Poe Extracts

for

speaking guitarist

by

Justin Henry Rubin

HARVEY MUSIC EDITIONS

Forward

approximate duration: 18 minutes

Poe Extracts was composed in response to a commission by Andrew Hull and completed on December 18, 1996. It became the first of many works written especially for him. Movements II-IV were first performed by Hull at the California School for the Arts (3/97). The first complete performance by Hull was at the University of Arizona (4/97). He featured the work as a dramatic presentation, fit with a period costume and candles to capture the spirit in which the piece was composed. Any performer planning to play the piece as a whole (the inner three can function as an independent structure) is free to interpret the material in this way.

The work consists of five movements-

I *Pit and Pendulum* (prose fiction), II *Upon the Quiet Mountain Top* (verse), III *to Eveleth* (letter), IV *Divine Injustice* (philosophy), V *Labyrinth of Light* (verse)

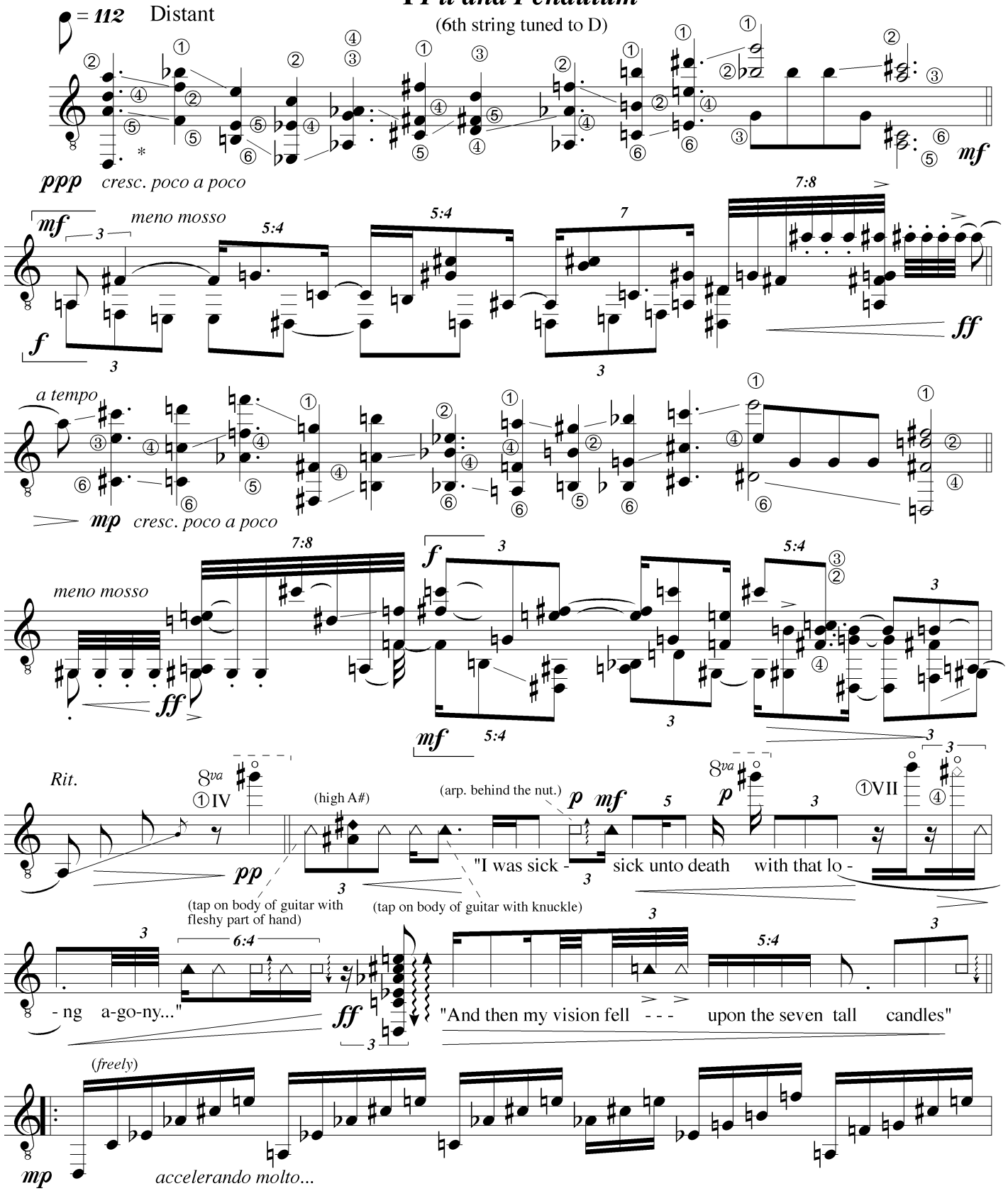
"…The opening glissandi and rhythmic pendulums reminded me of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum* story and so I thought I'd do a piece taking that tale and dividing it up into scenes with the player taking the point of view of the narrator. Once I became more involved in reading about the life of the author as well as other works of his, I noticed recurring visual motifs he would use from genre to genre and I said to myself that it would be more interesting to illuminate something about the man through his work rather than to set one of his macabre affairs. I selected text excerpts from all sorts of his writings including stories, poems, letters, and philosophical discourses and arranged them so that the thread of his thinking from piece to piece was made apparent.

Next came the idea that in order to illustrate Poe's swaying back and forth between sanity and madness (like a pendulum), I would avoid writing my entire work in a consistent style. Instead I would, too, sway between using the vocabularies of two musical languages. The problem was to try to maintain unity throughout a single work while developing the disparate materials independently. The piece then all fell into place very fast, composed amidst an illness I was suffering with all during the Christmas season. I decided to structure the work as a five pillar arch with through-composed and non-tonal first, third, and fifth movements. Meanwhile, the second and fourth would further explore the tonal techniques that I had previously reserved for my sacred organ chorales, here within a repetitive framework. A further means of distinguishing the two styles was in the manner of using the text. The non-tonal pieces would have rhythmically accurate renderings of the chosen passages integrated into the flow of the music and the guitar writing was to reflect the imagery Poe was drawing upon. The tonal pieces, on the other hand, would have the text read normally at the end of each 'verse' (for lack of a better word) of the movement while the performer plays a in vamping style in the background.

I finally decided that to bring out the pendulous nature of Poe, the last movement would contain snippets of all the previous movements thrown about, but carefully thrown about to tie together the many types of musical gestures despite the wide variety of their content. To set the stage for the piece, I used the word 'extracts' over 'excerpts', as the first obviously had more painful associations than the latter, and called the work *Poe Extracts*."

- from *About My Music* by the composer

I *Pit and Pendulum*



* Note: all glissandi begin as soon as the initial pitch has been attacked. The arrival pitch should itself be attacked unless notated as a grace note.

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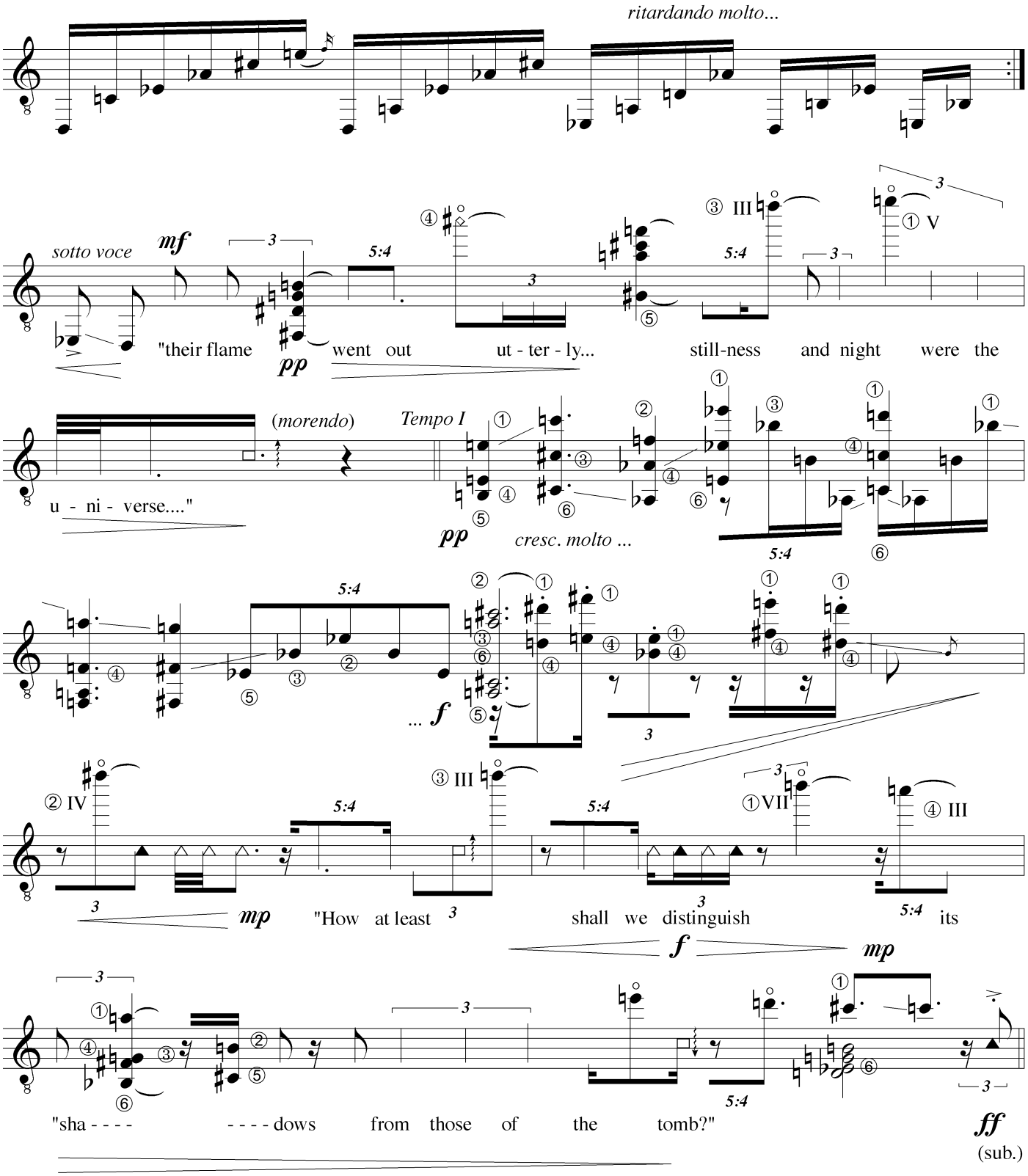
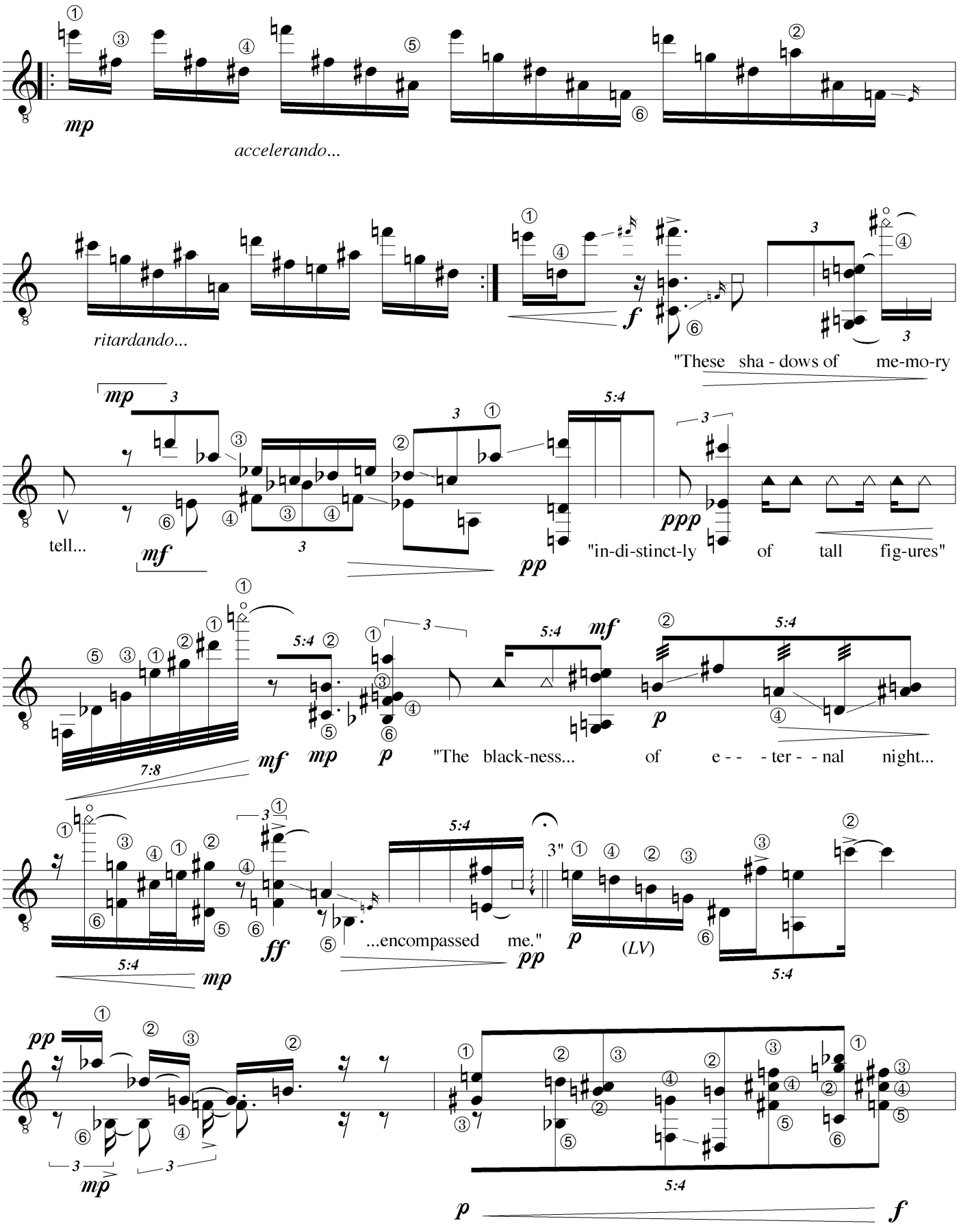
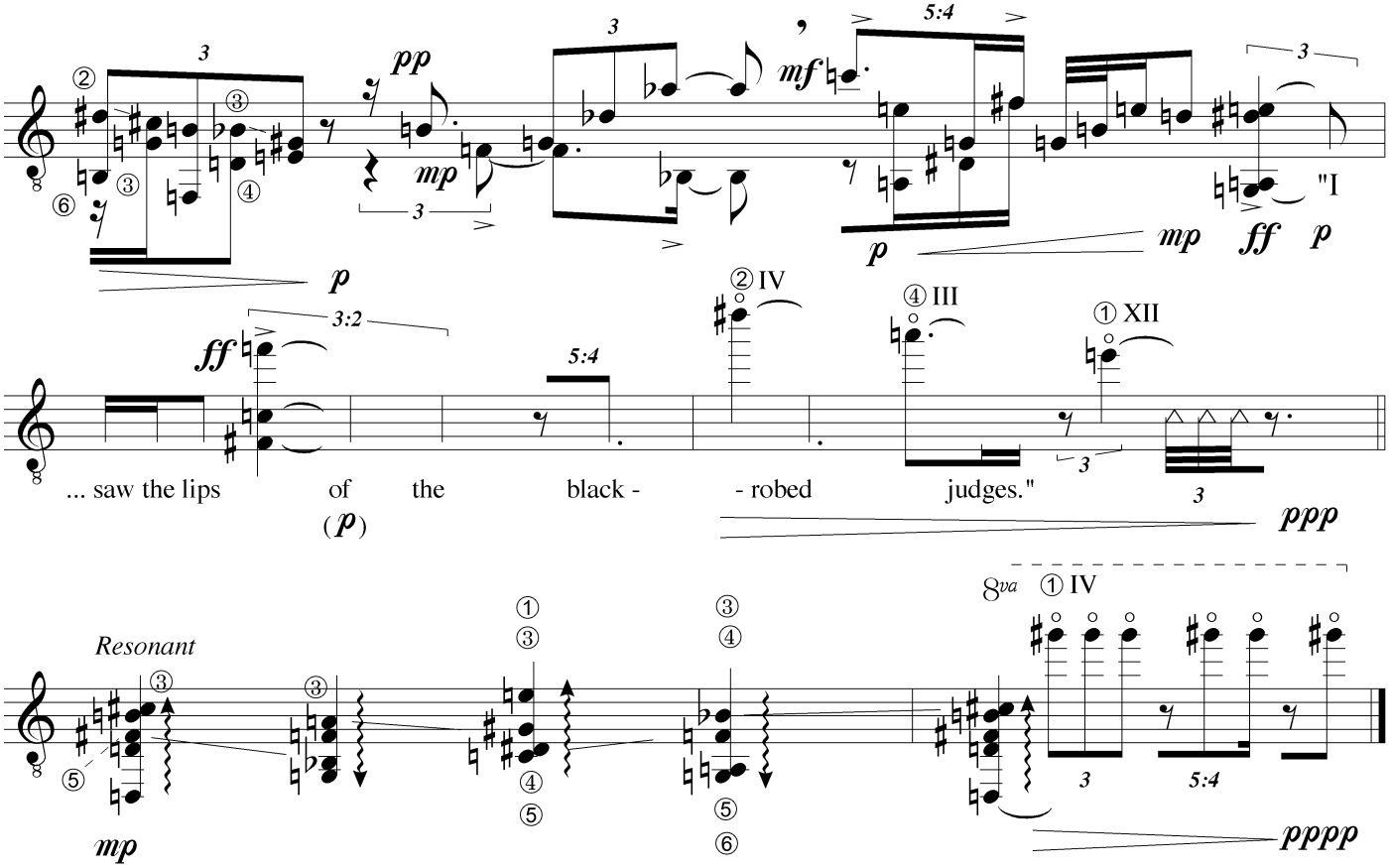
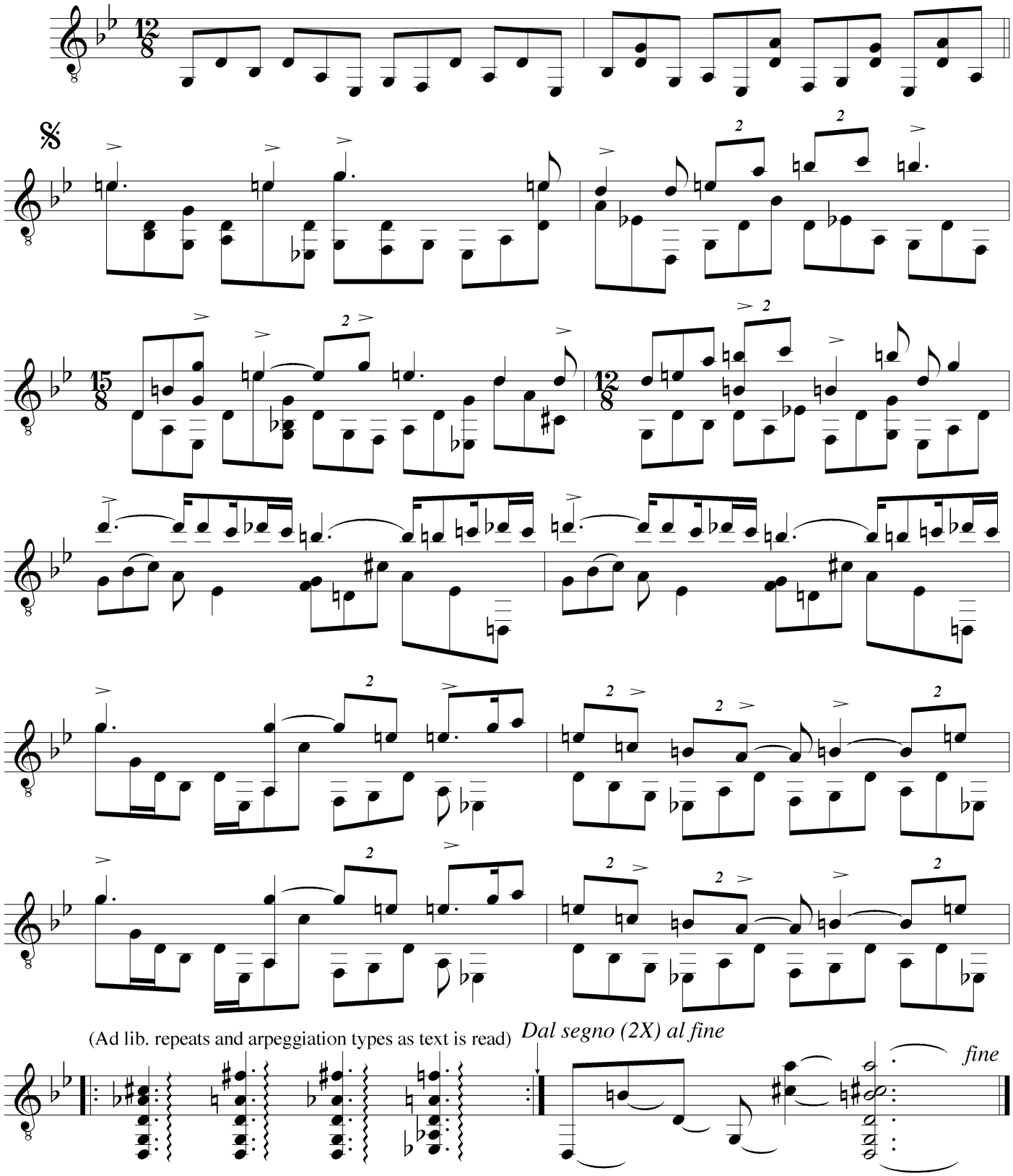

ritardando molto...
sotto voce
mf
"their flame
pp
went out
ut - ter - ly...
still-ness and night were the
u - ni - verse...."
(morendo)
Tempo I
pp
cresc. molto ...
... f
"How at least
shall we distinguish
its
mp
f
mp
"sha - - - -
- - - - dows from those of the tomb?"
ff
(sub.)


mp
accelerando...
ritardando...
f
"These sha - dows of me-mo-ry
mp
3
V
tell...
mf
pp
"in-di-stinct-ly of tall fig-ures"
ppp
5:4
7:8
mf
mp
p
"The black-ness... of e - - - ter - - nal night...
ff
...encompassed me."
3"
(LV)
pp
f


pp
mp
mf
p
mp
ff
p
"I
ff
3:2
5:4
② IV
④ III
① XII
... saw the lips of the black - - robed judges."
(p)
ppp
8va
① IV
Resonant
mp
3
5:4
pppp

II *Upon the Quiet Mountain Top*

♩. = 72 Calm- *legato e cantabile* (5th string tuned to G, 6th on D)

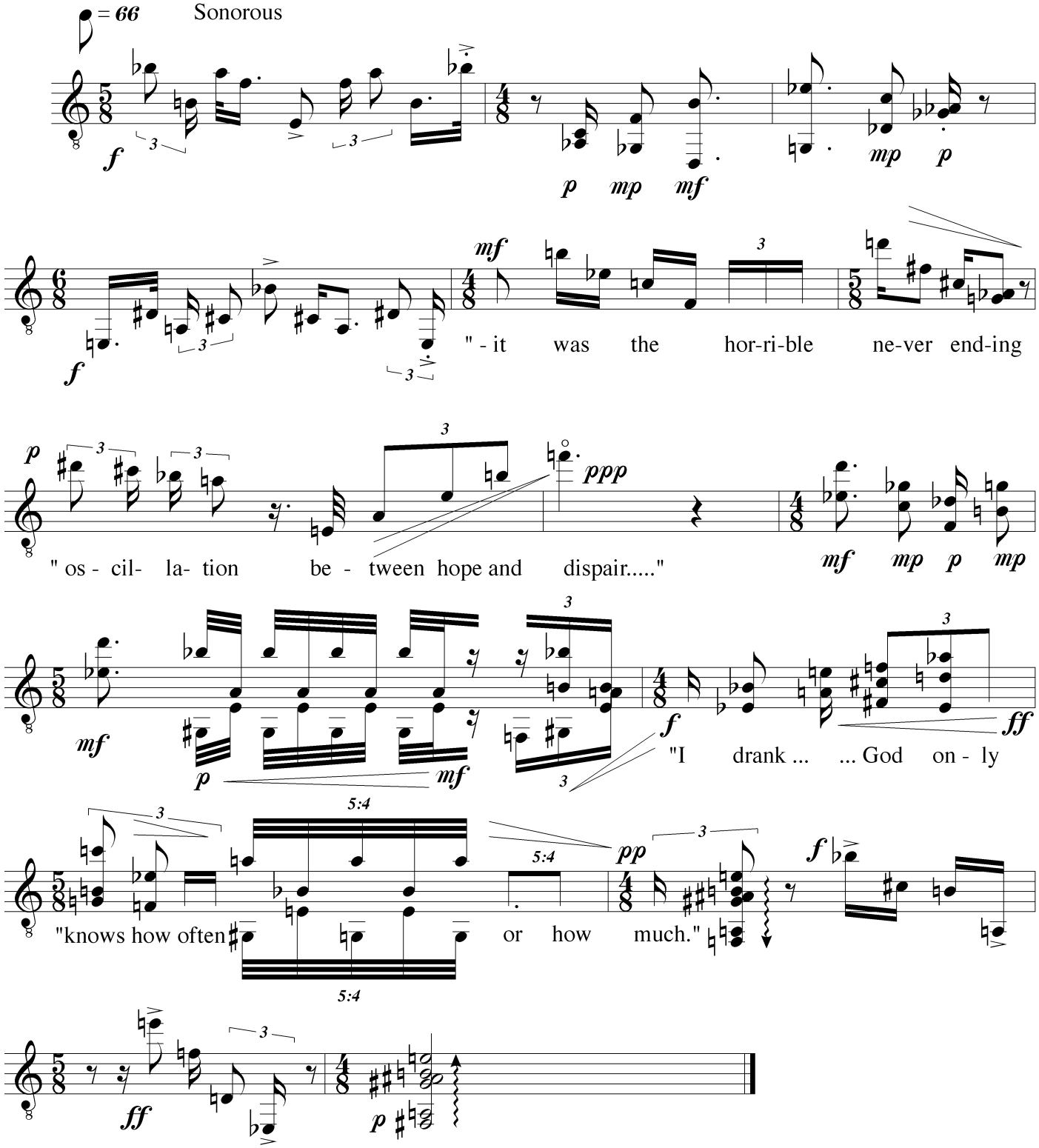


1. "I stand beneath the mystic moon.
An opiate vapour, dewy, dim..."

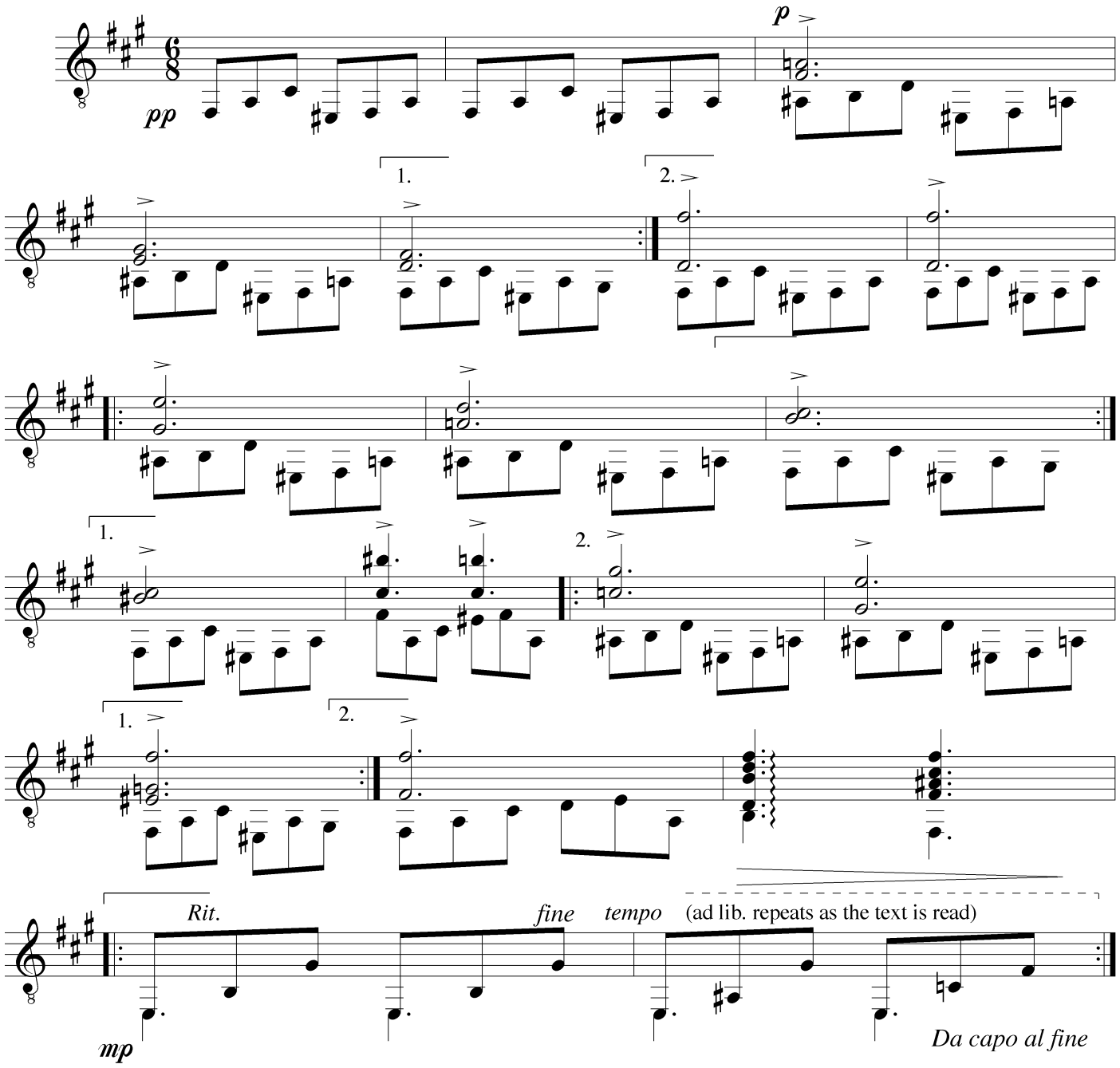
2. "Of her grand family funerals -
some sepulchre, remote, alone..."

III *to Eveleth*

(5th string tuned to A)



IV *Divine Justice*



" We walk about, amid the destinies of our world-existence, encompassed by dim but ever present memories of a Destiny more vast - very distant in the bygone time...
... and infinitely awful."

V *Labrynth of Light*

(6th string tuned to D)

♩ = 100 Lightly

crescendo...

sffz *f* *ffff*

V

mf *ff* *mp*

7:8 5:4 4:3

meno mosso

p *mf* *pp*

ff "Dim vales... *mp* and sha - - dow - - y floods...

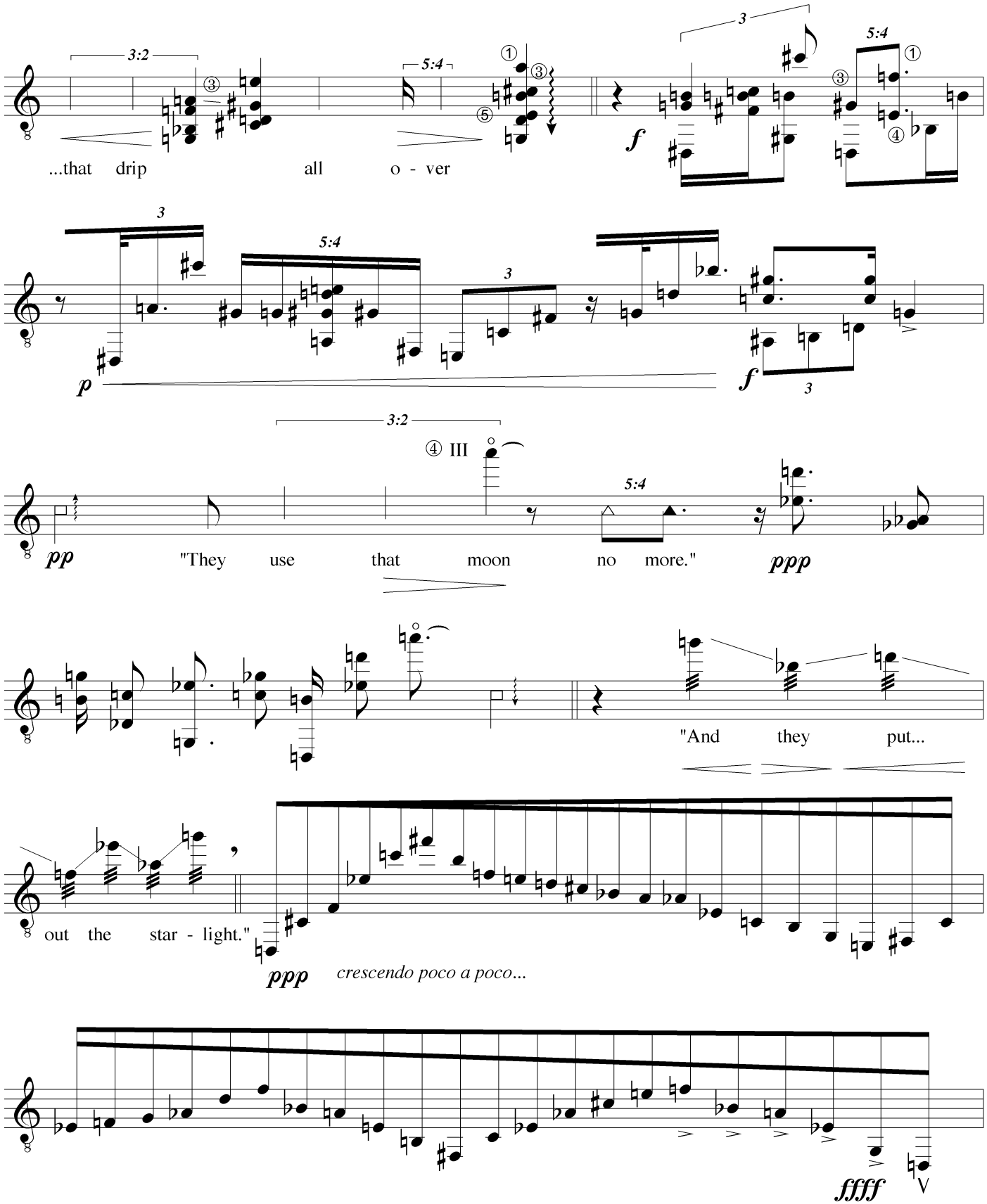
V

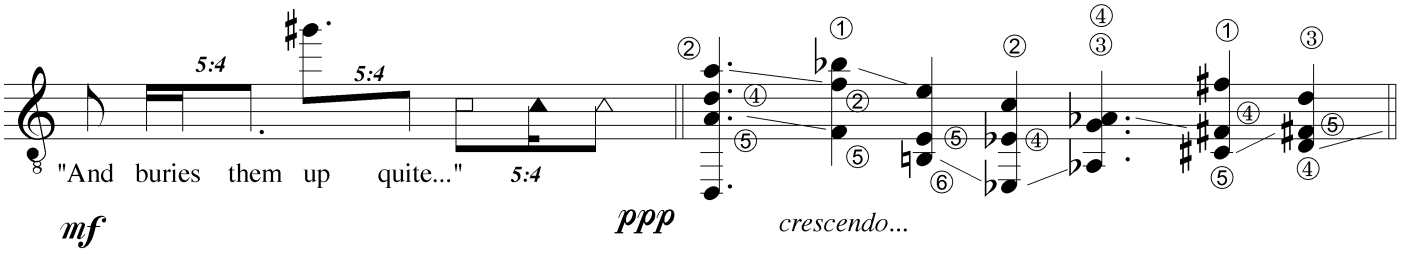
...And cloud - y looking woods..." *mf* *f*

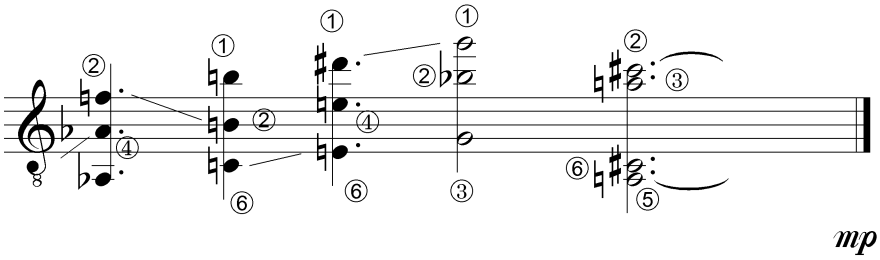
mp *pp* *mf* *p*

"Whose form we can't

dis - co - ver... *f* (sub) For the tears... *p*


3:2
5:4
3
5:4
...that drip all o - ver
f
3
5:4
3
p
f
3
3:2
④ III
5:4
pp
"They use that moon no more."
ppp
"And they put...
out the star - light."
ppp
crescendo poco a poco...
ffff
V





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December 1996
revised
January 1999