing the sonnet into three quatrains and a final couplet, Britten radically departs in the remainder, sometimes cutting across the octave/sestet division. As in the Michelangelo

Sonnets, octave and sestet division is accomplished in two ways: 1) by contrast, as seen in "O might those sighes and teares," "What if this present," Since she whom I loved," "Thou hast made me," and "Death be not proud;" or 2) by return to elements of the *A* section, as seen in "Batter my heart" and "At the round earth's imagined corners." For those sonnets that do articulate the 4 + 4 + 4 + 2 division, the setting of the second quatrain is either a parallel section to the first, as in "O might those sighes and teares," "At the round earth's imagined corners," and "Death be not proud;" or the second quatrain begins a departure, as in "Since she whom I loved." Following the lead of the octave, in three of the sonnets, the third quatrain is a departure with the final couplet as a return, as in "O might those sighes and teares," "Since she whom I loved," and "Death be not proud;" the fourth sonnet, "At the round earth's imagined corners," is a strophic setting that features the final couplet as a refrain.

In several of the sonnets, the octave is divided non-traditionally, with the sestet remaining either following a 4 + 2 division or functioning as a complete six-line unit. In "What if this present," the first line of the poem functions as an introduction, so that lines 2-8 of the poem are set as one section and the sestet as a contrasting one. Britten also uses line 1 of "Thou hast made me" as separate from the remainder of the octave, but divides the sestet into four lines plus two.

In three of the poems, the articulation of the octave and sestet is eschewed in favor of a setting that cuts across these divisional lines. In "Oh my blacke Soule," lines 1 and 2 of the poem constitute a section, lines 2-10 form the second, with a return at line 11. In the second song, "Batter my heart," the return also occurs at line 11, but the octave and first two lines of the sestet are divided thusly: *ll.* 1-4, *ll.* 5-6, and *ll.* 7-10. In "Oh, to vex me," as well, Britten articulates the first quatrain, but uses the first three lines of the sestet in conjunction with the second quatrain to form the second section, leaving the final three lines of the sestet for the return. In each case, the reason for his structure has to do the thought processes found in the text. The images may require a gathering into a central section, as in "Oh my blacke Soule," or the rhythm of the text may drive toward certain lines, as in "Oh, to vex me," in which the series of opposites at the end of the octave accelerate toward the first two lines of the sestet.

For the most part, Britten explores a variety of familiar forms in the songs, as can be seen in Table 42; but, although they nominally resemble traditional paradigms, such as ternary, strophic, or rounded binary forms, they display a complexity of relationships between sections of contrast and return. In particular, the point of return, which is a form-defining element, sometimes features a redefinition of the *A* material in the light of a new

TABLE 42

MUSICAL FORMS USED IN BRITTEN'S DONNE SONNETS

Sonnet	Musico-Poetic Form
Oh my blacke Soule	*A* (*ll.* 1-2) *B* (*ll.* 2-10) *A'* (*ll.* 11-14)
Batter my heart	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *A'* (*ll.* 5-6) *B* (*ll.* 7-10) *A"* (*ll.* 11-14)
O might those sighes	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *A'* (*ll.* 5-8) *A"* (*ll.* 9-13a) *A'''* (*ll.* 13b-14)
Oh, to vex me	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *B* (*ll.* 5-11) *A'* (*ll.* 12-14)
What if this present	*Intro.* (*l.* 1) *A* (*ll.* 2-8) *B*[*A'*] (*ll.* 9-14)
Since she whom I loved	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *B* (*ll.* 5-8) *C* (*ll.* 9-12) *A'* (*ll.* 13-14)
At the round earth's	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *B* (*ll.* 5-8) *A"* (*ll.* 9-12a) *Coda* (*ll.* 12b-14
Thou hast made me	*A* (*l.* 1) *A'* (*ll.* 2-8) *B* (*ll.* 9-12) *A"* (*ll.* 13-14)
Death be not proud	*A* (*ll.* 1-4) *A'* (*ll.* 5-8) *B* (*ll.* 9-12) *A"* (*ll.* 13-14)

tonal area. This procedure affects the perception of contrast and similarity, thus, redefining concepts of form. Three of the songs have "progressive" tonality, beginning and ending at different tonal levels: "Oh my blacke Soule" (F# to B), "Batter my heart" (G to C), and "Oh, to vex me" (C# to F#). In "What if this present," the return only occurs in the accompaniment; and in "At the round earth's imagined corners," the third strophe (or return) features a change of mode, from D major to D minor, with elements of D major still operative. For the most part, the returns are fairly clear in this cycle, which is quite unlike those in the Michelangelo settings.

Britten uses the point of return in these songs to reveal the progress of the soul as it looks for reconciliation with God in each of these sonnets. In "Oh my blacke Soule," the return coincides with the speaker's directive to his soul to rue his sins and prepare himself through the sacrament of Communion for possible sanctification. After this point, the speaker asks God to sanctify him ("Batter my heart"), but finally realizes that all he can truly ask for is God's love. Following the unashamed begging of "Batter my heart," the speaker in "O might those sighes and teares" retreats into himself and examines his sinfulness. The return occurs as the speaker realizes that the punishment for his sins is his despair over his sinfulness, and that the despair in itself is a sin because it shows how little faith he has in God. In "Oh, to vex me," the speaker makes more progress on his journey, for he comes to realize that he is closest to achieving reconciliation when he is most aware of his sinfulness, as in the previous song. The fifth song finds the speaker questioning God over the nature of Christ. How can Christ judge him to Hell since he is so forgiving? The speaker's only answer to himself is that Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is his only hope. The conflict between secular and sacred love arises in "Since she whom I loved." The speaker concludes that he still values his secular love over God, and thinks that God must doubt what love he is able to give to Him. In "At the round earth's imagined corners," the speaker feels as though he is ready for the Last Judgment, at least for the octave of the sonnet. He rethinks his position with God and asks for guidance on how to repent. The speaker has begun to accept God's grace in "Thou hast made me," but he still needs for God act upon him more strongly to break the bonds of sin. In the final song, the speaker confronts his own mortality, convinced that he will receive his sanctification from God.[67]

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[67] For an alternate reading of the program of the sonnets, see Brown, "Stimulus and Form."

CONCLUSIONS

The reason that a composer chooses to set a particular text is almost always to be found within his life. Consciously or subconsciously, the chosen text speaks to the composer at some level that we as outsiders can only guess at through the facts of his life. Our conscious and subconscious contain, among other things: the details of our life; our own perception of these details in past and present; our personality, which is shaped by the details of our life and our perception of these; and our imagination, which may or may not relate obviously to the facts of our life, but which reflects our personality. The choice of text says something about at least one of these facets of the composer's mind, whether we can discern it or not. The manner in which he sets the text, which may seem to have little biographical reference (I am thinking particularly of the detached twentieth-century settings which deconstruct the text to its essential elements), reveals an aspect of the composer with which we, as the observers, may or may not feel comfortable. In other words, we might find a callousness or insensitivity where we expected the opposite, or vice versa. The text and the reading in its musical setting become a personal account of the composer, revealing either a detail of his life, his perception of a detail, his personality, or his imaginative power at the time the song was composed.

Although he was largely bound by the strong images within the poems themselves, Britten's musical response to the sonnets of Michelangelo and John Donne show an attempt to interpret the poetry that was born out of the events that he was experiencing in his own life. The Michelangelo Sonnets were written shortly after he and Peter Pears consummated their long-lasting love. Prior to this, Britten had been somewhat cautious in his approach to homosexual relationships, but his love of Pears caused his fears to be alleviated, and gave him reason to compose his first love songs – the poems he chose reveal a lover who pursues the beloved as the realization of a spiritual goal.

The Donne cycle, by contrast, was written during a very dark time in European history. The second World War had just ended, and the inmates from the German concentration camps were being discovered and officially liberated, although they were detained for fear of the spread of disease. Britten witnessed firsthand the faces of those who had suffered cruelty at the hands of an unjust society; and when he returned to his own comfortable surroundings, the very black Donne songs were composed. As a politically sensitive artist, Britten could not ignore the impact the trip to Germany had upon the song cycle: the sonnets that Britten chose are filled with guilt over man's sinfulness and at the same time, question the role of God in man's life.

In Britten's setting of the texts of the Donne cycle, a central image in each text suggests the musical idea, or motive, for the setting. This musical image, which is ever present, provides a psychological undercurrent and connects aspects of the text that cannot be associated in the text itself. The motive that contains the image operates at both micro- and macro-levels to generate the musico-poetic form. In contrast, in his setting of Michelangelo's sonnets, Britten sets up a musical problem that often involves the conflict of tonal levels. The method by which the problem is revealed or unfolds affects the musico-poetic form.

Britten's approach to the poetic form is based on one of several models (see Table 43): 1) the octave and sestet are clearly articulated, and the octave is further divided into two quatrains with the sestet divided into 4 + 2 (English model) or 3 + 3 (Italian model), or is not divided; 2) the octave and sestet are clearly articulated, but the octave is not divided into two quatrains; 3) the octave and sestet are clearly articulated, but the sestet is not divided according to traditional models; and 4) the octave and sestet division is not clearly articulated.

TABLE 43

DIVISIONS OF THE OCTAVE AND SESTET IN BRITTEN'S MUSICAL FORMS

Song	Traditional Octave and Sestet	Non-Trad. Octave Traditional Sestet	Traditional Octave Non-Trad. Sestet	Non-Traditional Octave and Sestet
XVI	X (Italian Model)			
XXXI				X
XXX	X (Italian Model)			
LV	X (Italian Model)			
XXXVIII			X	
XXXII			X	
XIV	X (Italian Model)			
Oh my blacke Soule				X
Batter my heart		X		
O might those sighes	X			
Oh, to vex me				X
What if this present?		X		
Since she whom I loved	X			
At the round earth's	X			
Thou hast made me		X		
Death be not proud	X			

N.B. Non-Trad. = Non-Traditional

More important than the adherence to the poetic model, are the point of departure – harmonically, melodically, texturally, or even rhythmically – and the point of return in the musical form, for the concept of return has no poetic equivalent in the sonnet form (see Table 44). There are four strophic settings: Sonetto XXXVIII and Sonetto XXXII from the Michelangelo set, and "O might those sighes and teares" and "At the round earth's imagined corners" from the Donne cycle. In all four, however, there is an element of departure at the sestet due to tonal motion. The melody, although transposed, remains relatively intact. The second song of the Donne cycle, "Batter my heart," uses the principle of variation for the constuction of the melody, but with a macro-form overlaid that is generated by concepts of return and departure.

When the point of departure occurs at the sestet, it may be considered that Britten is articulating the turn or counterstatement that the sestet reveals. A point of significant departure (as opposed to a variation of the first section) within the octave, however, indicates that there are different thought processes at work, and that the quatrains (or an alternate division) of the octave require some sense of development. Further, points of departure both within the octave and at the sestet clearly shows a concern for the progression of the images of the sonnet, rather than for association of particular lines of text within the octave or across the octave and sestet.

In his settings, Britten begins the return at a variety of places within the sestet. Sometimes he articulates the model division of the sestet, but more often, he does not. In the Michelangelo set, in particular, the return generally constitutes a recall or a reversion to the emotions or thoughts from the beginning of the poem, because there is a lack of resolution to the musical problem, or ambiguity concerning the exact point of return. In the Donne cycle, the return either coincides with a resolution of a tonal conflict with the result that its effect is heightened or only certain elements recur, so that it is weakened. The effect of the return (and indeed, of the departure, as well) on the musico-poetic form, and the

TABLE 44

POINTS OF DEPARTURE AND RETURN WITHIN THE SONGS

Song	Departure at Sestet	Departure Within Octave	Departure in Octave & at Sestet	Point of Return
XVI			X (*ll.* 5 & 9)	*l.* 14
XXXI		X (*l.* 6b)		*l.* 12
XXX			X (*ll.* 5 & 9)	*l.* 12 (blurred)
LV		X (*l.* 5)		*l.* 9 (with Coda)
XXXVIII	(X) (*l.* 9)			(*l.* 13)
XXXII	(X) (*l.* 9)			(*l* 14)
XIV	X (*l.* 9)			*l.* 12
Oh my blacke Soule		X (*l.* 2)		*l.* 10
Batter my heart		(X) (*l.* 7)		(*l.* 9)
O might those sighes	(X) (*l.* 9)			(*l.* 13b)
Oh, to vex me		X (*l.* 5)		*l.* 12
What if this present?	X (*l.* 9)			(*l.* 9) in acc.
Since she whom I loved			X (*ll.* 5 & 9)	*l.* 13
At the round earth's	(X) (*l.* 9)			(*l.* 14)
Thou hast made me	X (*l.* 9)			*l.* 13
Death be not proud	X (*l.* 9)			*l.* 13

N.B. "X" in ( ) indicates a strophic setting with some elements of contrast.

degree of resolution in it, however, can only be determined on a case-by-case basis through the examination of all elements of melody and harmony, as seen in chapters IV and VI of the present study.

That Britten sought to interpret the sonnets through his musical form, is evident from his variety of approaches to the same basic poetic form. Moreover, the principles by which he constructs his musical form have a significant impact upon the poetic form. When the melody is constructed motivically, it creates a network of associations within the sonnet. The use of a single figure or complex of figures in the accompaniment also provides a psychological underpinning to the images of the text. And finally, the points of departure or return create a musico-poetic form that is unique to each setting.

The penetrating question found in the program notes to a recording of Britten's Serenade can now be seen in light of Britten's approach to the sonnet:

> Now the sonnet is an exceedingly difficult form. Should the composer embody its unalterable shape or should he endeavour to catch something of the immortal spirit that shaped its symmetry?[1]

The answer must be unequivocally, "Yes." The musical form is not limited to following the poetic form exactly in order to interpret or define it, nor is it confined to an adversarial relationship with the poem in order to give it meaning. Rather, the musico-poetic form that results from the creation of song ultimately is the response of the composer to the situation of the poem, and therefore, follows his logic.

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[1] Program notes for Benjamin Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings, Peter Pears, Dennis Brain, Benjamin Britten, K 1151-3, Decca, 1944, sound recording.

APPENDIX A

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS'S TRANSLATIONS OF MICHELANGELO'S SONNETS SET BY BRITTEN

Sonnet XVI: Love and Art

As pen and ink alike serve him who sings
In high or low or intermediate style;
As the same stone hath shapes both rich and vile
To match the fancies that each master brings;
So, my loved lord, within thy bosom springs
Pride mixed with meekness and kind thoughts that smile:
Whence I draw nought, my sad self to beguile,
But what my face shows – dark imaginings.
He who for seed sows sorrow, tears, and sighs,
(The dews that fall from heaven, though pure and clear,
From different germs take divers qualities)
Must needs reap grief and garner weeping eyes;
And he who looks on beauty with sad cheer,
Gains doubtful hope and certain miseries.

Sonnet XXXI: Love's Lordship; To Tommaso de' Cavalieri

Why should I seek to ease intense desire
With still more tears and windy words of grief,
When heaven, or late or soon, sends no relief
To souls whom love hath robed around with fire?
Why need my aching heart to death aspire,
When all must die? Nay, death beyond belief
Unto these eyes would be both sweet and brief,
Since in my sum of woes all joys expire!
Therefore, because I cannot shun the blow
I rather seek, say who must rule my breast,
Gliding between her gladness and her woe?
If only chains and bands can make me blest,
No marvel if alone and bare I go,
An armėd KNIGHT'S captive and slave confessed.

Sonnet XXX: Love the Light Giver; To Tommaso de' Cavalieri

With your fair eyes a charming light I see,
For which my own blind eyes would peer in vain;
Stayed by your feet, the burden I sustain
Which my lame feet find all too strong for me;
Wingless upon your pinions forth I fly;
Heavenward your spirit stirreth me to strain;
E'en as you will, I blush and blanch again,
Freeze in the sun, burn 'neath a frosty sky.
Your will includes and is the lord of mine;
Life to my thoughts within your heart is given;
My words begin to breathe upon your breath:
Like to the moon am I, that cannot shine
Alone; for, lo! our eyes see nought in heaven
Save what the living sun illumineth.

Sonnet LV: Love's Entreaty

Thou knowest, love, I know that thou dost know
That I am here more near to thee to be,
And knowest that I know thou knowest me:
What means it then that we are sundered so?
If they are true, these hopes that from thee flow,
If it is real, this sweet expectancy,
Break down the wall that stands 'twixt me and thee;
For pain in prison spent hath double woe.
Because in thee I love, O my loved lord,
What thou best lovest, be not therefore stern:
Souls burn for souls, spirits to spirits cry!
I seek the splendour in thy fair face stored;
Yet living man that beauty scarce can learn,
And he who fain would find it, first must die.

Sonnet XXXVIII: Love's Vain Expense

Give back unto mine eyes, ye fount and rill,
Those streams, not yours, that are so full and strong,
That swell your springs, and roll your waves along
With force unwonted in your native hill!
And thou, dense air, weighed with my sighs so chill,
That hidest heaven's own light thick mists among,
Give back those sighs to my sad heart, nor wrong
My visual ray with thy dark face of ill!
Let earth give back the footprints that I wore,
That the bare grass I spoiled may sprout again;
And Echo, now grown deaf, my cries return!
Loved eyes, unto mine eyes those looks restore,
And let me woo another not in vain,
Since how to please thee I shall never learn!

Sonnet XXXII: Love's Expostulation

If love be chaste, if virtue conquer ill,
If fortune bind both lovers in one bond,
If either at the other's grief despond,
If both be governed by one life, one will;
If in two bodies one soul triumph still,
Raising the twain form earth to heaven beyond,
If Love with one blow and one golden wand
Have power both smitten breasts to pierce and thrill;
If each the other love, himself forgoing
With such delight, such savour, and so well,
That both to one sole end their wills combine;
If thousands of these thoughts, all thought outgoing,
Fail the least part of their firm love to tell:
Say, can mere angry spite this knot untwine?

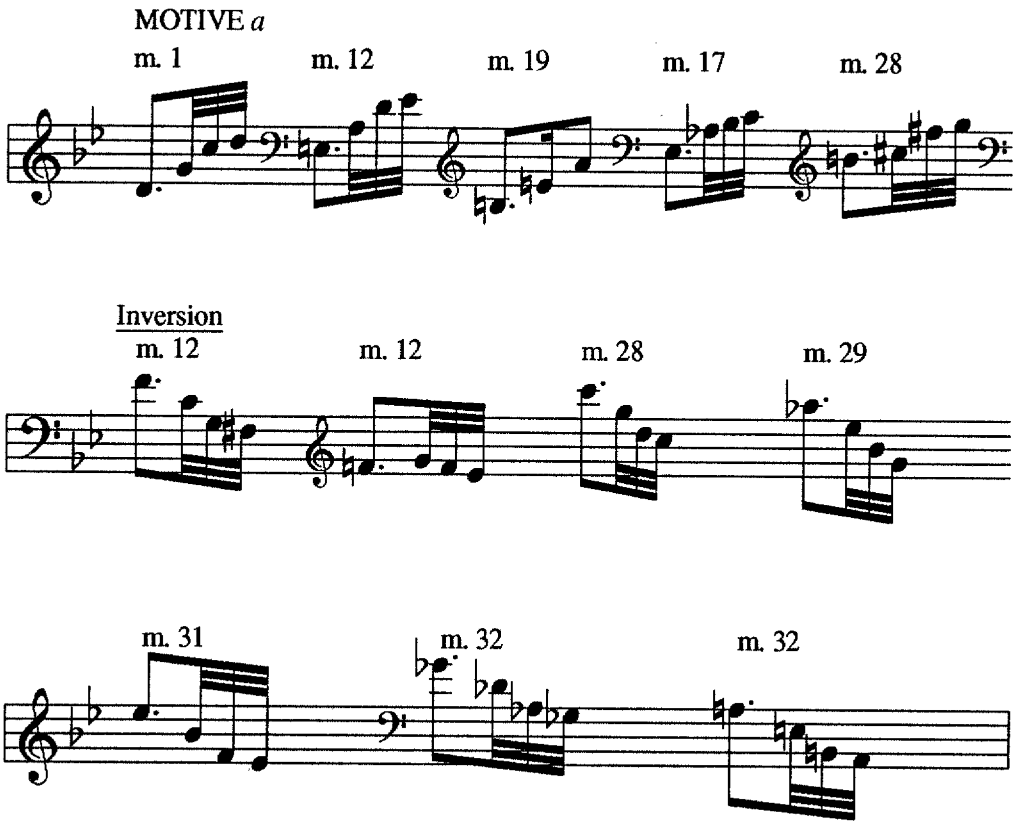
Sonnet XXIV: The Doom of Beauty

Choice soul, in whom, as in a glass, we see,
Mirrored in thy pure form and delicate,
What beauties heaven and nature can create,
The paragon of all their works to be!
Fair soul, in whom love, pity, piety,
Have found a home, as from thy outward state
We clearly read, and are so rare and great
That they adorn none other like to thee!
Love takes me captive; beauty binds my soul;
Pity and mercy with their gentle eyes
Wake in my heart a hope that cannot cheat.
What law, what destiny, what fell control,
What cruelty, or late or soon, denies
That death should spare perfection so complete?

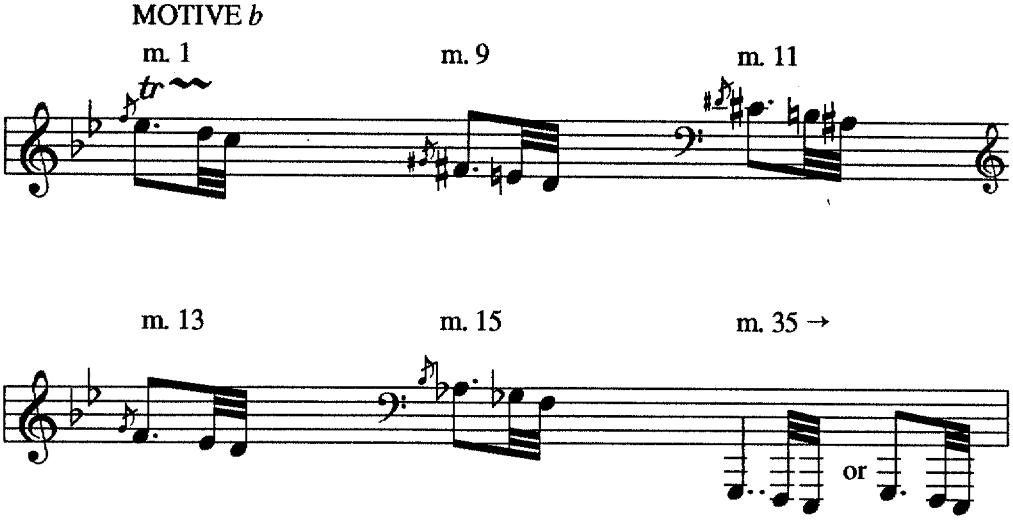
APPENDIX B

ACCOMPANIMENT MOTIVES OF WHAT IF THIS PRESENT AND THEIR VARIANTS

Example 103: "What if this present," Motive *a* and its variants.

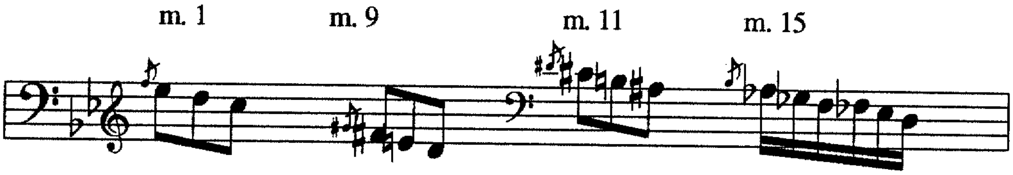

MOTIVE *a*
m. 1
m. 12
m. 19
m. 17
m. 28
Inversion
m. 12
m. 12
m. 28
m. 29
m. 31
m. 32
m. 32

Example 104: "What if this present," Motive *b* and its variants.

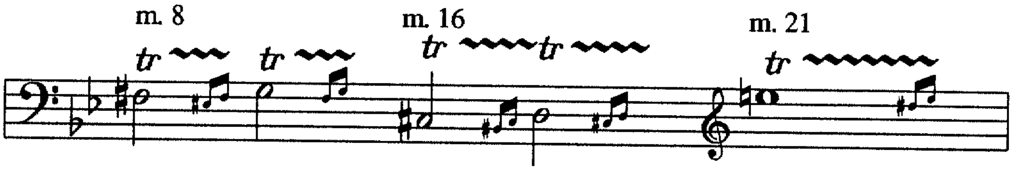

MOTIVE *b*
m. 1
tr
m. 9
m. 11
m. 13
m. 15
m. 35 →
or

Example 104: "What if this present," Motive *b* and its variants, cont.

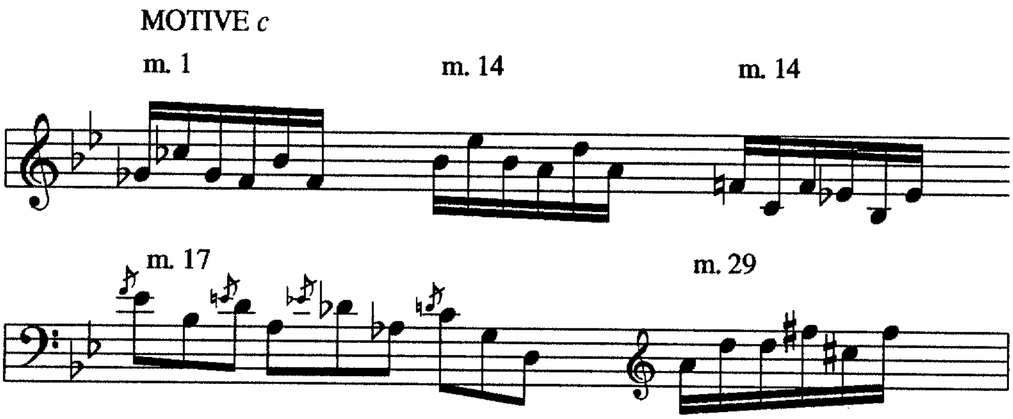
Transformation 1


m. 1
m. 9
m. 11
m. 15

Transformation 2

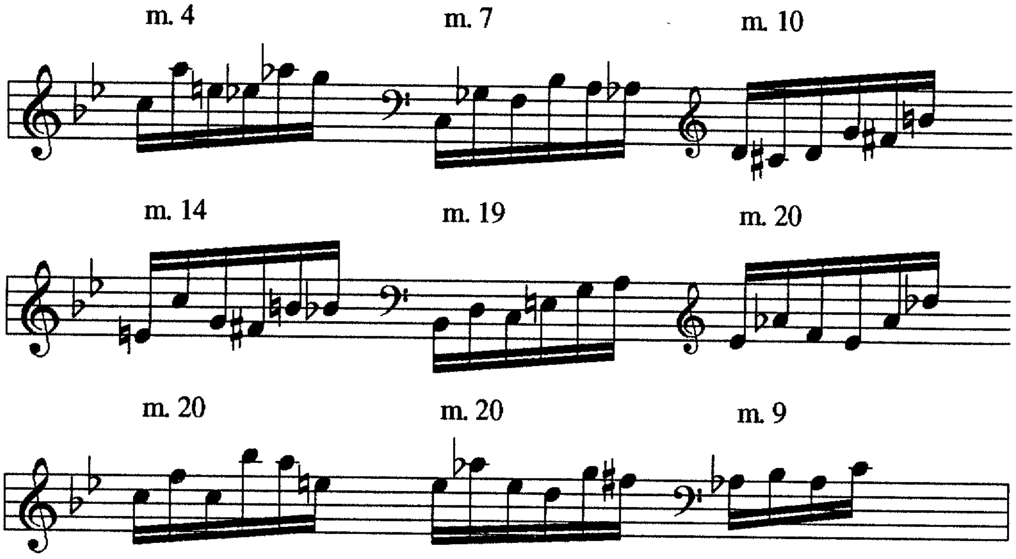

m. 8
tr
tr
m. 16
tr
tr
m. 21
tr

Example 105: "What if this present," Motive *c* and its variants.

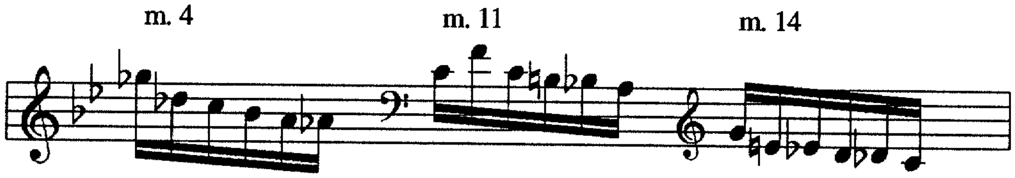

MOTIVE *c*
m. 1
m. 14
m. 14
m. 17
m. 29

Example 105: "What if this present," Motive *c* and its variants, cont.

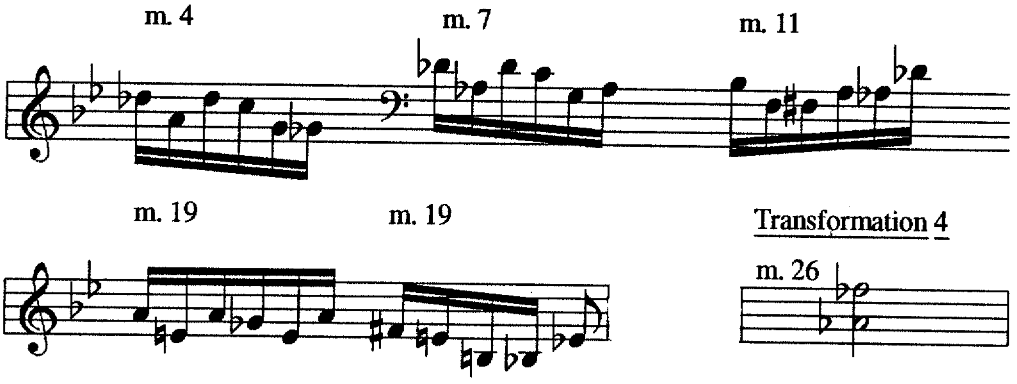
Transformation 1


m. 4
m. 7
m. 10
m. 14
m. 19
m. 20
m. 20
m. 20
m. 9

Transformation 2



Transformation 3


m. 4
m. 7
m. 11
m. 19
m. 19
Transformation 4
m. 26

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