Seven Poems

for
Piano

by

Barrie Armstrong

PREFACE

These miniatures are not programmatic.
Each quotation purely introduces the spirit of the following piece.
The full poems follow for the sake of completeness,
to encourage contemplation about the qualities common to both art forms
and to reinforce the idea that the music was written as if it were poetry.

Though the great song return no more
There's keen delight in what we have:
The rattle of pebbles on the shore
Under the receding wave.

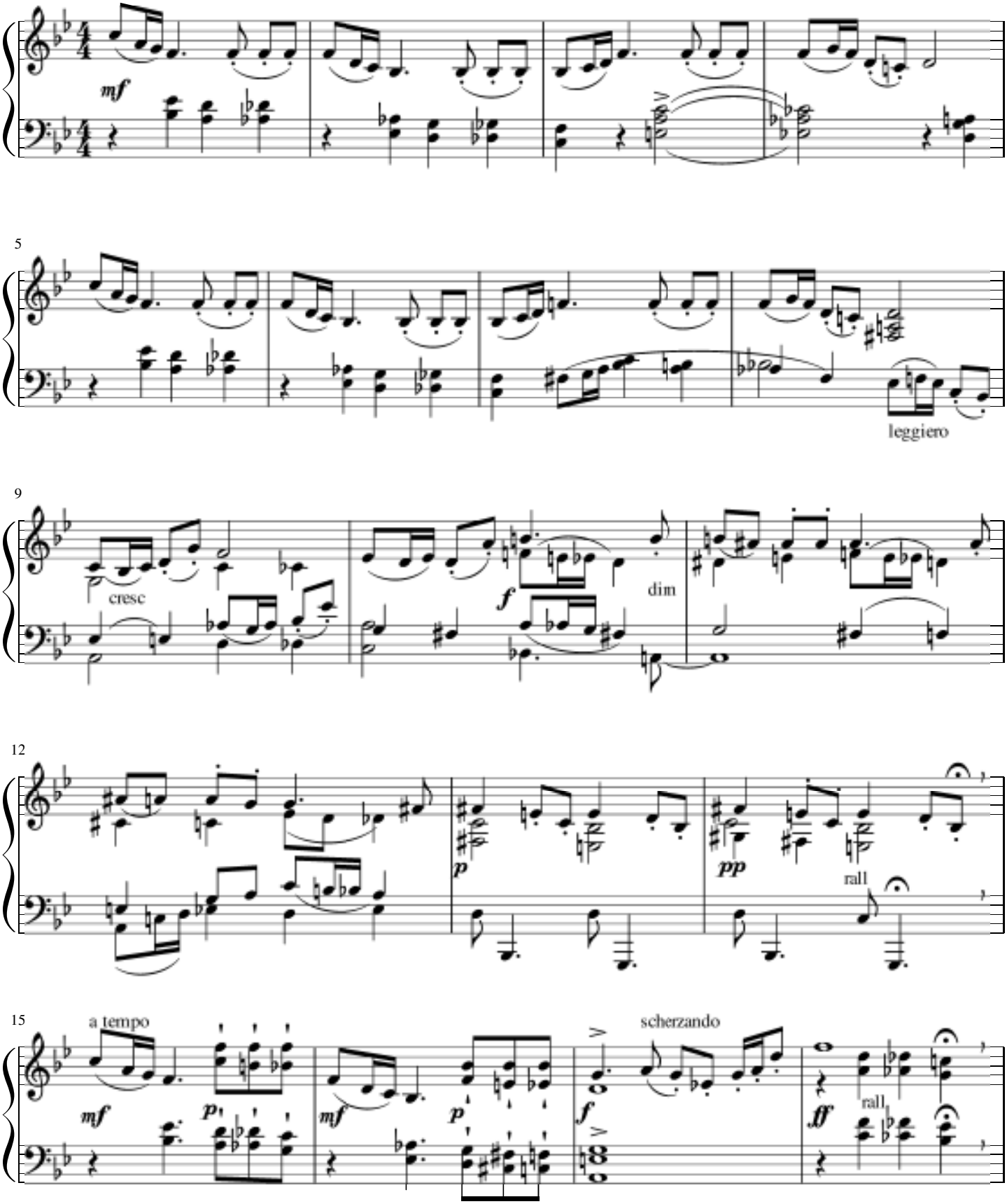
The Nineteenth Century and After
W B Yeats
1933

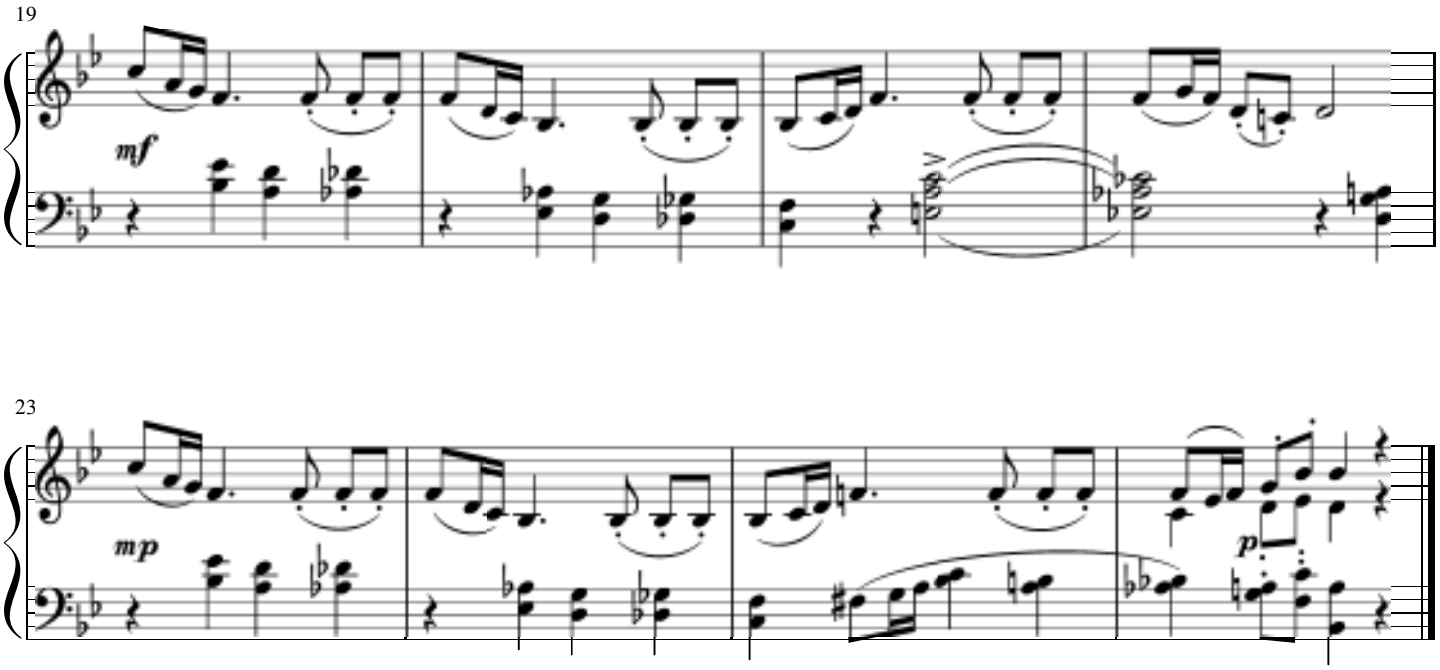
Seven Poems for Piano - No 1

So the spirit bows before thee, to listen and adore thee

Barrie Armstrong

Molto espressivo (♩ = 60)





There be none of Beauty's daughters
With a magic like Thee;
And like music on the waters
Is thy sweet voice to me:
When, as if its sound were causing
The charmed ocean's pausing,
The waves lie still and gleaming,
And the lull'd winds seem dreaming:

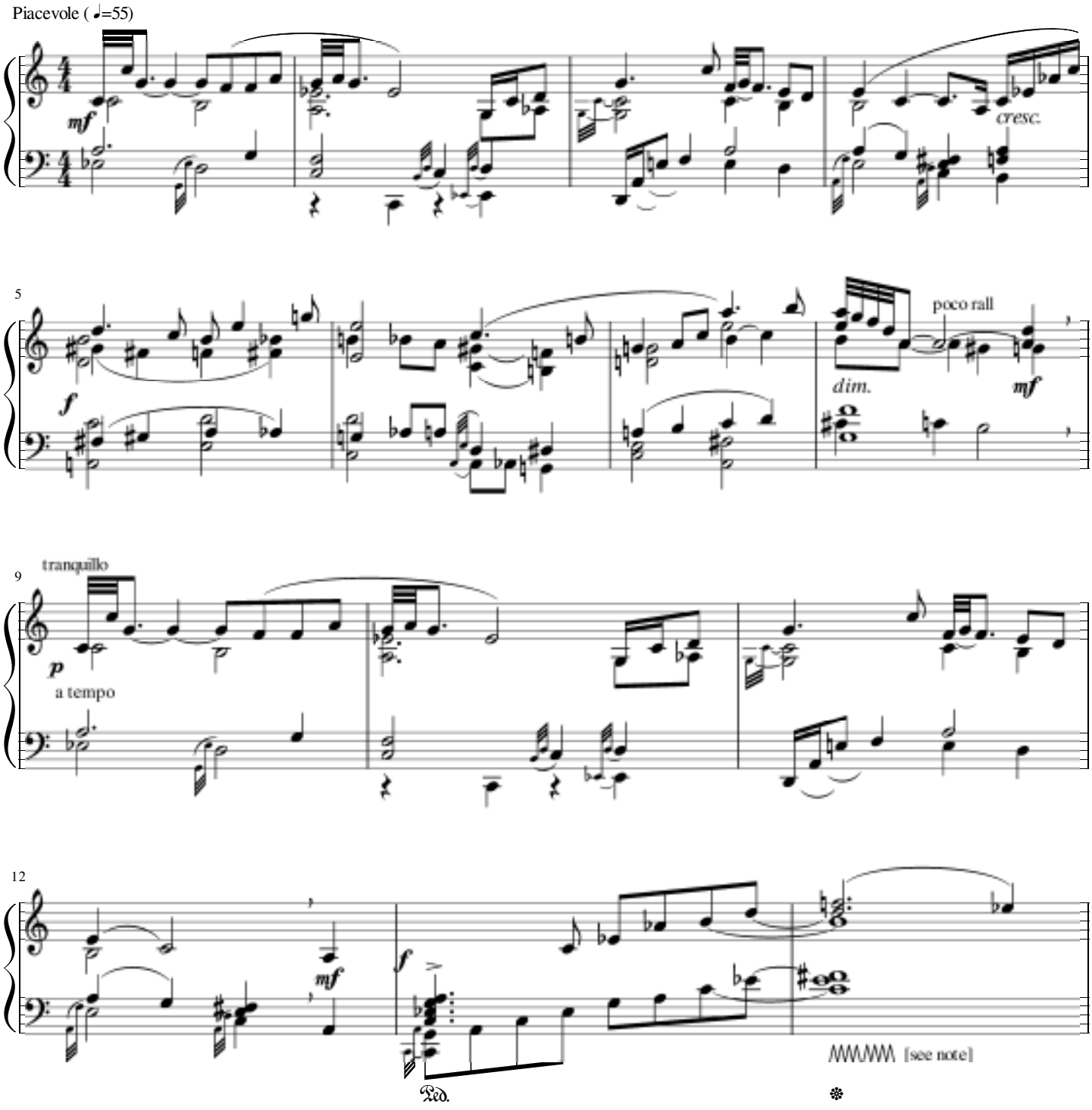
And the midnight moon is weaving
Her bright chain o'er the deep,
Whose breast is gently heaving
As an infant's asleep:
So the spirit bows before thee;
To listen and adore thee;
With a full but soft emotion,
Like the swell of Summer's ocean.

Stanzas for Music
Lord Byron
1816

Seven Poems for Piano - No 2

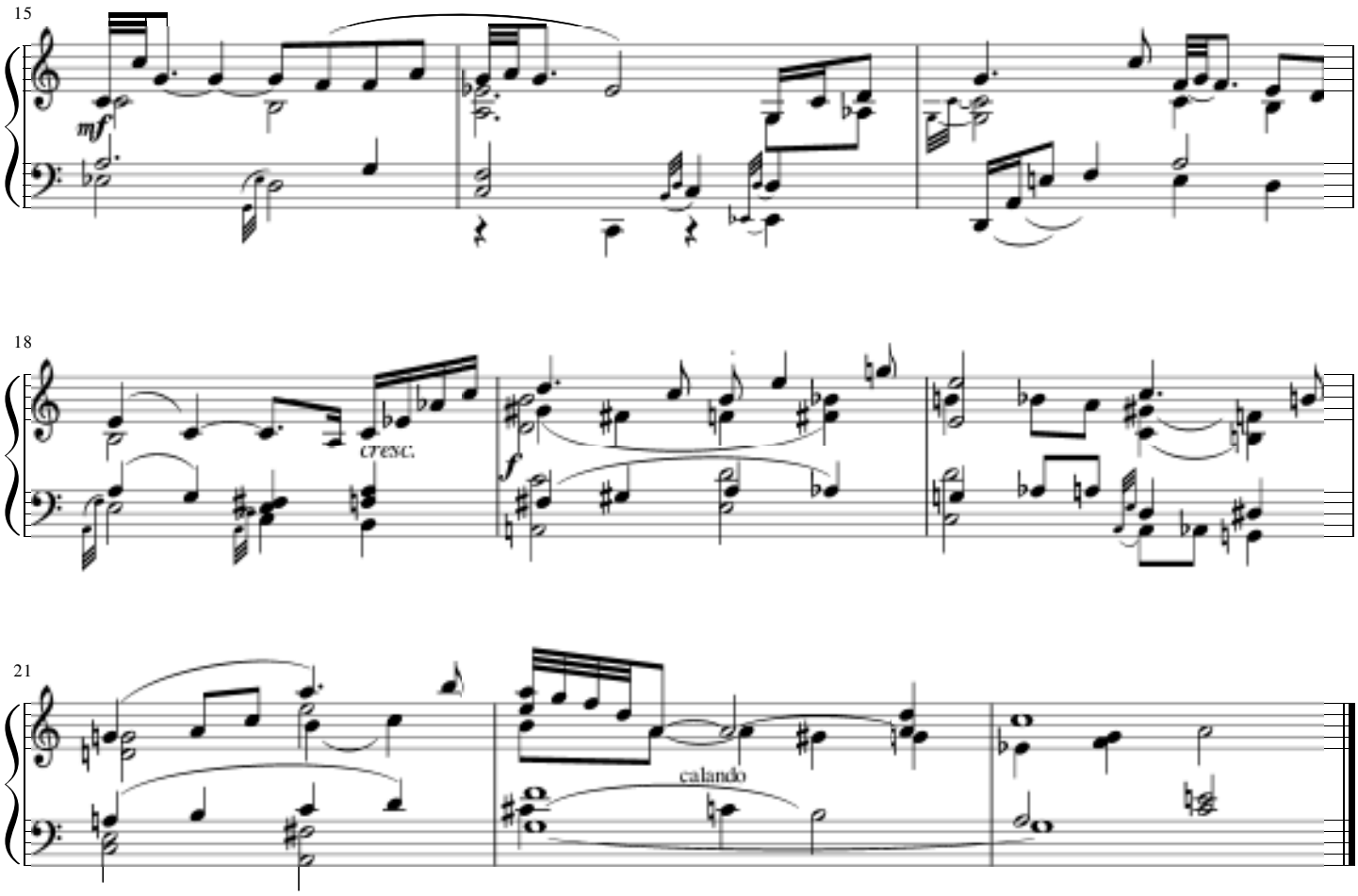
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea

Barrie Armstrong



* Note to bar 14:

The pedal should be partially released and depressed again thoughtout the bar (in quick, undetectable snatches)
at intervals of approximately every quaver, the full chord sustained from the previous bar gradually fading away to leave the present chord sounding



It is a beauteous evening, calm and free
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder – everlastingly.
Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

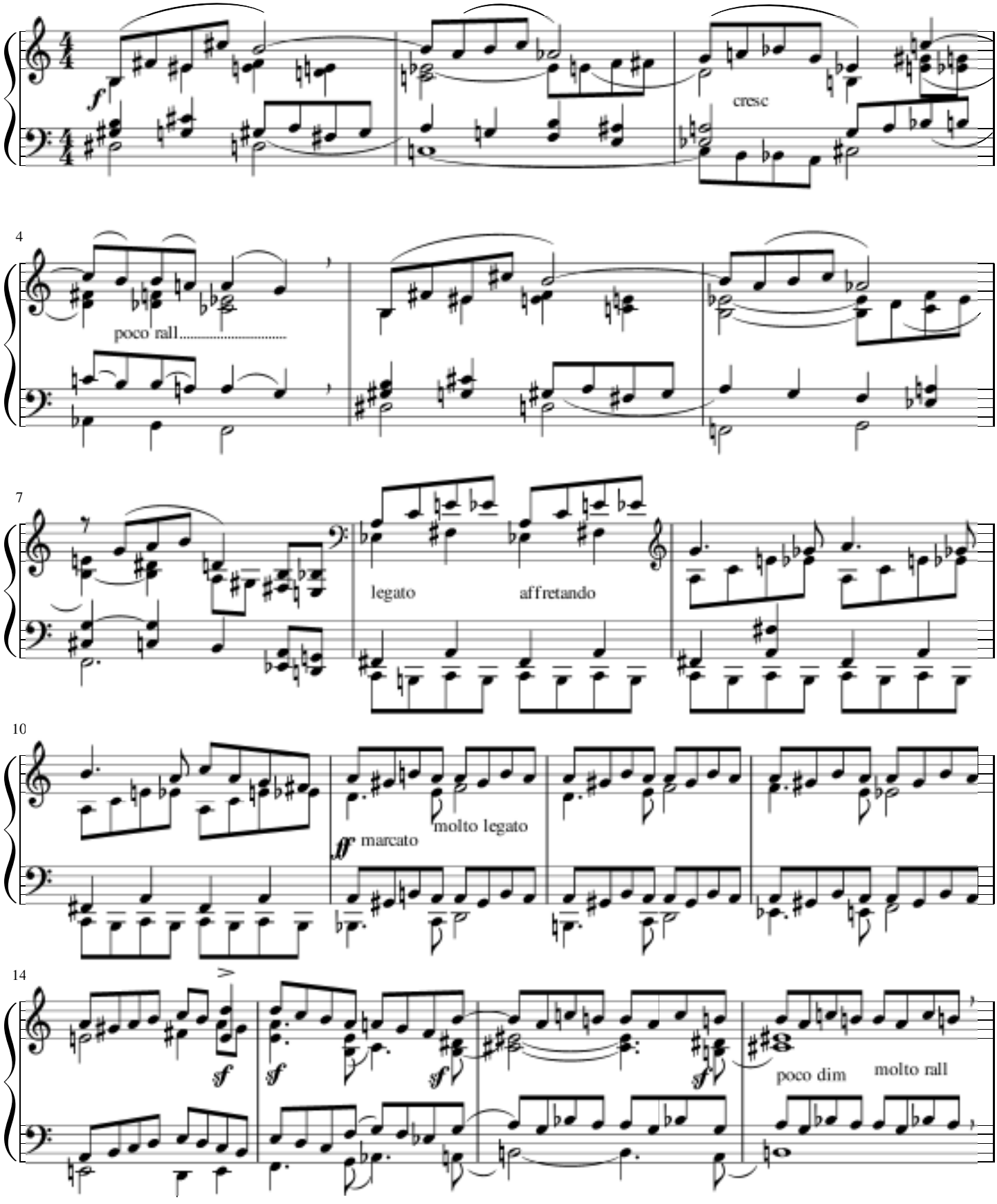
Sonnet
William Wordsworth
1802/1807

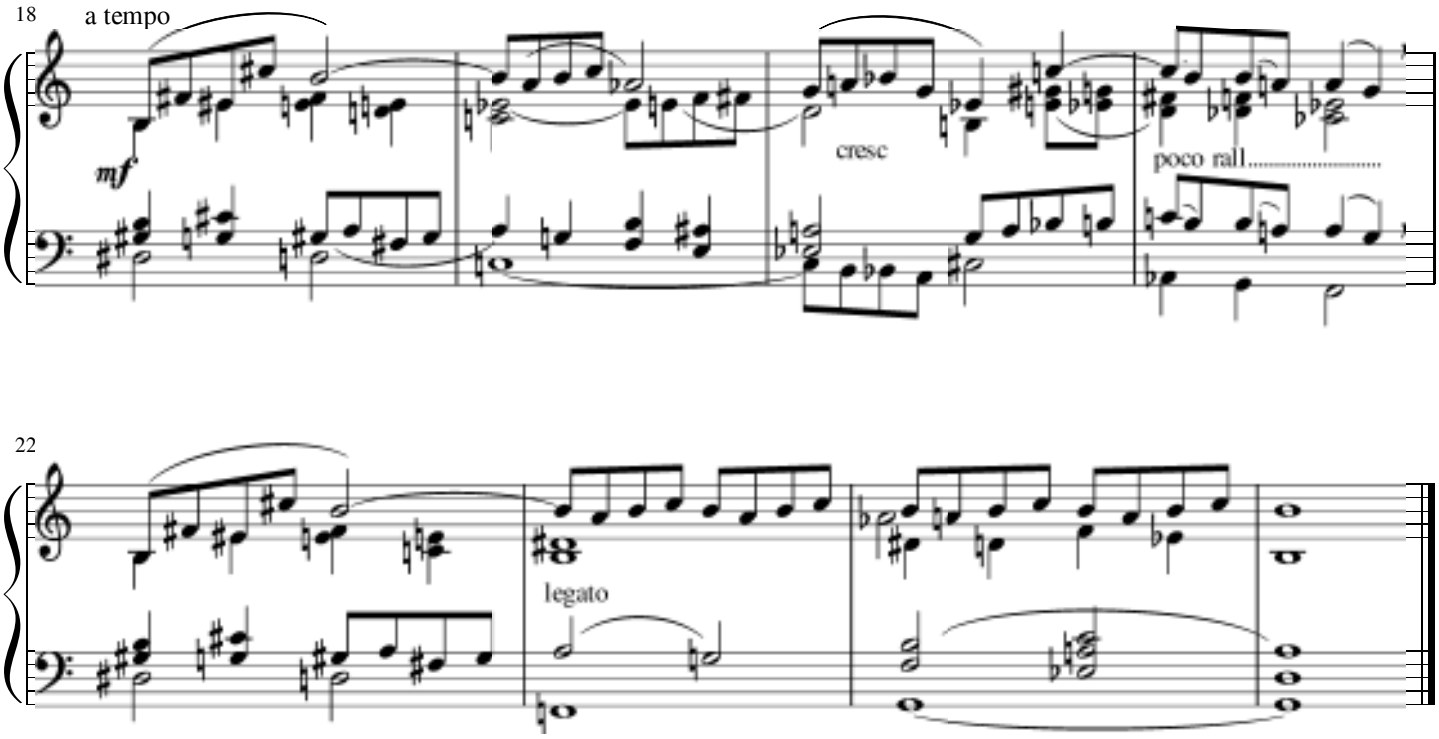
Seven Poems for Piano - No 3

When I have fears that I may cease to be

Barrie Armstrong

With deep feeling (♩ = 80)





When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love; - then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

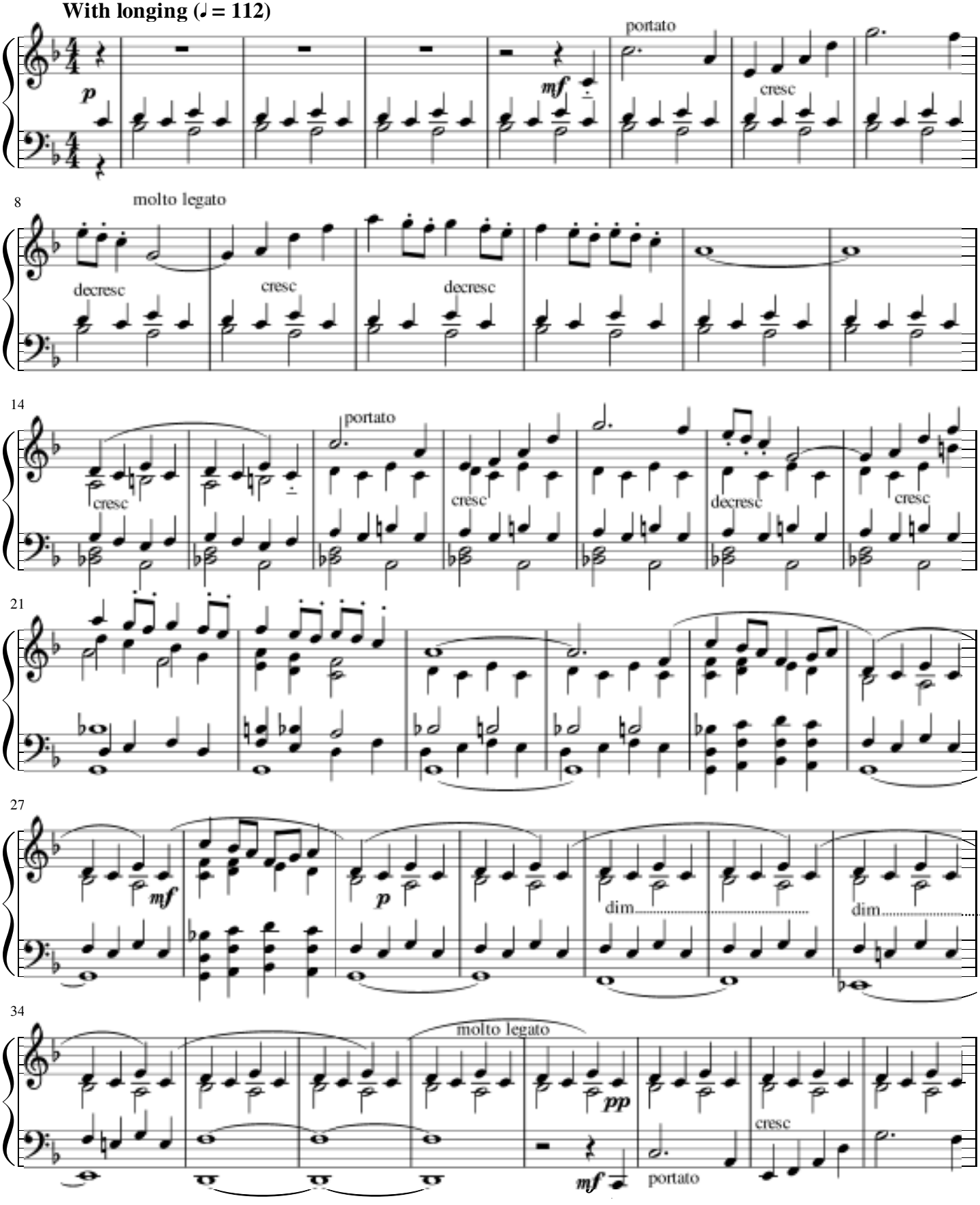
Sonnet
John Keats
1818

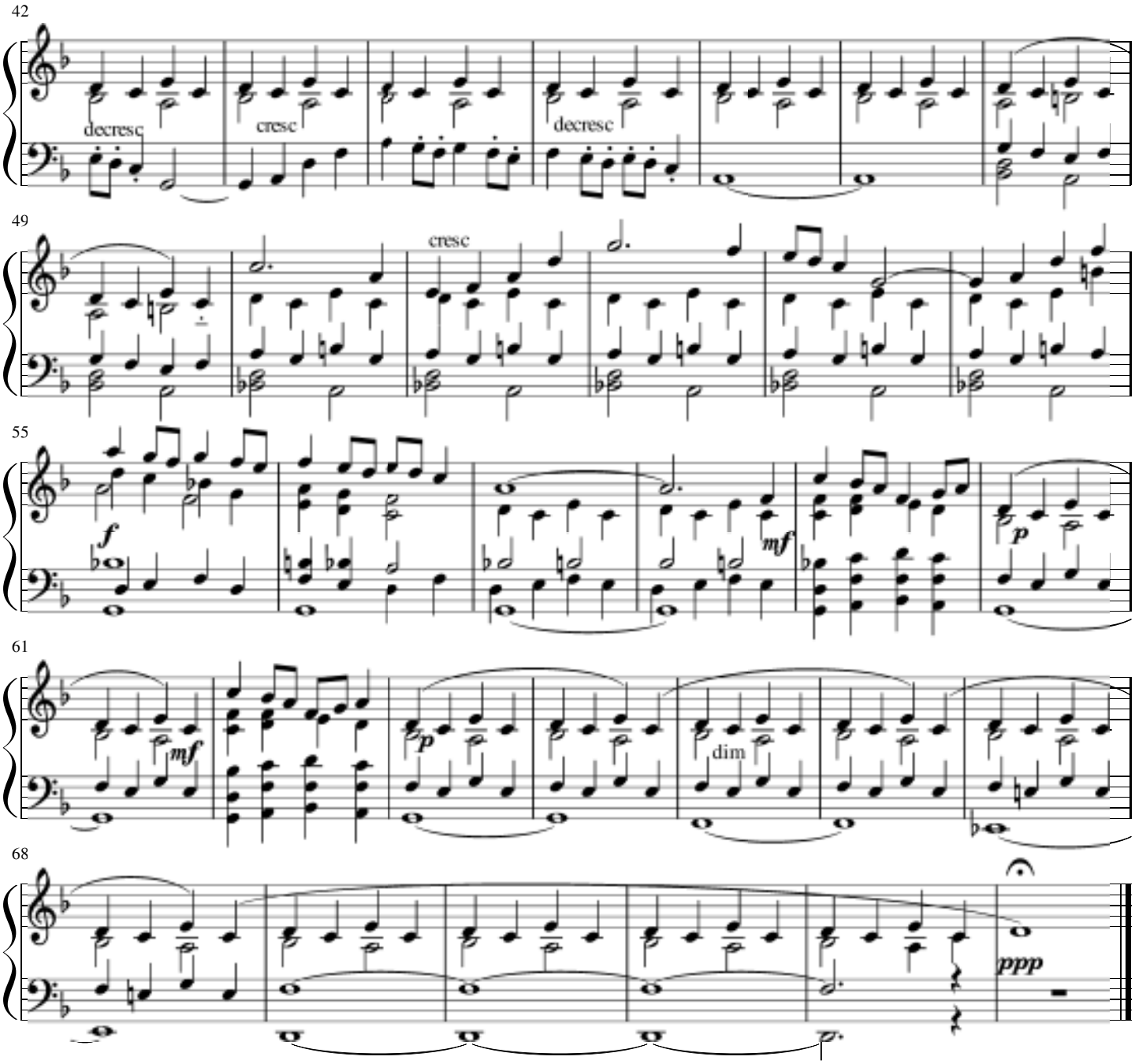
Seven Poems for Piano - No 4

Her peaceful being slowly passes by to some more perfect peace

Barrie Armstrong

With longing (♩ = 112)





Fair is her cottage in its place,
Where you broad water sweetly slowly glides.
It sees itself from thatch to base
Dream in the sliding tides.

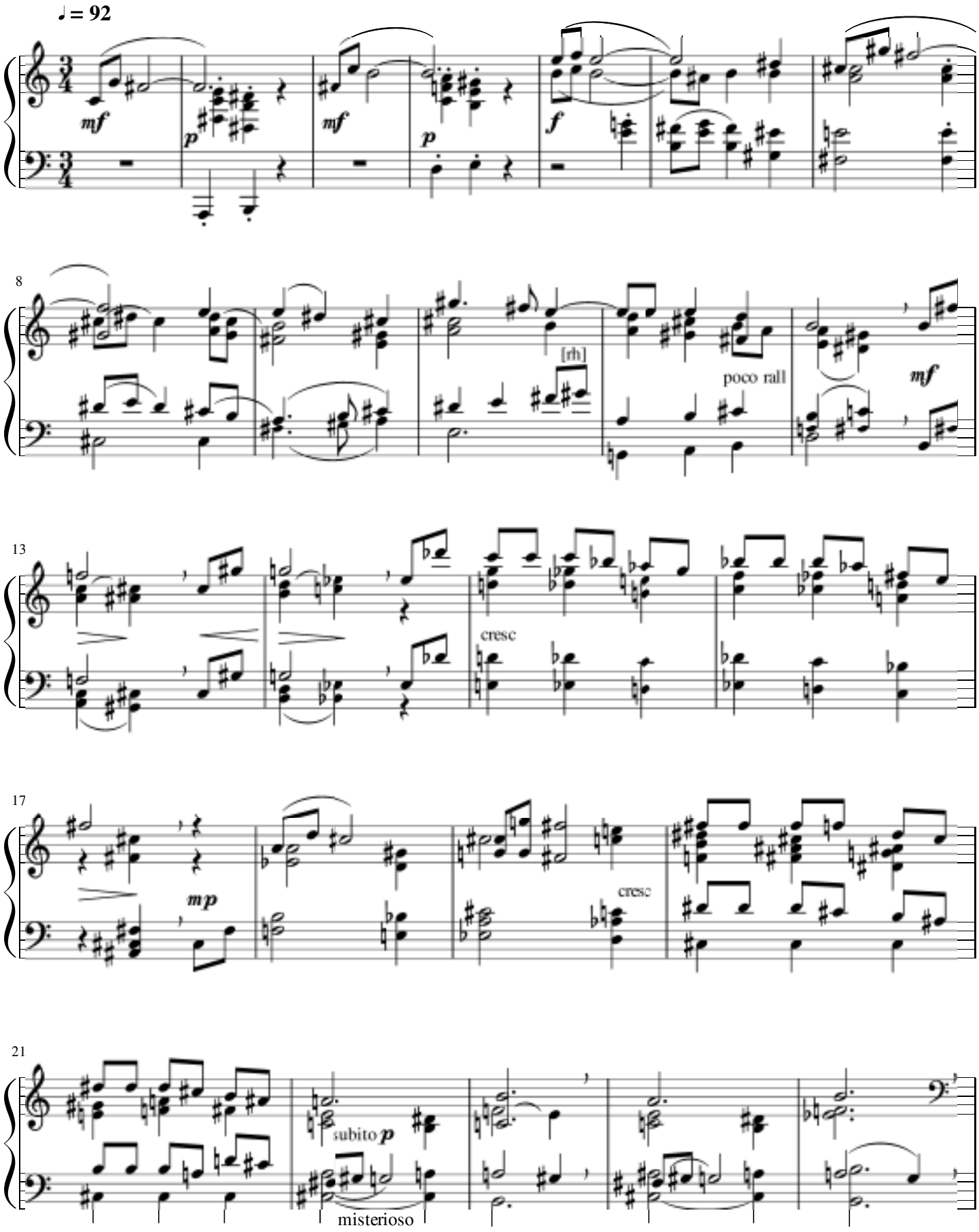
And fairer she, but ah how soon to die!
Her quiet dream of life this hour may cease.
Her peaceful being slowly passes by
To some more perfect peace.

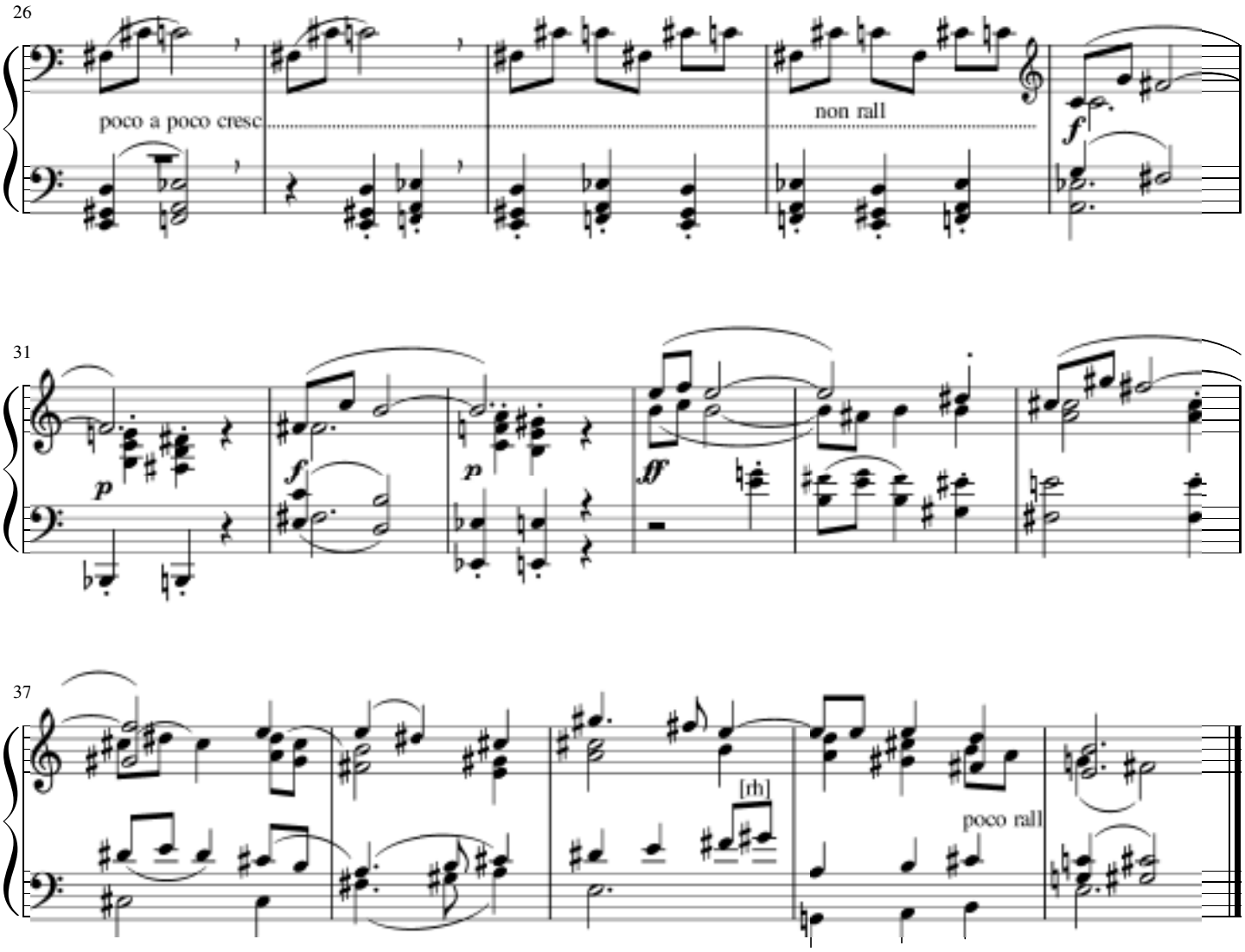
Requiescat
Alfred, Lord Tennyson
1864

Seven Poems for Piano - No 5

A widow bird sate mourning for her love

Barrie Armstrong





A widow bird sate mourning for her love
Upon a wintry bough;
The frozen wind crept on above,
The freezing stream below.

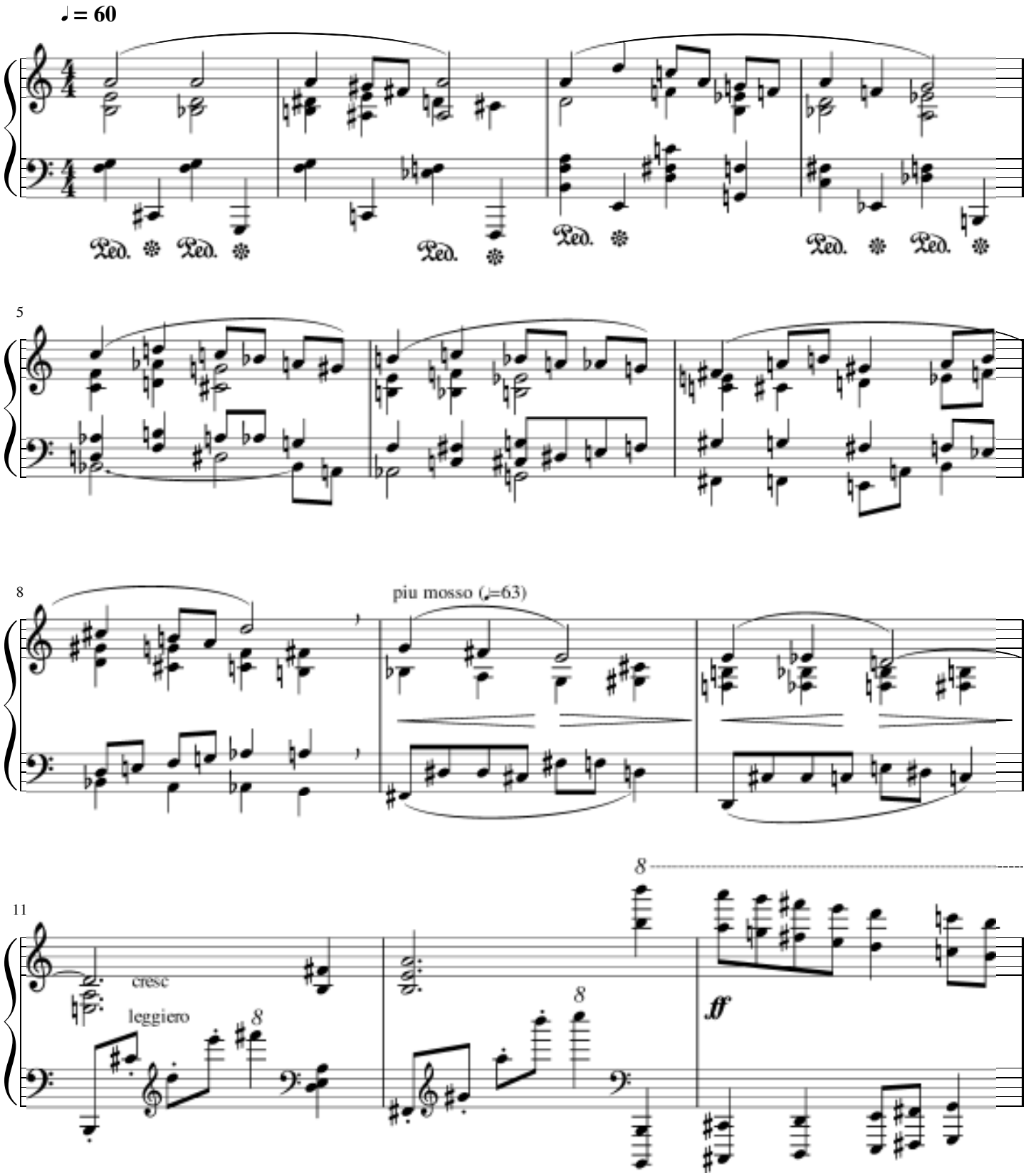
There was no leaf upon the forest bare,
No flower upon the ground,
And little motion in the air
Except the mill-wheel's sound.

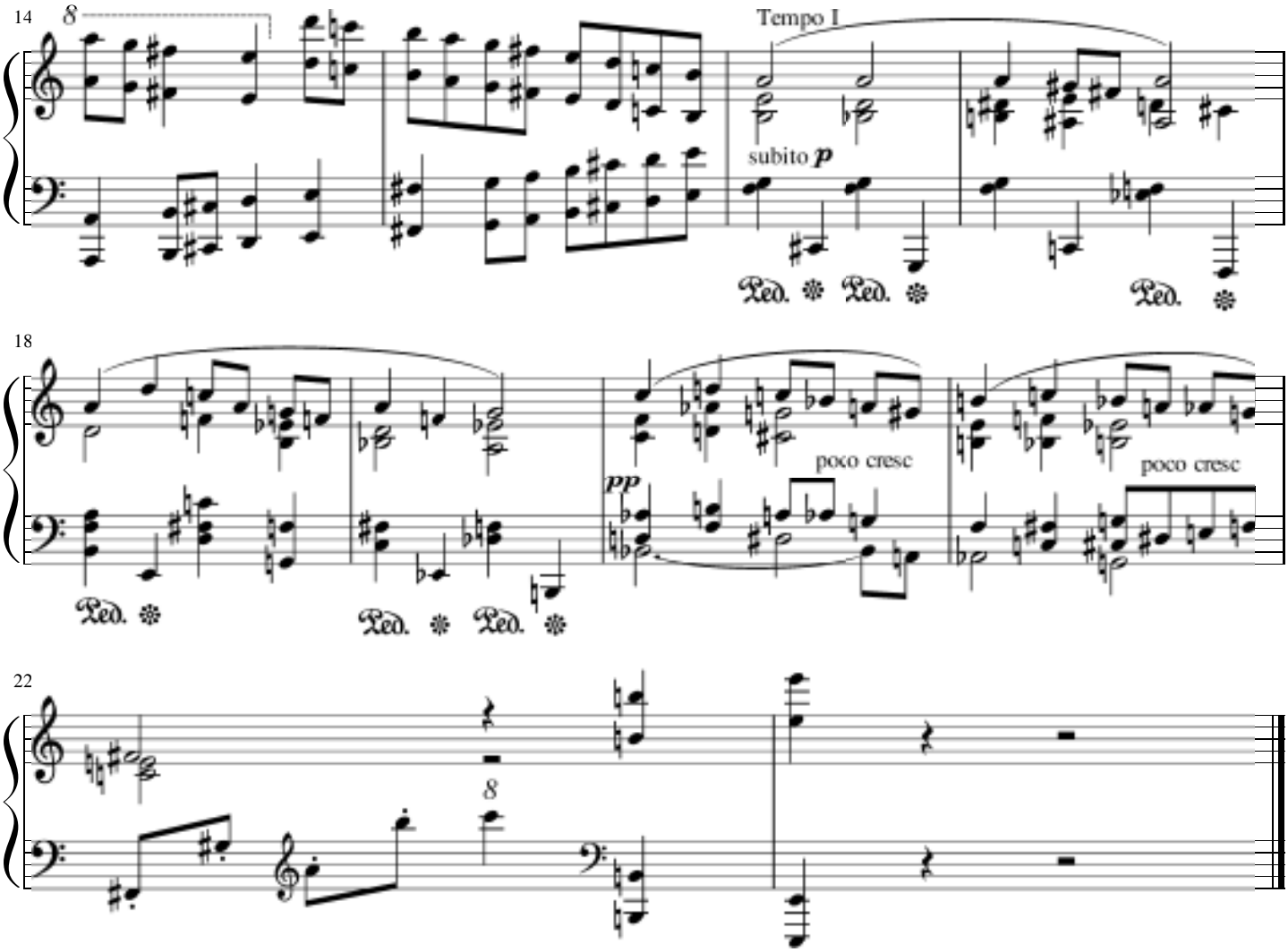
A Song
P B Shelley
1822

Seven Poems for Piano - No 6

You did not come, and marching Time drew on, and wore me numb

Barrie Armstrong





You did not come,
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb -
Yet less for loss of your dear presence there
Than that I thus found lacking in your make
That high compassion which can overbear
Reluctance for pure lovingkindness' sake
Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,
You did not come.

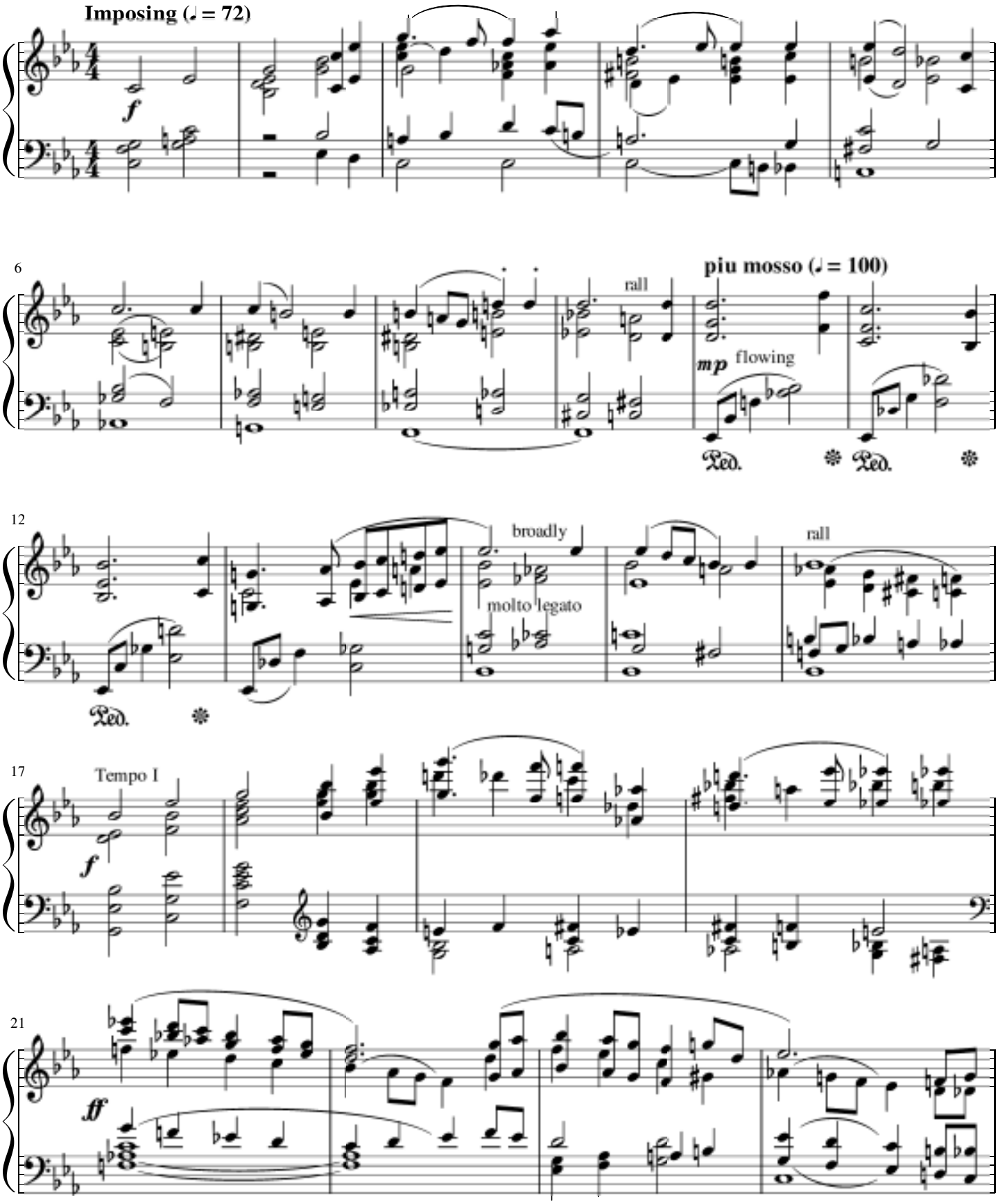
You love not me,
And love alone can lend you loyalty;
-I know and knew it. But, unto the store
Of human deeds divine in all but name,
Was it not worth a little hour or more
To add yet this: Once you, a woman, came
To soothe a time-torn man; even though it be
You love not me?

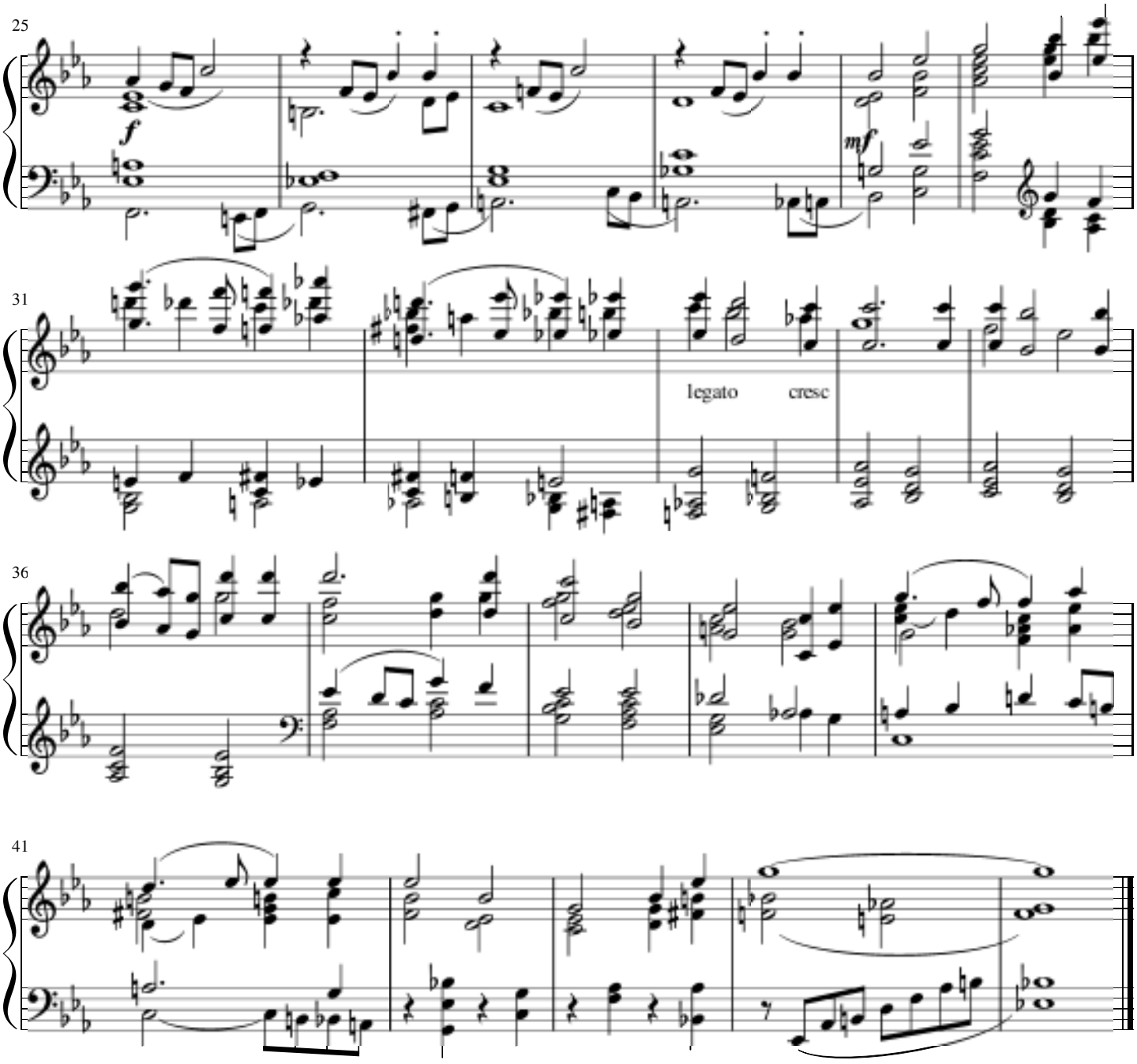
A Broken Appointment
Thomas Hardy
1902

Seven Poems for Piano - No 7

And so make life, death, and that vast for-ever one grand, sweet song

Barrie Armstrong





My fairest child, I have no song to give you;
No lark could pipe to skies so dull and grey;
Yet, ere we part, one lesson I can leave you
For every day.

Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever;
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long;
And so make life, death, and that vast for-ever
One grand, sweet song.

A Farewell
Charles Kingsley
1856