Abstract
Metric Experiments in Benjamin Britten's Vocal Music: 1943-1945
Stuart Paul Duncan
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1942 was a pivotal juncture in Benjamin Britten's career. Originally, he had planned to emigrate to the United States of America, but after staying a few years, he unexpectedly returned to England in 1942. Upon leaving America's shores, his compositional scores and sketches were confiscated by US Customs. This confiscation, on the one hand, disrupted a smooth transition back to the United Kingdom, but on the other, presented the opportunity for a fresh compositional start. In the years directly following his return, 1943 to 1945, Britten's vocal music is full of metric complexity, suggesting a captivation with metric experimentation. *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard* (1943), *Festival Te Deum* (1944), *the Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (1945), and *Peter Grimes* (1945), diverse in their musical construction and distinct in the types of texts set, share a central compositional concern: the employment of sustained metric conflict as a means of emphasizing structural junctures or poetic ideas. This dissertation presents an overview of metric and hypermetric displacement and grouping conflicts, demonstrating how Britten establishes, sustains, and problematizes meter for expressive and text-interpretative purposes. The methodology employed here draws upon developments in metric theory over the past thirty years, and builds upon analyses that foreground cognitive, performative, and spatial representation.

Metric Experiments in Benjamin Britten's Vocal Music: 1943-1945

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Table of Contents

List of Examples and Figures

1 Britten, Meter, and Metric Conflict, An Introduction

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Jen Duncan, for all her patience and to the late Steven Stucky who invited me to study in the United States in 2006 and who set me on the musical path I now happily travel.

CHAPTER ONE:
Britten, Meter, and Metric Conflict, An Introduction

Benjamin Britten left England just prior to the Second World War, an act that was interpreted at the time, according to Brian McMahon, as an "act of betrayal" and is now considered "possibly one of the most controversial decisions of his life."[1] Following in the steps of several of his close acquaintances, including W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Britten's move was meant to be permanent, since England offered few opportunities for a homosexual, pacifist, composer of contemporary music."[2]

Thus Britten's return to England in 1942 was entirely unexpected.[3] He had applied to become a resident alien in 1941, and his own letters indicate a desire to stay in United States. McMahon argues that he returned to England for the same reason that he left: to avoid conflict. Rising tensions with Japan led the United States to initiate a military draft via a lottery system, whose result he, even as a non-resident, was beholden to. Pushing back against the romanticized notion that he returned to England because of the poetry of George Crabbe, which formed the source material for *Peter Grimes*, McMahon concludes that it is more likely that "Britten chose to avoid conflict again." An ironic consequence was that he "embedded further conflict in his own personality[.]"[4]

The conflict Britten felt surrounding yet another transatlantic change in residence was further exacerbated by an issue with his departure from the United States. United States

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[1] Brian McMahon, "Why did Benjamin Britten Return to Wartime England?" in *Benjamin Britten, New Perspectives on his Life and Work*, ed. Lucy Walker (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2009): 174.

[2] Ibid., 178.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 183.

Customs, under the suspicion that they contained encoded messages, detained the majority of Britten's scores.[5] Britten arrived in England with only a handful of scores, including *A Ceremony of Carols* and *Hymn to St. Cecilia* that he completed on the long transatlantic journey. In terms of compositional scores and sketches, he had to start somewhat from scratch. In the three years that followed his return, Britten spent the majority of his time completing *Peter Grimes* (op. 33), which was first performed in 1945. During 1943 to 1945, he composed six other works, listed in Figure 1.1.

Opus	Year	Title
30	1943	Rejoice in the Lamb
31	1943	Serenade
no opus	1943	Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard
32	1944	Festival Te Deum
33	1945	Peter Grimes
34	1946	Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Henry Purcell
35	1945	Holy Sonnets of John Donne

FIGURE 1.1: Britten's compositions during 1943 to 1945.

A striking aspect of these compositions is the extent to which they incorporate metric conflict with the notated barline and time signature. At times, the voice establishes one meter while the accompaniment establishes another; at times, the accompaniment offers several meters while the voice provides an independent meter of its own; and at times, the meter is unclear. These different metric tensions generate sustained metric conflicts that suggest different interpretations of both the rhythmic/metric structure of given passage, and even of the setting of the text.

[5] See Micheal Marcades, "Benjamin Britten's *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*: A Musico-Poetic Analysis and Performance Guide for the Choral Conductor," PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1999: 35.

1943 to 1945 were years of metric experimentation for the composer. This dissertation examines not only how Britten plays with different meters (both consecutively and simultaneously) in these pieces, but also how, from a broader perspective, the pieces demonstrate an increasing process of metric experimentation. The *Holy Sonnets* constitute an apex in his fascination with metric experimentation, which is unrivaled in his output. This is not to say that Britten does not continue to employ metric complexity during later pieces, but rather that his compositional interest in experimenting with metric techniques is both sustained and intensely examined during this period, and therefore warrants particular attention.

Chapter 1 examines how Britten's approach to meter has been discussed in the literature and then explores how recent developments in metric theory provide an important resource for reconsidering his music. Chapter 2, "Britten and Metric Priming," explores how Britten prepares a metric technique in an early section of a piece that is then realized more saliently in a later section. In particular the chapter focuses on three pieces: "Pastoral" from the *Serenade*, *Festival te Deum*, and the round "Old Joe has gone fishing" from *Peter Grimes*. Chapter 3, "Metric Form and Ski-Hill Graphs in *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard*," investigates his metric experimentation across an entire song. The chapter applies a recently developed method of representing meter visually to show how different meters interact with the text's formal elements and its unfolding story. Chapter 4, "*The Holy Sonnets of John Donne:* Metric Conflict in the Song Cycle," draws on the metric concepts established in the first three chapters, and demonstrates their

application throughout a multi-movement work. In this song cycle, Britten employs meter and metric conflict strategically, enabling a particular parsing of the cycle's nine songs.

Although analytical discussion of Britten's use of meter has been limited, several scholars have noted unusual metric properties of his music. The *Serenade*, which has been described as the composer's first "mature work," is one of the earliest pieces to receive analytical commentary that references metric phenomena. Presenting the most comprehensive analysis of Britten's music prior to and including the *Serenade*, Christopher Mark's *Early Benjamin Britten* situates it as a turning point in the composer's approach to meter: "The new degree of metrical and rhythmical flexibility is the most impressive technical advancement in the *Serenade*."[6]

Take, for instance, the opening measures of "Pastoral," the first of *Serenade*'s six songs, shown in Example 1.1. Arnold Whittall observes that even though the song's opening is notated in 3/8, the time signature functions more like a "background against which the music moves freely, [with] the strings in a lilting 6/16, [and] the voice in a smooth 4/8."[7] Imagining the voice notated in 4/8, it is possible to reconceive of the opening silence as one full measure of 4/8 with an additional eighth-note rest on the second 4/8 measure. "The Day's grown" aligns with the second, third, and fourth eighth-note time points of the imagined second 4/8 measure; the word "old" aligns with the beginning of the imagined third 4/8 measure; and the agogically-accented "Sun" aligns with the fourth 4/8 measure.

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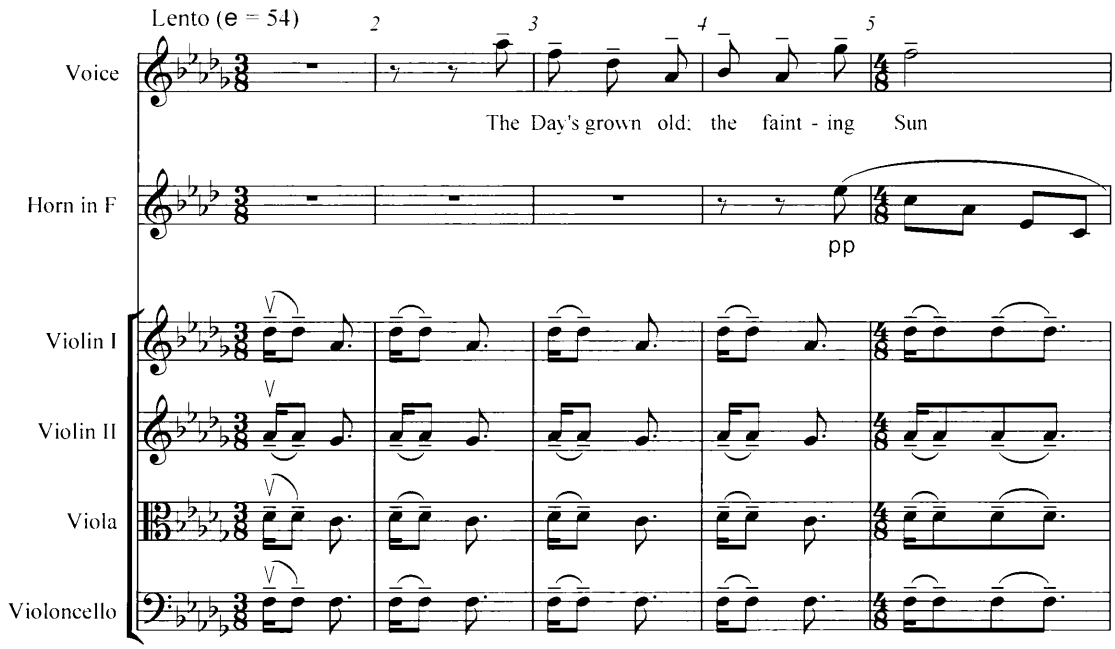
[6] Christopher Mark, *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution* (New York: Garland, 1995), 259.

[7] Arnold Whittall, *The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 81.

Peter Evans anticipates Whittall's view, suggesting that the repeating rhythmic figure in the strings "produces an effect of 6/16," but he argues that the vocal line "suggest[s] a leisurely 3/4" instead.[8] To trace Evans's 3/4 in the voice, one only need remove the first and third barlines. Although both interpretations hear "Sun" as a downbeat, Evans's meter perceives "Day's" as a downbeat, whereas Whittall's meter perceives "old" as a downbeat. Mark's analysis summarizes both of these interpretations, concluding that "whichever reading one agrees with (it seems to me that both are valid and that metre is ambiguous), it is the flexibility that is significant."[9]



EXAMPLE 1.1: *Serenade*, "Pastoral," mm. 1-5. The strings divide the measure into successive dotted-eighth-note attacks rather than three eighth-note attacks, whereas the voice does maintain eighth-note attacks, though they do not clearly group into a dotted-quarter note.

[8] Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (London: Dent, 1979), 91.

[9] Mark, 259.

The standard approach to thinking about meter assumes that an opening time signature represents the metric organization of the piece as a whole. Yonatan Malin's study of nineteenth-century lieder argues that analyses often perceive meter "as a singular, unchanging background" that can only change with the intervention of a new time signature.[10] He is skeptical of the privileged position that time signatures have occupied in analysis, and he argues that although "a piece or song may be notated in 3/4," several questions need addressing, such as "what is it that makes us hear it in 3/4?" or "how is this 3/4 different from any other 3/4?"[11] For Malin, time signatures act as a "prescriptive tool to guide performance," rather than as a guide for metric analysis. To talk about meter, "we need different tools [...] when we are engaged in description and analysis."[12]

The analyses of "Pastoral" bring this conventional association into question, implying that the opening time signature might function as a "background," rather than as an indicator of meter. And although Britten is by no means the first composer to treat time signatures in a different manner, the extent to which he adapts their use is compelling. Neither the strings nor the voice group eighth-note attacks into the dotted-quarter-note units implied by the 3/8 time signature. The surface rhythm of the strings maintains *two* dotted-eighth-note attacks instead of *three* eighth-note attacks (captured by Whittall's designation by the compound time signature 6/16). The voice's poetically stressed words of "old" and the "faint-" of "fainting" (that precede and follow the unstressed definite article) group eighth-note attacks into quarter-note units that cut across the barline, whether one

[10] Yonatan Malin, *Songs in Motion: Rhythm and Meter in the German Lied* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

[11] Ibid., 37.

[12] Ibid.

adopts Whittall's 4/8 or Evans's 3/4. Their analyses superimpose multiple meters, which brings into question conventional analytical claims that a piece can only contain a single meter at a time. As Evans emphasizes, the song moves on "two contrasted levels," but without further elaboration it is unclear what such a contrast involves or what is analytically at stake.[13]

Mark, Evans, and Whittall's analyses of "Pastoral" highlight the problem of dealing with meter when attacks on the musical surface do not align with the notational framework generated by the time signature. Theories of metric induction propose that meter is created by a wide range of musical information that may or may not be synchronized with the pulses implied by a time signature or its attending bar lines.[14] Drawing upon a wider array of musical information, such as word stress, articulation, melodic shape, and gestural parallelism, these analysts hear meters that cut across the notation.[15] Relating this experience back to the score requires a different metric set of resources.[16]

The following metric analysis of *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne's* "Death be not proud," which is expanded in detail in Chapter 4, demonstrates the need for a systematic and clear methodology when discussing meter (See Example 1.2, p. 9). Multiple authors have hinted

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[13] Evans, 99.

[14] For example, see Danuta Mirka, *Metric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart: Chamber Music for Strings, 1787-1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); also, see Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1983); and Joel Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: South Illinois University Press, 1986).

[15] This is not to say that the time signature and notation do not play a role in the experience of meter for a performer; however, one's experience as a listener is to some extent different.

[16] While these prominent analysts offer compelling metric evaluation, their comments only touch upon the opening four measures; no mention is made of Britten's 4/8 time signature in m. 5 and how it might impinge on their readings, nor is their any discussion on the role of meter beyond their short analytical vignettes.

at this passage's complex metric interaction. Peter Pears asserts that the song "starts regularly in 4/4, but moves into 3/4 against itself."[17] Lloyd Whitesell describes the passage as a "flexible interplay of duple and triple metric implications" where "spans of the [voice] overlie the seams of the [piano]."[18] The authors hear the passage differently from each other and from what is suggested by the notation. Pears hears a dotted-half-note pulse that conflicts with the notated 4/4 time signature, whereas Whitesell hears a metric tension between the voice and piano; however, neither goes into detail concerning the factors that underlie their hearings. Evans's analysis compares the omnipresent five-measure ground bass, which contains "internal metrical fluctuations" and "unpredictable timing of the accompanying chords," to the voice, which "savours more of a nineteenth-century rhetoric." The combination of the two serves to prevent "a ponderous squareness of phrase[.]"[19]

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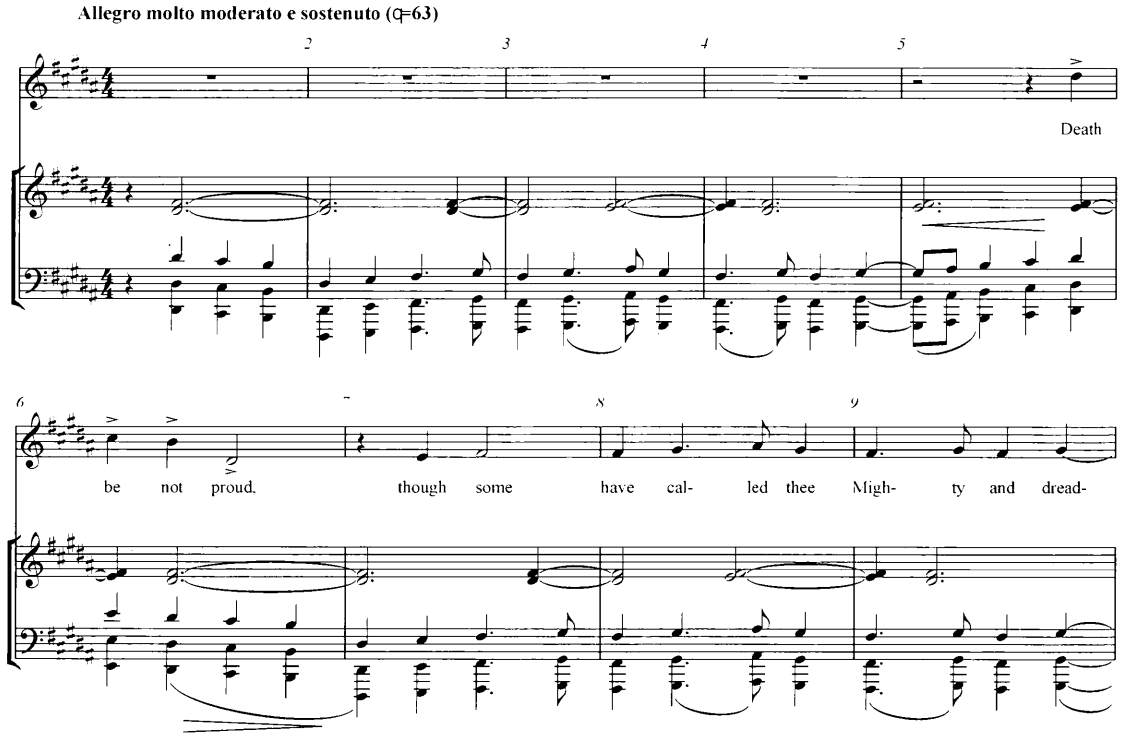
[17] Pears's reference to a non-notated 3/4 is no doubt influenced by the piano's repeating figure in mm. 2 to 4 (the dotted-quarter, eighth, and quarter attacks). Pears's use of abstract time signatures to represent meters not indicated by the notated time signature is similar to Evans's use in "Pastoral" from the *Serenade*. His observation that "Britten never allows his ostinatos to cling to the bar-line" is indicative of Britten's music of this period. Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music" in *Benjamin Britten, a commentary on his works from a group of specialists*, eds. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London: Rockliff publishing, 1952): 71.

[18] Lloyd Whitesell, "Love Knots: Britten, Pears, and the Sonnet," in *Rethinking Britten*, ed. Philip Rupprecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 57.

[19] In other words, Britten avoids the notational strictures of the song's 4/4 time signature. Or as Evans proposes: "the bass is so devised as constantly to run across into the following statement." Evans, 354.



EXAMPLE 1.2: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (1945), "Death be not Proud," mm. 1-9. Division of a twenty-quarter-note repeating phrase within a 4/4 time signature with a predominance of triply-grouped units.

Vicki Pierce Stroeher's analysis of this passage is the most systematic and metrically oriented of those considered.[20] She notes that the bass is "relatively free of the confines of the bar line."[21] While the first three piano notes "are in keeping with the 4/4 meter" (in that they act as a pickup to the subsequent leap), the agogically accented dotted-quarter-note attack in m. 2 sets up a rhythmic pattern that causes the meter to break down "due to the triple-meter structure of the pattern."[22] Shown in Figure 1.2, she visually demonstrates how her experience of meter differs from that of the score, comparing "implied groupings"

[20] See Vicki Pierce Stroeher, "Form and Meaning in Benjamin Britten's Sonnet Cycles" (PhD dissertation, University of North Texas, 1994).

[21] Ibid., 526.

[22] Ibid.

against the actual notation. Instead of switching time signatures from 3/4 to 2/4 or using an initial 5/4, Britten employs a single meter of 4/4 to express the passage: "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 [emphasis mine]."[23] Given its unusual metric properties, this piece warrants an extended examination, and will receive further analysis in Chapter 4.

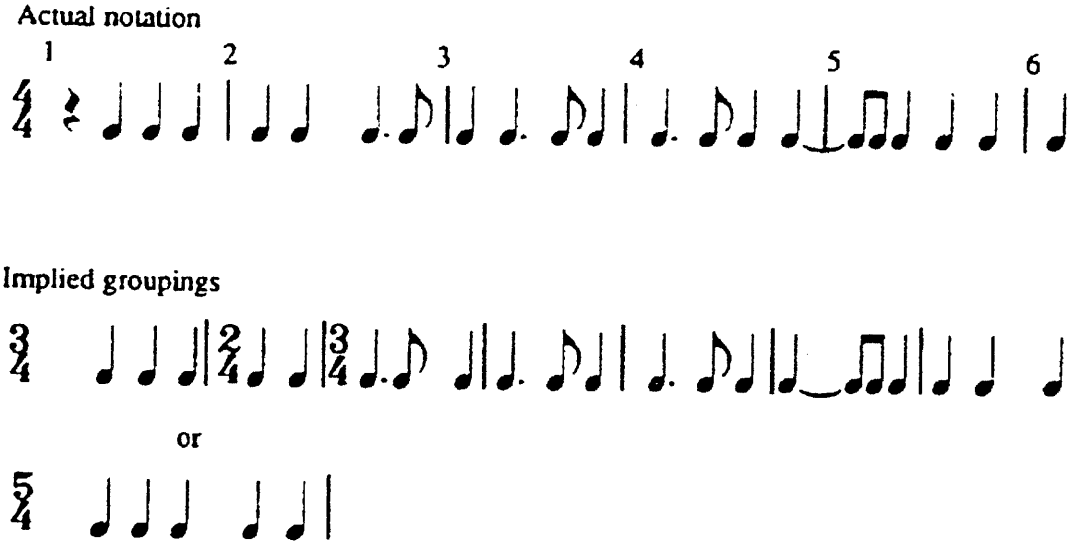


FIGURE 1.2: Stroeher's example 97 examines the notational versus implied metric groupings in "Death be not Proud."[24]

Three essential points fall out from these discussions. First, a time signature does not necessarily match the meter or meters experienced in Britten's music, suggesting that time signatures should not unilaterally determine meter. Second, texturally and registrally separate instrumental layers invite multiple metric interpretations, suggesting the

[23] Ibid., 531.

[24] Ibid., 530.

interaction of multiple meters.[25] And third, the terms and methods used by these authors are inadequate for capturing the types of metric conflict at play, and the effect that these conflicts have on musical and poetic interpretation.

Recent developments in metric theory provide us with resources for describing the generation of meter from the point of view of a listener, and, more importantly, how these simultaneous meters interact. These developments offer a more detailed account of syncopations, hemiolas, and other metric phenomena that do not align with the time signature or the notated barline. By drawing upon both recent metric theory and existing Britten scholarship, this project applies a methodologically tight and systematic model of meter to Britten's music of 1943 to 1945.

One representation of meter used throughout this dissertation is a modified version of the dot notation popularized by Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff in *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*.[26] In their excerpt from the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, shown in Example 1.3, there are six pulse layers that combine to form a single meter. A set of dots depicts a meter if pulses are equally spaced at each level, and any dot that appears at a slower pulse (i.e. further down) also appears at each faster level (i.e. at all levels above it). Note that four of these pulses occur within the span of a notated measure, which I refer to as local-level meter, and two occur beyond the span of a notated measure, at the hypermetric level.

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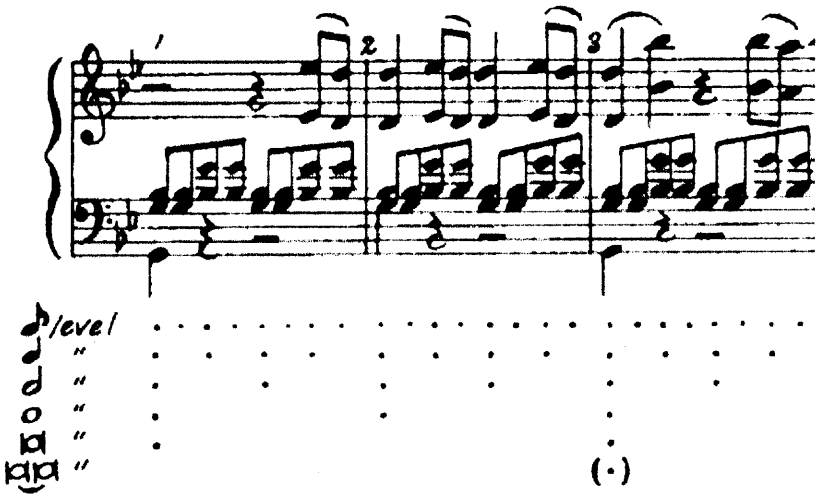
[25] The concept of stratification has been well documented in the work by Evans and Philip Rupprecht. See, in particular, Philip Rupprecht, "Tonal Stratification and Uncertainty in Britten's Music," *Journal of Music Theory* 40, no. 2 (1996): 311-346. They treat stratification from the perspective of tonal expectation; this dissertation explores the same concept but from the perspective of meter.

[26] Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1983).



EXAMPLE 1.3: Adapted Example 2.10 from Lerdahl and Jackendoff's *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*.[27]

The process of hearing pulses from attacks is called induction: upon hearing two attacks on the musical surface, one projects a third attack into the future at the interval defined by temporal distance between the first two attacks.[28] Danuta Mirka, in her seminal book *Metric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart*, outlines the process of induction that is to be employed here. According to Mirka, "if the third attack occurs on schedule, the projection is realized, and a hypothesis of regularity is confirmed on one metrical level. If not, the projection is discarded."[29] Thus, if a third time point occurs at the projected

[27] Lerdahl and Jackendoff, 23.

[28] For more on the concept of projection, see Christopher F. Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and John Roeder, "Interacting Pulse Streams in Schoenberg's Atonal Polyphony," *Music Theory Spectrum* 16, no. 2 (Autumn, 1994): 231-249.

[29] Danuta Mirka, *Metric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart: Chamber Music for Strings, 1787-1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33.

interval determined between the first and second, then a *pulse* is formed, as shown in Figure 1.3.[30]

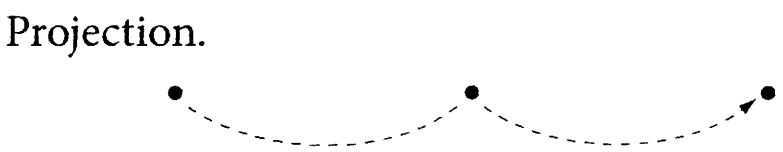


FIGURE 1.3: Danuta Mirka's representation of a pulse.[31]

Slower pulses may then be built upon this induced pulse either in groupings of two or three, forming a meter as shown in Figure 1.4. Here, a slower duple pulse is induced beneath the fastest pulse; it too contains the same dotted- to solid-line notation to demonstrate induction.

FIGURE 1.4: Danuta Mirka's demonstration of a single meter comprising two pulses formed from equidistant duration-less instants. Dotted arrows represent the process of induction to these pulses, and the solid-lined arrows represent induced pulses.[32]

Mirka borrows the concept of projection from Christopher Hasty's *Meter as Rhythm*, but incorporates it within Jackendoff's dot-notation form. At first, she notes, these two approaches appear incompatible, as the axiom behind Hasty's theory, in contrast to Jackendoff, "is not an attack point imagined as a durational instant but is instead a

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[30] The use of the term time point here follows the work of David Lewin and Richard Cohn, where a time point is a "duration-less instant," or a specific moment in time, as opposed to a series of durations. See David Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 29-30; and Richard Cohn, "Complex Hemiolas, Ski-Hill Graphs and Metric Spaces," *Music Analysis* 20, no. 3 (2001): 295-326.

[31] Mirka, 24.

[32] Ibid., 25.

gradually growing duration."[33] While Hasty's system deals with the inner workings of the process of inducing meter, Jackendoff's dot-notation represents a final-stage representation. In other words, the former deals with the process, the latter with the result: "It is no surprise that Hasty's theory of meter concerns the side of the processor's activity that is opposite to that dealt with by Jackendoff ... What is surprising is, rather, that Hasty's approach turns out to be compatible with Jackendoff's model of the metric process and that both approaches can [work together.]"[34] Mirka uses Hasty's approach as a basis to form a variety of metric readings, each of which can be represented as dot notation.

One further aspect of Mirka's approach is central to the formation of meter, and sets her work apart from the theory espoused by Jackendoff. There is no reference to accents, harmony, pitch or any other types of musical information--elements that are often invoked to create phenomenal accents in the initial phase of inducing pulses/meter. Phenomenal accents are frequently considered as the primary agents in forming meter, but in Mirka's system this is a *secondary* stage: "attack points of pitch events are not phenomenal accents. They do not weight in favor of one analysis over others but rather enable analyses to be elaborated in the first place ... phenomenal accents are effectuated not by attacks as such but by salient characteristics of sound events initiated at certain attacks."[35] Attacks on the musical surface, at regular intervals, enable pulses and consequently meters to form. Phenomenal accents then enable us to choose between these meters.

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[33] Ibid, 28. See Ray Jackendoff, "Musical Parsing and Musical Affect," *Music Perception* 9 (2), winter (1991): 199-229.

[34] Ibid., 29-30.

[35] Ibid., 38.

Richard Cohn has developed a system of labeling meters based on the relationship between pulses.[36] He classifies a meter as pure duple when the relationship between all pulses is a factor of two (for example, a meter with quarter, half, and whole pulses); as pure triple, when the relationship between all pulses is a factor of three (for example, a meter with triplet-quarter, half, and dotted-whole pulses); or as mixed, when there are both factors of two and three involved in the meter (for example, a meter with quarter, dotted-half, and dotted-whole pulses). Using this terminology, the meter in Ex. 1.3 (p. 12 above) is an instance of a pure duple meter.

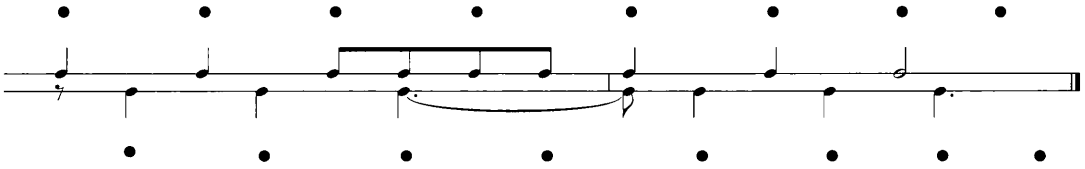
Pedagogically, meter is often classified under a binary classification of simple or compound. Under this system, 9/8 (eighth, dotted-quarter, and three-dotted-quarter notes) and 12/8 (eighth, dotted-quarter, dotted-half, and dotted-whole notes) time signatures are classified as compound meters; however, in the former, the relationships between the pulses are all triple, but in the latter, the relationships are not exclusively triple. The latter meter contains a mixture of both triple (between eighth and dotted-quarter notes) *and* duple (between the dotted-quarter, the dotted-half, and the dotted-whole notes). Cohn's classification provides a terminology for distinguishing these meters. The present study will refer to a pulse as *x*-pulse, where *x* signifies a quarter, half, whole and so forth, in contrast to the more cumbersome quarter-note pulse, half-note pulse, or whole-note pulse.

In the Mozart example above (Ex. 1.3, p. 12) the six pulses coordinate to form a single unified meter; however, when elements such as dynamics, agogic accent, texture, or phrasing, among others, create phenomenal accents that do not align, then multiple metric

[36] See Richard Cohn, "Dramatization of Hypermetric Conflicts in the Scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 15 no. 3 (1992): 22-40.

interpretations become feasible, as seen in Britten's "Pastoral" and "Death be not proud." These multiple interpretations often interact in one of two ways, generating either a displacement or grouping metric conflict.[37]

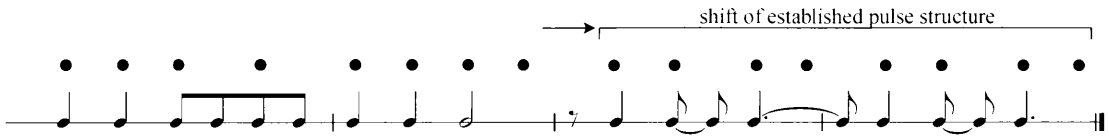
A displacement conflict, or syncopation, involves pulses that are misaligned with other pulses of the same periodicity; they can be either direct or indirect. In Example 1.4, two quarter pulses are initiated by the quarter-note attacks in the upper and lower lines. However, only the top line's quarter pulse aligns with the notated barlines; the lower pulse is displaced by an eighth. In this example, the conflict occurs at the same time, and it therefore generates a *direct* displacement conflict.



EXAMPLE 1.4: Hypothetical rhythmic passage that demonstrates a *direct* displacement conflict.

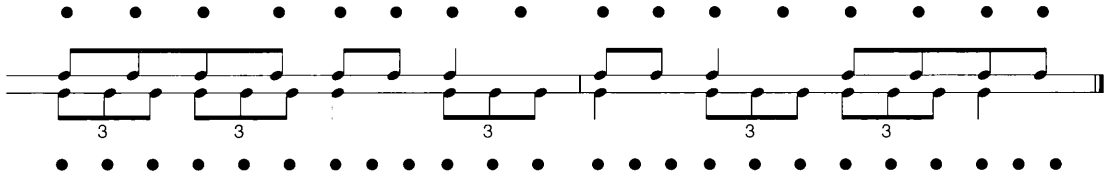
In Example 1.5, however, there is only one sounding part, not two. In mm. 3-4 of the example, this single sounding part is displaced from the meter established in mm. 1-2. This sort of displacement, in which a single sounding voice is shifted with respect to a previously established meter, is referred to as an *indirect* displacement conflict.

[37] Harald Krebs propagated the terms displacement and grouping dissonances that Peter Kaminsky originally distinguished in Peter Kaminsky, "Aspects of Harmony, Rhythm and Form in Schumann's *Papillons*, *Carnival* and *Davidsbündlertänze*," PhD diss., Eastman School of Music, 1989. See Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonances in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Malin uses the term metric conflict in place of dissonance, a term that I will employ in this dissertation.



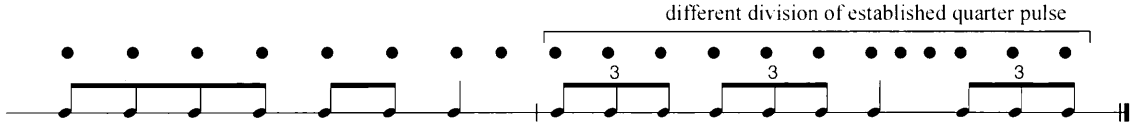
EXAMPLE 1.5: Hypothetical rhythmic passage that demonstrates *indirect* displacement conflict.

A grouping conflict involves pulses that have different spans that are neither multiples nor factors. The most commonly encountered instances of these types of conflicts are the familiar three-against-two hemiola: these are most commonly encountered as eighth versus triplet-eighth pulses or as slower hemiolas such as dotted-half versus half pulses. In Example 1.6, the upper line establishes an eighth pulse, which groups into a quarter pulse at the next deeper level; however, in the second line the same quarter pulse divides triply. The triplet and duplet eighths establish a *direct* grouping conflict.



EXAMPLE 1.6: Hypothetical rhythmic passage that demonstrates a *direct* grouping conflict.

In Example 1.7, the grouping conflict occurs in sequence, forming an *indirect* grouping conflict.



EXAMPLE 1.7: Hypothetical rhythmic passage that demonstrates an *indirect* grouping conflict.

To track the differences between pulses, the meters they are involved with, and any resulting grouping conflicts, I use Cohn's ski-hill graphs, which provide a visual representation of meter. Figure 1.5 shows three different meters based on duple or triple

relations, realized graphically as ski-hill graphs: a pure duple meter, a pure triple meter, and a mixed meter, respectively.[38] A ski-hill graph encodes the pulses of a meter, listed downward from slowest to fastest, and the relations among adjacent pulses, with leftward paths denoting *duple* relationships and rightward paths delineating *triple* relationships.

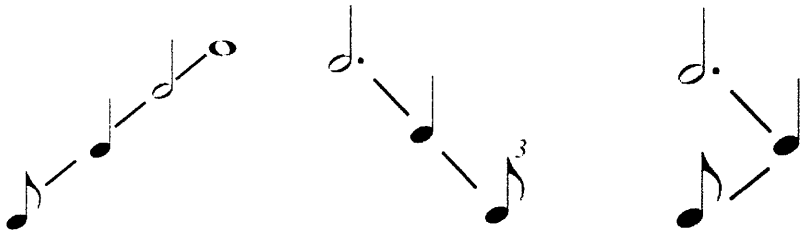


FIGURE 1.5: Three different ski-hill graphs that represent pure duple, pure triple, and mixed meters, respectively.

The pure duple meter contains four pulses (represented by the first ski-hill graph at Fig. 1.5): the slowest pulse, the whole pulse, is at the top, and the fastest pulse, the eighth pulse, is at the bottom; and, as the relationships between all adjacent pairs of pulses is duple, the graph contains only leftward paths down the ski hill. The slowest and fastest pulses in any meter are referred to as the span and unit pulses respectively. The pure triple meter comprises three pulses: the span pulse, the dotted-half pulse, is at the top, and the unit pulse, the triplet-eighth pulse, is at the bottom; and, as the relationships between adjacent pairs of these pulses is triple, the graph contains only rightward paths down the ski-hill. The mixed meter involves three pulses: the span pulse, the dotted-half pulse, is at the top,

[38] Ski-hill graphs are similar to dot diagrams, in that they specify all members active in a particular meter; however, rather than tracking those pulses synchronously with the music, they capture the metric activity of any given slice of time asynchronously and facilitate a less-visually cumbersome method of graphically representing grouping conflicts. For a more detailed discussion on ski-hill graphs, see Daphne Leong, "Humperdinck and Wagner: Metric States, Symmetries, and Systems," *Journal of Music Theory* 51, no. 2 (2007): 211-242.

and the unit pulse, the eighth pulse, is at the bottom. Within this wide range, the graph contains duple and triple relationships and therefore has both rightward and leftward paths.

Ski-hill graphs also encode grouping conflicts generated by multiple meters that share at least one common pulse, but that group or divide this common pulse differently. According to Cohn, the traditional view of a hemiola (a specific type of grouping conflict) occurs when "any successive or simultaneous conflict between a bisection and trisection of a single time-span."[39] But this definition can be expanded to include grouping conflicts that occur at two different levels of metric hierarchy. Cohn refers to these cases as a double hemiola, and those that involve more than two contrasting levels of metric hierarchy as a complex hemiola. Figure 1.6 illustrates ski-hill representations for traditional and double hemiolas.

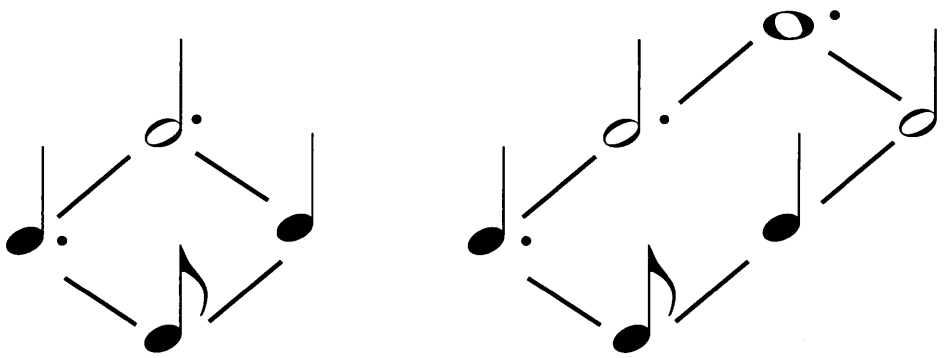
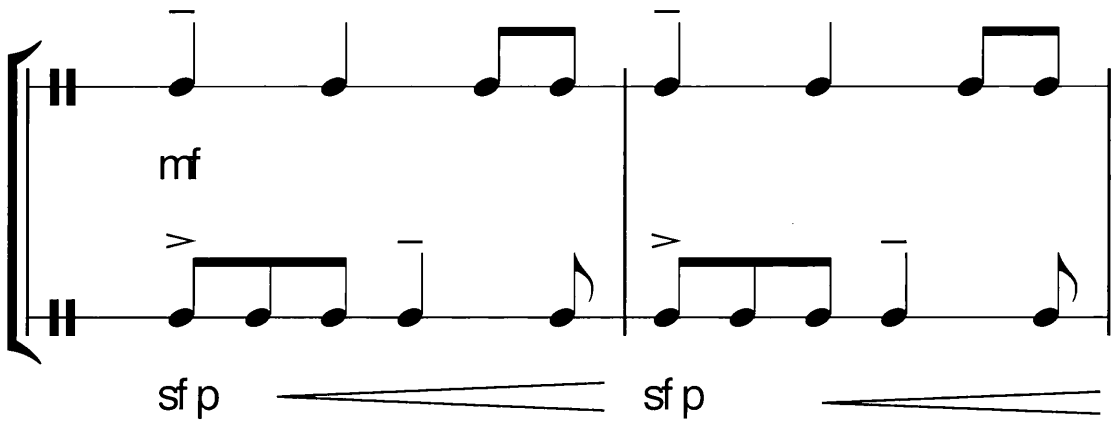


FIGURE 1.6: Two ski-hill graphs that demonstrate grouping conflicts between two meters: a hemiola then a double hemiola.

The first ski-hill graph demonstrates the juxtaposition of two mixed meters: one containing dotted-half, dotted-quarter, and eighth pulses, the other dotted-half, quarter,

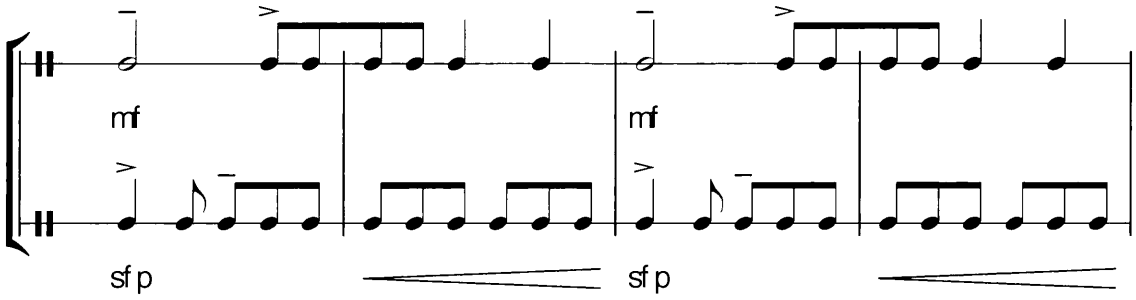
[39] Cohn, "Complex Hemiolas," 295.

and eighth pulses. They differ in that one divides the dotted-half pulse duply and the other divides the same pulse triply. One could imagine such a graph capturing the metric interplay in the following hypothetical passage shown in Example 1.8. The resulting conflict, a *direct* hemiola, is formed between the dotted-quarter and quarter pulses.



EXAMPLE 1.8: A hypothetical passage as source material for first ski-hill graph shown in Figure 1.6, demonstrating the conflict between two mixed meters.

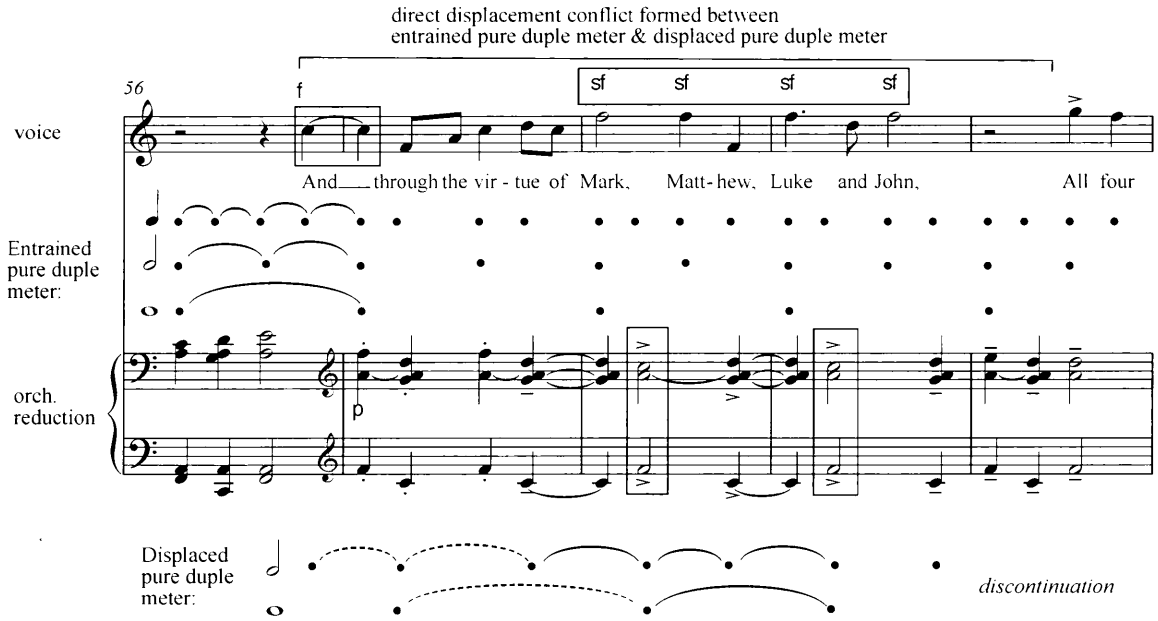
The second ski-hill graph of Fig. 1.6 contains two mixed meters with four pulses rather three in each meter, generating two grouping conflicts. A double hemiola forms between the dotted-half and half pulses and the dotted-eighth and quarter pulses.[40] One could imagine such a graph representing the following passage shown in Example 1.9.



EXAMPLE 1.9: A second hypothetical passage as source material for the second ski-hill graph of Fig. 1.6 (see p. 19), demonstrating a double hemiola.

[40] Note that there is no pathway between the dotted-half pulse and the quarter pulse in Figure 1.6; if there were, then the metric graph would contain three different meters rather than two with the same resulting double-hemiola conflict.

In order to ease into the complex metric dissonances that Britten used in the 40's, it will be pedagogically useful to harvest some simpler examples from his music of the previous decade. Consider Britten's *Our Hunting Fathers*, composed in 1936. Although not within the period of 1943-1945, these examples demonstrate Britten's treatment of meter at prior points in his career; this will also give the reader some sense of how he scaled up to the complex metric strategies that are the focus of the present study. Example 1.10 illustrates displacement conflict in a passage from *Our Hunting Fathers* of 1936, when Britten was still in his early 20's.



EXAMPLE 1.10: *Our Hunting Fathers*, "Rats Away," mm 56-60.

The dot notation beneath this example demonstrates the various possible projections. Broken dotted lines represent potential pulses that are not fully induced. Solid lines represent the same pulses that have been realized. There are two meters shown in the example. A pure duple meter is established prior to this excerpt; it aligns quarter, half, and whole pulses with the notated barline and time signature. The majority of dynamic (*sforzandos*) and agogic accents align with the half-note attacks in mm. 56-57; however, half-

note agogic accents on "And" (mm. 56 to 57), the two half-note attacks in the orchestra emphasized with performative accents (mm. 58 and 59), and stable triadic harmonies (compared to the dissonant harmonies that directly precede them), support a second meter displaced from the notated barline and established meter.[41] Combined, the duple meters conflict at both half- and whole-note levels, as can be seen by inspecting the dot diagrams beneath voice and piano respectively, forming a direct displacement conflict.

A second example, this time from the climax of "Rats Away," demonstrates an indirect grouping conflict. In the case of mm. 139-143 of "Rats Away," shown in Example 1.11, the orchestra and voice combined maintain a quarter pulse; however, the half- and whole-pulse groupings established in mm. 139-141 are problematized in mm. 142-143. In mm. 139-142, the whole pulse aligns with the measure and is reinforced through agogic accents in the orchestra and marcato accents in the voice (in m. 139) and the orchestra (mm. 139 and 140). In mm. 142 to 143, the voice groups the quarter pulse triply into a dotted-half pulse, and duply into a dotted-whole pulse. This dotted-half pulse is formed by the melodic parallelism of the voice's "Rats." Previously, this figure fell on the upbeat to mm. 140 and 141 at the distance of a whole-note interval; however, in mm. 142 and 143, the three "Rats" span the distances of a dotted-half interval (as shown by the dot diagram beneath the voice). Combined, the voice and accompaniment generate an indirect grouping conflict between mm. 139-141 and 142-143 at two different levels, between the half- and dotted-half pulses, and between the whole and dotted-whole pulses.

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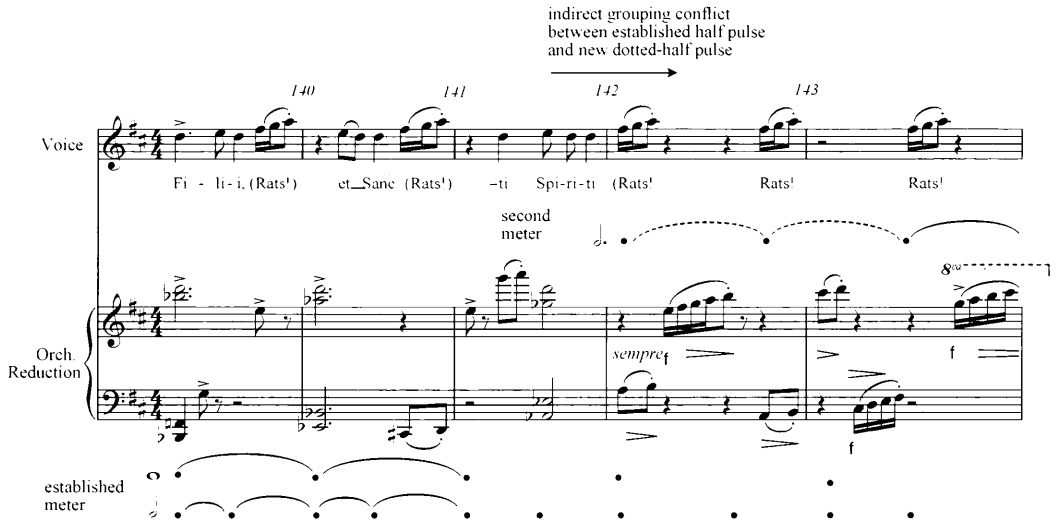
[41] Of course other pulses can be formed, such as a dotted-half pulse beginning at "And." But this is rejected because in order to induce such a pulse, salient phenomenal accents would need to reinforce the two subsequent dotted-half time points over the induced meter.

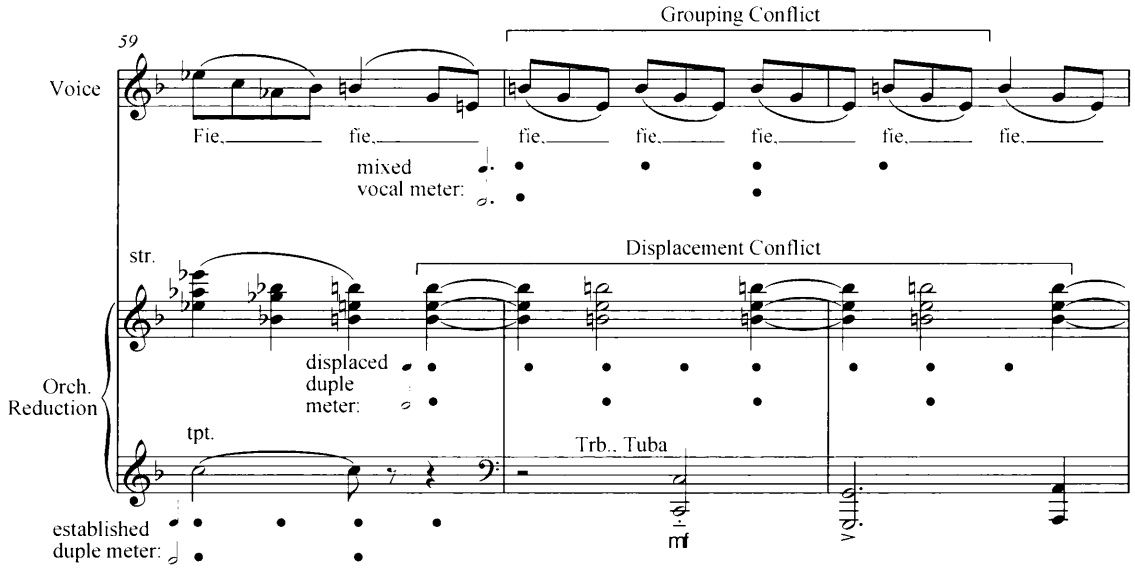


EXAMPLE 1.11: *Our Hunting Fathers*, "Rats away," mm. 142-145, grouping conflict demonstrated via dot diagram.

A final example from *Our Hunting Fathers*, this time from the song "Messalina," demonstrates the combination of both displacement and grouping conflicts.[42] The climax of the song, excerpted in Example 1.12, is reached after the text "if her monkey die, she will sit and cry" when the word "fie" is set multiple times to a variety of melismatic patterns. Compare m. 59 to the two measures that follow. In m. 59, the trumpet's agogic accent, the harmonic changes in the strings, and the two vocal "fie" melismas all support quarter, half and whole pulses aligned with the measure. In mm. 60-61, Britten employs both types of metric conflict. While the trombone and tuba maintain the meter established in m. 59, the strings initiate a displaced half pulse non-aligned with the measure, and the vocal utterance "fie," starting in m. 60, groups the eighth pulse triply into a dotted-quarter pulse (made explicit by Britten's choice of beaming) and then duply into a dotted-half pulse. The

[42] For an analysis of the unusual text, see Stephen Arthur Allen, "O Hurry to the Fêted Spot of Your Deliberate Fall" in *Rethinking Britten*, ed. Philip Rupprecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20-39.

combination of these pulses forms a mixed meter. This mixed meter forms a direct grouping conflict with both the duple meter and the displaced duple meter.



EXAMPLE 1.12: *Our Hunting Fathers*, "Messalina," mm. 59-61, grouping and displacement conflict combined.

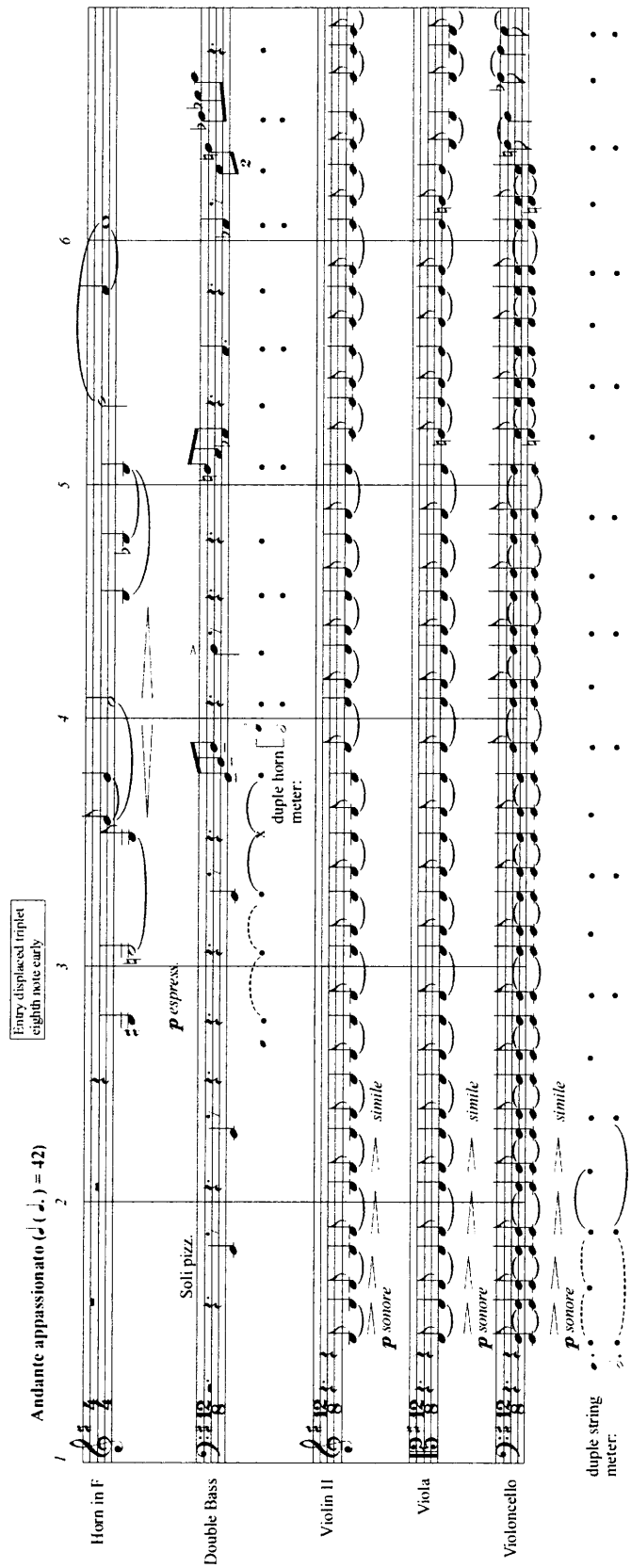
The difference between Britten's *Our Hunting Fathers* and the compositions considered in the present study is in the scope and complexity of the metric conflicts. In the earlier work, metric conflicts serve to briefly and abruptly disrupt an otherwise clear meter, and in general only one meter presides over the course of the piece. In the latter, metric conflicts are longer, bringing into question whether there is a simple overarching meter.

I shall now consider examples from 1943-1945, which demonstrate these longer metric conflicts. Example 1.13 (p. 27) excerpts the opening of "Elegy," from *Serenade*, in which the initial string chords form a meter that is offset from the notated 12/8 meter; the horn's entry and subsequent phrase maintain the same meter as the strings, but it aligns with the measure and is notated as 4/4, generating a direct displacement conflict with the strings. In this example, I have placed the double bass between the horn and the second violin, above

its traditional position at the bottom of the orchestral score.[43] This non-traditional instrumental arrangement shows the dual role that the *solo* double bass (an individual voice rather than a section, and the only instrument to perform *pizzicato*) plays in supporting two different meters: one associated with the horn and the other with the remaining upper strings.

Throughout mm. 1-6, the second violins, violas, and cellos repeat the same rhythmic figure, a dotted-quarter-note duration (in 12/8, quarter-note duration in 4/4) offset from the measure. Immediately, at the song's initiation, the introductory material is non-aligned with the notational framework. This repetition generates a dotted-quarter pulse. Over the course of the first three measures (excepting the final eighth note of m. 3), there is no distinction between these repetitions: they are harmonically static (an E-minor triad throughout), each attack is equally weighted with the same *diminuendo* dynamic profile (there is no variance in up-bow/down-bow patterning; and there are no performative accents). The lack of phenomenal accents in the upper strings leads to ambiguity as to whether the dotted-quarter pulse groups duply or triply; however, according to Lerdahl and Jackendoff's duple-grouping preference, a duple over triple grouping is preferred in the absence of other metric information.

[43] The first violin and voice are *tacit* during these measures.



EXAMPLE 1.13: *Serenade*, "Elegy," mm. 1-6.

The double bass supports the duple reading. Its three E_2 (sounding E_1) quarter-note *pizzicato* attacks function as anacruses to the upper strings' third, fifth, and ninth attacks, differentiating the endless stream of dotted-quarter (in 12/8) attacks. The subsequent arpeggiated G-major figure in m. 3, the accented quarter-note duration in m. 4, and the shift in harmony at the end of m. 3 (in the upper strings) continue to support the duple grouping of the dotted-quarter pulse into a dotted-half pulse, shown as a duple string meter below the cello in the example. While these pulses are implied by the time signature, they are displaced from the notational framework; instead of aligning with the beginning of the measure, the strings establish their dotted-half pulse on the sixth eighth-note time point of m. 1.[44]

Consider the role of the horn's entry in m. 2, which is notated at sounding pitch. The horn's $G^{\circledcirc}_3$ functions as an anacrusis to the agogically accented $G^{\bullet\bullet}_3$. Combined with the double bass, the quarter pulse (equivalent to a dotted-quarter pulse in 12/8) forms from consecutive quarter-note attacks: the $G^{\circledcirc}_3$ to $G^{\bullet\bullet}_3$ in the horn to the double bass's E_2 in m. 3 forms a quarter pulse. As shown in the dot diagram, this quarter pulse continues in m. 3 with the arpeggiated figure. Starting at m. 4, this pulse groups duply into a half pulse: the horn's $F^{\circledcirc}_4$ and B_3 in m. 4 coupled with the double bass's descending arpeggio in m. 5,

[44] In m. 5, the double bass's triplet figure and the change in harmony in the strings do not align with the dotted-half pulse (as established in prior measures). One could imagine hearing this as a brief syncopation, as the subsequent harmonic shift and tuplet double bass figure in m. 6 do align with the established meter.

subsequent A$^{\text{X}}_{2}$s in mm. 5 and 6, and the A$^{\text{X}}_{2}$ that begins the triplet rhythm in m. 6 all support a half pulse aligned with the established quarter pulse.[45]

To summarize, while a quarter pulse aligned with the notational framework is established during m. 3, it is not until m. 4 that this pulse groups duply, forming a duple horn meter. These two meters, juxtaposed and sustained and acoustically equivalent in terms of their pulses, generate a displacement conflict.[46] After the establishment of the strings' duple meter, the horn's duple meter enters a triplet eighth-note early and is maintained throughout mm. 1-6, with a slight syncopation generated by the horn's half-note durations in mm. 4 and 5.

I will now consider "Dirge," from *Serenade*, where metric conflict operates at the hypermetric level. In "Dirge," parallelism plays a vital role in establishing a hypermetric grouping conflict between the voice and the strings. The voice, shown in Example 1.14, groups an underlying one-measure pulse duply into a two-measure hyperpulse and then triply into a six-measure hypermetric pulse, forming a mixed hypermeter. Each six-measure unit (24 quarter-note span in the example) is melodically and rhythmically parallel, with a slight alteration in m. 9 due to syllabic placement.

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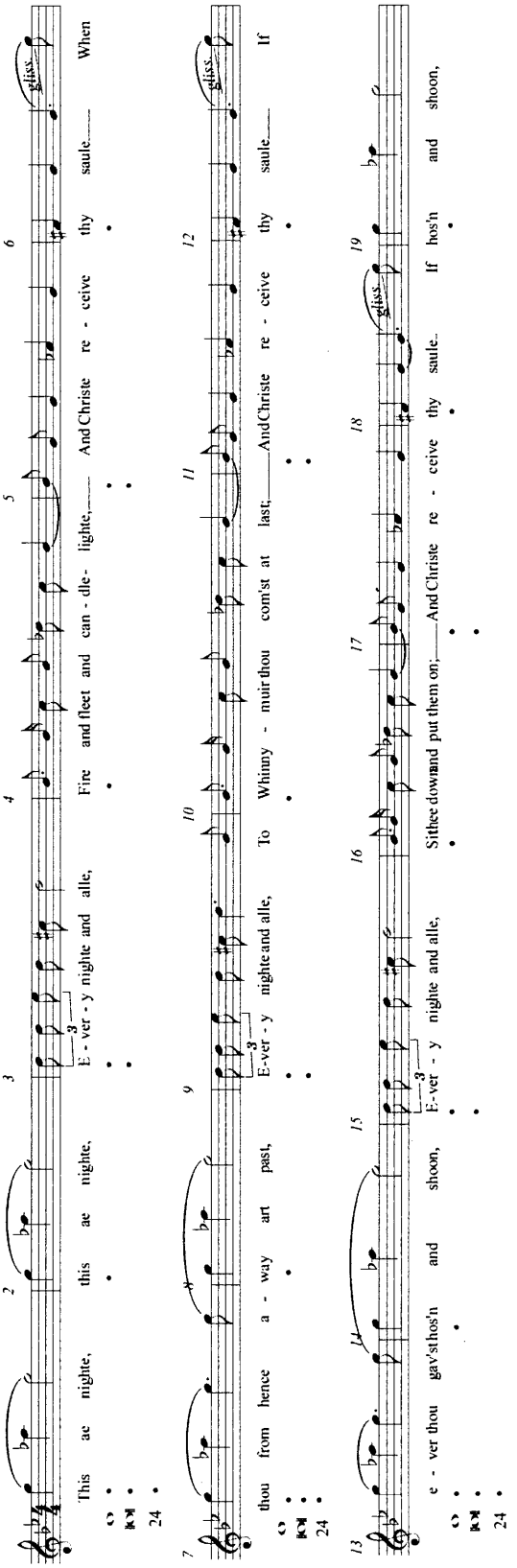
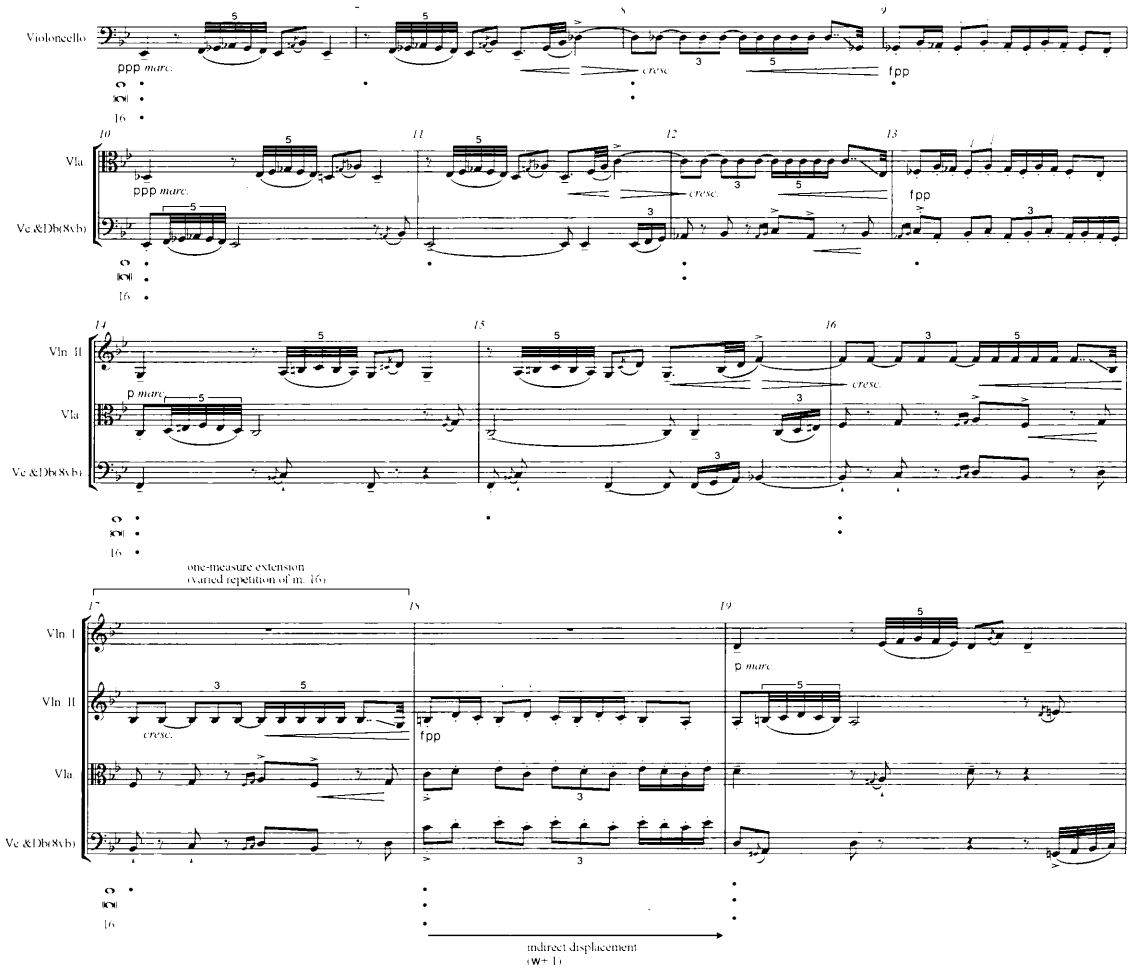
[45] One might ask why a half pulse does not begin before m. 4. The issue is that neither the horn's nor the double bass's attacks support a half pulse. The horn, in m. 3, has a tied half note to an eighth note, overwriting the point where a half pulse might be established, and at the same point the double bass has a rest.

[46] It is not a grouping conflict as the quarter and dotted-quarter pulses and half and dotted-half pulses are equivalent.



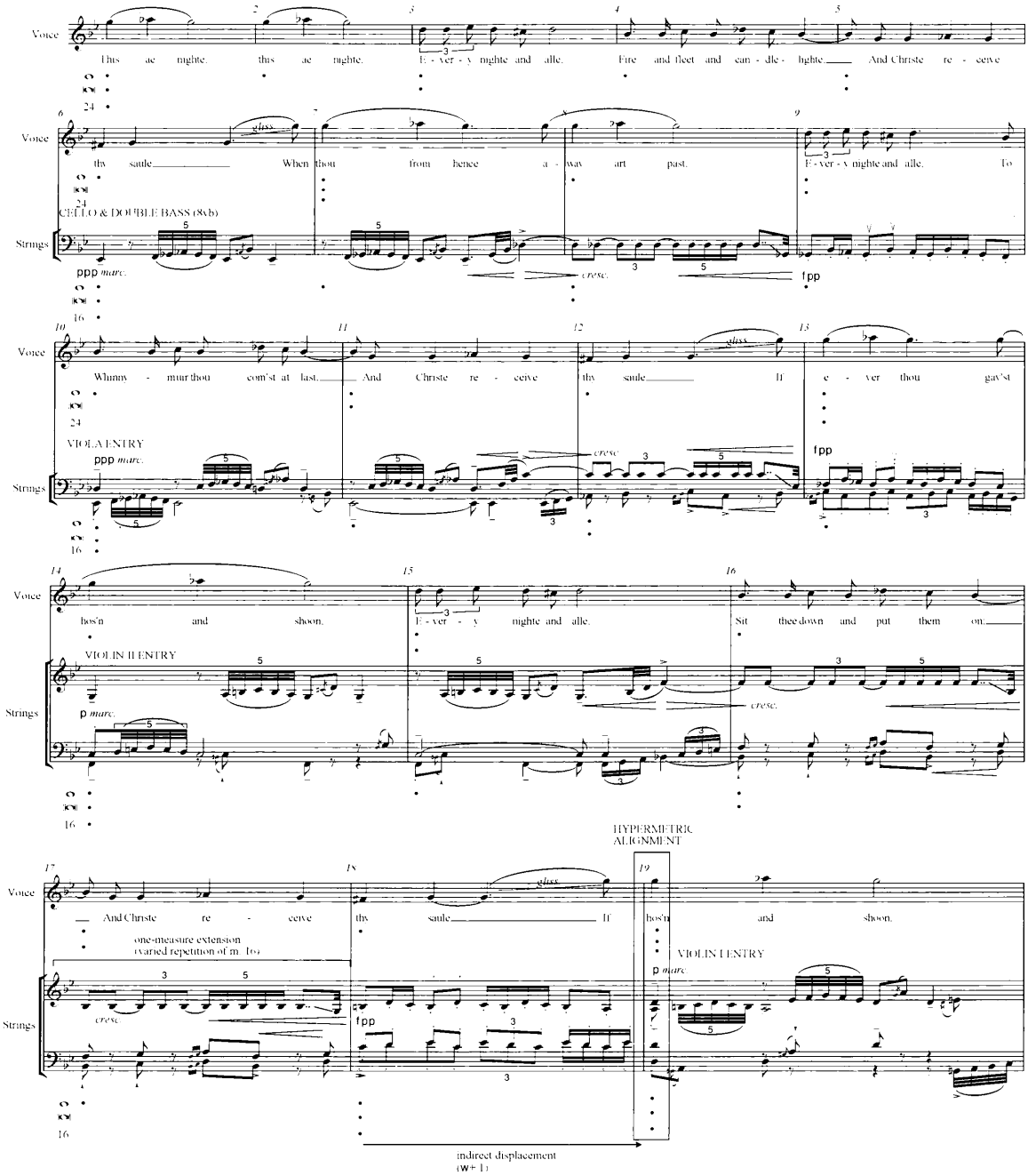
EXAMPLE 1.14: *Serenade,* "Dirge," voice, mm. 1-19.

Shown in Example 1.15, the staggered introduction of string voices at four-measure intervals forms a large-scale fugue. As the fugue unfolds, a one-measure pulse groups duply into a two-measure hyperpulse and duply again into a four-measure hyperpulse, forming a pure duple hypermeter; however, what begins in m. 14 as a standard four-measure repetition expands to five measures. This extra measure is a transposed repetition of m. 17. It is subsequently followed, in m. 19, by the expected fourth fugal entry in the first violins. The delay generates an indirect hypermetric displacement, where the pure duple hypermeter is displaced by a measure.



EXAMPLE 1.15: *Serenade*, "Dirge," strings, mm. 6-19.

Example 1.16 compares the hypermeters generated by the voice and strings in mm. 1-19. Note, particularly, the difference between the two dot diagrams, shown beneath their respective staves. The entrance of the strings does not align with the slower pulses of the voice's mixed hypermeter; rather, it enters a measure before the next downbeat of the voice's next pulse. The non-alignment between voice and accompaniment is maintained until mm. 17 and 18, where the fourth fugal entry in m. 19 (via the inserted measure of m. 17) aligns with strings for the first time. Unlike the metric conflicts in *Our Hunting Fathers*, "Dirge" demonstrates how Britten sustains metric conflict over a protracted period, saving the point of resolution to heighten the boundary between the poem's stanzas.



EXAMPLE 1.16: *Serenade*, "Dirge," mm. 1-19. Interaction of pure-duple hypermeter generated by the string fugue and the mixed hypermeter generated by the voice.

The final example comes from Britten's folksong setting of "Come you not from Newcastle?" composed prior to the 21st February 1946. What is unique about this song, in comparison to many of his folksong settings, is the metric reframing of the folksong melody in the song's second half. The text of the song is repeated, and the division between

iterations is marked by an indirect hypermetric grouping conflict. The text is set twice, in the two twenty-four-measure sections shown in Figure 1.7. The first section, mm. 1-24, subdivides duply into two twelve-measure spans, triply into four-measure spans, duply into two-measure spans, and duply again into individual measures, forming a pure duple hypermeter. The second section, mm. 25-48, subdivides duply into two twelve-measure spans, duply into six-measure spans, duply into three-measure spans, and triply into individual measures, forming a mixed hypermeter.

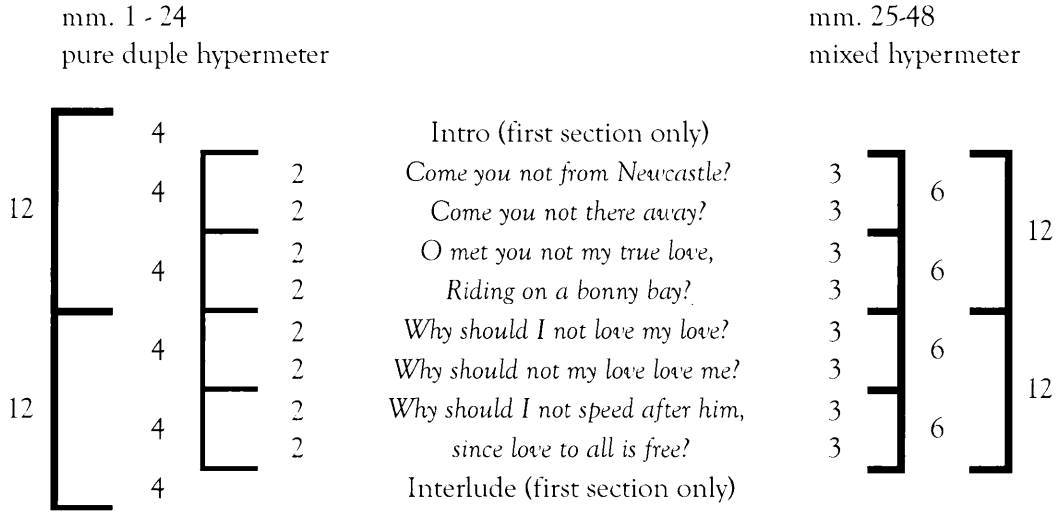
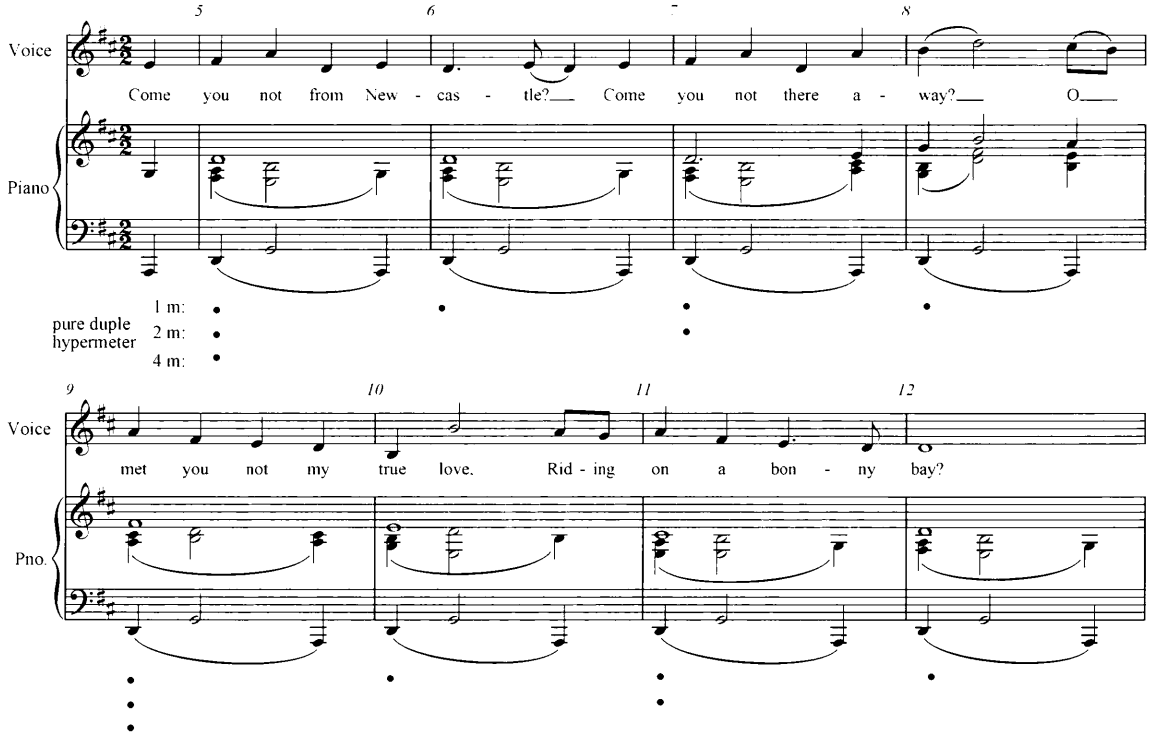


FIGURE 1.7: Hypermeters in mm. 1-24 and 25-48 of Britten's "Come you not from Newcastle."

As Britten uses a "found" melody in his folksong settings, one might imagine that the only avenue for fresh compositional ideas is in the accompaniment. In "Come you not from Newcastle?" however, rather than alter the pitch or rhythmic structure of the melody itself, he inserts salient pauses that are filled with a one-measure piano gesture. Example 1.17 presents the initial accompanimental framing of the folksong melody in mm. 5-12, and Example 1.18 displays the subsequent shift in hypermeter in mm. 25-30.[47] In both

[47] Both of these excerpts are representative of their respective sections.

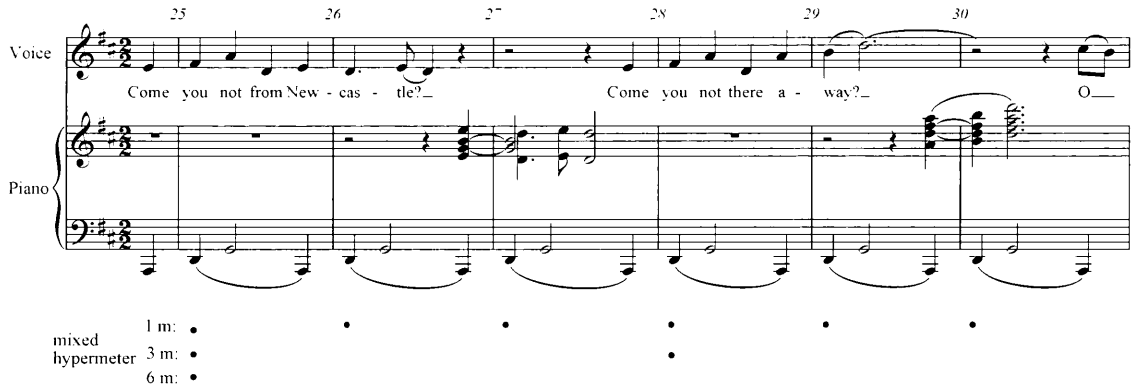
examples, dot diagrams illustrate the different hypermetric groupings of the one-measure pulse. In the first section, the one-measure pulse groups duply via melodic parallelism between mm. 5 and 7 and the setting of each line of text to a two-measure hypermetric pulse. This pulse then groups duply again into a four-measure hyperpulse, via the return to tonic harmony in m. 9 after the subdominant to dominant motion in m. 8, forming a duple hypermeter representative of the first section as a whole.



EXAMPLE 1.17: "O Come you not from Newcastle?" establishment of duple hypermeter.

In the second section, shown in Example 1.18, the same melodic elaboration connects "Come you not from Newcastle?" to "Come you not there away?" This time, however, the insertion of a vocal rest between "Newcastle?" and "come" leads to a triple grouping of the one-measure pulse. The piano's chordal interjections in mm. 27 and 30 also help delineate

this new three-measure unit, again via parallelism.[48] The difference in grouping between these two different settings in their respective sections generates an indirect hypermetric double hemiola. Both meters share twelve-measure hypermeter but they differ in their division with four versus six-measure hypermeter pulses and two versus three-measure hypermetric pulses. Additionally, the piano's lower voice contains a repeating agogic accent on the second beat of each measure that generates a subtle displacement conflict at the local-level throughout the song regardless of the hypermetric grouping.



EXAMPLE 1.18: Shift to mixed hypermeter in "O Come you not from Newcastle?"

Chapter 1 has examined how Britten scholarship has highlighted several compositions during 1943-45 as metrically interesting, yet their analyses demonstrate a need for a more thorough investigation. Through the adaptation of recent advances in metric theory via the work of Richard Cohn, Yonatin Malin, and Danuta Mirka, this chapter examined how Britten employs sustained metric conflicts in several pieces from the 1943-45 period and how these compare to the brief uses in 1936's *Our Hunting Fathers*: local-level displacement conflict in "Elegy," hypermetric displacement grouping conflict in "Dirge," and large-scale formal salient hypermetric grouping conflict in "Come you not from Newcastle." In

[48] A displacement conflict is weakly present in the accompaniment and is generated by the half-note agogic accent on the second quarter-note time point of each measure.

Chapter 2, I will consider how Britten employs metric conflict across larger spans, marking specific moments in the text. Britten sets up and highlights these moments by preparing certain elements of the metric conflict in earlier passages. Chapter 2 focuses on how he sets up and realizes these conflicts.

CHAPTER TWO
Britten and Metric priming

Chapter 1 established a conceptual framework for the induction of meter and hypermeter, their categorization as duple, triple, or mixed, and a terminology to deal with resulting conflicts between multiple meters employed at the same time (direct) or one after the other (indirect) in grouping or displacement forms. Examples from Britten's early vocal music demonstrated straightforward metric devices employed at the beginning of a piece. His use of metric conflict, however, is not only limited to opening sections, as demonstrated by the analysis of "O come you not from Newcastle," but it also plays a strategic role later, at structurally important junctures. These later metric conflicts are of particular interest because Britten foreshadows them in earlier sections. This anticipation invites hermeneutic interpretation of the texts that he set.

Peter Desain and Henkjan Honing introduce the term metric priming in their paper "The formation of rhythmic categories and metric priming."[49] Through a psychological study involving twenty-nine participants, they demonstrate that when subjects are provided with an initial duple or triple meter, a later stimulus of the same meter is more easily and readily identified. Several music scholars have noted a similar process. Harald Krebs, in "Some Extension of the Concepts of Metrical Consonance and Dissonance," describes how a future metric conflict can be prepared in a prior stable passage.[50] He states, "while two attacks do not suffice to determine a level [pulse], they do hint at one and can thus be used

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[49] Peter Desain and Henkjan Honing, "The formation of rhythmic categories and metric priming," *Perception* 32 (2003): 341-365.

[50] Harald Krebs, "Some Extension of the Concepts of Metrical Consonance and Dissonance," *Journal of Music Theory* 31, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 99-120.

to foreshadow a coming dissonant level within a consonant context."[51] David Temperley also explores a similar concept, this time in relation to hypermeter.[52] He notes that certain musical factors can be "carefully prepared" by the composer, leading to what he refers to as a "gradual hypermetric shift."[53] In "Extra Measures and Metric Ambiguity in Beethoven," [54] Andrew Imbrie argues that given two conflicting metric interpretations at the outset of a piece, a composer can strategically return to them later and "favor one or the other side of the contradiction, thereby helping to satisfy the dramatic or formal requirements of the music."[55] Alternatively, a perceptively weak change in meter may occur early on in a piece that "may be difficult to accept per se as the vehicle for the accomplishment of the metric shift"; however, it can function as "preparation of the ear for the acceptance of the real shift soon to follow."[56]

This chapter examines sections from "Pastoral," from *Serenade* (1943), *Festival Te Deum* (1944), and "Old Joe has Gone Fishing" from *Peter Grimes* (1943-45) that demonstrate the role that metric priming plays in his music. Following the work of Krebs, Temperley, and Imbrie, I use the term metric priming to refer to a passage, early in a piece, that contains rhythmic material that conflicts with its surrounding metric context but that returns at a

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[51] Krebs, "Some Extensions," 110.

[52] David Temperley, "Hypermetrical Transitions," *Music Theory Spectrum* 30, no. 2 (2008): 305-325.

[53] Ibid., 309.

[54] Andrew Imbrie, "Extra Measures and Metrical Ambiguity in Beethoven," *Beethoven Studies*, ed., Alan Tyson (New York: Norton, 1973): 51.

[55] Ibid., 51.

[56] Ibid., 65.

later point realizing its metric potential. Thus the earlier passage metrically primes the listener for its later fruition.

The following analysis compares Britten's setting of the first and last stanzas of "Pastoral" from the song cycle *Serenade*, briefly considered in Chapter 1. Charles Cotton's text, shown in Figure 2.1, describes the lengthening of shadows during the setting of the sun. In the first stanza, the sun has almost set; yet, like a horse pulling a chariot in the final furlong, the sun appears to struggle in its home stretch. In the second stanza, a series of small objects (brambles, mole hills, and ants) project larger shadows as the sun sets. In the third stanza, the shadows grow further, illustrated by a young bird that appears three times its actual size, like a mighty Greek giant. And, in the final stanza, the shadows complete their expansion as the sun sets in the west, leading the world into slumber as night falls.

The day's grown old; the fainting sun
Has but a little way to run,
And yet his steeds, with all his skill,
Scarce lug the chariot down the hill.

The shadows now so long do grow,
That brambles like tall cedars show;
Mole hills seem mountains, and the ant
Appears a monstrous elephant.

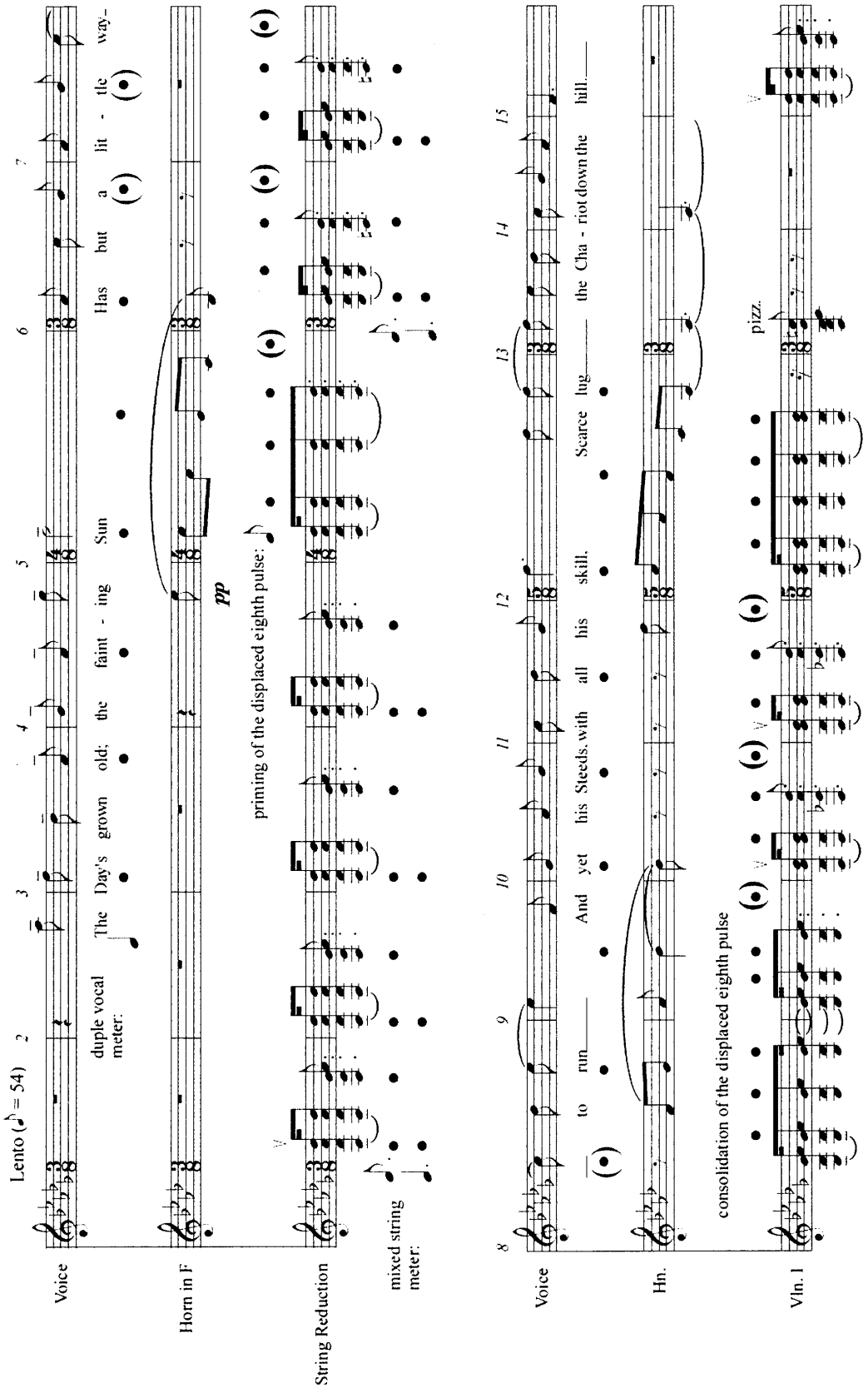
A very little, little flock
Shades thrice the ground that it would stock;
Whilst the small stripling following them
Appears a mighty Polypheme.

And now on benches all are sat,
In the cool air to sit and chat,
Till Phoebus, dipping in the west,
Shall lead the world the way to rest.

FIGURE 2.1: Charles Cotton's "Pastoral."

The lengthening of shadows is essentially the displacement of images. Across the first three stanzas, these displacements become longer before transforming into night in the fourth stanza. Britten encapsulates this process of expanding shadows in his setting of the first stanza: the lengthening of shadows is musically realized as a displaced meter whose initial appearance is short, but over the course of the stanza grows longer and longer. It is in the final stanza that the displaced meter, primed throughout the opening, is fully realized, mirroring the setting of sun through the completed expansion of the shadow.

Britten's setting of the first stanza, shown in Example 2.1, offers two different meters in the strings. In mm. 1-4, 6-7, and 10-11, the strings generate and maintain dotted-eighth and dotted-quarter pulses (shown in dot diagram form beneath the string reduction): the faster dotted-eighth pulse is generated by attacks at dotted-eighth-note intervals and changes of harmony. The rhythmic and harmonic parallelism of mm. 2, 3, and 4, which repeat m. 1, groups this dotted-eighth pulse into a dotted-quarter pulse (and again in mm. 6-7 and 10-11). This interpretation is supported by the "strong beat early" preference rule.



EXAMPLE 2.1: *Serenade*, "Pastoral," mm. 1-15, priming of the displaced eighth pulse.

Measures 5, 8, 9, and 12, however, suggest an alternative metric reading of the strings. This alternative reading contains patterns of accent that are at variance with the notated meter and that are phenomenally salient enough to offer a competing meter, which has been aptly termed a "shadow meter" by Frank Samaratto.[57] Compare the strings in m. 5 with mm. 1-4. In mm. 1-4, the second string attack is agogically accented compared to the preceding sixteenth note that aligns with the dotted-eighth pulse. These attacks do not fit with the given metric interpretation, sounding like a brief syncopation instead. In m. 5, however, this displaced eighth gains additional salience through two further attacks at the distance of an eighth; the shadow lengthens, priming a displaced eighth pulse (shown via dot notation above the strings in m. 5). This interpretation is supported by a preference for longer durations. How one assigns meter in this passage depends on how one weighs these preferences.

Given the priming of the displaced eighth pulse in m. 5, the subsequent repetition of the rhythm of mm. 1-2 in mm. 6-7 can be heard in two ways: either as a return of the dotted-eighth and dotted-quarter meter of mm. 1-4 with the displaced eighth pulse of m. 5 relegated to the edge of perception; or, one can project the displaced eighth pulse, established in m. 5, forward into these measures (as captured by the dot diagram). In this latter case, the initial string attacks in mm. 6 and 7 are heard as anacruses to the agogically-accented second attacks. Even if one continues to maintain a hearing of mm. 5-7 through the metric lens of the strong-beat-early meter, established in mm. 1-4, the strings in mm. 8-

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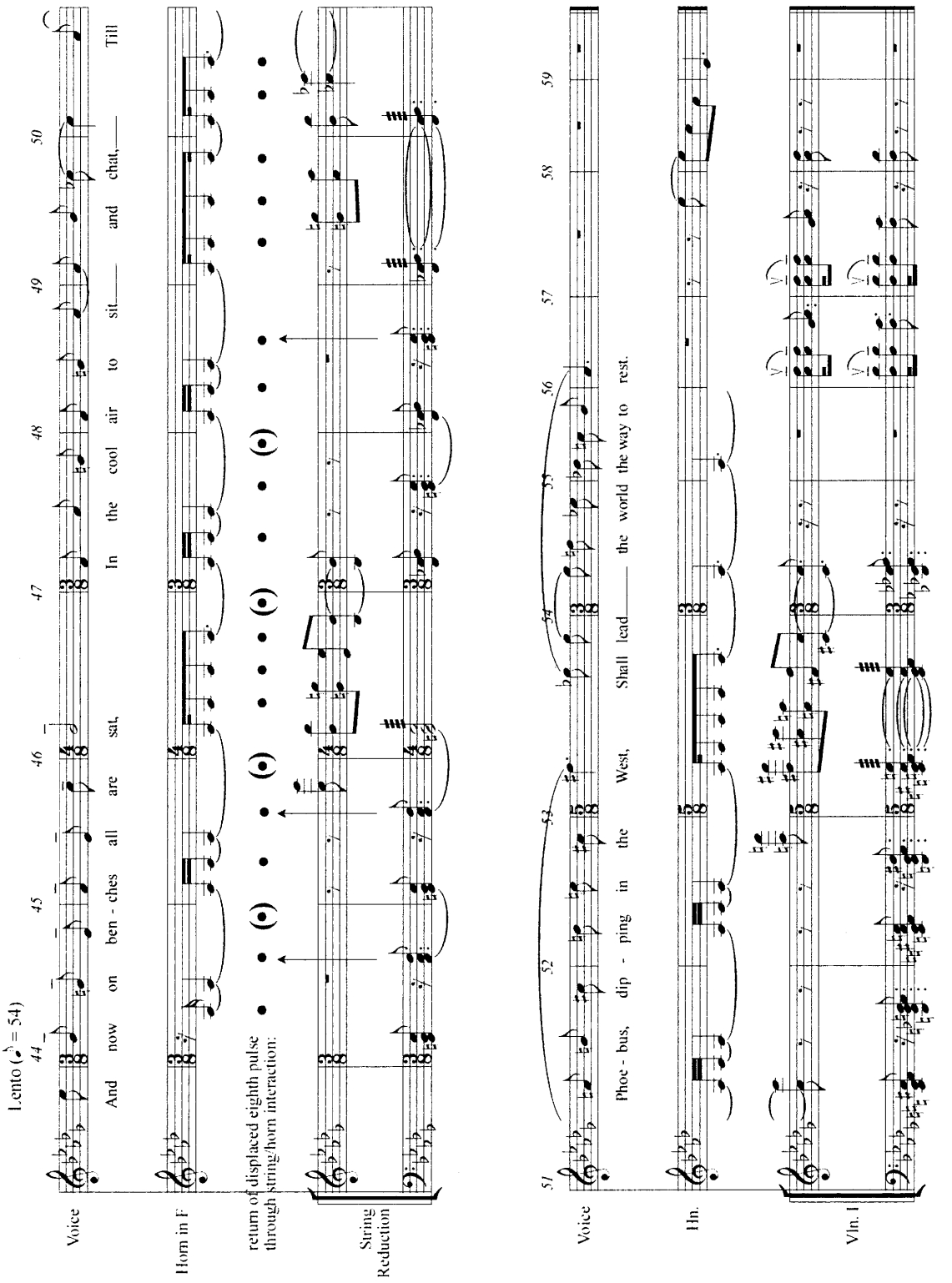
[57] Frank Samarotto, "Strange Dimensions: Regularity and Irregularity in Deep levels of Rhythmic Reduction" in *Schenker Studies II*, eds. Carl Schachter and Hedi Siegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 222-238.

9 return to and further extend the shadow through the displaced eighth pulse of m. 5. This process lengthens again in m. 12.

Over the course of Britten's setting of the first stanza, the displaced meter lengthens and gains further aural traction. Flipping metric allegiance results in the trading of grouping for displacement conflict as the voice's quarter pulse is displaced from the string's quarter pulse. He strategically places the moments where one might flip allegiance, punctuating the ends of each of the first stanza's lines: on "Sun" of line 1, "to run" of line 2, and "skill" of line 3.

Britten varies the opening material in his setting of the final stanza, shown in Example 2.2. Given that the strings no longer initiate the displaced eighth pulse, it appears that the shadow meter is absent. Instead, in mm. 44-45, 47-48, and 51-52, he omits the second attack from the original three attacks per measure, thus eliminating the motivation for hearing an eighth pulse, and so a dotted-eighth pulse is induced by default. In mm. 46, 49-50, and 53, the lower strings abandon the repeating displaced eighth attacks from the first stanza in favor of a string *tremolando,* which supports the quarter pulse of the voice. And in mm. 46, 49-50 and 53-54, the upper strings perform the horn's interjections from the setting of the first stanza, supporting the vocal meter. However, the most salient difference between the settings of these two stanzas is the role of the horn. The horn supplies the missing "middle" attacks previously present in the strings. The horn combines these missing attacks (in mm. 44-45, 47-48, and 51-52) with the missing attacks during the string *tremolando* measures (in mm. 46, 49-50, and 53) into one long pedal tone.



EXAMPLE 2.2: *Serenade*, "Pastoral," mm. 44-59, closing section of *Pastoral* and return of the displaced eighth pulse.

Having been primed to the displaced eighth pulse in the first stanza, it is possible to quickly induce to the same pulse via the combination of the horn's agogically-accented durations and the second lower string attack (in mm. 44, 45, 47, 48, 51 and 52). The interplay of their attacks generates the displaced eighth pulse (shown between the strings and horn in the example, with arrows showing the role of the lower strings in the formation of displaced eighth pulse). The major difference between the two stanzas is that here, the shadow meter can be induced from beginning to end in contrast to the lengthening passages of induced meter in the first stanza.

Britten's setting of the opening stanza contains two competing string interpretations, with the displaced eighth pulse gradually becoming more prominent throughout, evoking the setting sun through the lengthening of shadows. In the final stanza, the displaced eighth pulse, and resulting displacement conflict (this time between voice and horn / lower strings), is supported and maintained throughout, a metric analogy to the setting of the sun and the completed expansion of the shadow. What begins as a process of lengthening shadows in the first three stanzas is transformed into night as the shadows engulf the day.

In *Festival te Deum* (1944), composed for organ and chorus and based upon the liturgical text of the same name, Britten uses priming as a means of marking structural moments in the text. The setting of the first thirteen lines, shown in Figure 2.2, is metrically unstable; there is no consistent uniform meter formed between organ and chorus. While a continually tolling bell-like organ (set with a 3/4 time signature) provides some stability, a rhythmically and metrically fluctuating plainchant-like choral line prevents a single meter from stabilizing. At the setting of "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ," the

text's fourteenth line, there is a sudden stabilization of meter through the back and forth between two distinct meters. This analysis traces how Britten prepares these two distinct meters during the initial thirteen-line setting.

We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting.
To thee all Angels cry aloud the Heav'ns and all the Powr's therein.
To Thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry,
Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth!
Heav'n and earth are full of the majesty of Thy Glory.

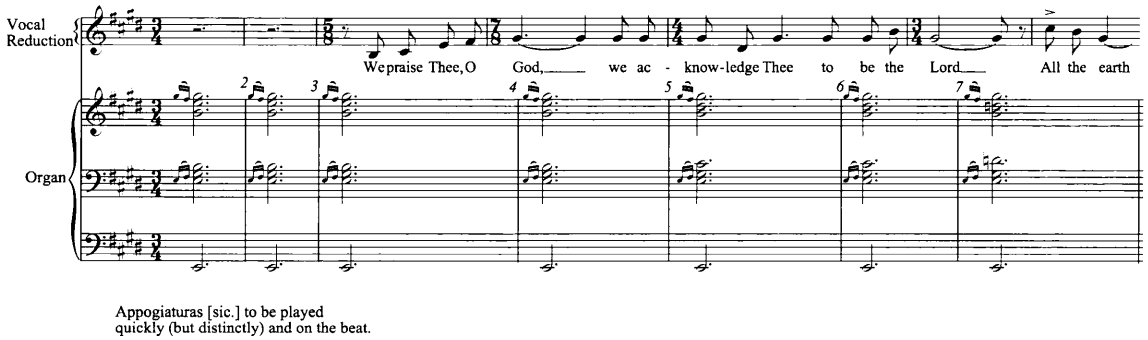
The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee.
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise Thee.
The noble army of Martyrs praise Thee.
The holy Church thro'out all the world doth acknowledge Thee.
The Father of an infinite majesty
Thine honourable, true, and only Son;
Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.
When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.
When Thou hads't overcome the sharpness of death, Thou did'st open the Kingdom of Heav'n to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.
We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge.
We therefore pray Thee Help Thy servants. Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.
Make them to be number'd with Thy Saints in glory everlasting.

O Lord save Thy people and bless Thine heritage.
Govern them and lift them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify thee and we worship Thy name ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let Thy mercy lighten upon us, As our trust is in Thee.
O Lord in Thee have I trusted let me never be confounded.

FIGURE 2.2: Te Deum Text, English translation used by Britten.

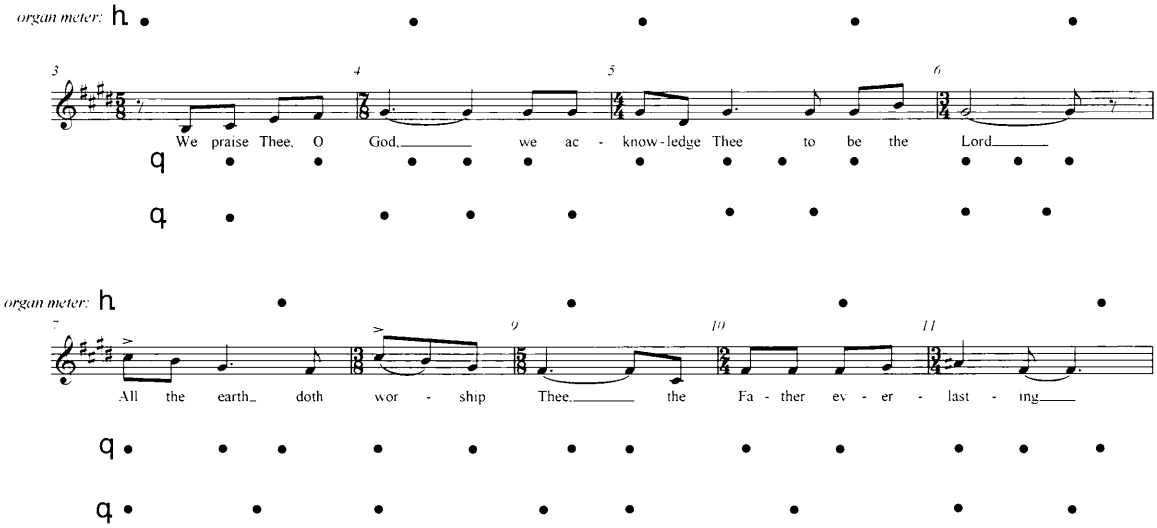
Throughout the first half of *Festival te Deum*, the organ's repeating bell-like dotted-half pulse conflicts with the chorus's metrically agnostic plainchant line, as shown in Example 2.3. Anchored around the pitch $G^{\sharp}_{4}$, the voice's agogic accents do not align with the organ: the placement of "God" falls an eighth note before the organ's attack, and the placements of "Thee" and "Lord" occur a quarter note after their respective organ attacks. While a stable meter does not emerge from the opening interaction of chorus and organ, Britten primes two different meters in the voice.



EXAMPLE 2.3: *Festival te Deum*, opening.

Example 2.4 excerpts the chorus alone, with the organ's salient dotted-half pulse (and weakly-present duple grouping) displayed in dot notation above the example and the voice's pulses beneath. Beyond the constant reinforcement of an eighth pulse, initiated first by the phrase "we praise Thee, O God," two different groupings are possible. A quarter pulse forms from agogic accents ("Thee" in chorus-m. 5, "Lord" in chorus-m. 6, and "-last-" and "-ing" of "everlasting" in chorus-mm. 10 and 11), from performative accents (on "All" in chorus-m. 7 and "wor-" of "worship" in m. 8), and from an alignment with organ attacks (in mm. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 11). A dotted-quarter pulse forms from the introduction and subsequent returns to a $G^{\sharp}$ recitation tone in mm. 1-4 (on "Thee" in m. 5 and "Lord" in m.

6), agogic accents (on "God" in m. 4, "Thee" in m. 5, "Lord" in m. 6, and "Thee" in m. 9), and performative accents (on "All" and "wor-" of "worship" in m. 8).

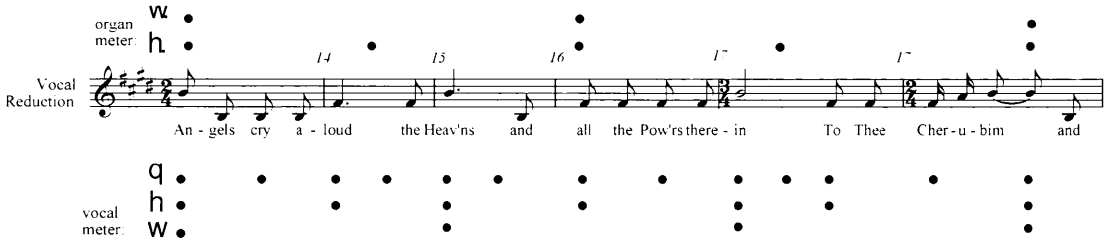


EXAMPLE 2.4: *Festival te Deum*, chorus, chorus-mm. 3-11, priming of two metric interpretations in an otherwise metrically ambiguous opening.

The quarter and dotted-quarter pulses align every six units, generating a dotted-half pulse supported by agogic accents on "Thee" (m. 3) and "Lord" (m. 4) and the parallelism between "All the earth" and "worship thee" in mm. 7 through 9. The metric instability of this passage is motivated by two agents: first, the voice's dotted-half pulse is displaced from the organ's dotted-half pulse; and second, it is unclear whether the voice's dotted-half pulse divides duply or triply into a quarter or dotted-quarter pulses.

This uncertainty generates a hemiola that prepares us for a double hemiola in the subsequent passage, shown in Example 2.5. Britten set this line of text trochaically, alternating strong and weak syllables in the text "Angels cry aloud the Heav'ns and all the Pow'rs therein." Here, half and whole pulses join the eighth and quarter pulses through salient pitch changes between B_3, B_4, and $F\sharp_4$ and through durational accents on textually-stressed words (such as the "-loud" of "aloud" in m. 14, "Heav'ns" in m. 15, and the "-in" of

"therein" in m. 17). These pulses form a duple meter shown beneath the example. The organ, on the other hand, maintains its established dotted-half pulse, which groups duply into a dotted-whole pulse, shown above the example. Over the course of these measures, the voice's half and whole pulses conflict with the organ's dotted-half and dotted-whole pulses, forming a double hemiola. Note that although there is no explicit vocal attack on the expected whole pulse in m. 17, there are two reasons for perceiving an attack. First, in prior measures there was an ambiguity between the dotted-quarter and quarter pulses in the voice. Here there is no such ambiguity; an explicit duple vocal meter is fully established in mm. 13-16, which enables the projection of the whole pulse into m. 17. Second, the syllable "-bim" of "Cherubim" contains two elements: an initial plosive "b" and the sustained singing pure vowel "ee." Because the singing vowel comes after the initial plosive and is sustained, it is easy to align with the expected whole-note attack in m. 17.[58]



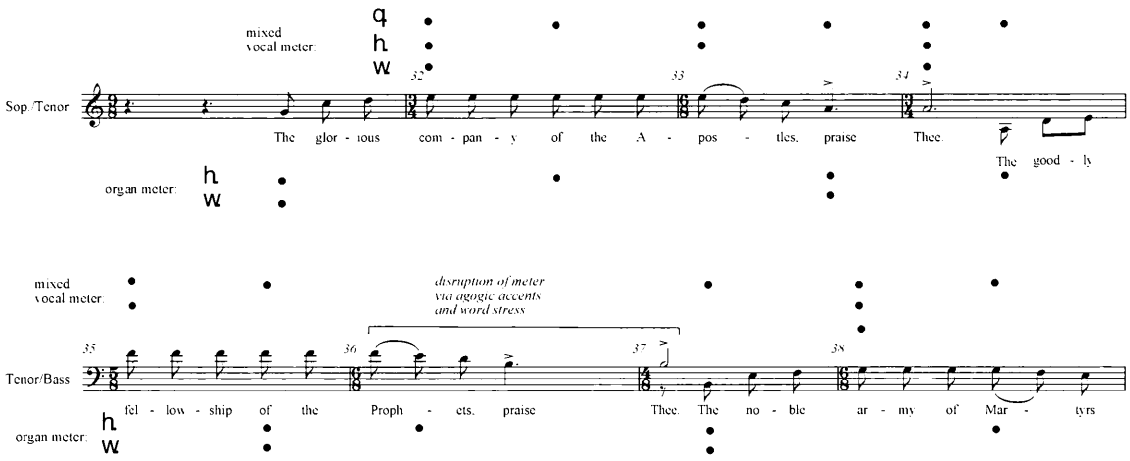
EXAMPLE 2.5: *Festival te Deum,* mm. 13-17, double hemiola formed between half- and dotted-half pulses and whole- and dotted-whole pulses.

While the opening measures of *Festival* lean towards a quarter pulse, which duply groups the eighth unit (further supported in mm. 13-17), the triple grouping of the eighth pulse, subtly primed in the opening, also returns with its own section.[59] Shown in Example

[58] One might consider the span pulse as a twelve-quarter note span from m. 13 to the second eighth of "-bim."

[59] These two sections are perceptually salient because they are the only two passages in the opening half of *Festival* that are metrically stable enough to enable metric conflict to form.

2.6, the return of the primed dotted-quarter pulse aligns with *Festival*'s first key change and with a shift from unison chorus line to independent voices. In mm. 31-32, the chorus' three-note rising figure finds its peak on a repeating E, placing a phenomenal accent on the first syllable of "company." Subsequent durational and performative accents on "praise" and "Thee," in addition to the entrance of the tenor in m. 34, support dotted-quarter, dotted-half, and dotted-whole pulses, generating a mixed vocal meter. In m. 36, the placement of "prophets," which melodically and rhythmically corresponds to the setting of "apostles" in m. 33, enters an eighth note early, temporarily disrupting the vocal meter with the durationally and performatively accented words "praise" and "thee." This disruption, however, is only brief, as the bass's entry in m. 37 restores the placement of attacks on established pulses. The mixed vocal meter forms a displacement conflict with the organ's meter at a dotted-quarter note distance.

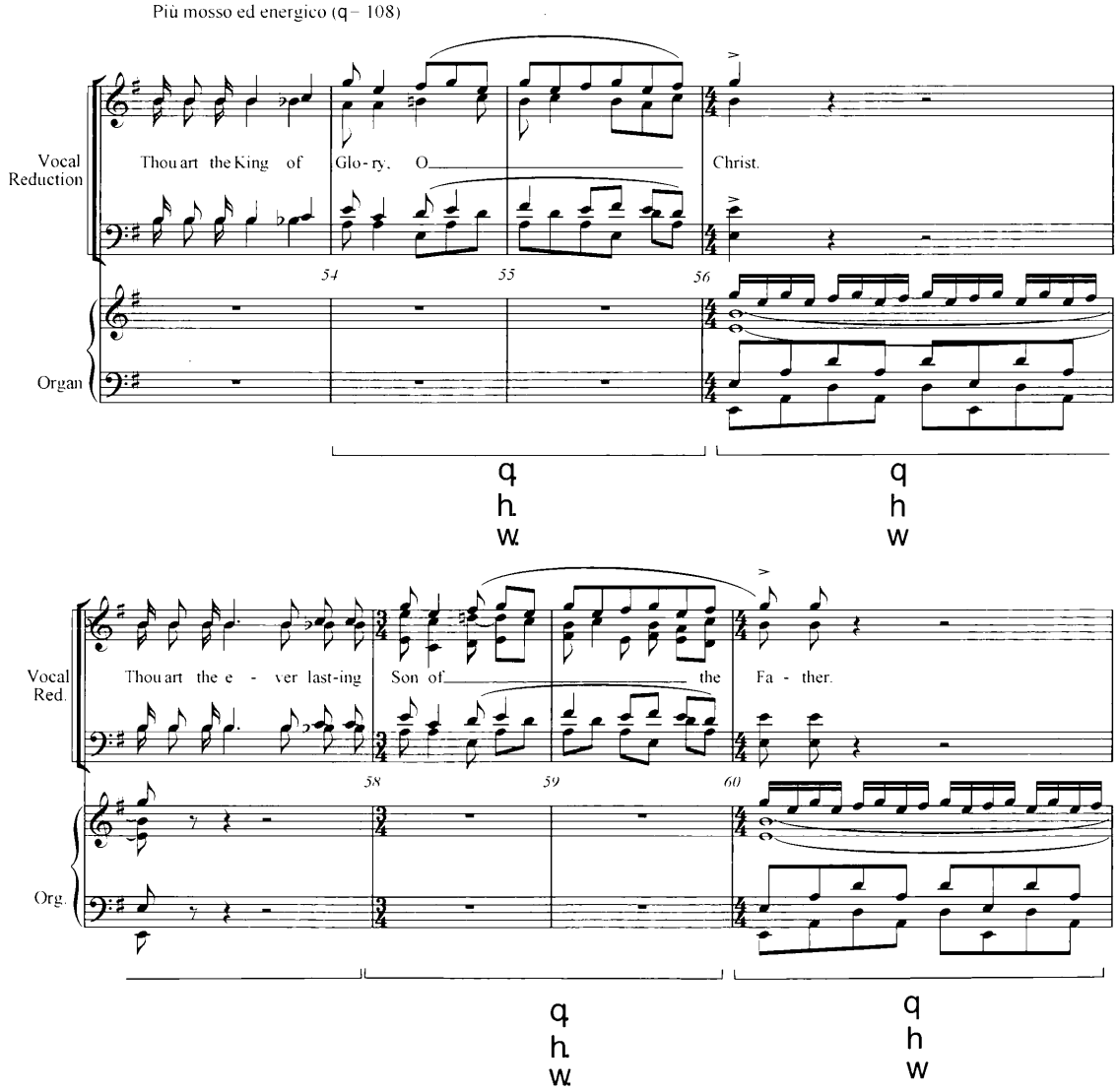


EXAMPLE 2.6: *Festival te Deum*, chorus, mm. 31-38, realization of primed dotted-quarter pulse.

These passages are the only time in the first half of *Festival* that the voice is stable, acting as moments of metric clarity in an otherwise ametric sea of free-floating plainchant.

Both meters, however, are in direct conflict with the organ (either in as a direct grouping or displacement conflict) and as such generate metric instability.

Britten's setting of the text "Thou art the King of Glory O Christ" in his earlier *Te Deum in* C (1934) marks this point through change of key and theme. In *Festival te Deum*, in addition to key changes and the introduction of thematic material, meter stabilizes for the first time through the realization of the two meters primed at the opening. This passage is shown in Example 2.7.



EXAMPLE 2.7: *Festival te Deum*, mm. 53-60, structural turning point.

Four features mark this turning point. First, the organ's tolling bell pulse ceases for the first time at m. 53. Second, the voice's metrically ambiguous plainchant-like melody ceases and is replaced by repeating motivic material. Third, the organ and voice align notationally for the first time in the piece with the same changing time signatures. The fourth, most striking feature is the realization of the two primed meters in a pseudo call-and-response fashion between chorus and organ.

In mm. 54-55 and 58-59, the chorus recalls the mixed vocal meter: each of these phrases lasts for a dotted-whole span, but the faster dotted-half and dotted-quarter pulses are harder to perceive. The reason for this is that these pulses rely on two types of phenomenal accents (harmonic change and motivic parallelism) that have been largely absent so far. Up to this point in the piece, the fastest harmonic change in the organ is at the rate of a dotted-half note, with the unison plainchant variously supporting or orbiting around the organ's harmony. Here, the chorus forms its own harmony through four independent voices that change at a faster rate. In m. 54, an A^7 harmony lasts for a dotted-quarter duration (setting the text "Glory"), changing mid-measure (on "O" that begins a melisma) to an E, D, B, $F^{\sharp}$ collection. The subsequent return to the A^7 harmony in m. 58, followed by the E, D, B, $F^{\sharp}$ collection mid-measure (among the other harmonic shifts at the rate of an eighth note), supports the dotted-quarter pulse. These harmonic shifts are further supported by the melodic parallelism in the soprano. In contrast, mm. 56-57 and 60 recall the pure duple vocal meter: quarter and half pulses are clearly audible within an overall whole-note span. The shifts between these two meters generate indirect grouping

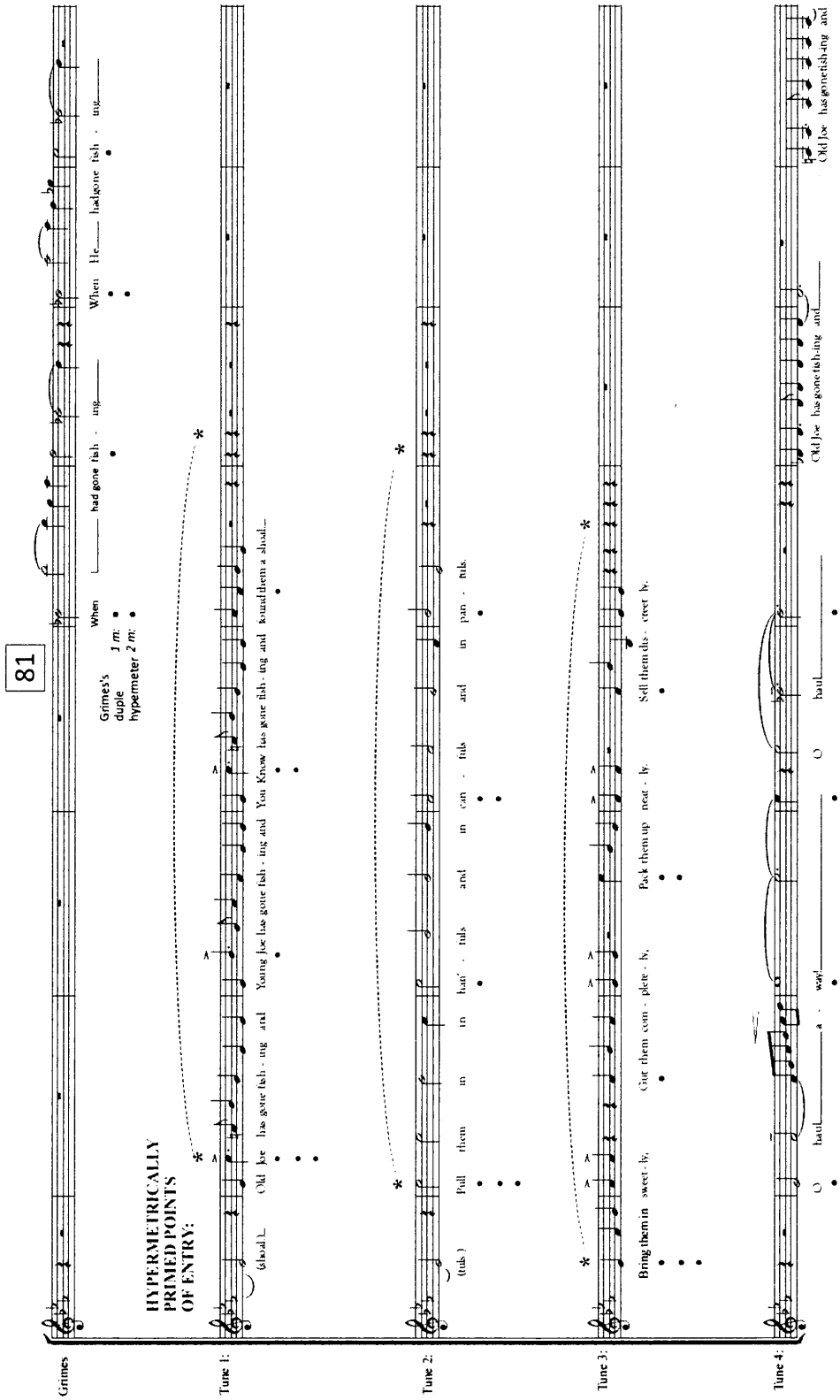
conflicts. These indirect conflicts contrast *Festival's* opening half, where direct conflicts emerged from an otherwise non-metric soundscape.

In summary, *Festival* opens in metric ambiguity, but Britten subtly primes two different meters. These primed meters are then revisited in two subsequent phrases, gaining further salience and forming two different types of metric conflicts with the organ. Britten strategically reveals these two meters in their most explicit form at an important structural moment of the piece. Changes of key and tempo, notational alignment between organ and voice, and the cessation of plainchant and organ tolls emphasize the realization of the two primed meters.

Both the *Serenade's* "Pastoral" and *Festival te Deum* foreshadow meters in introductory sections that are then subsequently realized at important structural moments of their respective texts. The final analysis concerns "Old Joe had gone fishing," a round from Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*, which demonstrates one of the most complex forms of metric priming of his music. Over the course of the round, Britten introduces four different tunes in canon. As shown in Example 2.8 (on p. 55), all parts are notated within a 7/4 time signature and in quadruple hypermeter. The simultaneous presentation of these tunes generates several downbeat locations for the quadruple hypermeter: Tune 1's quadruple hypermeter is displaced one beat late, offset from the notated bar line and aligned with the dynamically and durationally accented word "Joe." Tune 2, "Pull them in in handfuls," aligns with the 7/4 measure. Tune 3's metric allegiance is twofold: on the one hand, it enters a dotted-half span before the barline; on the other hand, the performative accents on "sweetly," the "-pletely" of "completely," "neatly," and the "-creetly" of "discreetly" align

with the notated measure. Tune 4 initially aligns with the notated measure with agogically accented "O" and the "-way" of "away" but becomes a jack of all trades in the measure prior to rehearsal mark 81 as the durational accent on "haul" supports tune 3's quadruple hypermeter.

All of these quadruple hypermeters are well established by rehearsal mark 81: tune 1, "Old Joe has gone fishing," begins and repeats ten times up to this point; tune 2, "Pull them in in handfuls," enters after two repetitions of tune 1 and repeats eight times; tune 3, "Bring them in sweetly," enters after two repetitions of tune 2 and repeats six times; and tune 4, "O haul away!," enters after two repetitions of tune 3 and repeats four times. The sheer number of repetitions of these four tunes enables the listener to become comfortable with multiple points of hypermetric induction. If one induces tune 1's quadruple hypermeter, then it is possible to hear members of the Borough entering a quarter note early with tune 2, and a whole note early with tune 3; if one induces tune 2's quadruple hypermeter, then tune 1 enters a quarter note later and tune 3 a dotted-half note early; and if one induces tune 3's quadruple hypermeter, then tune 1 enters a whole note later and tune 2 a dotted-half note later. Although, at the slowest hyperpulse level, these four tunes generate hypermetric displacement conflicts, their continual repetition establishes a sort of hypermetric consonance where one feels the groove of the passage even in the face of multiple points of hypermetric induction.



EXAMPLE 2.8: *Peter Grimes*, rehearsal mark 81, Peter's hypermetric interruption of the Borough's four tunes.

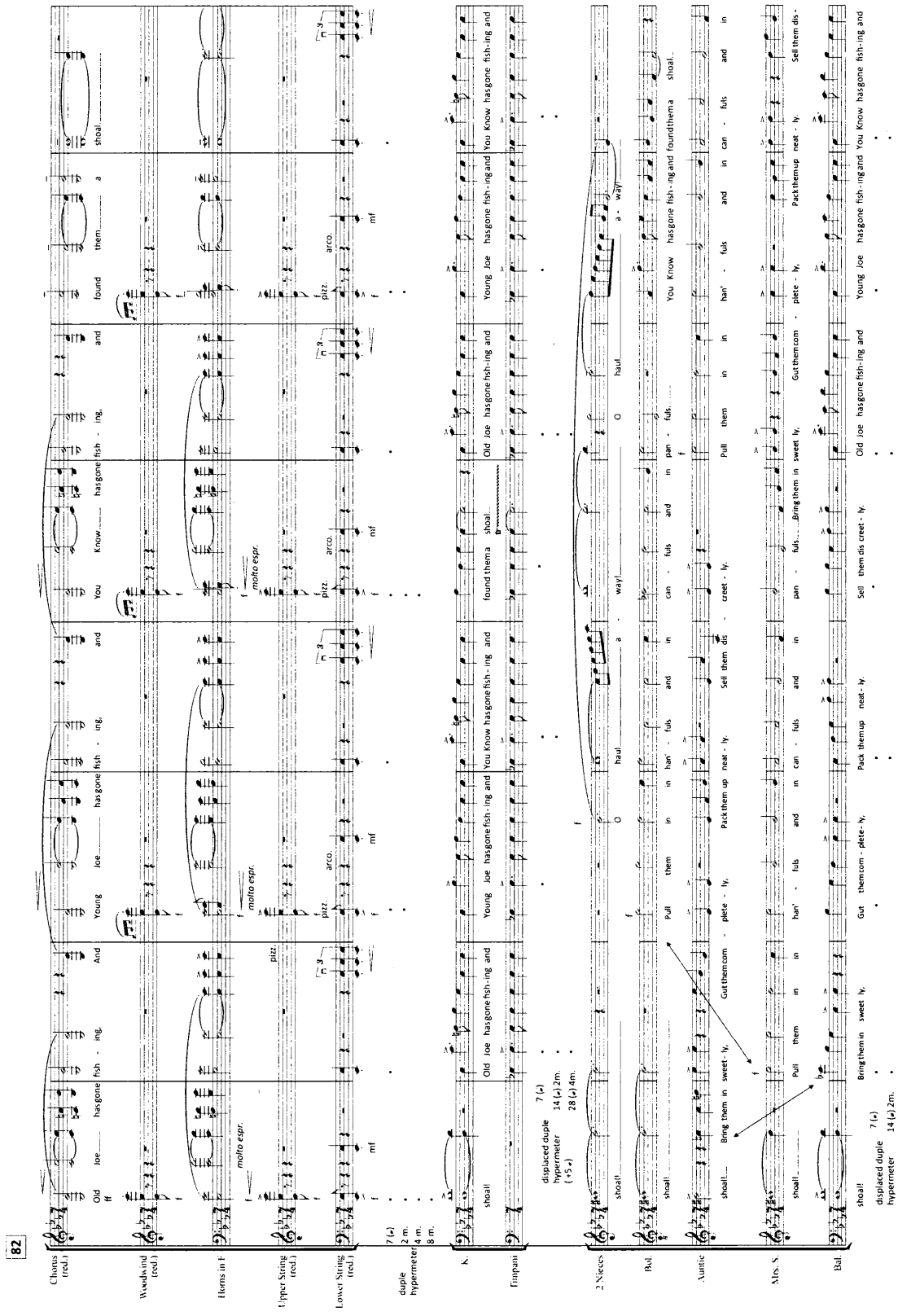
At rehearsal mark 81, Grimes enters with a modified version of the Borough's tune 1. It is durationally augmented: for each single measure of the Borough's version, Grimes's version takes up two. It is also textually altered: Grimes places himself in the text: "When I had gone fishing" replaces "Old Joe has gone fishing." But more importantly, it also is in the wrong downbeat location for that tune: Grimes's entry places an agogic accent on the first attack of tune 1 (in comparison to the Borough's accent on the second attack). Grimes's hypermeter is displaced from the four tunes' established quadruple hypermeters in comparison to tune 1, he is eight quarter-notes early; to tune 2 he is seven quarter-notes early; and to tune 3 he is four quarter-notes early.

Upon Grimes's entry, the Borough's repetition of all four tunes ceases, leaving a starkly transformed version of tune 1.[60] Hermeneutically, the Borough is unwilling or perhaps unable to sustain both the quadruple hypermeters of tunes 1 through 4 in conjunction with Grimes's hypermetrically displaced and modified tune 1. Grimes is out-of-time with the Borough, a hypermetric metaphor of his social alienation. His entry is all the more ironic, given that he is a fisherman and would likely know this tune. Having sung it many times, he should have entered at the right point in the Borough's established hypermeter.

Excerpted in Example 2.9, the "Old Joe" tune returns in climactic fashion a few measures later when Grimes is no longer present. At rehearsal mark 82, the Borough re-establishes their quadruple hypermeters following their disruption from Grimes's earlier entry. The example organizes Britten's score into three specific instrumental and vocal

[60] Like Grimes's version of tune 1, it expands each measure of the original tune into two measures; however, it does not durationally expand each attack like Grimes, but keeps the original rhythmic profile. The upshot of this is the pregnant pause after the word "and," which transforms the prior continuous flow of tune 1 into a stuttering series of aborted interjections. Unlike either Grimes's version or the Borough's original version, this version has been stripped of its melodic contour, replaced by a monotonous chant-like version (that perhaps foreshadows the final act's manhunt scene).

groupings, each adhering to a particular quadruple hypermeter. Group one (the chorus, woodwinds, horns, and strings) performs Grimes's expanded version of tune 1. Group two (Keene and the timpani) performs the original version of tune 1. Group three, the most complex, involves individual members of the Borough singing a variety of excerpts from tunes 1 through 4 in canon but whose quadruple hypermeters align with group two.



EXAMPLE 2.9: *Peter Grimes,* rehearsal mark 82, Climax of "Old Joe has gone Fishing."

The displacement between the chorus and the other two groups is a repetition of the earlier hypermetric relationship between Grimes's entry and the Borough: at rehearsal mark 81, Grimes entered a measure early in relation to the Borough's expected continuation of tunes 1 through 4, but the Borough decided to cease their four tunes rather than maintain what would be a hypermetric displacement with Grimes. At rehearsal mark 82, the chorus enters a measure earlier than the rest of the Borough, and they sing *Grimes's version* of the tune (perhaps mockingly?). However, unlike the earlier situation, where Grimes's attempt at entering a measure early resulted in the Borough's silence of the four-tune complex, here, the Borough *does* sustain both hypermetric placements and versions of the tune. In other words, this passage of music contains all four of the Borough's tunes established prior to rehearsal mark 81 as well as Grimes's displaced version of tune 1 at rehearsal mark 82. In an ironic and somewhat twisted turn of events, the Borough succeeds hypermetrically where Grimes fails: the chorus realizes the primed version of the eight-measure version of "Old Joe" that Grimes hinted at but failed to complete.

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Chapter 2 has examined Britten's strategic use of metric conflict strategically over larger structural spans. As seen in later chapters, he frequently establishes one metric situation (be it a meter, or a specific metric conflict between multiple meters) only to then switch it for another. The location of these switches differs from piece to piece, but each interacts with the text in a strategic manner. In "Pastoral," Britten offers two different metric interpretations of the strings that enable the listener to flip between two types of metric

conflict formed with the voice. In his setting of the final stanza, one of these string meters primed in the setting of the first stanza is realized through textural and agogic support. In *Festival te Deum*, Britten primes two meters at the piece's inception, each of which is then explored further in individual phrases before joining forces at a pivotal halfway point of the Te Deum text. In the round "Old Joe has gone fishing," from *Peter Grimes*, Grimes's early entry throws the Borough off its established hypermeter. Britten uses this failed moment to prime a later successful reprisal of this hypermetric situation as the Borough regain control following Grimes's interruption. The concept of metric priming explored here will play a role, alongside other types of metric conflict, in the examination of the *Holy Sonnets of John Donne* in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER THREE

Metric form and Ski-Hill Graphs in *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard*

Chapters 1 and 2 examined various metric techniques at both local and hypermetric levels, demonstrated the prevalence of prolonged metric devices, and studied their strategic priming over larger spans. Regardless of the type of text set, whether the metered poetry of "Pastoral," the sacred non-metered text of *Festival Te Deum*, or the prose text of *Peter Grimes*, metric conflict plays a role in each: in "Pastoral," increasing spans of metric conflict align with narrative elements depicting the setting of the sun; in *Festival*, the dialectic of conflict and resolution marks the central climax of the text; and in *Peter Grimes*, Grimes's failure to maintain two hypermetric versions of the "Old Joe" tune marks his separation from the Borough as they *are* able to sustain the two versions in a later passage.

Chapter 3 examines Britten's *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard*, and demonstrates the role that changes in meter and tempo, and initiation and resolution of metric conflict play, over the course of an entire texted piece. These changes closely align with significant shifts in the text's topics, characters, locations and perspectives. This popular seventeenth-century English folk ballad tells of an adulterous relationship between two protagonists, Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard, and their demise at the hand of Lord Barnard. *Musgrave's* text is shown in Figure 3.1. The text is metered, as is standard for ballads; each stanza contains four lines (with the exception of stanza 14, which contains a couplet), a regular series of between three to five stressed syllables per line of both disyllabic and trisyllabic forms, frequent alternation of strong and weak syllables, and a rhyming of second and fourth lines.

1. As it fell on one holy day,
As many be in the year,
When young men and maids together did go
Their matins and mass to hear.

2. Little Musgrave came to the church door
The priest was at private mass
But he had more mind of the fair women
Than he had of Our Lady's grace.

3. The one of them was clad in green,
Another was clad in pall,
And then came in my Lord Barnard's wife,
The fairest amongst them all,

4. "I've loved thee, Little Musgrave
Full long and many a day"
So have I love'd you, fair ladye,
Yet never a word durst I say.

5. But I have a bower at Bucklesfordberry
Full daintily it is dight'
If thou'lt wend thither, thou Little Musgrave
Thou's lig in my arms all night.

6. With that be heard a little tiny page,
By his lady's coach as he ran.
Says 'although I am my lady's foot page
Yet I am Lord Barnard's man!"

7. Then he's cast off his hose and cast off his shoon,
Set down his feet and ran,
And where the bridges were broken down
He bent his bow and swam.

8. 'Awake! awake! thou Lord Barnard,
As thou art a man of life!
Little Musgrave is at Bucklesfordberry
Along with thine own wedded wife.'

9. He called up his merry men all: 'Come saddle me my steed;
This night must I to Bucklesfordberry,
For I never had greater need,
I never had greater need.'

10. But some they whistled and sang,
And some they thus could say,
Whenever Lord Barnard's horn it blew,
Away, Musgrave, Away.

11. 'Methinks I hear the threstlecock,
Methinks I hear the jay;
Methinks I hear Lord Barnard's horn,
Away Musgrave away!'

12. Lie still, lie still, thou little Musgrave,
And huggle me from the cold;
For it is but some shephardes boy
A driving his sheep to the fold.

13. By this, Lord Barnard came to his door
And lighted a stone upon;
And he's pull'd out three silver keys,
And open'd the doors each one.

14. He lifted up the coverlet,
He lifted up the sheet:
[Remainder omitted]

15. 'Arise, arise, thou Little Musgrave,
And put thy clothes on;
It shall ne'er be said in my country
I've killed a naked man.

16. I have two swords in one scabbard,
They are both sharp and clear;
Take you the best, and I the worst,
We'll end the matter here.'

17. The first stoke Musgrave struck
He hurt Lord Barnard sore;
The next stroke that Lord Barnard struck,
Little Musgrave ne'er struck more.

18. Woe worth you, woe worth, my merry men all,
You were ne'er born for my good!
Why did you not offer to stay my hand
When you saw me wax so wood?

19. For I have slain also the fairest ladye,
That ever wore woman's weed,
Soe I have slain the fairest ladye
That ever did woman's deed.

20. A grave, a grave, Lord Barnard cried,
To put these lovers in!
But lay my lady on the upper hand,
For she comes of the nobler kin.

FIGURE 3.1: Britten's version of the text from *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard.*

In stanzas 1-5, Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard meet at church and reveal their love for one another and decide to consummate their love at Bucklesfordberry; however, in stanza 6, Lady Barnard's pageboy overhears their plan and sets off to inform Lord Barnard. After Musgrave and Lady Barnard's arrival at Bucklesfordberry and the implied fulfillment

of their affair, Lord Barnard finds the two lovers in stanza 13. He challenges Musgrave to a duel that leads to the latter's death as described at the end of stanza 17. The story closes with the burial of the two lovers and Lord Barnard laments that his knights did not quell his rage.

Based on changes in topic, location, and characters involved, the plot's twenty stanzas group into several sections as outlined in Figure 3.2. Stanzas 1-5 set the scene for Musgrave and Lady Barnard's affair. Told from the perspective of the narrator in stanzas 1-3, Musgrave stands by the church door, watching women rather than focusing on "Our Lady's grace." Lady Barnard catches his attention. Switching to dialogue in stanzas 4-5, Lady Barnard and Musgrave declare their love for one another and their plan to fulfill the affair at Bucklesfordberry.

Stanzas	Topic	Location	Perspective	Characters
1-3	Musgrave at mass	Church	Narration	Musgrave & Lady Barnard
4	Love declaration		Dialogue	
5	Planning the affair			
6-7	The snitch	To Lord Barnard's camp	Narr. & Monologue	Page boy
8-10	Lord Barnard's preparation	Lord Barnard's camp	Monologue	Page, Lord Barnard and his knights
11-12	Musgrave's concern	Bucklesfordberry	Dialogue	Musgrave & Lady Barnard
13-15	Lord Barnard's discovery		Narration	Lord Barnard
16	The challenge		Monologue	Lord Barnard and Musgrave
17	Fight and Musgrave's death		Narration	Lord Barnard
18-20	Lord Barnard's lament		Monologue	Lord Barnard and his knights

FIGURE 3.2: *Musgrave's* text, twenty stanzas grouped via changes in location, perspective, and character.

Stanzas 6-10 lay the foundation for the lovers' discovery. Stanza 6 changes perspective, location, and characters: the narrator introduces Lady Barnard's pageboy who, having overheard the two illicit lovers, sprints through the wilderness to tell his Lord. Following the pageboy's revelation, stanzas 8-10 switch from narration to monologue: Lord Barnard prepares his knights for the journey ahead to search for the lovers.

Stanzas 11-20 take place at Bucklesfordberry and trace Lord Barnard's discovery of the lovers and their deaths at his hands. In stanzas 11-12, Musgrave's dialogue with Lady Barnard concerns the approaching Lord Barnard: he hears Lord Barnard's hunting horn in the distance, but Lady Barnard, in an attempt to calm Musgrave, suggests that it is just a shepherd boy. In stanzas 13-16, Lord Barnard arrives at Bucklesfordberry and begins his hunt for the lovers.[61] After an initial description of Lord Barnard's search and discovery of the lovers by the narrator, stanza 16 continues with a monologue by Lord Barnard, . challenging Musgrave to a duel to the death. Stanza 17, and in particular its fourth line, is arguably the climax of the story as the narrator describes how Lord Barnard kills Musgrave.[62] Lord Barnard's final monologue in stanzas 18-20 is a lament: following the death of both Musgrave and his wife, he admonishes his knight for not stopping him in his rage and orders them to bury the two protagonists next to each other as a mark of respect.[63]

Britten's metric treatment of the text closely follows shifts in the text's plot through changes in time signature, tempo, meter, and through the initiation and resolution of metric conflicts. Figure 3.3 presents an overview of the interaction of these changes with

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[61] Here, Britten omits the final two lines of stanza 14, "How now, how now, thou Little Musgrave, Doest thou find my lady sweet?," and also the following stanza: "I find her sweet,' quoth Little Musgrave, 'The more 'tis to my paine; I would gladly give three hundred pounds That I were on yonder plaine."

[62] Following Musgrave's death, Britten omits three stanzas, the absence of which reduces the text's violent nature. In the first two of these omitted stanzas, Lady Barnard laments Musgrave's death, informing Lord Barnard that she is no longer his: "With that bespake this faire lady, In bed whereas she lay: 'Although thou'rt dead, thou Little Musgrave, Yet I for thee will pray," "And wish well to thy soule will I, So long as I have life; So will I not for thee, Barnard, Although I am thy wedded wife." In a rage-induced response, Lord Barnard then kills his wife: "He cut her paps from off her brest; Great pitty it was to see That some drops of this ladie's heart's blood Ran trickling downe her knee." One might speculate that the reason for Britten's omission of these passages is due to the nature of the performance venue in a prisoner of war camp.

[63] Britten modifies stanza 19 from its original form "For I have slaine the bravest sir knight That ever rode on steed; So have I done the fairest lady That ever did woman's deed." By omitting Musgrave from Barnard's lament and the text that describes the violent death of Lady Barnard, Britten paints Lord Barnard in a more favorable light and Musgrave in a less favorable one.

the text. In the opening church scene (stanzas 1-5), he sets both protagonists with grouping and displacement conflict (with the exception of their love declaration in stanza 4). Note Britten's resolution of metric conflict as the story switches characters to the pageboy in stanza 6 to a stable meter further accentuated by the tempo shift from quarter equals 76 to dotted-quarter equals 144 and the change from 2/2 to 6/8. The return of the protagonists in stanzas 11 and 12, prefaced by a piano interlude, restores metric conflict: Musgrave's concern over hearing Lord Barnard in the distance is accompanied by an unstable hypermeter; and Lady Barnard's response is shaped by a direct hemiola.

Stanzas	Topic	Characters involved	Metric conflict	Time sig.	Tempo indication	Tempo
1-3	Musgrave at mass	Lady Barnard and Little Musgrave	Direct double hemiola and indirect hypermetric conflict	2/2	Andante tranquillo	Quarter = 76
4	Love declaration		None			
5	Planning the affair		Direct displacement conflict			
6-7	The snitch	Lady Barnard's page and Lord Barnard	None	6/8	Prestissimo	Dotted Quarter = 144
8-10	Lord Barnard's preparation					
	Piano Interlude		Hypermeter unstable			
11	Musgrave's concern	Musgrave				
12	(Lady Barnard's response)	Lady Barnard	Direct hemiola			
13-14	Lord Barnard's discovery	Lord Barnard and his Men	None	2/4	Quarter = Dotted Quarter	Quarter = 144
15				4/4	Grave [Quarter=Half of prior tempo]	Quarter = 72
16	Lord Barnard's challenge	Lord Barnard and Musgrave	Indirect grouping conflict	6/8	Prestissimo	Dotted Quarter = 144
17 (lines 1-3)	Fight					
17 (line 4)	Musgrave's death	Lord Barnard and Musgrave	Indirect grouping conflict	2/2	Lento	Quarter = 60
18-20	Lord Barnard's lamentation and the burial	Lord Barnard and his Men	Indirect hypermetric conflict			

FIGURE 3.3: Summary of metric techniques in *Musgrave*.

The arrival of Lord Barnard and his discovery of the two lovers is prefaced by another alteration in tempo and time signature and again resolves the prior metric conflict initiated by Musgrave and Lady Barnard. This time the direct hemiola initiated by Lady Barnard resolves and the change is reinforced by the shift in tempo from dotted-quarter equals 144 to quarter equals 144. Further shifts in tempo and time signature mark the final events of the story: the tempo change between stanzas 14 and 15 marks Lord Barnard's discovery of Musgrave after lifting up the bed sheets (the indirect grouping conflict and change of

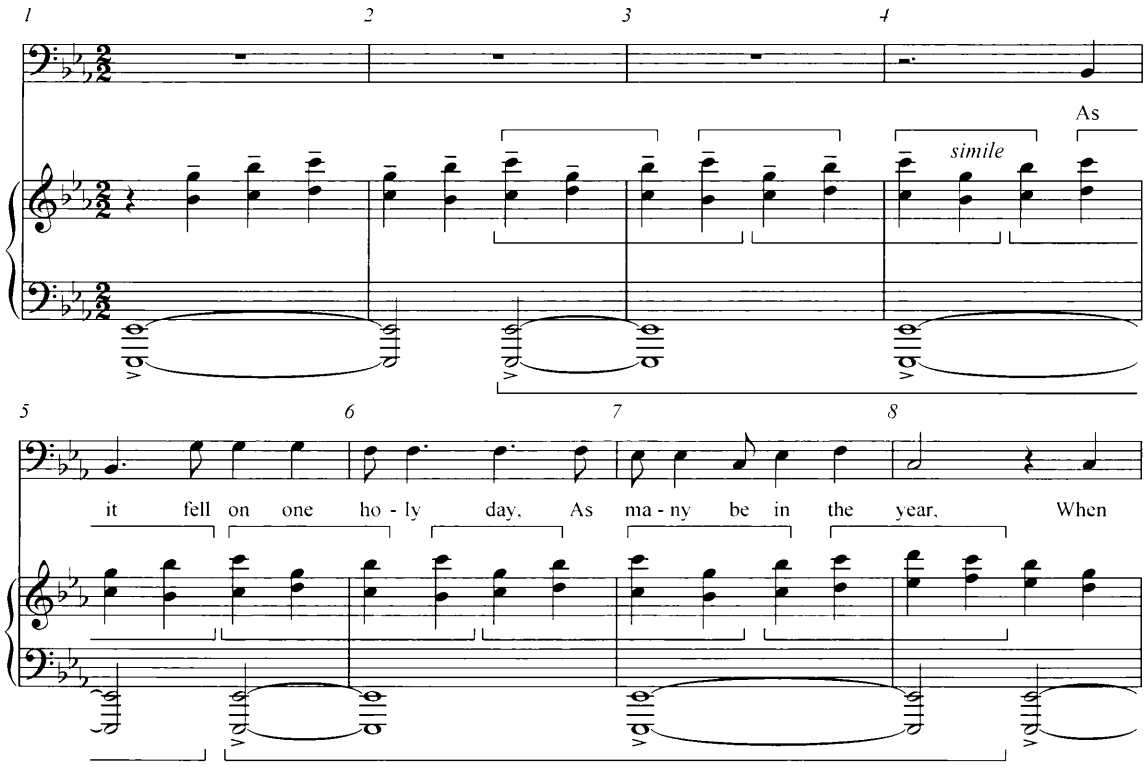
tempo between stanzas 15 and 16 marks Lord Barnard's challenge to Musgrave); and the change of meter (via an indirect grouping conflict), between the first three lines of stanza 17 from its fourth line ("Little Musgrave ne'er struck more"), marks the story's most significant event.

Although there are multiple changes in tempo throughout the piece, this final change is unusual. As will be demonstrated, all prior shifts in tempo and meter maintain at least one approximately equivalent pulse, connecting the pre- and post-change material. For example, a quarter-note duration at quarter equals 76 in stanzas 1 through 5 is roughly equivalent to a dotted-half duration at dotted-quarter equals 144. At Musgrave's death, however, there are no pulses maintained from the prior tempo, suggesting that one might hear this passage as metrically divorced from all the prior material and therefore as an analogy to his death.

With the exception of the love declaration (stanza 4), Musgrave and Lady Barnard's passages are steeped in metric conflict (stanzas 1 to 3, 5, 11, and 12); by contrast, innocent characters, such as Lord Barnard's knights, Lady Barnard's pageboy, and Lord Barnard, in his initial appearance, are metrically stable (stanzas 6 to 10 and 13 to 15). In the last quarter of the ballad's stanzas, Musgrave's material is metrically stable, whereas Lord Barnard's material, in contrast, contains metric conflict (stanzas 18-20). The following analysis weighs up how Britten's treatment of meter and tempo impacts the story as the events unfold.

Example 3.1 gives the score of the opening measures. The piece begins with piano alone. The slow tolling $E^{\flat}$ bass octaves establish a dotted-whole pulse. The quarter-note

dyads in the right hand separate into two distinct strands, referred to as cantus and altus; even though they have the same rhythm, they often project distinct pulses. The cantus offers two interpretations of a three-quarter-note grouping: a strong-beat early preference establishes a dotted-half pulse on the pitch G_5 (G_5, $B^{\flat}_5$, C_6), but a preference for pitch climax and subsequent change in melodic direction establishes a dotted-half pulse on C_6 (C_6, G_5, $B^{\flat}_5$). The altus offers two different starting positions for whole and half pulses: strong-beat early and parallelism establish these pulses beginning on $B^{\flat}$ ($B^{\flat}_4$, C_5, D_5, C_5), but a preference for a central repeating pitch establishes these pulses beginning on C_5 (C_5, D_5, C_5, $B^{\flat}_4$), aligned with the measure and with D and $B^{\flat}$ functioning as neighbor tones. On their own, the cantus and altus are metrically ambiguous, but they always align on octave Cs simultaneously with the bass starting in the middle of m. 2. Thus the dotted-half pulse starting on C and the whole pulse starting on C override the other interpretations.



EXAMPLE 3.1: *Musgrave,* mm. 1-8, the piano's three registrally distinct strands.

Starting at m. 2, the bass's dotted-whole pulse groups duply into a dotted-breve pulse through parallelism: the piano's dyad pattern restarts at the halfway point of m. 5. The cantus line divides this dotted-breve pulse duply into a dotted-whole pulse, duply into a dotted-half pulse, and then triply into a quarter pulse, forming one mixed meter. The altus, on the other hand, divides this dotted-breve pulse triply into a whole pulse, duply into a half pulse, and then duply into a quarter pulse, forming a different mixed meter. One might hear this passage as playing the role of church bells, calling people to mass, where individual bells toll at metrically irregular intervals.

Figure 3.4 traces the piano's division of the dotted-breve pulse in stanzas 1-2 via a ski-hill graph.[64] The mixed meter associated with the cantus divides the dotted-breve pulse duply, descending the left channel of the ski hill and arriving at the dotted-whole pulse, then duply again, descending leftward to the dotted-half pulse, and finally triply, turning rightward to the quarter pulse. The mixed meter associated with the altus divides the dotted breve duply, then triply, and then duply, navigating the left, right, and left pathways down to the quarter pulse. Visually, the ski hill shows the two different levels of metric conflict between dotted-whole and whole pulses and dotted-half and half pulses. Combined, these conflicts at adjacent levels form a double hemiola.

[64] See Chapter 1 for an introduction to ski-hill graphs.

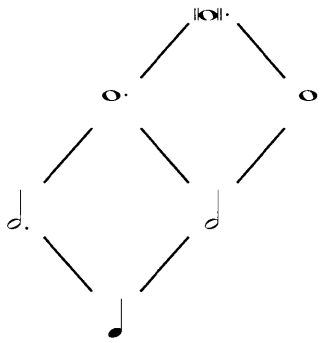
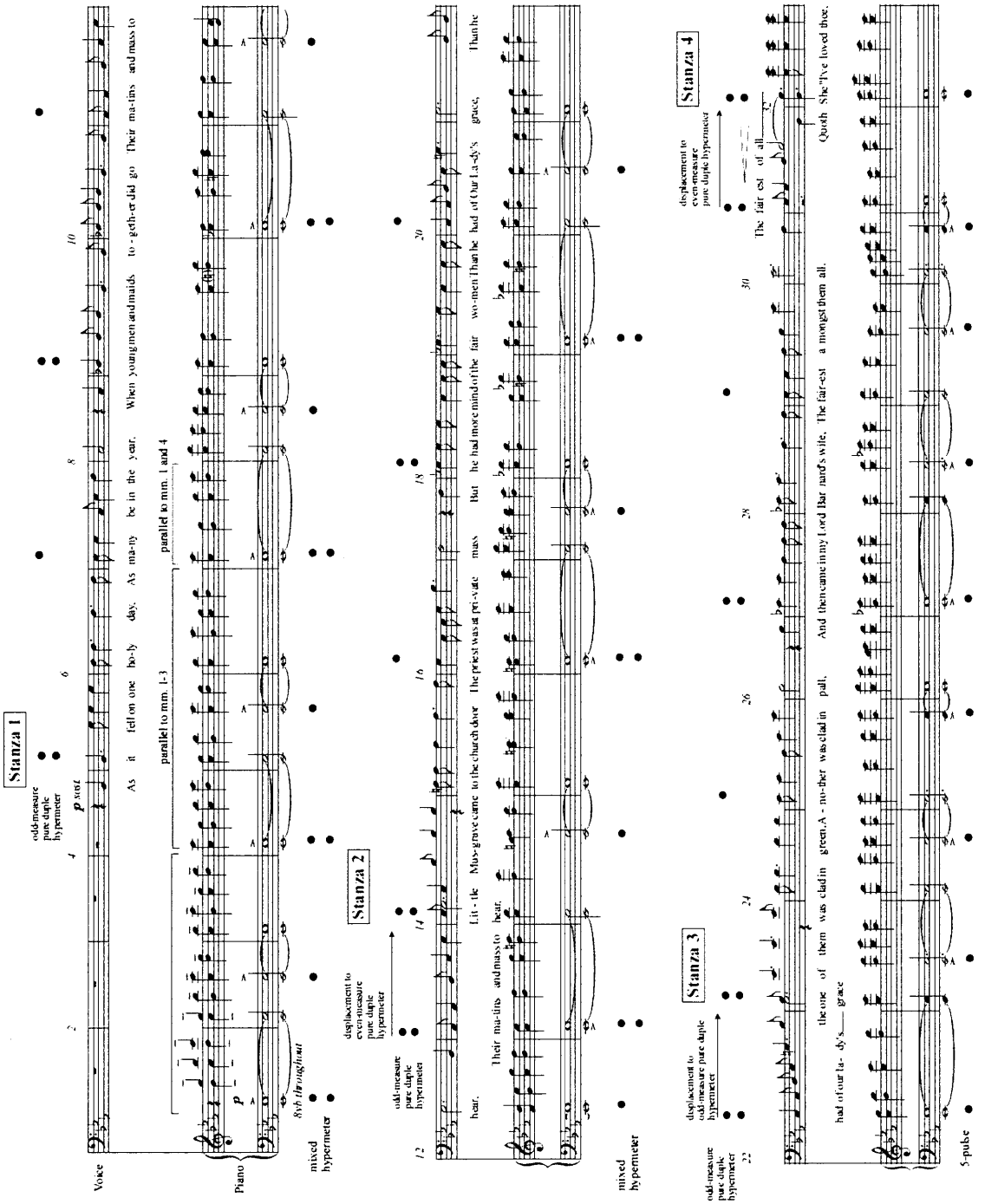


FIGURE 3.4: Double hemiola generated by the piano in stanzas 1-2 as represented by a ski-hill graph.

The piano's double hemiola sets the metric conditions for the chorus's entry at m. 5. With its descending thematic line and prosodic setting, the chorus projects a consistent duple meter of quarter, half, and whole pulses aligned with the barline, generating three indirect hypermetric displacements between stanzas and forming direct grouping conflicts with the piano.

Example 3.2 presents a choral reduction of Britten's setting of stanzas 1-3. He sets each of these three stanzas with an individual voice part and with similar thematic material that establishes two- and four-measure hyperpulses: the bass begins in m. 5, the baritone in m. 14, and the tenor in m. 23. Throughout these stanzas, the text is declaimed in a consistent and uniform manner with two bars allocated to each line of text. Thus, the end of stanza 1 is reached at the end of m. 8. However, Britten extends the original text by repeating each stanza's final line: in mm. 13-14 (including a quarter-note pickup), the basses repeat "Their matins and mass to hear" from mm. 11-12; in mm. 22-23, the baritones repeat "Than he had of Our Lady's grace" from mm. 20-21; and, in mm. 31-32, the tenors repeat "The fairest of all," which is a varied form of the earlier "The fastest amongst them all"—in mm. 29-30.



EXAMPLE 3.2: *Musgrave*, mm. 1-32, hypermetric conflict generated between piano and voice.

These three two-measure extensions turn what would have otherwise been a straightforward eight-measure realization of each stanza into ten-measure thematic units.

Each successive entry of these ten-measure phrases, however, is elided: the baritones overlap the final measure of the bass's ten-measure unit in m. 14; the tenors likewise overlap the final measure of the baritones ten-measure unit in m. 23, and the entry of the basses and ensuing full chorus interrupts the final measure of the tenors ten-measure unit in m. 32.

The repetition of the basses' "matins and mass" at m. 13 aligns with the established odd-measure hypermeter. But the entrance of the baritone in m. 14, which is a dynamically accented initiation of a new phrase that parallels mm. 5-12 (via a rhythmic and melodic variant), displaces the odd-measure hypermeter to an even measure. Similar flips occur at the onset of stanza 3 in m. 23 and stanza 4, in m. 32. These alterations have an impact on hypermeter at multiple levels: the phrase extension perturbs what would have otherwise been a four-measure hypermeter, and the overlap likewise perturbs the two-measure hypermeter.

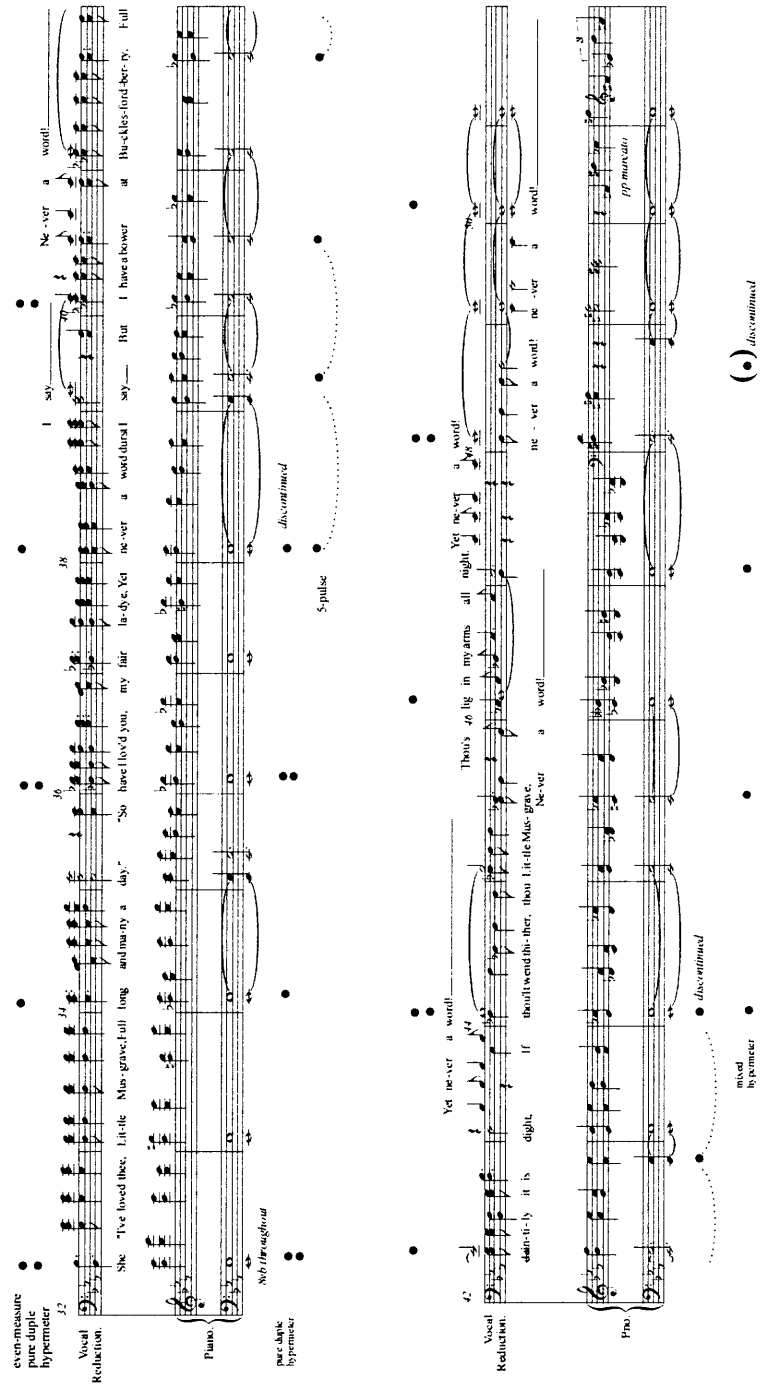
In addition to the voice's hypermetric displacements, the combination of the voice's one, two, and four-measure hyperpulses creates a direct grouping conflict with the piano's dotted-whole pulse and three-measure hyperpulse. However, this grouping conflict is also displaced: the piano's three-measure hyperpulse, which is initiated at the start of the song, does not align with the voice's four-measure hyperpulse, which is initiated at m. 5. The moment they should align, given their points of initiation, is at m. 13; however, the voice's hyperpulses shift to an even-measure (m. 14) due to the phrase extension and elision, thus delaying their alignment. The piano's three-measure hyperpulse groups into a nine-measure hyperpulse misaligned with the voice.

In stanza 3, Britten sets the voice in the same manner as stanzas 1 and 2 with phrase expansion and elision. However, after 21 measures, the spacing of the piano's tolling bass notes is compressed by one beat, establishing a five-quarter hyperpulse (five-pulse). This new pulse perturbs the piano's prior dotted-whole pulse and three-measure hyperpulse, forms a sustained grouping conflict with the voice, and is aligned with neither the cantus's dotted-half pulse nor the altus's half and whole pulses. Furthermore, the initiation of the five pulse occurs at m. 22, the point at which the piano's mixed hypermeter and the voice's duple hypermeter should align;[65] however, as was the case between stanzas 1 and 2, the voice's indirect displacement through expansion and elision shifts the hypermeter later to m. 23, disrupting the expanded hypermetric alignment at this point.

Example 3.3 excerpts stanza 4, the love declaration, and stanza 5, the plan for the affair. At the beginning of m. 4, the bass attacks are compressed by one more unit, projecting a whole pulse that, for the first time in the song, *aligns with* the meter of the voice (mm. 32-38). The upper piano voices no longer project regular pulses that conflict, reducing the metric complexity. Moreover, the piano and voice's hypermeters align for the first time. In the previous stanzas, the voice's expansion and elision had resulted in a displacement from the piano's slowest hyperpulse at the distance of a measure. Here, in stanza 4, the bass of the piano changes from a five-unit pulse to a four-unit, one-measure pulse that aligns with the voice's hypermeter. The global effect of these two metric events is

[65] Britten employs a higher prime at the local level for the first time in stanza 3, in this case a five pulse, destabilizing the established hypermeter. In addition to increasing the level of metric complexity between the voice and piano, the five pulse primes the listener for later passages where higher prime rhythms successfully destabilize an established hypermeter.

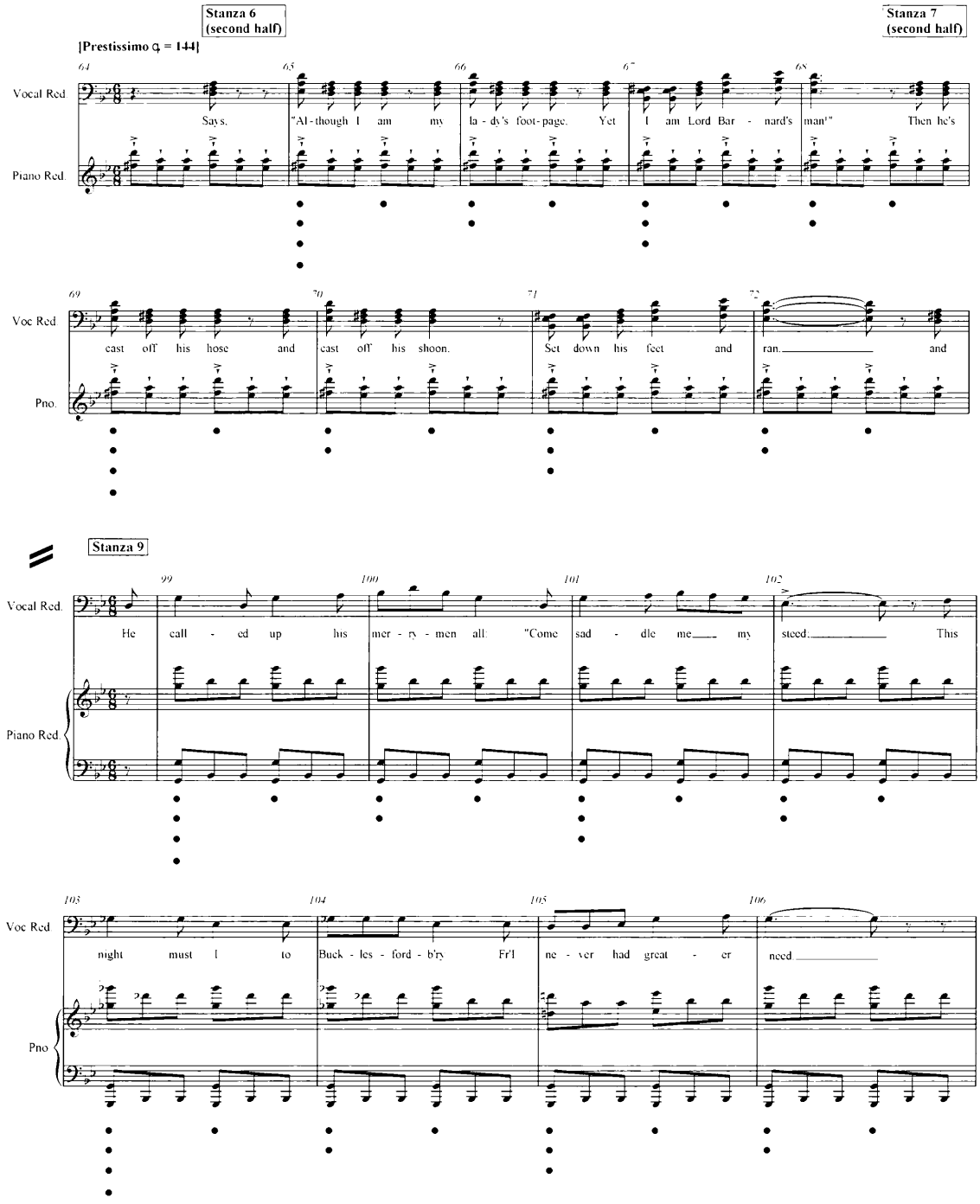
the resolution of the heightened metric complexity of stanza 3, and the first stable meter following 31 measures of sustained metric conflict.



EXAMPLE 3.3: *Musgrave*, mm. 32-50, resolution of metric conflict in stanza 4 and the resumption of conflict in stanza 5.

Beginning at the end of stanza 4 and continuing into stanza 5, the process of compression is reversed. Beginning at m. 38, the tolling bass notes are again separated by five quarter notes, creating an indirect displacement conflict. At m. 44, the six-unit dotted-half pulse of the opening is restored. The voice, on the other hand, maintains its duple hypermeter throughout. The combination of voice and piano generates two passages of direct metric conflict. In mm. 38-43, the piano bass's five pulse clashes with the voice's one-measure pulse; and in mm. 44-48, its dotted-whole pulse battles with voice's one-measure pulse and two-measure hyperpulse and briefly re-establishes the double hemiola present during the opening.

Several features separate stanzas 6-10 from 1-5: first, the prior metric conflict resolves to a single, stable meter which is then maintained for the longest period in the song (in contrast to the brief resolution of metric conflict at the beginning of stanza 4's setting); second, the tempo changes from *Andante tranquillo* [quarter = 76] to *Prestissimo* [dotted quarter = 144]; and third, the piano changes textural pattern for the first time. Example 3.4 excerpts two metrically representative passages from stanzas 6-7 (the pageboy's journey to inform Lord Barnard) and stanzas 8-10 (Lord Barnard's preparation with his knights). Both passages introduce new thematic material and maintain a stable mixed meter, consisting of eighth, dotted-quarter, and dotted-half local pulses and consistent two- and four-measure hyperpulses (shown in the dot diagram). Texturally, the accompaniment ceases its prior winding quarter-note dyad line and tolling bass octaves and initiates a repeating three-eighth-note figure. This figure supports eighth and dotted-quarter pulses aligned with the voice. The combination of voice and piano creates a uniform stable meter.



EXAMPLE 3.4: *Musgrave*, mm. 64-72 and 99-106, stabilization of meter in stanzas 6 to 7 and 9 to 10 as represented by two new themes.

The ski-hill graphs shown in Figure 3.5 summarize the resolution of metric conflict, the change of tempo, and the shift in meter that separates stanza 6 from the prior five stanzas.

While at first glance the notational difference between stanza 6 and the prior stanzas implies a wholly different meter, three of stanza 6's pulses are already primed in stanzas 1-5. The dotted arrows in Fig. 3.6 demonstrate the temporal equivalency, in clock time, of these three pulses. In terms of the dotted quarter equals 144, the dotted-half pulse is approximately equal temporally to the quarter pulse at the tempo of a quarter equals 76, and likewise the half is equivalent to the dotted-whole pulse and the whole is equivalent to the dotted-breve pulse. The transition between these two passages from the point of view of pulse structure is smooth at slower levels; what is striking is the introduction of a faster triply-related unit pulse and resolution of the metric conflict established by Musgrave and Lady Barnard's characters via the introduction of the pageboy.

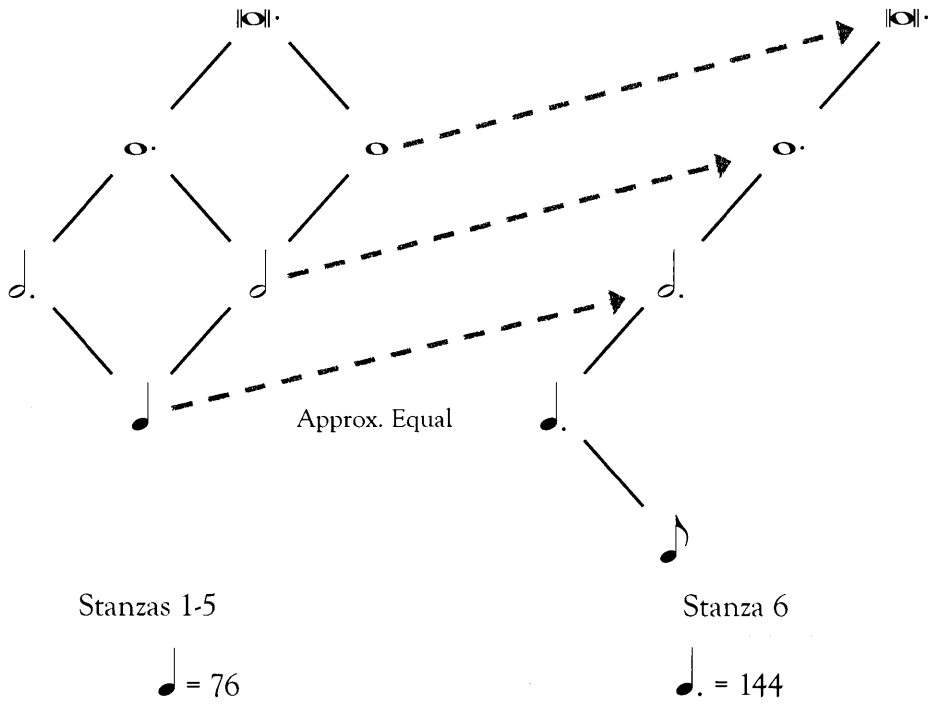
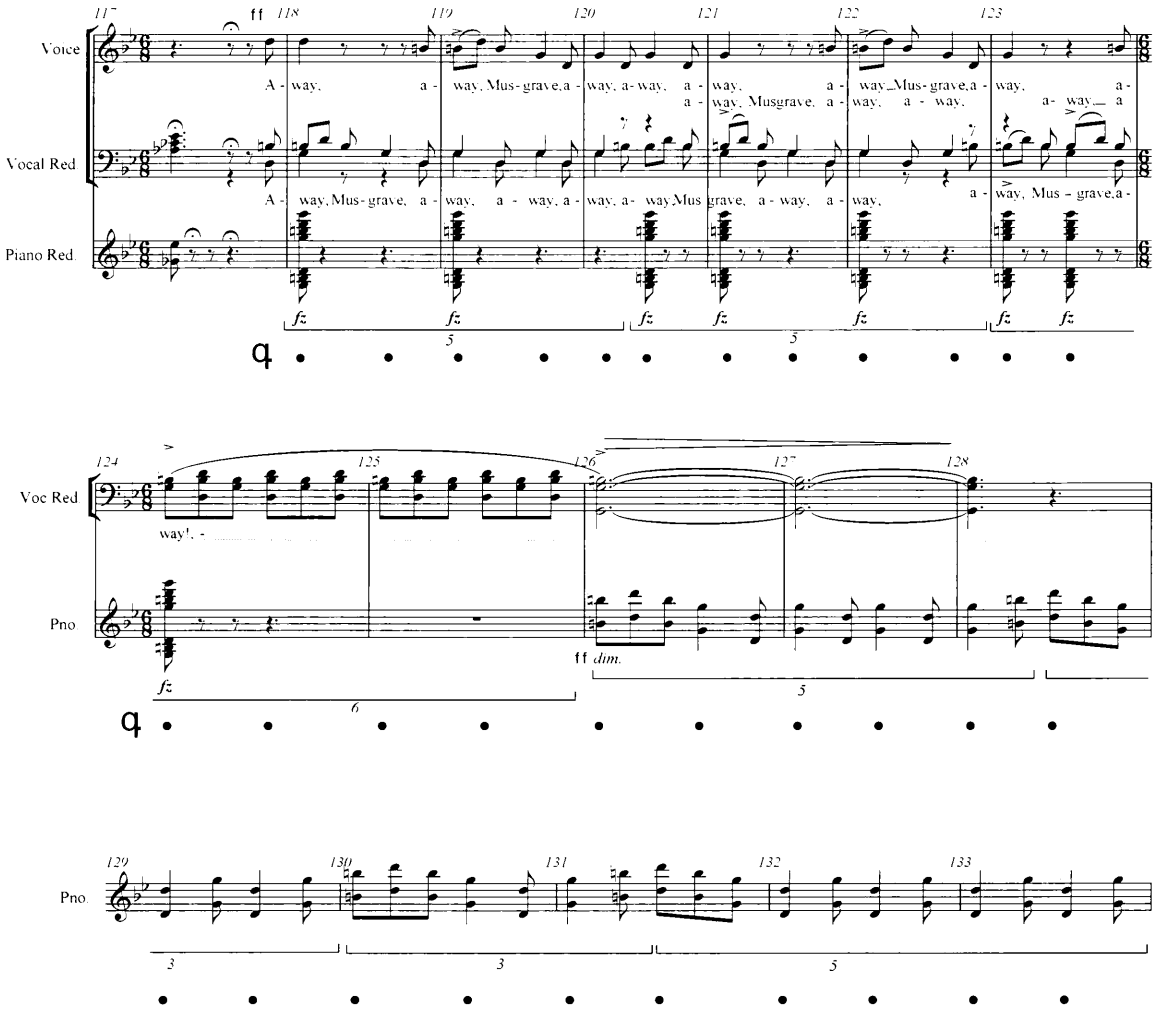


FIGURE 3.5: Ski-hills representing stanzas 1-5 and the change of tempo and meter in stanza 6.

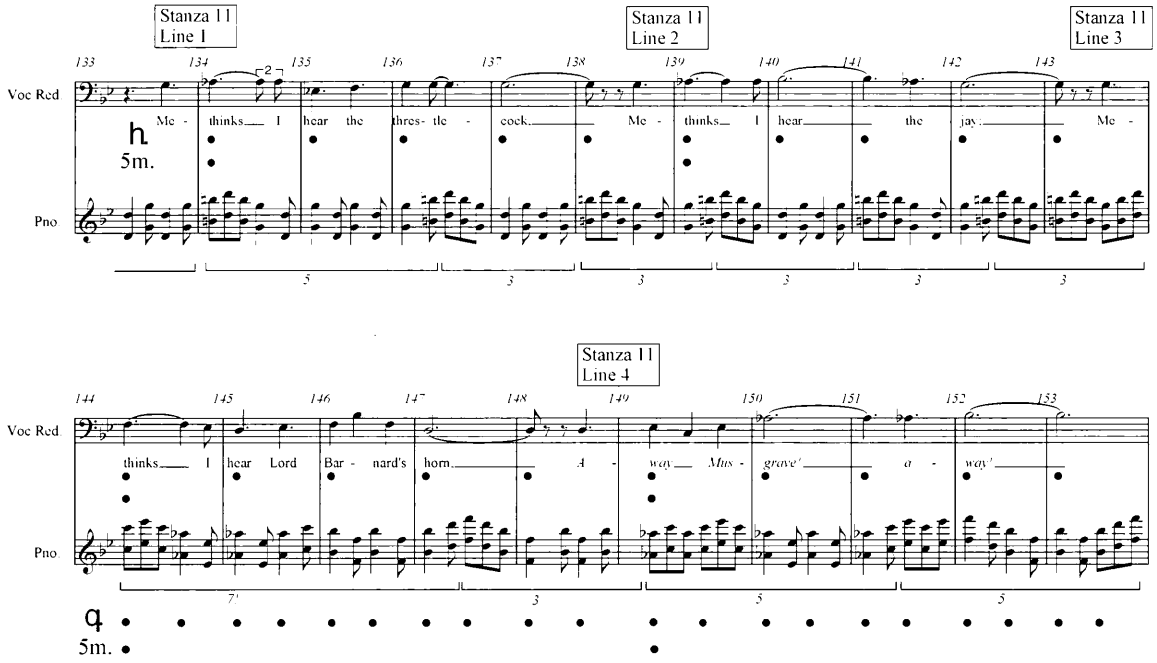
The piano interlude between stanzas 10 and 11 divides Lord Barnard's journey to Bucklesfordberry and Musgrave and Lady Barnard's consummation of their affair. Shown in Example 3.5, Lord Barnard's closing utterance, "away Musgrave away," and the subsequent interlude disrupt the metric stability of stanzas 6-10 through the initiation of higher-prime rhythms. The main thematic material is a metrically and harmonically skewed version of Lord Barnard's theme in stanzas 8-10 (see Ex. 3.4, p. 75). His original version, in G minor, reinforced a one-measure pulse and two- and four-measure hyperpulses via a falling-fourth melodic figure (G to D) aligned with the beginning of the measure. The piano interlude, by contrast, alters the theme's motivic emphasis by placing the three-eighth-note rhythm, rather than the falling-fourth figure, at the beginning of the theme; and it generates rhythmic groupings that undermine the induced duple hypermeter. Originally, Lord Barnard's theme began with a repetition of quarter- and eight-note attacks. Here, however, the three-eighth-note rhythm, from the end of the original version, initiates the new motivic grouping. There is a 2.5-measure pulse that includes the downbeat of m. 118; the middle of m. 120; and the downbeat of m. 123. This is projected both by the timing of the *strettos* in the chorus, and by the marcato chords in the piano. The five-measure unit here is part of a 5+ 3 division of the eight-measure unit following the fermata, starting at m. 118, to the vocal cadence at m. 126. Britten further thematizes the 5+3 rhythm in the subsequent measures, this time in diminution by half across a four-measure span: he divides mm. 126-129 as 5+3 and mm. 130-133 as 3+5.



EXAMPLE 3.5: *Musgrave*, Lord Barnard's cry to Musgrave and subsequent piano interlude, mm. 117-133.

Musgrave's entry following the piano interlude is shown in Example 3.6. Britten sets each line of text as a five-measure phrase and begins with a dotted-quarter anacrusis to the subsequent agogically accented attack on the downbeat. At the local level, the voice intermittently disrupts the dotted-quarter pulse through a duple grouping of the eighth pulse in mm. 136, 146, and 149, forming brief indirect grouping conflicts with its established dotted-quarter pulses (Britten anticipates this duple grouping via the vocal melisma across mm. 124 to 125, assuming a parallel interpretation of the B/D pitch class

alternation). Hypermetrically, the voice establishes a five-measure hyperpulse, a higher prime grouping of the dotted-half pulse. This pulse creates an indirect grouping conflict with the prior interlude, which had maintained a four-measure hypermeter and a direct grouping conflict with the piano's four-measure hypermeter (at least until m. 138).



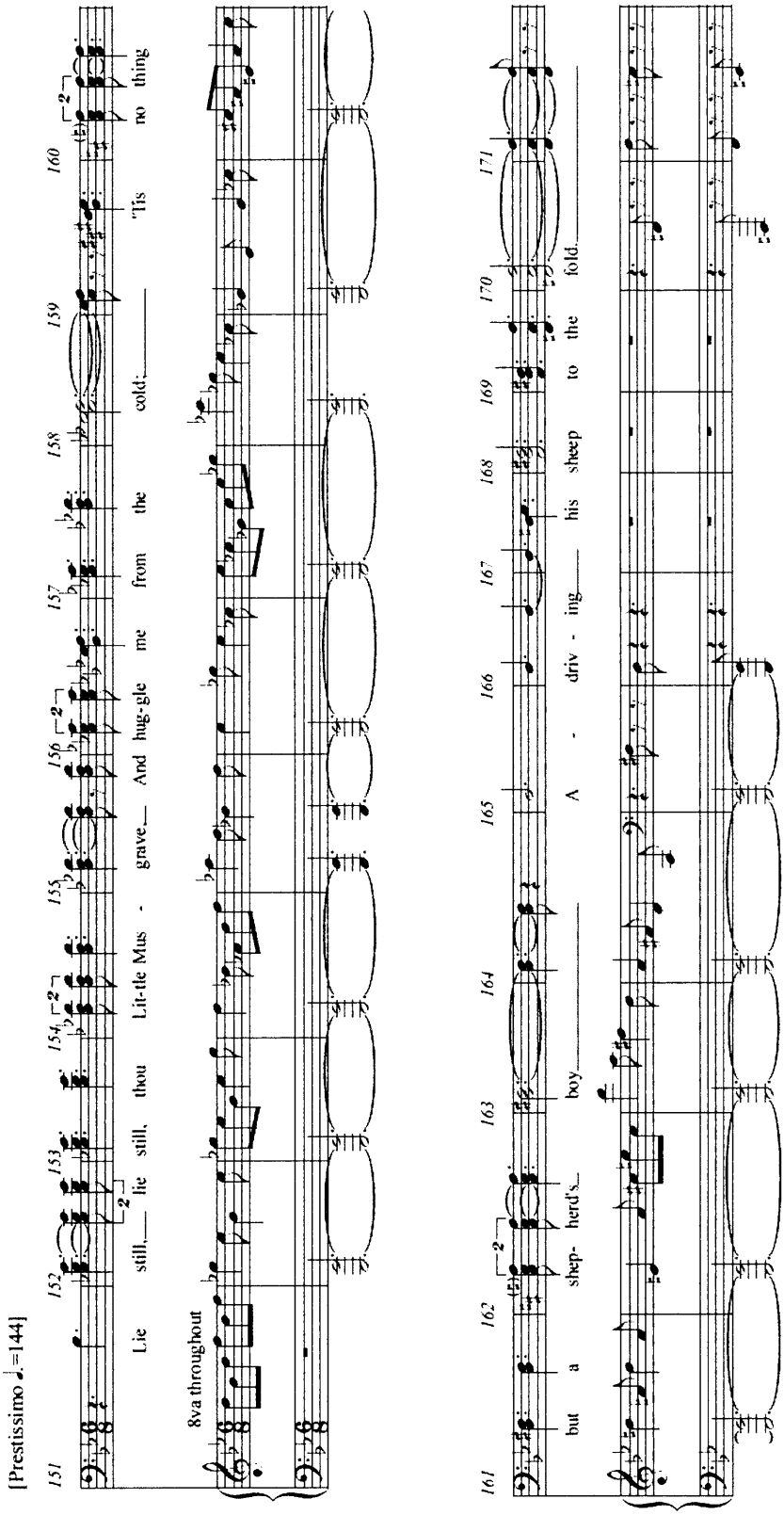
EXAMPLE 3.6: *Musgrave*, mm. 133-153, stanza 11 and disruption of hypermeter via higher-prime rhythms.

While the voice maintains a regular hypermeter, the piano's irregular rhythms continue to disrupt hypermetric entrainment. The accompanimental groupings are different for each line of stanza 11: line 1, mm. 134-137, groups as 5+3; line 2, mm. 138-143, groups as 3+3+3+3, and potentially establishes 1.5- and 3-measure hyperpulses; line 3, mm. 144-148, groups as 7+3; and line 4, mm. 149-153, groups as 5+5 (matching mm. 118-122).

In summary, over the course of the interlude and stanza 11, Britten consistently problematizes every pulse slower than the dotted-quarter pulse established in stanzas 6-10 and perturbs the dotted-quarter pulse through quarter-note attacks in the voice (see mm.

136, 146, and 148). The only stable pulses throughout this passage are the eighth and dotted-quarter pulses.

Example 3.7 excerpts Britten's setting of stanza 12, where Lady Barnard attempts to quell Musgrave's concern. He restores the hypermetric pulses absent in stanza 11 and introduces a direct grouping conflict at the fastest pulse level to mark the change of speaker. The voice establishes a pure duple meter in contrast to the mixed vocal meter of stanzas 6-11: the duple division of the dotted-quarter pulse in most even-numbered measures and the lack of eighth-note attacks in the voice establish a dotted-eighth pulse notated (anomalously) as duplet eighths; and the first three lines, set as four-measure phrases, recall the opening theme, restoring two- and four-measure hyperpulses. While the accompaniment continues its metrically skewed version of Lord Barnard's theme, maintaining eighth and dotted-quarter pulses, it no longer projects higher prime pulses. The accents provided by the three-eighth-note figure are still non-isochronous; but they are overridden by isochronous accents of tonal change. The combination of the voice's duple meter (duple eighth = dotted eighth, dotted-quarter, dotted-half pulses) and the accompaniment's mixed meter forms a hemiola.



EXAMPLE 3.7: *Musgrave*, mm. 151-171, Britten's setting of stanza 12 in 6/8 rather than 2/2.

The three ski-hill graphs in Figure 3.6 illustrate stanza 12's restoration of stanza 6-10's pulses that were disrupted by the piano's interlude/stanza 11. Britten marks the return of the main protagonist in stanza 11 by disrupting the longest stable meter of the ballad (stanzas 6-10). While Lady Barnard's response in stanza 12 restores the prior hypermetric pulses, it also reintroduces direct grouping conflict. Thus the return of the protagonists disrupts the largest stable metric passage in the ballad, strengthening the association between metric instability / conflict with their adulterous act.

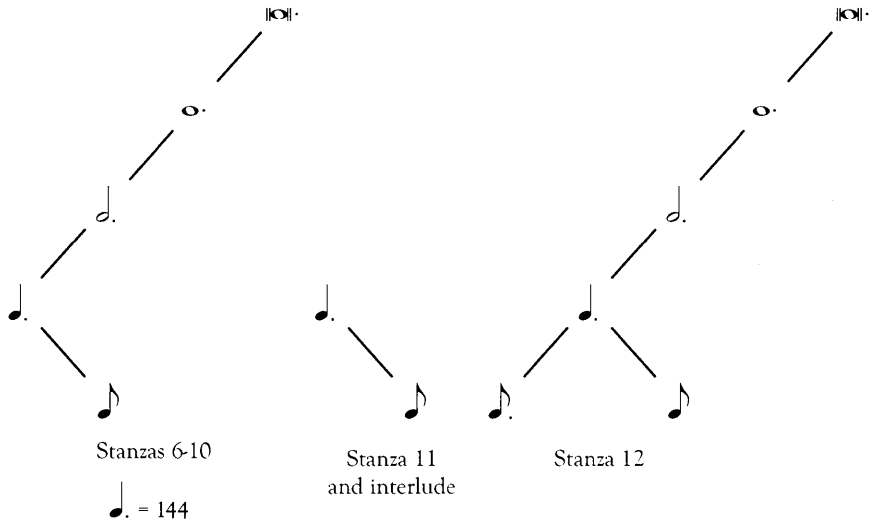
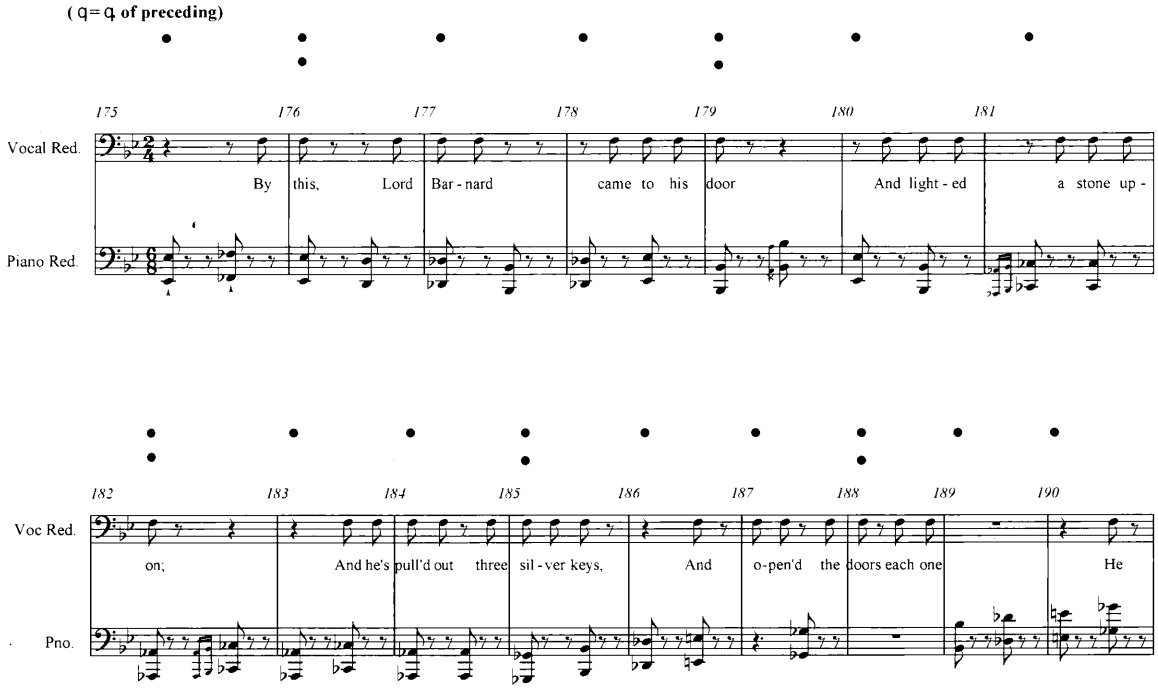


FIGURE 3.6: Ski-hill graphs capturing changes in meter that divide stanzas 6-10, 11, and 12.

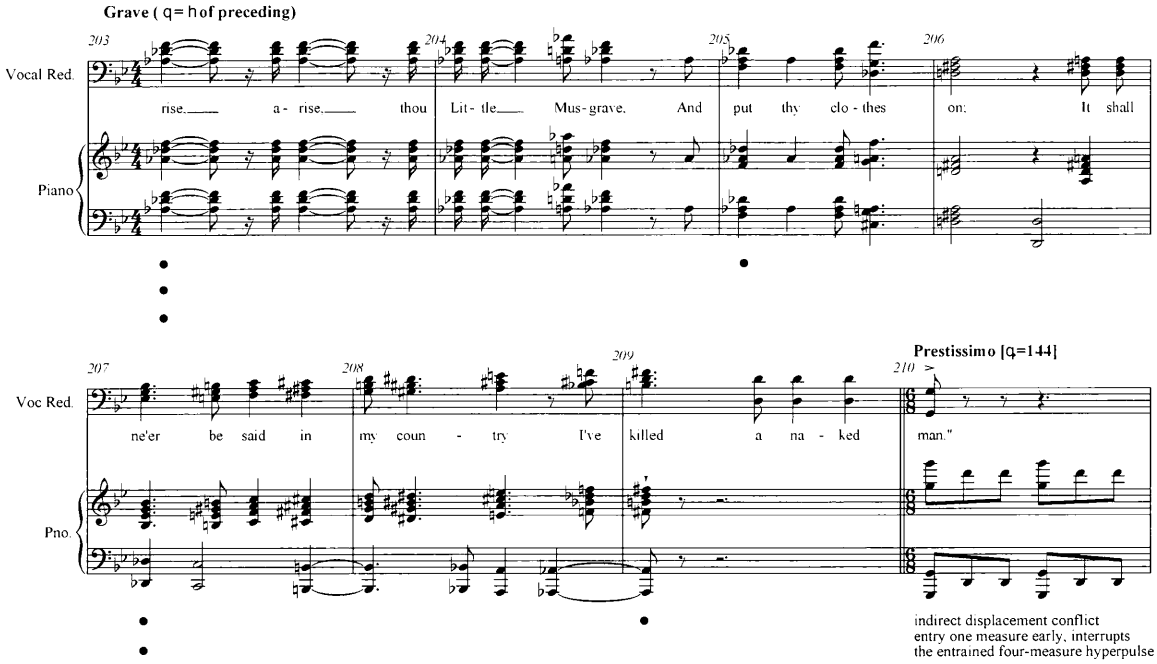
Stanzas 13-14 signal the arrival of Lord Barnard at Bucklesfordberry. Britten emphasizes the shift of narration and character through the resolution of stanza 12's direct grouping conflict to a stable uniform meter and a shift to a new meter involving triple hypermeter. As shown in Example 3.8, he notates the piano in 6/8 and the voice in 2/4; however, the piano's attacks align exclusively with the voice's dotted-quarter-note timepoints, and thus support the voice's quarter pulse. The piano and voice form a

uniform meter in contrast to the setting of stanza 12. The plain declamation of text and rhythmic placement of attacks generate local-level quarter and half pulses; additionally, the voice's attacks on certain downbeat locations establish a triple hypermeter.



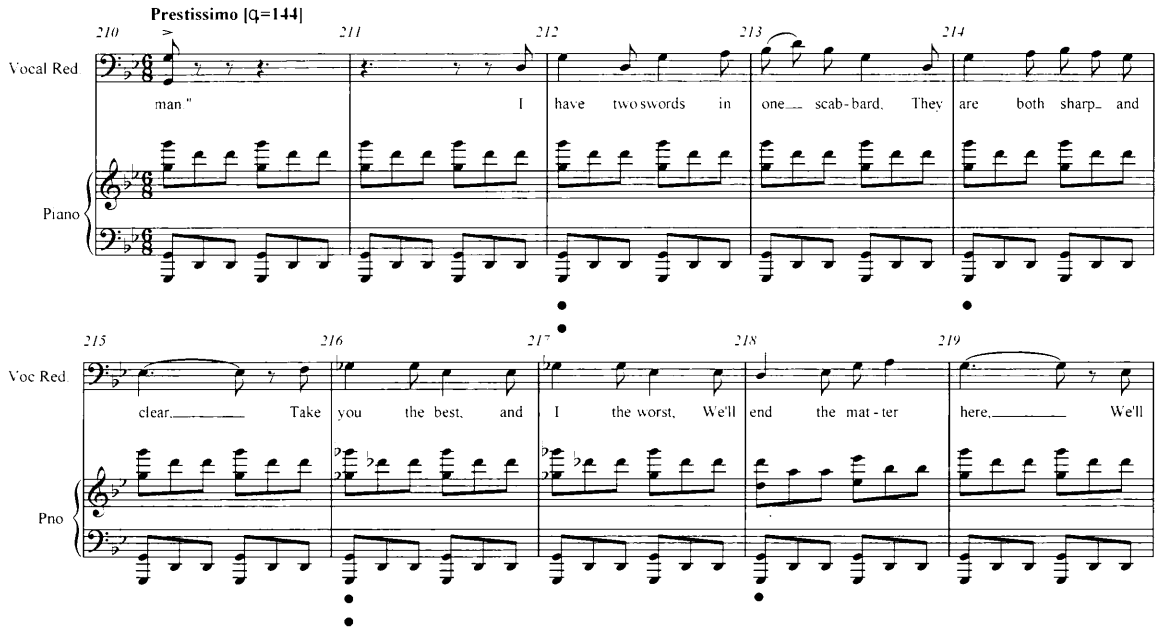
EXAMPLE 3.8: *Musgrave,* mm. 175-190, opening of stanza 12.

Following his arrival in stanzas 13-14, Lord Barnard discovers the lovers in stanza 15. In Example 3.9, Britten sets Lord Barnard's address to Musgrave with full choral voicing and piano chordal attacks that contrast with the single-pitch declamatory text and sparse accompaniment of stanzas 13-14. A *Grave* tempo replaces the *Prestissimo* dotted-quarter=144 tempo in stanza 15 as it had done earlier in stanza 6. Here, the quarter pulse is equivalent to the half pulse of stanzas 13-14, and thus a quarter = 72.



EXAMPLE 3.9: *Musgrave,* mm. 203-210, Lord Barnard's discovery of the lovers in stanza 15.

Example 3.10 excerpts stanza 16, Lord Barnard's challenge. This moment is marked by the shift from pure duple to mixed meters (the dotted quarter, which is grouped duply at slower pulse levels, divides triply into eighths, forming a mixed meter), and by the shift in tempo. Additionally, the change to a mixed meter occurs a measure early at m. 210 rather than the expected m. 211, briefly disrupting the four hyperpulse of stanza 15 and generating an indirect displacement conflict.



EXAMPLE 3.10: *Musgrave*, mm. 210-219, stanza 16, changes in tempo, and return to mixed meter.

As shown in Figure 3.7, Britten differentiates stanzas 12 to 16 from one another through changes in meter and tempo. While the increased frequency of changes mirrors the intensification of events in the story (with Lord Barnard searching and finding Musgrave and challenging him to a duel), he maintains continuity through equivalent pulses. For example, the dotted-half pulse in stanza 12 is equivalent to the half pulse in stanzas 13 and 14, itself equivalent to the quarter pulse of stanza 14 and the dotted-half pulse of stanza 16.

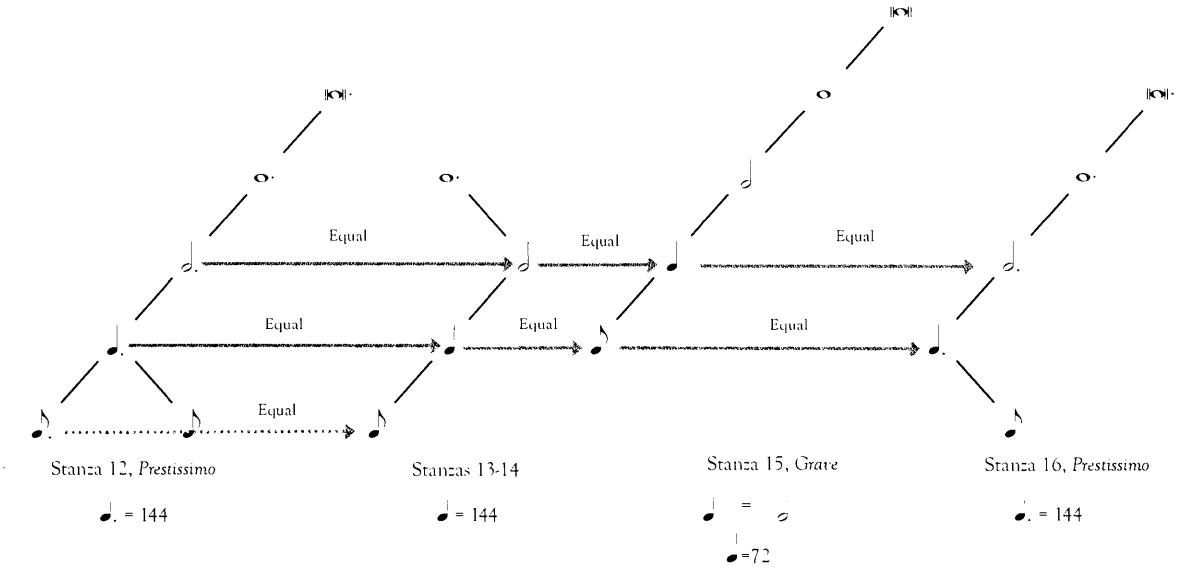
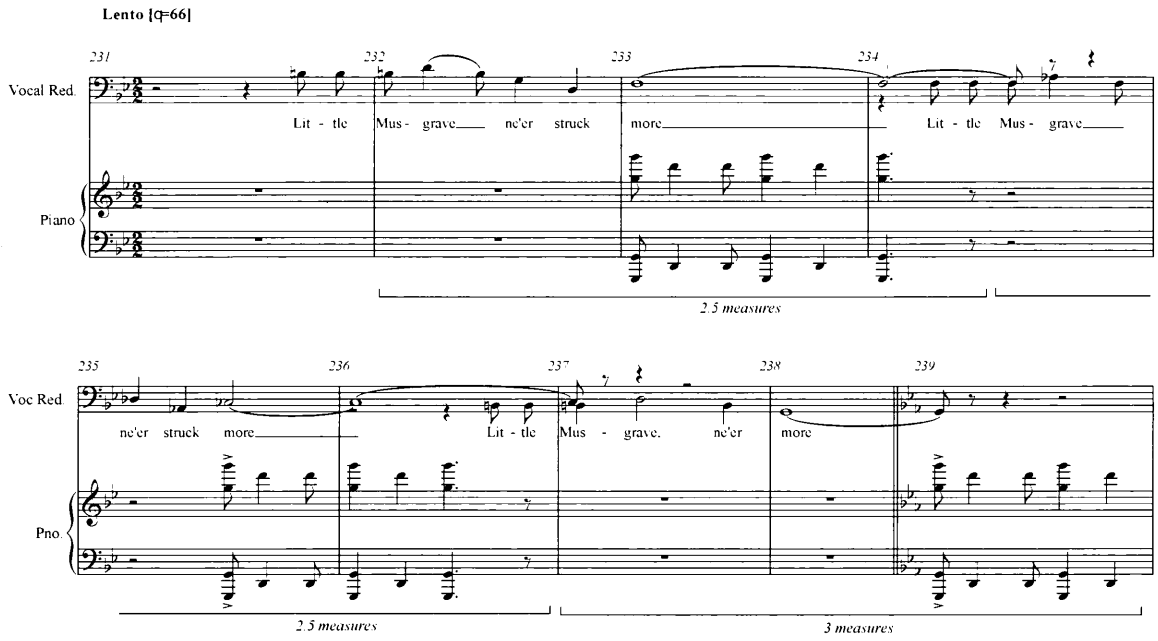


FIGURE 3.7: Resolution of stanza 12's hemiola in stanzas 13-14 and the change in hypermeter.

Britten's maintenance of a shared pulse throughout *Musgrave* ceases at the fourth line of stanza 17, Musgrave's death. Shown in Example 3.11, Britten marks the final tempo shift with a change from mixed meter to duple via the change of time signature from 6/8 to 2/2. Beginning in mm. 231-238 and continuing to the ballad's conclusion, the piano fixates on the rhythm eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, quarter rhythm from the ballad's opening in m. 13. This material was used to extend the normative eight-measure framework, disrupting the duple hypermeter (this rhythm first appears in m. 7, and again in m. 11; it is characteristically used to set the interior of the second line of each couplet). Moreover, the two repetitions of the text "Little Musgrave neer struck more" are set to the same tune (arpeggio plus repercussed fourths) as "away Musgrave away" from m. 117, but stretched from six beats to eight. The imitation again occurs at the space of 2.5 bars, and the eight measures again are divided 2.5 + 2.5 + 3 as in mm. 118-125.



EXAMPLE 3.11: *Musgrave*, mm. 231-238.

At m. 231, the shared pulse between all previous changes in meter/tempo ceases. This cessation is graphically represented in Figure 3.8 via the lack of an arrow connecting closely-equivalent (in clock time) pulses.

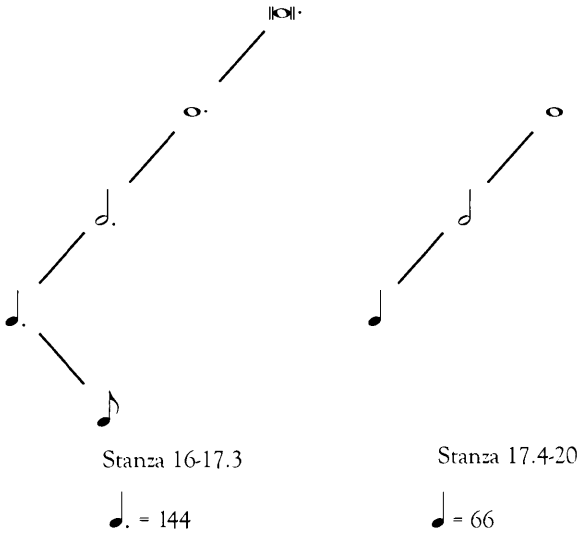
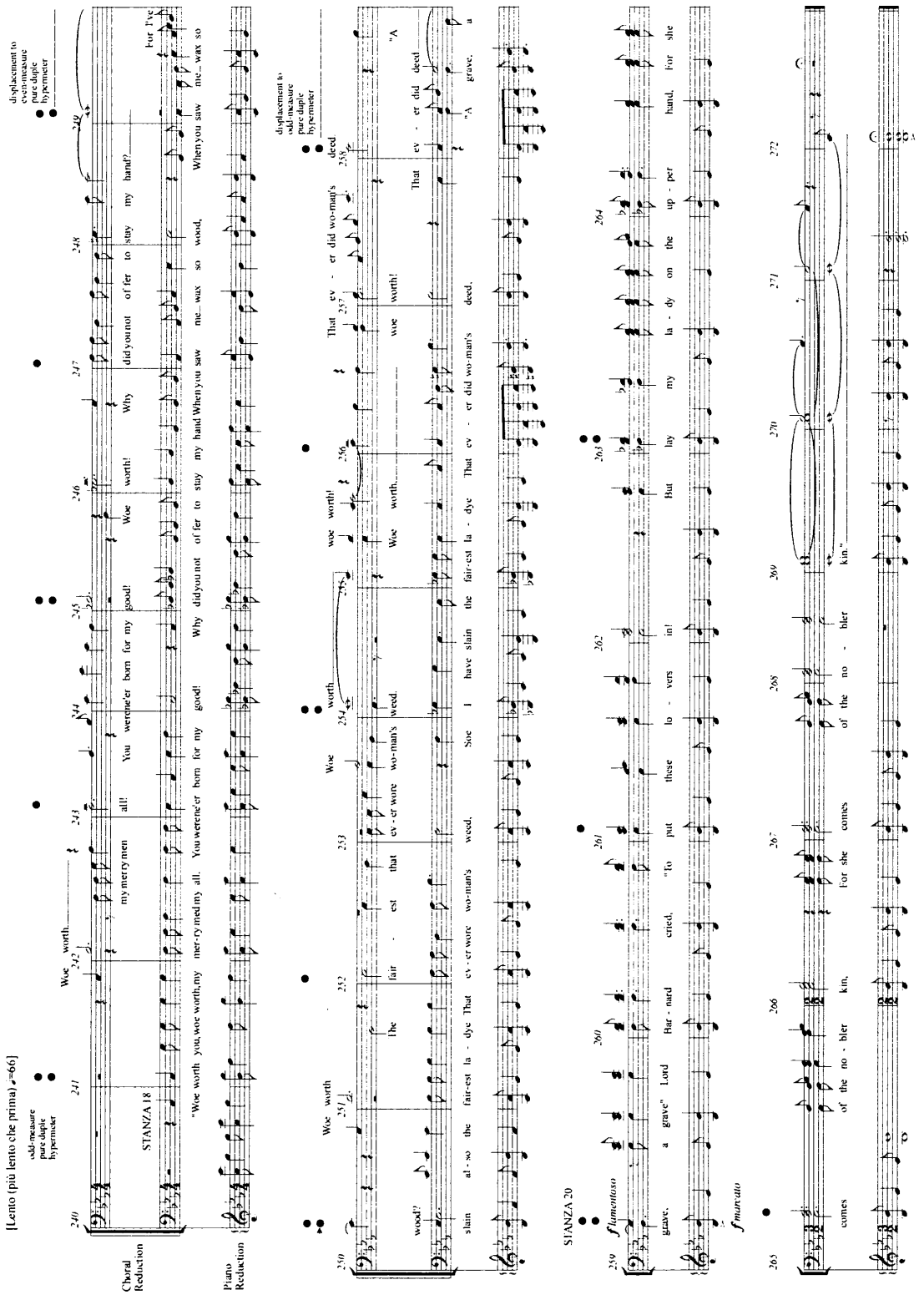


FIGURE 3.8: Ski-hill graph representations of stanzas 16-17.3 and 17.4-20, demonstrating the lack of a shared temporal equivalency between the two metric spaces.

Example 3.12 excerpts the final three stanzas, Lord Barnard's lament. Up to this point in the ballad, all passages involving Lord Barnard (stanzas 8-10 and 13-16) have been metrically consonant at local and hypermetric levels. Britten references the opening textural disposition of voices by appointing the theme in stanzas 18 and 19 first to the bass then to the tenor before the textural climax of all three voices setting stanza 20, reprising the opening. But the piano fixates upon a different rhythmic idea that contains only brief displacements in contrast to the opening's metrically complex interweaving rhythmic strands.

As in the opening stanzas, each vocal entry in stanzas 18 and 19 expands normative eight-measure phrases: for example, the bass repeats the phrase "when you saw me wax so wood" in mm. 249-250, extending an eight-measure phrase into ten measures. As in the opening, the entry of the next voice, the baritone in this case, cuts across this repetition, shifting the hypermeter from odd- to even-measured. Then the baritones repeat "That ever did womans deed," which is cut short by the tenor and bass's "A grave, a grave." This interpretation shifts the hypermeter back to an odd-measure orientation. In stanza 4, Britten discontinued these indirect hypermetric displacements through its setting as an eight-measure phrase without expansion. Here, in stanza 20, there is no such normalization. Instead, he internally expands its eighth measure, m. 265, through a 3/2 measure, delaying the downbeat by a half note, and then proceeds to expand the phrase by several measures, setting "for she comes of the nobler kin."



EXAMPLE 3.12: *Musgrave*, mm. 240-272(end), Britten's setting of stanzas 18-20.

Following Musgrave's death in stanza 17, Lord Barnard's passages are no longer metrically consonant as they had been in all prior appearances. Britten imbues his closing monologue with two features associated primarily with Musgrave's passages: the hypermetric indirect conflicts from stanza 1-3, including its theme; and an expanded version of the eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, and quarter rhythmic figure from Musgrave's death, themselves associated with Musgrave's prior passages. Perhaps the lack of hypermetric resolution suggests that Lord Barnard will find no resolution even after slaying the illicit lovers and that he too must share the burden of guilt for the ballad's tragic end, which originally targeted Musgrave and Lady Barnard for their affair. While one could imagine an interpretation of the text's ballad that spins Lord Barnard's victory against Musgrave in the duel and the accidental killing of Lady Barnard as a form of justice, given their adultery, Britten's metric treatment that also places the blame at Lord Barnard's feet align with the composer's pacifist leanings.

Chapter 3 has examined one of Britten's most complex stand-alone songs, *the Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard.* Throughout the ballad, I have argued that metric conflict and stability play a central role in the unfolding plot between its three central characters, Little Musgrave, Lady Barnard, and Lord Barnard. By connecting all of the different meters throughout stanzas 1-17.3, Britten enhances the sudden lack of connection of the fourth line of stanza 17, Musgrave's death. And following Musgrave's death, Lord Barnard's material is no longer metrically consonant and moreover reprises the vocal material associated with the most metrically complex passage, the opening. The most compelling aspect of the ballad is how metric conflict interacts with proportional tempo changes,

suggesting that Britten is sensitive to metric conflict across an entire piece rather than in select sections. If chapter 3's analysis of the ballad hints at his more global treatment of metric conflict, chapter 4's analysis of the song cycle *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne,* confirms the approach. Arguably the most metrically complex of all his music, *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* takes his metric experiments from the *Serenade,* folksong settings, *Little Musgrave*, *Festival te Deum*, and *Peter Grimes* and demonstrates how metric conflict can function over an entire cycle.

CHAPTER FOUR
The Holy Sonnets of John Donne: metric conflict across a song cycle

Composed in 1945, the *Holy Sonnets of John Donne* is arguably the most rhythmically complex and metrically unstable of all Britten's vocal music. While metric conflict appears in various guises throughout his career, this song cycle for voice and piano presents an apex in their use. While prior chapters examined how Britten employed metric conflict strategically to mark points within an individual piece, here, consider how he uses metric conflict structurally across an entire song cycle.

The *Holy Sonnets* sets nine sonnets authored by the seventeenth-century poet and cleric John Donne from a collection of nineteen (referred to as his *Divine Meditations*). These nine sonnets, listed in Figure 4.1 and presented in full in the Appendix, do not tell a linear story, but are loosely connected by topics including sin, love, and death. While the scholarly literature is diverse, especially concerning their theological interpretation, there is a consensus that they reflect Donne's own religious struggle with God. According to the literary critic Ken Gransden, his sonnets encode "a personal record of a brilliant mind struggling towards God."[66]

[66] Ken Grandsen, *John Donne*, revised edition (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1969), 132.

1. (IV) Oh my blacke soule
2. (XIV) Batter my heart
3. (III) Oh might those sighes and teares
4. (XIX) Oh to vex me
5. (XIII) What if this present
6. (XVII) Since She whom I lov'd
7. (VII) At the earth round imagin'd corners
8. (I) Thou hast made me
9. (X) Death be not proud

FIGURE 4.1: Britten's choice of sonnets and their ordering in *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne.*[67]

Donne's fourteen-line sonnets are complex in their structure, fusing characteristics of traditional Italian Petrarchan conventions and what is now referred to as a Shakespearean sonnet.[68] He combines important turning points in both structures: the Petrarchan division of the sonnet as an eight-line octave and six-line sestet, and the Shakespearean division of the sonnet as three four-line quatrains and a final two-couplet rhyming couplet (8+6 versus 4+4+4+2). Even though the Shakespearean version contains the articulation of the octave via the rhyme scheme, it differs from the Petrarchan in that the latter emphasizes the beginning of the sestet as a "solution" to the problem presented in the octave, whereas the former sonnet delays this resolution to the final rhyming couplet. Donne combines these two major points of articulation, calling attention to the boundary between lines 8 and 9 (Petrarchan) *and* lines 12 and 13 (Shakespearean). Helen Gardner calls attention to Donne's treatment of the final couplet as a "true rhetorical climax,"

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[67] The roman numerals represent one specific ordering of sonnets referred to as the "Westmoreland Manuscript." The most detailed account of different orderings and sources for Donne's sonnets can be found in John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 7/I, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 55-115.

[68] According to the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, the Petrarchan sonnet divides into octave and sestet, where the octave contains the rhythm scheme abbaabba, and the sestet varies as either cdecde or cdcdcd. The sestet can also contain different combinations, but it "avoids the closing couplet." Compare the Petrarchan to the Shakespearean, whose rhyme scheme (abab cdcd efef gg) contains a rhyming final couplet. See *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan s.v. "Sonnet" (New York: MJF Books, 1993), 1167-1168.

explaining that while he distinguishes the octave from the sestet in the traditional Petrarchan sense, the final rhyming couplet is not an "afterthought, or an addition, or a mere summary."[69]

Take, for example, Donne's "Death be not proud," shown in Figure 4.2, which is one of the most conventional of his sonnets. Donne's punctuation observes both Petrarchan and Shakespearean divisions and as such divides the sonnet into four sections: lines 1-4, lines 5-8, lines 9-12, and lines 13-14. Donne divides the sonnet as octave (lines 1-8) and sestet (lines 9-14) via the salient thematic shift from the subject's criticism of Death's pomposity to the mocking of Death's stroke, which competes with multiple different death granting events. He marks the division of sestet as quatrain (lines 9-12) and final rhyming couplet (lines 13-14) by answering the question posed at the end of line 12.

1. Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
2. Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe,
3. For, those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
4. Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
5. From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures bee,
6. Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
7. And soonest our best men with thee do goe,
8. Rest of their bones, and souls deliverie.
9. Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
10. And dost with poison, warre, and sickness dwell,
11. And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
12. And better than thy straoke; why swell'st thou then?
13. One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally
14. And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

FIGURE 4.2: Donne's "Death be not proud"

In addition to the formal play between the sonnet forms, Donne pushes against the Shakespearean conventions of iambic pentameter (a ten-syllable line divided into five verse feet containing an unstressed and stressed syllable pairs). Through his placement of stresses

[69] Helen Gardener, *The Divine Poems*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), xxxii.

within individual lines, enjambments between lines (the sentential continuation from one line to the next), mid-line pauses, and varying the number of syllables per line, his sonnets have been judged as incompetent by some, but as genius by others: compare Ben Jonson, who notes that he "should have hanged for his misplacement of accents,"[70] to Gardner, who commends him for being "very bold and original."[71] Donne plays with the tension between reading the sonnet as rhythmically varied prose and as shaped by the conventions of iambic pentameter. As Arnold Stein explains, his "poetry is not to be read as prose, solely according to sense; nor as verse, solely according to meter, regardless of sense."[72]

Take, for example, one of Donne's most unusual sonnets, "Oh might these sighes and teares," shown in Figure 4.3. He delineates the sestet from the octave, marking the subject's lamenting through distinct shifts in syllabic distribution, enjambment, and punctuation. In the octave, monosyllabic words dominate and adhere closely to an iambic pentameter; in the sestet, conversely, monosyllabic words are scarce, with multiple two- and three-syllable words disrupting the prior iambic pentameter of the octave. In the octave, the prosodic flow and balance of lines 1 and 2 repeats in lines 3 and 4. The enjambment in both cases continues an idea into the next line that is then followed by a brief subordinating clause ("which I have spent" in line 2 and "as I have mourn'd in vaine" in line 4). Although lines 6 and 7 contain internal line stops, they are integrated into the overall sentential logic of their respective couplets. Now, consider the function of enjambment in the sestet, which is

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[70] Quoted in Yvor Winters, *Forms of Discovery* (Chicago: Alan Swallow, 1967), 74.

[71] Gardener, 54.

[72] Arnold Stein, "Meter and Meaning in Donne's Verse," *The Sewanee Review* 52, 2 (Spring 1944): 292. A more in-depth argument appears a few pages later: "[P]eople who read Donne as if he were prose miss almost as much of his point and emphasis as those who try to read him as if each line were composed of five model iambs. Examples in Donne are numerous, from all the periods of his poetry."

unusual. Lines 9 and 10 enjamb pairs of noun phrases that describe various sinners. It is not until line 11 that the sentence's verb directs the reader to the object "the remembrance of past joys." But the sentence does not end here. The enjambment between lines 11 and 12 continues the thought from line 9 through to line 12's "for reliefe of comming ills[.]" At this point, one might expect the sentence to end at the close of line 12, which would form a quatrain unit and observe Shakespearean conventions. However, the end of the sentence occurs *within*, rather than at the end of, line 12. Furthermore, line 12 is enjambed to line 13 with a semi-colon, internally punctuating line 13 and generating a further unusual pause mid-sestet. Thus Donne also plays with the placement of the final rhetorical flourish, in this case delaying it into line 13.

1. O might those sighes and teares returne againe
2. into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
3. That I might in this holy discontent
4. Mourne with some fruit, as I have mourn'd in vaine;
5. In mine Idolatry what showr's of rain
6. Mine eyes did waste? what griefs my heart did rent[73]?
7. That sufferance was my sinne; now I repent;
8. 'Cause I did suffer, I must suffer paine.
9. Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night-scouting thiefe,
10. The itchy Lecher, and selfe tickling proud
11. Have the remembrance of past joyes for reliefe
12. of comming ills. To poore me is allow'd
13. No ease; for, long, yet vehement griefe hath been
14. Th'effect and cause, the punishment and sinne.

FIGURE 4.3: Donne's "Oh might these sighes and teares."

Britten's setting of each sonnet demonstrates an understanding of Donne's fusion of Petrarchan and Shakespearean structural norms and his play with rhythmic and metric stresses within the convention of iambic pentameter. All of the songs establish metric conflict from the start; changes in the type or strength of these conflicts or their resolution

[73] Past participle of rend, to tear.

usually align with the two boundary points generated by Donne's fusion of Petrarchan and Shakespearean forms. Britten's phrases take into account Donne's enjambments in order to foreground sentential logic, but they do not completely abandon the structural implications of iambic pentameter: there is sensitivity to his sonnets as prose and as structure.

Sonnets IV, XIV, III, and XIX (see Fig. 4.1, p. 93), which are the texts for the first four songs, are lamentations on sin: in "Oh my blacke soule," the speaker likens himself to a series of sinners who wish to avoid execution for past crimes; in "Batter my heart," the speaker asks God to make him anew because of his weak faith; in "O might those sighes and teares," the speaker laments the fact that he wasted tears over lost loves; and "Oh, to vex me" contains a series of contrary statements, depicting the speaker's wavering faith and fear of God. Sonnets XIII, XVII, VII, and I, the texts for the next four songs, concern Death and Judgment Day: in "What if this present," the speaker worries about the arrival of Judgment Day and consoles himself that surely Christ will forgive him for his sins; in "Since she whom I Lov'd," the speaker is engulfed with anguish over the death of his dearly beloved; in "At the round earth's imagined corners," the speaker's fears are realized as Judgment Day arrives; and in "Thou hast made me," the speaker beseeches God to help him, given that time is running out. The final song in the cycle, Sonnet X, "Death be not proud," is the most distinct of all the poems and fits into neither of the two prior groups. It is the most profoundly optimistic of all the sonnets, discussing the victory over Death and eternal salvation that follows.

There is no single accepted ordering of Donne's *Divine meditations*, and the order of Britten's *Holy Sonnets* does not match any of the orders proposed by Donne scholars. The principle that generated Britten's ordering is not immediately clear. David Brown, an early analyst of Britten's music, views the *Holy Sonnets* as a "personal drama." He interprets the cycle as a linear story with three acts divided as songs 1-5, 6-8, and 9, labeled as summons, crisis, and victory.[74] Bryan N. S. Gooch offers a different grouping based on the various themes presented in the sonnets: 1-5, 6, 7-9. Arguing that the selection and placement of each poem is unique, he labels songs 1-5 as conscience, unworthiness, and death; song 6 as individual melancholy; and songs 7-9 as resurrection.[75] In both readings, song 6 is highlighted as a structural turning point in the cycle.

Arnold Whittall suggests an alternative, non-contiguous grouping based on musical properties. His chart, shown in Figure 4.4, assigns a single key to each song in the cycle, reading from left to right. Starting with B minor (lower-case) and ending with B major (upper-case), the nine songs divide into two rows, with those related to C minor listed in the top row and those related to B minor in the bottom row. These opposed key centers resolve via the eighth song's enharmonically equivalent $E^{\flat}$ / $D^{\sharp}$, which acts as a tonal mediator: "while prominence is given to immediate relatives (dominants and relative majors) of both centres, the cycle integrates the alternatives rather than preserving and enhancing their independence."[76]

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[74] David Brown, "Stimulus and Form in Britten's work," *Music & Letters* 39, no. 3 (Jul., 1958): 221.

[75] Bryan N.S. Gooch "Britten and Donne: Holy sonnets set to music," in *Wrestling with God: Literature & Theology in the English Renaissance–Essays to Honour Paul Grant Stanwood* (Vancouver, BC: Henley and Hall, 2001), 195.

[76] Arnold Whittall, "Tonality in Britten's Song Cycles with Piano," *Tempo* 96 (Spring, 1971): 5.

c g E flat e flat
b e f sharp D B

FIGURE 4.4: Arnold Whittall's parsing of the *Holy Sonnets* on tonal grounds.[77]

I would like to propose a different grouping of Britten's setting of Donne's *Divine Meditations*. Rather than focusing on the content of the successive poems, or on the arrangement of musical keys, my analysis is informed by Britten's employment of different types of metric conflict across the cycle. On the basis of the types of metric conflict employed in successive songs, the *Holy Sonnets* divide into three sections: songs 1-4 prioritize *displacement* conflict, songs 5-8 foreground *grouping* conflict, and song 9 fuses both types of conflict. I am not claiming that each type of conflict is exclusively used in the representative section, but rather that it is more salient. This chapter surveys the usage of meter in each song, but then focuses on Britten's most compelling treatments of meter from each of the three sections: "Batter my heart" (song 2) demonstrates displacement conflicts, "Since she whom I lov'd" (song 6) demonstrates grouping conflicts, and "Death be not proud" (song 9) demonstrates both. Although I concentrate on song 2 to represent displacement conflict and song 6 to represent grouping conflict, I precede these detailed discussions with an overview of these techniques as they appear in songs 1, 2 and 4 and songs 5, 7, and 8 respectively.

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In the first four songs, Britten delineates the sonnet's main structural units through different treatments of displacement conflict. In song 1, he varies the intensity of an ever-present displacement conflict. In song 2, he brings the voice and piano into and out of

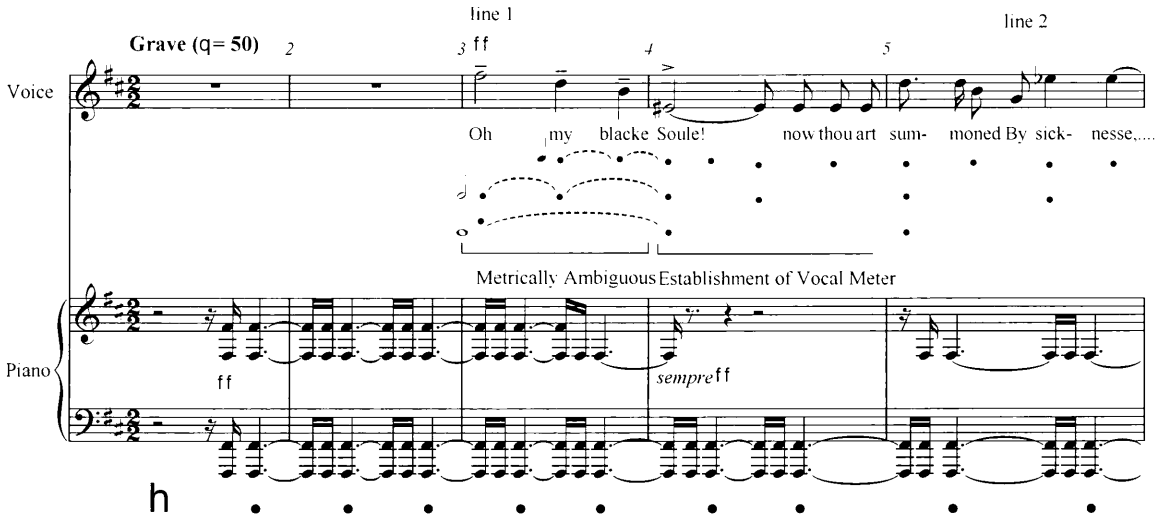
[77] Ibid., 4.

alignment with the notated meter, leading to a series of displacements spanning different lengths. In song 3, he establishes weakly present local-level displacements throughout, via a sighing minor-second figure, but also uses large-scale repetition to cut across an established hypermeter, forming indirect hypermetric displacements. And in song 4, he employs a toccata-like pattern in different positions to initiate retrospectively-heard shifts of hypermeter between odd and even measures.[78]

The opening song of the cycle, "Oh my blacke Soule!" (see Appendix), describes a subject who has been imprisoned, awaits execution, and turns his mind to saving his soul. The most compelling metric aspect of this song is the displacement conflict established between the piano and voice at the opening, which is maintained through most of the song. This displacement is intensified near the end of the initial octet, is weakened at the start of the sestet, marking this boundary, and is then intensified again at the final rhyming couplet. As shown in Example 4.1, the piano is offset from the notated beat. Its tolling figure establishes a displaced half pulse. While Lerdahl and Jackendoff's strong-beat early preference rule establishes a pulse on the first of each pair of attacks, their durational preference rule suggests that the following durational accent establishes a pulse on the second of each pair. The voice, on the other hand, aligns with expected time points of the notated 2/2 measure. Following a brief moment of metric uncertainty in m. 3, the voice reinforces a salient duple meter aligned with the notated measure (the dot diagram beneath

[78] Although grouping conflicts appear in several of these songs, their role is either brief, highlighting specific words, or combined with a displacement conflict to mark a structural boundary.

the voice demonstrates the induction of a duple vocal meter).[79] Over the course of mm. 3 and 4, one retrospectively re-interprets the piano's attacks, not as establishing a half pulse on the downbeat, but rather as displaced.

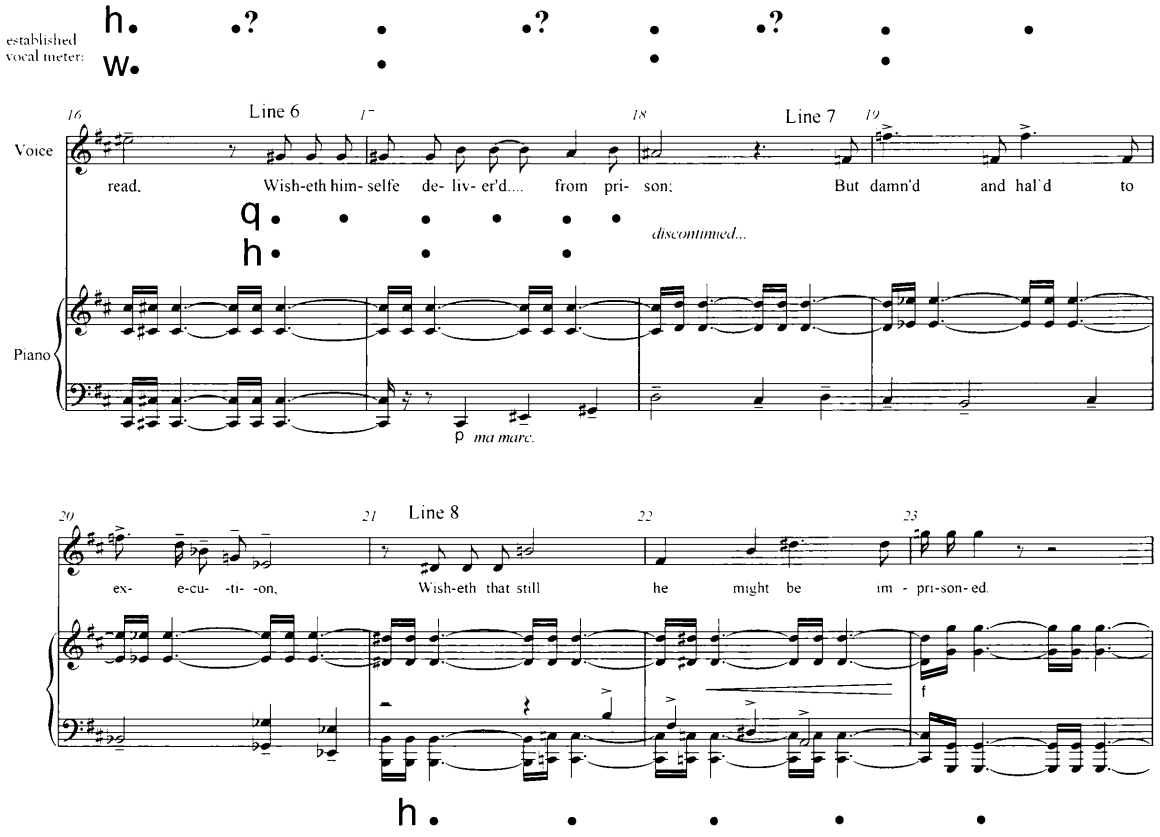


EXAMPLE 4.1: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 1, "Oh my blacke Soule!" mm. 1-5.

Their displacement is intensified in lines 6 and 8, shown in Example 4.2. In mm. 16-18, the initiation of the vocal phrase aligns for the first time with the piano's displaced half pulse. Subsequent agogic accents on "-er'd" of "deliver'd" and "from," with quarter-note durations, continue to reinforce the piano's displaced half pulse. As the voice appears to abandon its half pulse aligned with the notated meter, the left hand of the piano provides the missing on-the-beat attacks through an inverted version of the voice's opening melody

[79] There are no attacks on the musical surface (given the half-note-plus-sixteenth-note silence) that enable induction to pulses that would prepare us for the voice's entry. It is only in retrospect, after the establishment of the voice, that the listener can understand the piano's initial entry as displaced. Britten's use of this sort of metric sleight-of-hand has many precedents in the tonal literature. Danuta Mirka discusses a similar approach in the minuets of Haydn's String Quartets Op. 64 Nos. 3 and 4: "Haydn's purpose was to mislead the listener as to the moment when 'to take the first step.' Although minuets in string quartets are not designed for dancing, historical evidence bespeaks the internalization of the pattern of steps characteristic of this dance by eighteenth-century listeners to such an extent that they mentally recreated them during minuet movements. When the notated meter is revealed slightly later, forcing listeners to 'change the step,' this arouses an effect of a physical disturbance." Mirka, *Metric Manipulations*, 62.

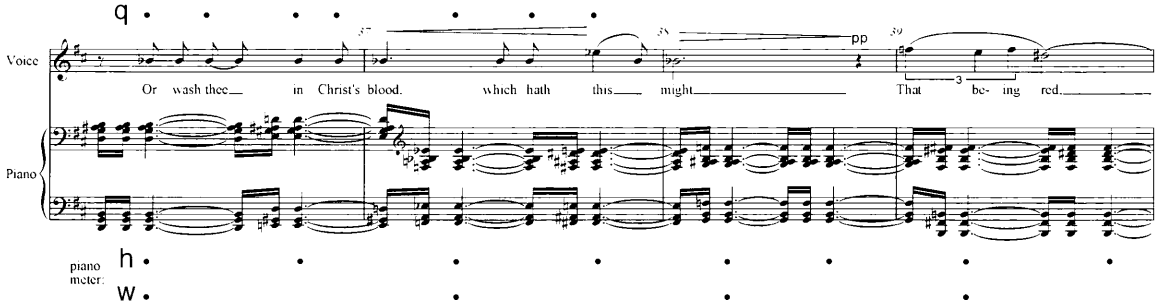
in m. 17. The voice's deviation from supporting the notated meter is swiftly corrected in the setting of line 7, which emphatically restores quarter, half, and whole pulses aligned with the measure. In mm. 21-23, Britten reinforces the piano's displaced pulse by adding an additional pitch class, from octave-doubled tones to pitch-class dyads, for the first time in the song, heightening the metric tension between voice and piano. This conflict lessens in m. 23: the end of the octave is marked as the voice and piano melodically and rhythmically come together for the first and only time in the song.



EXAMPLE 4.2: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 1, "Oh my blacke Soule!" mm. 16-23, Britten's setting of lines 6 and 8 and the reinforcement of the displaced piano pulse.

Britten marks the closing couplet by strengthening the displacement conflict to its greatest level of intensity via the techniques primed in lines 6 and 8. Shown in Example

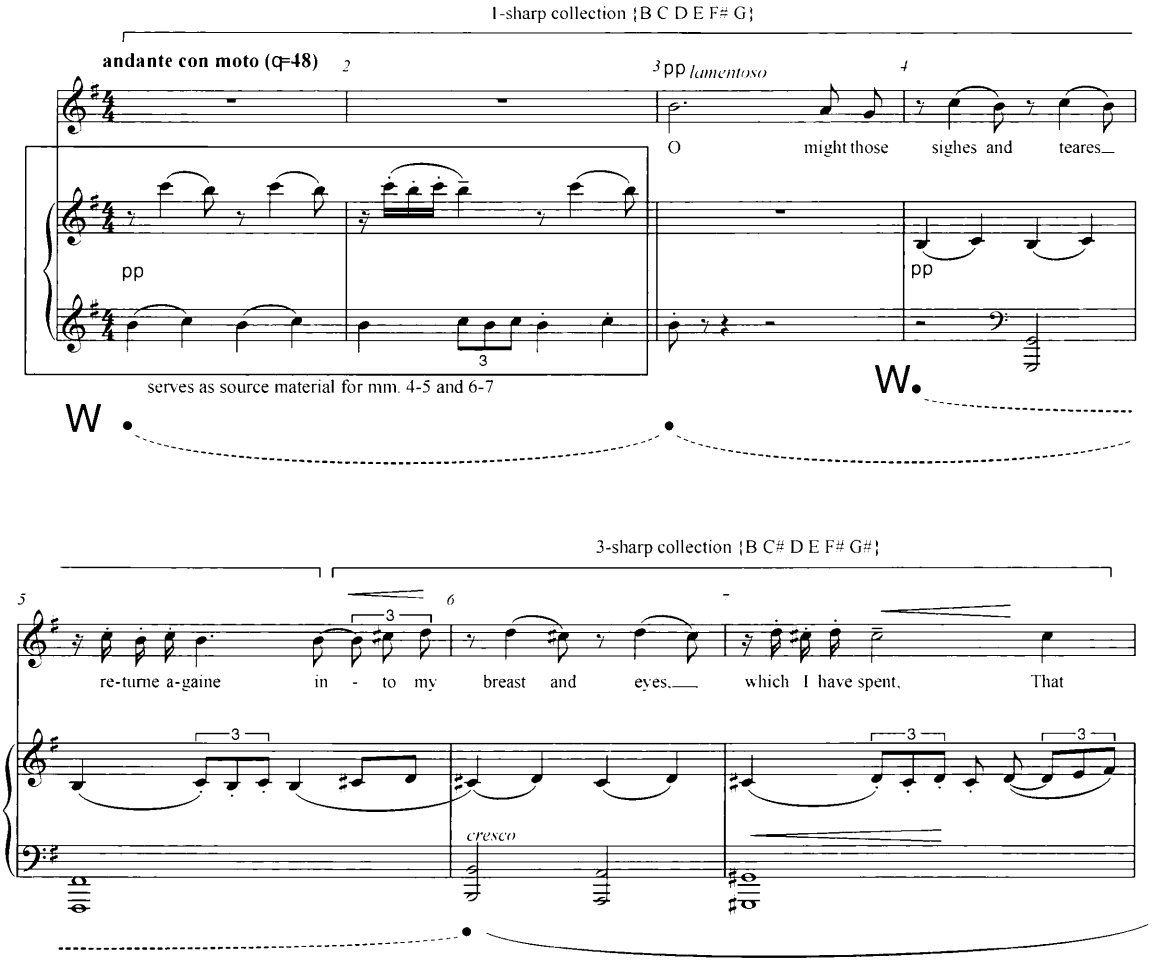
4.3, the displacement conflict is metrically strengthened by further phenomenal support of the piano's displaced pulse. The voice reinitiates the displaced agogic accents primed in the setting of line 6 (note, in particular, his treatment of "thee," "in," and "this"). The texture is further thickened by the conversion of pitch-class dyads to sharply dissonant 4- and 5-note chords. Through harmonic changes, the piano generates a whole pulse that, in addition to the half pulse, generates a displacement conflict at two pulse levels and the most intense version of displacement in the song.



EXAMPLE 4.3: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 1, "Oh my blacke Soule!" mm. 36-39, Britten's setting of line 13, marking the arrival of the final couplet.

Whereas Britten marks the Petrarchan and Shakespearean turning points in "Oh my blacke soule" through the varying of the intensity of the direct sustained displacement conflict, in "Oh might those sighes and teares," the third song in the cycle, he marks the same structural boundaries through indirect hypermetric displacements. Britten's two-measure piano introduction and setting of the first couplet, shown in Example 4.4, establish brief local metric conflicts that set the song's tone. The combination of the piano's left- and right-hand minor-second sighing figures, separated by an octave, generates two conflicts: a direct displacement conflict initiated by the agogic accents on C_6 of the upper figure; and indirect grouping conflicts as sixteenth-note attacks conflict with

subsequent triplet-eighth attacks.[80] The composite rhythm of the two minor-second sighing figures, however, projects a pure duple meter of eighth, quarter, half, and whole pulses aligned with the measure. The half pulse is supported by the resolution of minor ninth and major seventh dissonances at successive half-note spans, and the slower whole pulse is generated by the parallelism, where m. 2 is a rhythmic-melodic elaboration of m. 1.



EXAMPLE 4.4: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 3, "Oh might these sighes and teares," Britten's setting of lines 1 and 2, and the establishment of duple meter in mm. 1-3 and pure-duple hypermeter in mm. 4-7.

[80] These brief grouping conflicts continue into the first quatrain, directly in the case of the end of m. 5 (triplet versus duplet eighths), and indirectly in m. 7 (sixteenths versus triplets).

The voice's entry in m. 3 is agogically accented, initially suggesting that the whole pulse groups duply into a two-measure (breve) hyperpulse (shown via the dot diagram). The setting of the first couplet, though, is five measures long, disrupting that hypermetric projection. Measures 4 and 5 are a registral variant of mm. 1 and 2. The upper and lower registral material of the piano is transferred and divided between the voice and the piano's upper register. Measures 6 and 7 are also a melodic-rhythmic variant of mm. 4 and 5 transposed up a major second. This parallelism between mm. 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 causes a retrospective transfer of the hypermetric accent from the downbeat of m. 3 to that of m. 4. The difficulty with hearing hypermetric shifts as boundary points is that these shifts are rarely heard at the point of their initiation, but rather in retrospect.[81] This transfer of hypermetric accents primes the listener for the main type of hypermetric displacement conflict that marks the division of the octave and sestet and the final couplet.[82]

Britten marks the boundary between octave and sestet through not only an indirect hypermetric displacement primed in the opening, but also an indirect grouping conflict. Example 4.5 excerpts the end of the octave and the beginning of the sestet. The sestet's entrance is displaced, given the established meter (shown via the dot diagram), and, as in "Oh my blacke soule," this major structural point is also articulated by a textural shift in the piano. A chordal *tremolando* replaces the prior arpeggiating sixteenth-attacks and presents a transformed version of the opening material with descending harmonic shifts that change exclusively at half-note intervals. A mixed meter replaces the established pure duple meter:

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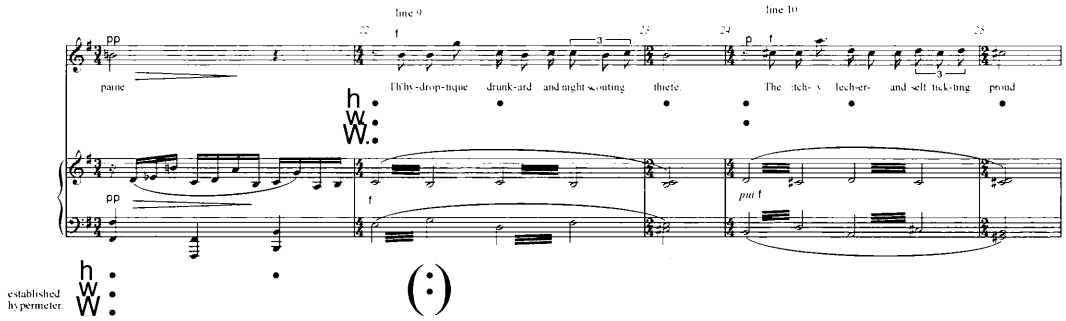
[81] For a model of this process, see David Temperley, "Hypermetrical Transitions," *Music Theory Spectrum* 30, no. 2 (2008): 305-325.

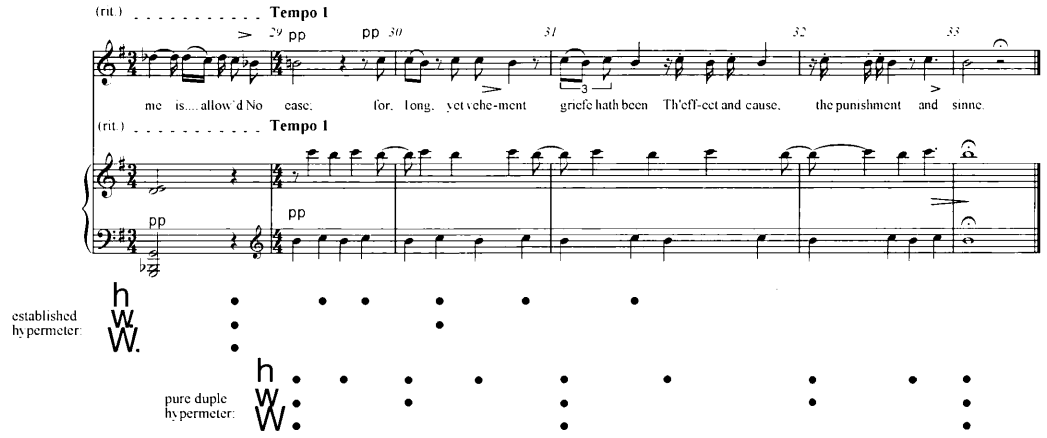
[82] There is also a division between the quatrains of the octave, which can be seen by looking at mm. 8-13.

the half pulse is now grouped triply into a dotted-whole pulse, which is grouped duply into a dotted-breve pulse. These two pulses are supported by the contraction of mm. 4-5, which spanned two 4/4 measures, into a 6/4 measure (4/4+2/4). The resulting melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic parallelism supports the new mixed meter. This mixed meter, initiated by the transformed version of the opening material, interrupts the established pure duple meter and generates an indirect hypermetric displacement.



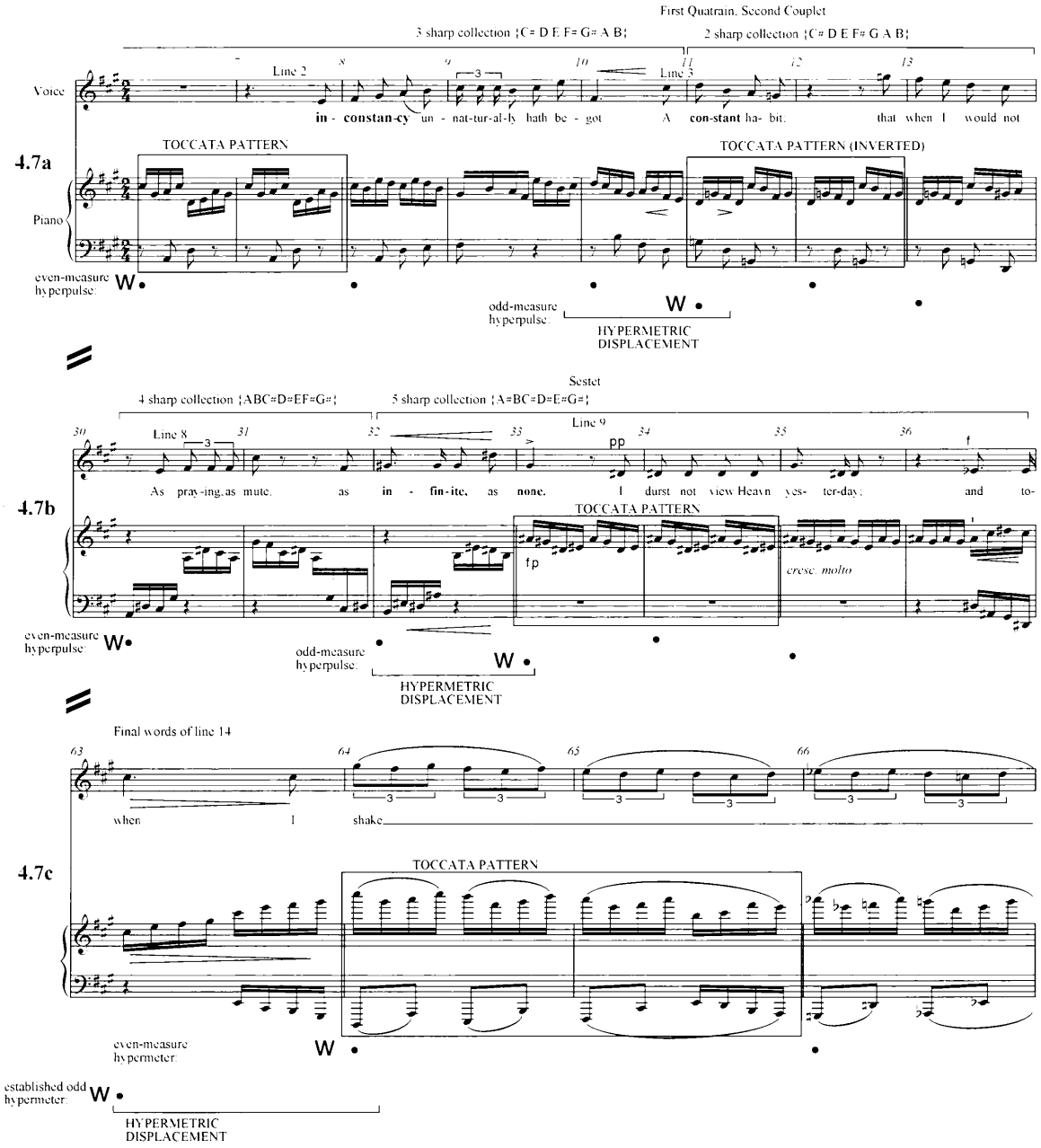
EXAMPLE 4.5: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 3, "Oh might these sighes and teares," mm. 21-25, the boundary between octave and sestet marked by a hypermetric indirect displacement and grouping conflicts.

Britten also marks the final couplet of the sonnet by reversing the process employed between the octave and sestet. Shown in Example 4.6, the pseudo-reprise of the song's opening material at m. 29 marks the final couplet (when considering "No" as an anacrusis to the agogically-accented "ease."). It fixates upon the material from mm. 1-4, and is texturally marked through a return of the piano's registrally-displaced octaves. As with previous versions of this material, its entrance is displaced, given the established meter, and it reverses the earlier shift to mixed meter at the sestet by returning to the opening's pure duple meter.



EXAMPLE 4.6: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 3, "Oh might these sighes and teares," mm. 28-33, Britten's setting of the final couplet and the use of an indirect hypermetric displacement and grouping conflicts.

In "Oh to vex me," the cycle's fourth song, repetition of a piano toccata pattern supports the initiation of several hypermetric shifts. Example 4.7 demonstrates three of these shifts: the first marks the division of the first quatrain into two couplets; the second marks the division of the octave from sestet; and the third emphasizes the final words of the last line of the sonnet ("I shake with feare"), rather than marking the final couplet, as in songs 1 and 3. In this final shift, the addition of indirect grouping conflicts creates a dramatic close to the song.



EXAMPLE 4.7a, b, and c: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 4, "Oh to Vex me," mm. 6-13, 30-36, 63-66, three excerpts demonstrating boundary points in Britten's setting of the text.

In mm. 6-10, the piano initiates a two-voice contrapuntal toccata with a consistent stream of sixteenth-note attacks in the right hand coupled with eighth-note attacks in the left. The toccata plays a central role in initiating hypermetric shifts by interrupting the *fantasia*-like flow of the piano: m. 7 repeats m. 6 wholesale, while m. 8 repeats the initial

part of the idea (C# in the right hand and A to D eighth-note attacks in the left). These shifts cut across a vocal phrase, which only belatedly joins the new hypermetric party.

Example 4.7a excerpts Britten's setting of the second and third lines of the first quatrain. He articulates the progression from line 2 of the quatrain ("Inconstancy ...") to line 3 ("A constant ...") with a hypermetric shift in mm. 10-11. The lines are identified above the stave in the excerpt. Several factors support this shift: first, in mm. 11-13, the piano's repeating pattern of sixteenth notes inverts mm. 6-7; second, the $G^{\blacksquare\blacksquare}_{3}$ in m. 11 initiates the first shift away from the established 3-sharp diatonic collection to a 2-sharp collection; his setting of lines 2 and 3 of the quatrain creates a musical enjambment that exactly parallels the enjambment in the poem; and he adds a measure of rest before the second half of line 3 ("that when I would"), so that the voice aligns with the new hyperpulse.

Having returned to an even-measure hypermeter in the second half of the octave (not shown in the excerpts), he articulates the separation of the octave and the sestet with another shift of hypermeter, now from even-measure back to odd-measure (Example 4.7b). His setting of line 9 aligns with the induced even-measure hypermeter at m. 34. Therefore, at least initially, I am hard pressed to hear m. 34 as hypermetrically weak. However, in m. 33, a new four-note version of the toccata pattern in the piano interrupts the last transposition of the prior two-measure arch-like figure. It is dynamically accented with a *fortepiano* and aligns with a durationally and performatively accented $G^{\sharp}_{4}$ in the voice on the word "none." Having just heard the word "infinite," the sudden shift in hypermeter highlights the word "none." Thus Britten emphasizes the duality of the words "infinite" and

"none" through the placement of the hypermetric shift. Although the voice's subsequent phrase initiation (setting line 9) does not align with the new hypermetric pulse, its melodic leap on "yes-" of "yesterday" does align.

Britten's setting of the final words of line 14 (as in Example 4.7c) is the most striking event in the song. Up to this point, the prosody has been doggedly syllabic: one syllable to one note, with the text flowing at a fast pace. At m. 64, Britten slows the pace of textual declamation about thirty-fold and writes a pseudo-Scarlatti melisma. The position of the melisma initiates multiple metric and hypermetric conflicts of both direct and indirect types. In mm. 64-66 the voice's tripleted-eighth pulse and the piano's eighth and sixteenth pulses conflict at the local-level while the initiation of the melisma shifts the hypermeter from odd- to even-measured.

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While songs 1, 3, and 4 all employ displacement conflict in a manner that interacts with each sonnet's textual and structural properties, the most compelling use of this type of conflict is found in the second song, "Batter my heart." The most prevalent view is that this sonnet, shown in Figure 4.5, employs a military analogy, where the subject is a sinner within a fortified city. According to Robert Ray, this sinner, occupied by Satan, requires total destruction so that a "completely new, regenerated town/man can be constructed from the foundation up."[83] The subject desires to be made anew: in the first couplet, the subject beseeches God to work more intensively on him ("Batter my heart"), as up to now "knocking, breathing, shining, and seeking to mend" have proven insufficient; in the

[83] Robert H. Ray, *A John Donne Companion* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), 46.

second couplet, the subject implores more radical acts, "bend your force to break, blow, burn and make me new," in order to "o'erthrow" him. The quatrain divides evenly into two couplets via line-end punctuation, but, internally, each couplet divides unevenly. Syntactic breaks (two syllables before the end of lines 1 and 3) are followed by an outburst of monosyllabic verbs in identical scansion. As James Winny observes, Donne "seems to be straining sonnet form to the point of breakdown."[84]

1. Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for, you
2. As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
3. That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
4. Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
5. I, like an usurpt towne, to another due,
6. Labor to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
7. Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend
8. But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.

9. Yet dearly I love you and would be loved faine,
10. But am betroth'd unto your enemie:
11. Divorce mee, untie or breake that knot againe,
12. Take mee to you, imprison mee, For I
13. except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
14. Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

FIGURE 4.5: John Donne's "Batter my heart."

The frantic nature of the opening lessens in the second quatrain as the subject ceases the litany of monosyllabic verbs.[85] Here, the subject turns his attention to why he requires God's intervention. He likens himself to an occupied city ("usurped"), which has perhaps been captured by the devil ("to another due.") His struggles to admit God ("Labor to admit") ultimately prove futile ("but, Oh, to no end"). The final two lines of the octave

[84] James Winny, *A Preface to Donne*, Preface Books, ed. Maurice Hussey (London: Longman, 1970), 142.

[85] The second quatrain is more balanced via mid- and end-line pauses that read more smoothly than the first quatrain. In addition, lines 6 and 8 contain important grammatical units such as the verb "Labor" and the subordinating conjunction "But" compared to "as" and "your" from lines 2 and 4.

provide insight into this futility. "Reason" should be enough to defend against the threat of Satan, but it is not. As Brijraj Singh argues, the subject has not only "proved too weak in [his] post as God's viceroy... " but, as the reader finds out in the first two lines of the sestet, has "... allied [himself] to the enemy."[86] He apparently loves God ("dearly I love you"), yet the truth is that the speaker is "betroth'd" to God's enemy. No solution is possible. Even the divine intervention in lines 11 and 12, with further physical acts ("untie or breake that knot"), is too little too late. Ultimately, the speaker shall never be free, and as the final couplet reveals, there is a perverse sexual nature to the speaker's desire for God to "ravish" him.

Britten's setting of "Batter my heart" pits the voice against the piano in a metric tug of war that one might interpret as representing the characters of the subject and God or perhaps the devil. I will examine the role that displacement conflict plays in this metric tug of war and how assigning a metric identity to each of the sonnet's characters offers a potential avenue for interpretation. The first couplet is shown in Example 4.8 (p. 113). The piano strongly projects tripleted-sixteenth, eighth, quarter and half pulses aligned with the notated meter.[87] However, the voice's performance- and agogic-accented G_5, at the end of m. 1, initiates displaced quarter and half pulses (joined by eighth and sixteenth pulses) in m. 2. Britten maintains these displaced pulses through the parallel placement of the

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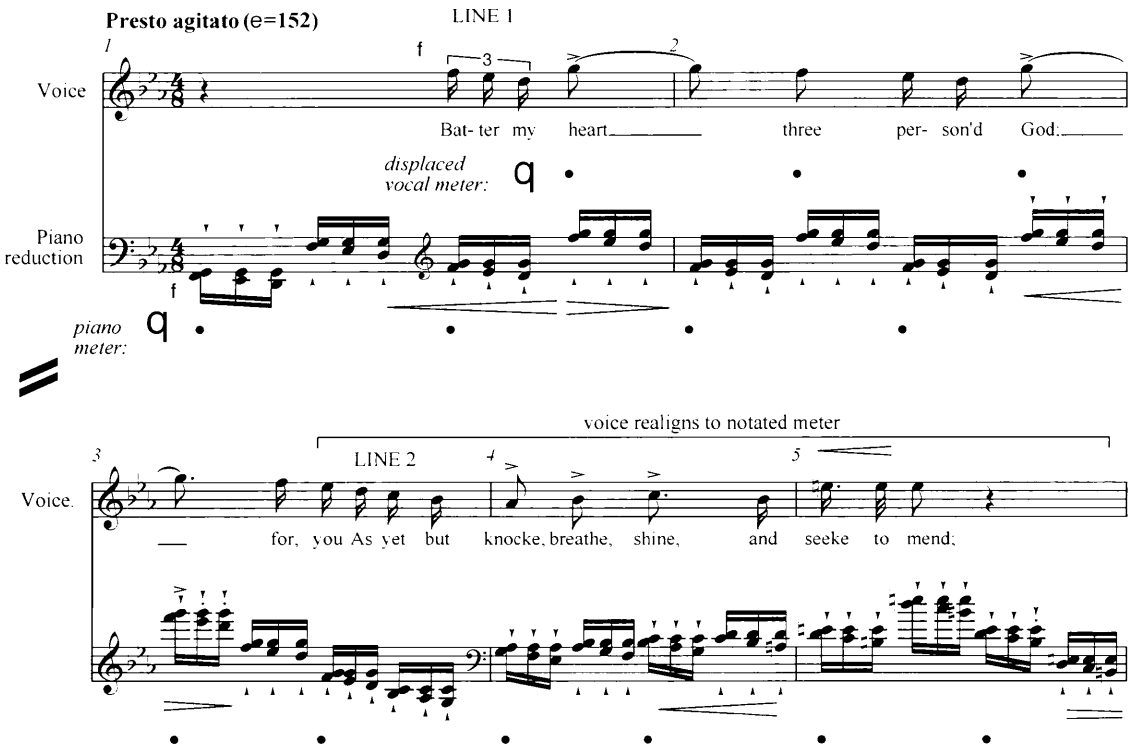
[86] Brijraj Singh, *Five Seventeenth-Century Poets: Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Marvell, Vaughn* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 101.

[87] While the piano generally lacks phenomenal accents that would explicitly group the eighth pulse duply, several factors influence this hearing. First, without other intervening information, listeners are primed to prefer a duple grouping to a triple grouping. Second, triplet gestures are paired, low followed by high. Third, the initial time point of m. 3 is reinforced registrally, via its peak (with F_5 and G_5), dynamically, as the culmination of a *crescendo*, and performatively, via an accent marking.

performance- and agogic-accented G_5 at the end of m. 2 (this time point is also melodically accented via the leap of a fourth).[88] However, starting in m. 4, the voice aligns with the notated meter: its first attack on the notated downbeat of m. 4 is phenomenally supported by *marcato* and agogic accents; subsequent words stressed in the poetic meter "knocke," "shine," and "seeke" all align with the quarter pulse; the leap of a fourth across the barline between "and" and "seeke" generates a melodic accent on the downbeat of m. 5.

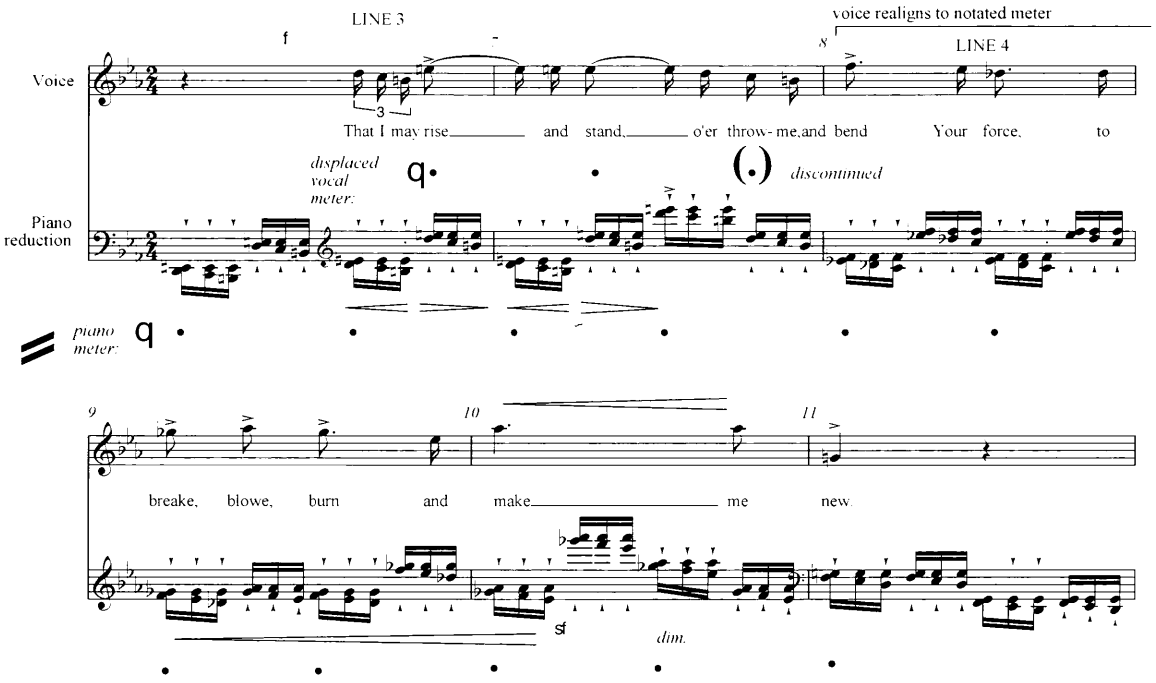


EXAMPLE 4.8: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 2, "Batter my heart," mm. 1-5, lines 1 and 2 and the realignment of an initially displaced voice in m. 3.

At the beginning of the second phrase (lines 3 and 4), shown in Example 4.9, the voice is displaced again. The return of the opening phrase's gestural shape induces a displaced quarter pulse, this time supported by agogic and *marcato* accents on "rise" in m. 6 and

[88] The triplet-sixteenth notes prior to this G_5, setting the text "Batter my," function as an anacrusis. The tripleted sixteenth is replaced by dupleted sixteenths in the remaining measures of the phrase.

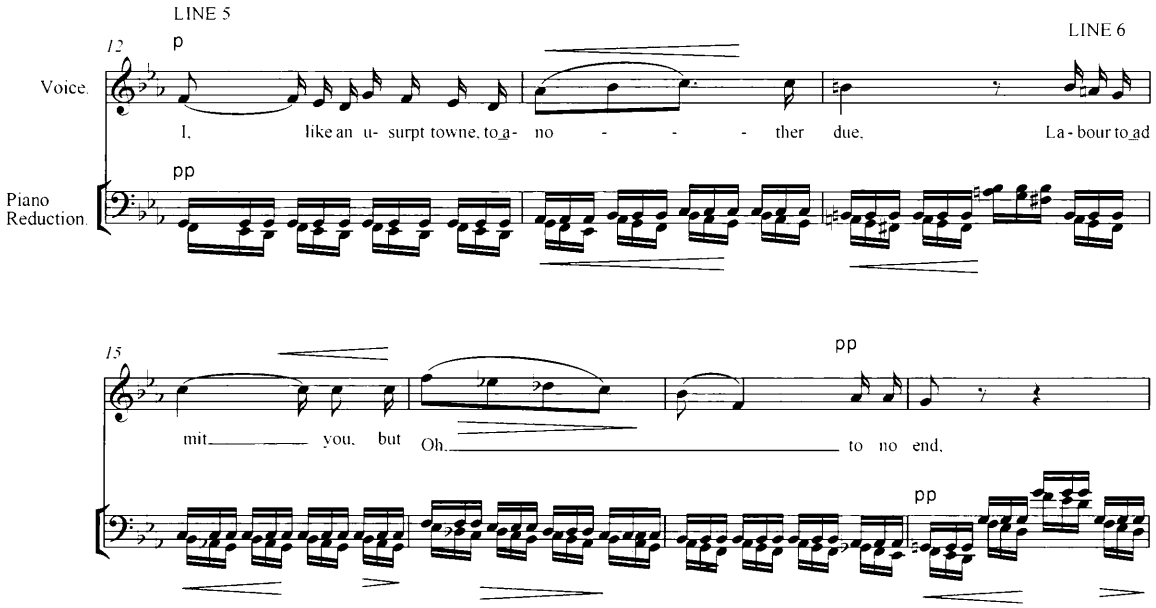
"stand" in m. 7. In m. 8, the voice aligns again with the notated meter. Employing the same phenomenal accents as in lines 1 and 2, the voice realigns with the notated meter through agogic accents on "bend" and "force" (m. 8), "burn" (m. 9), "make" (m. 10), and "new" (m. 11) with *marcato* performative accents and through leaps across the barline.



EXAMPLE 4.9: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 2, "Batter my heart," mm. 6-11, lines 3 and 4 and the realignment of an initially displaced voice in m. 3.

Coming after the initial displacements, the realignments highlight the list of actions (monosyllabic verbs) related to God's interaction with the subject: in line 2, God's "knocke, breathe, shine and seeke to mend" has not been enough for the speaker, and therefore a more severe course of action is required, which is requested at the end of line 3 with "bend your force to break, blow, burn and make me new." In addition, there is a subtle grouping conflict at the fastest pulse level as the voice's intermittent sixteenth pulse conflicts with the piano's constant triplet-sixteenth pulse. The voice's displacement from the notated meter plays a central role in the large-scale parsing of the song and the interpretation of the text.

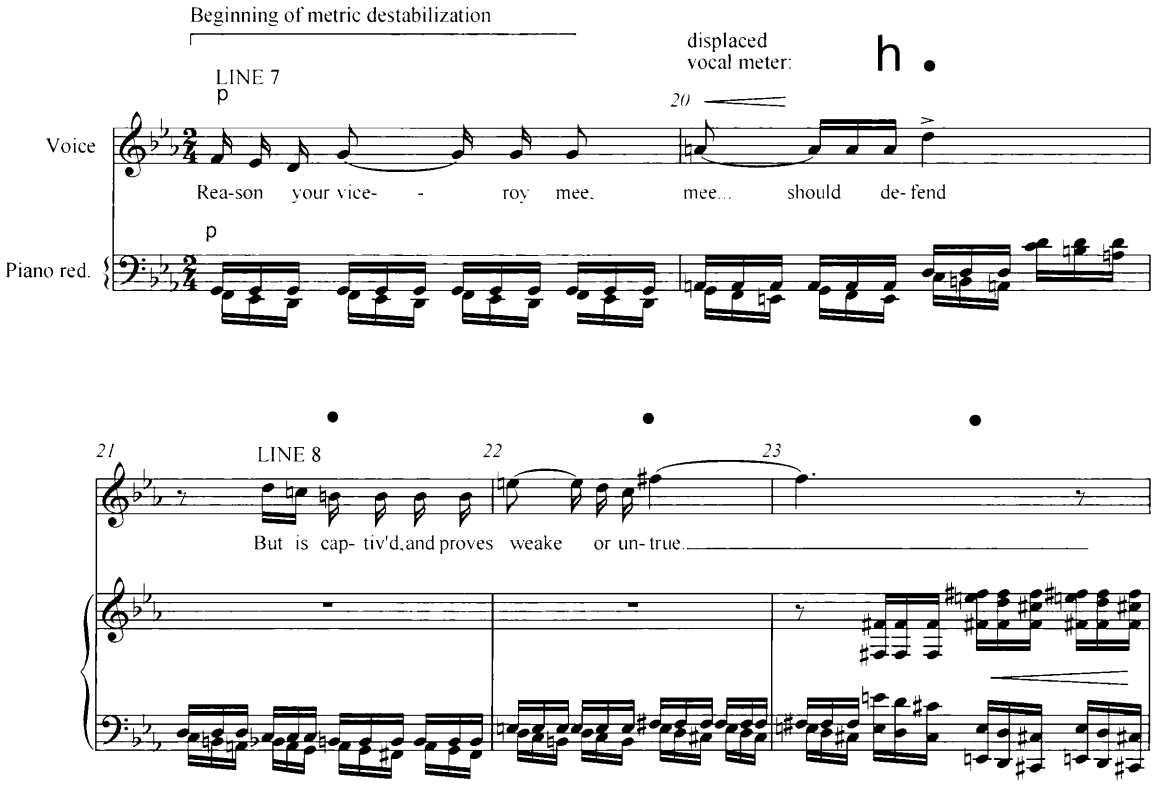
While the voice is initially displaced in both of the first quatrain's couplets, Britten contrasts the start of the second quatrain by aligning voice and piano. Shown in Example 4.10, neither lines 5 or 6 contain any displacement. Thus Britten marks the division of the octave into two quatrains through a change in metric state. Note how he extends the initial note (m. 12) of the triplet figure in his setting of line 5, lending agogic support to the downbeat, and also how the triplet figure returns to its normal disposition in his setting of line 6. Agogic accents, initiation of melismas, and leaps of a fourth all support the voice's alignment with the notated meter.



EXAMPLE 4.10: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 2, "Batter my heart," mm. 12-18, lines 5 and 6 and the voice's alignment with the notated meter.

Contrasting the voice's alignment in the opening couplet of the second quatrain, line 7 begins a process of metric destabilization. Shown in Example 4.11, the setting of line 7 is the first and only phrase to align the sixteenth-note figure, which had previously functioned as an anacrusis, with the notated downbeat (line 5 contained a modified first attack), pushing the metric emphasis onto the second eighth-note of m. 19 and disrupting

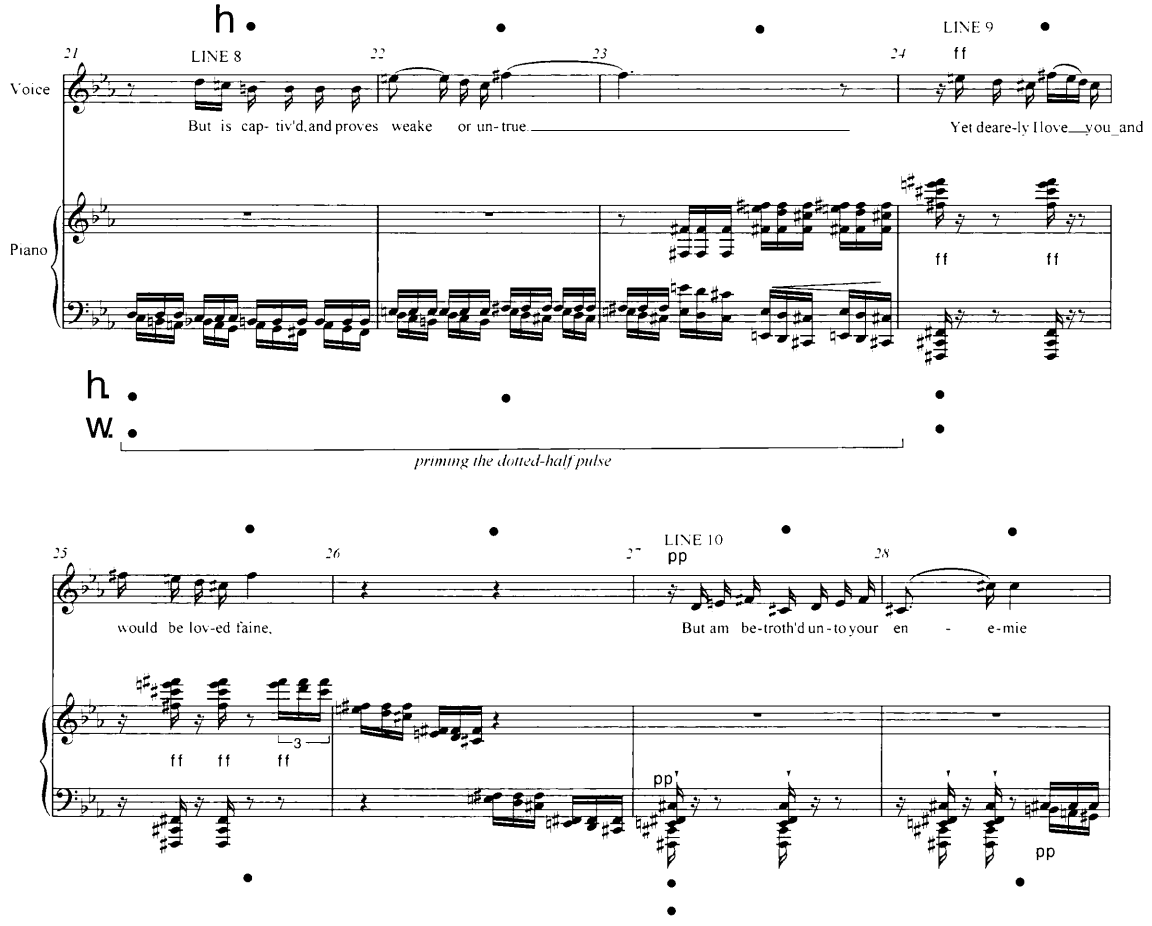
line 5 and 6's stable setting. This disruption results in the reinstatement of displaced quarter and half pulses in m. 20, beginning with the agogically and performatively accented "-fend" of "defend" and continuing with the stressed word "cap-" of "captiv'd" in m. 21 and the agogically accented and melodically marked "-true" of "untrue" in m. 22.



EXAMPLE 4.11: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 2, "Batter my heart," mm. 19-23, Britten's setting of lines 7 and 8.

The climactic, multi-octave piano crescendo that follows the completion of the voice's setting of line 8 marks the beginning of the sestet. As shown in Example 4.12, one of the most salient textural events in the song occurs here: the piano ceases its constant stream of triple-sixteenth-note attacks for the first time and replaces them with registrally-wide, isolated *fortissimo* attacks. For the first time in the song, the piano no longer aligns with the notated meter, as the *fortissimo* attacks initiate a new dotted-whole pulse (a three-measure

hyperpulse). Measures 24 and 27 initiate new textual units. Between these, accents occur at half-way time points: the $F^{\circledcirc}_{5}$ in the middle of mm. 25 (on "faine") is prepared by the anacrustic *fortissimo* piano chords and triggers the *fortissimo* waterfall in the piano that terminates at the downbeat of m. 26; and the vocal accent at the middle of m. 28 again triggers a harmonic and dynamic change. The midway points establish a dotted-half pulse. Thus the change in metric state aligns with the structural boundary between octave and sestet.



EXAMPLE 4.12: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 2, "Batter my heart," mm. 21-28, Britten's setting of lines 8 to 10 and the priming of a dotted-half pulse that is realized at the start of the sestet.

The initiation of this dotted-half pulse comes from an earlier point.[89] As shown in the dot diagram beneath Example 4.12, the projection of dotted-half and dotted-whole pulses potentially starts with the shift in the piano's textural pattern at the beginning of m. 21 and continues with the agogically-accented $F^{\#}_{5}$ in the middle of mm. 22. These two points prime the realization of dotted-half and dotted-whole pulses at the beginning of the sestet where the F#s are most saliently realized.

While the piano abandons its quarter and half pulses aligned with the measure, the voice continues to provide phenomenal support of its displaced half pulse established during line 7. The same leaps of a fourth, pitch climaxes (see "faine" and "enemie"), and agogic accents maintain the displaced half pulse throughout this passage. Note how the realization of the piano's dotted-half pulse does not initially align with voice's displaced half pulse; they are out of phase with one another. The first time they align is at the midway point of m. 25, but immediately following this alignment, the voice is silent for a measure, weakening the salience of the half pulse. If Britten had maintained the voice's half pulse more prominently, then one would hear the midpoint of m. 25 to the midpoint of m. 28 as a double hemiola (formed between the voice's quarter and half pulses against the piano/voice's dotted-quarter and dotted-half pulses). But, because of the rests in the voice, I am more inclined to hear the voice and the voice/piano as forming separate metric streams both of which are displaced from the notated meter.

Example 4.13 excerpts the final four lines. The piano ceases its support of the dotted-half pulse and aligns saliently with the barline in m. 31 through a dramatic textural change:

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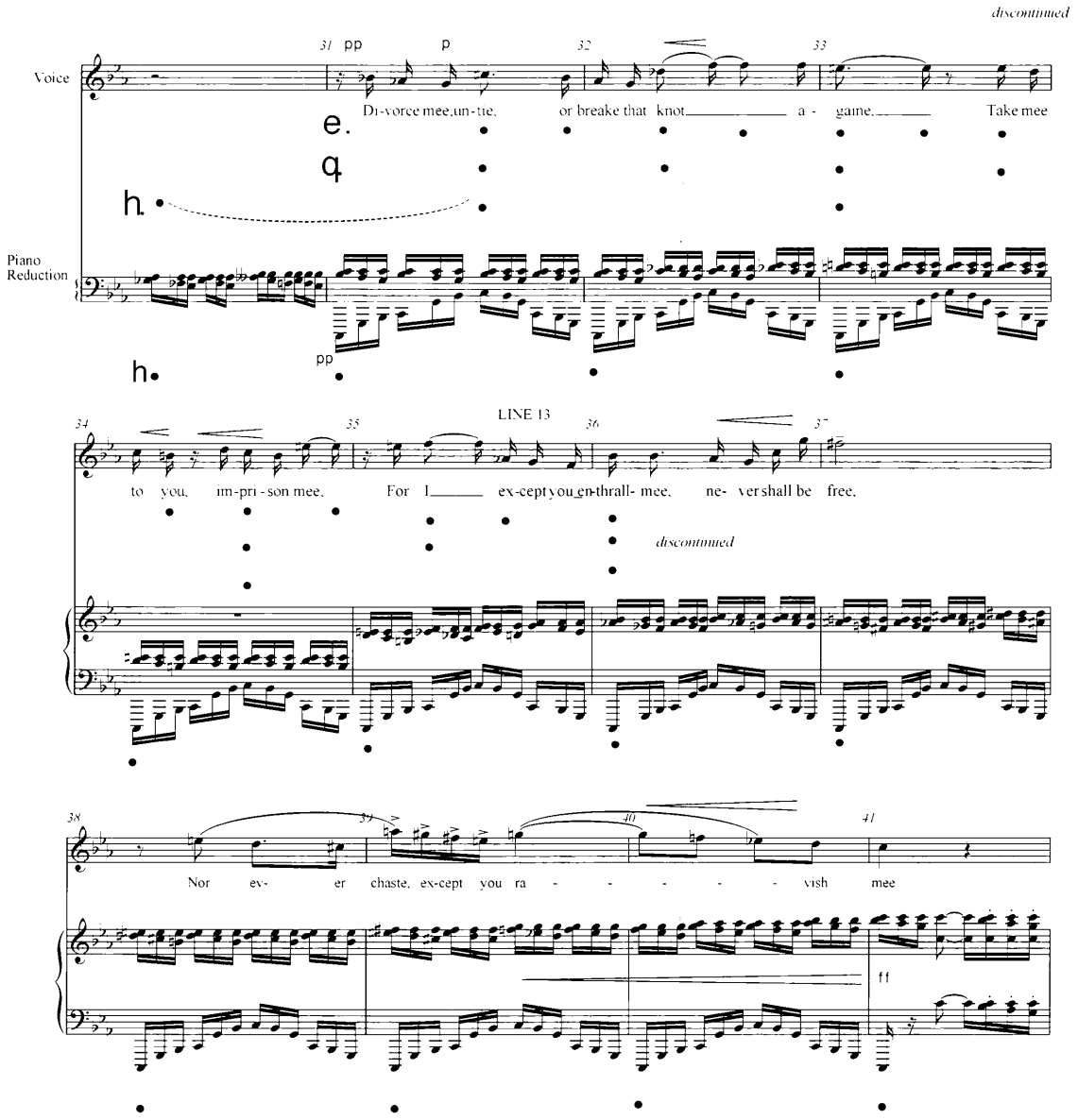
[89] For more on this process of priming, see Chapter 2.

with the repetition of an arpeggiated triplet-sixteenth-figure and the alignment of pitch collection changes with slower pulses, the piano projects tripleted-sixteenth, eighth, quarter, and half pulses. One might be inclined to hear a resolution here, because of the piano's abandonment of the dotted-quarter and dotted-half pulses and return to the notated meter, but Britten pulls the rug out from under this resolution by switching the dotted pulses to the voice. The dotted-quarter and dotted-half pulses continue, starting with the downbeat of m. 29, and are marked by the regularizing piano, by the accent on "un-tie," and by the accent on "againe." Furthermore, the voice also established a faster dotted-eighth pulse: this pulse is initiated by the parallel setting of "Divorce me untie" and "or break that knot" and is maintained by agogic accents on "-tie" (mm. 31), "knot" (mm. 32), "gain" (m. 33), and "I" (m. 35). The resolution of displaced dotted-eighth, dotted-quarter, and dotted-half pulses aligns loosely with the beginning of the final couplet in m. 35. Following the word "enthrall," the remainder of the text aligns with the notated meter, and while there is still a mild grouping conflict between the piano's triplet-sixteenth pulse and the voice's sixteenth attacks, the resolution of displacement conflict saliently marks the sonnet's final couplet.



EXAMPLE 4.13: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 2, "Batter my heart," mm. 30-41, Britten's setting of lines 11 through 14.

As is the case with songs 1, 3, and 4, changes in metric state, through the use of displacement conflict, align with sonnet's structural boundaries. One might interpret these changes as a commentary on the speaker's relationship with God. Consider the vocal meter as representing the speaker and the piano meter as representing God: Figure 4.6 outlines the metric states of the voice and piano and their relationship to the sonnet's text. In

general, the piano is almost exclusively aligned with the notated barline, whereas the voice rarely aligns with the notated barline.

Piano (alignment with notated barlines)	Voice (alignment with notated barlines)	Text (in lines)
aligned	displaced to aligned	1 and 2
aligned	displaced to aligned	3 and 4
aligned	aligned to displaced	5 to 7
aligned	displaced	8
change of meter via dotted half pulse (partially aligned)	displaced	9 and 10
return of original meter (aligned)	change of meter to Piano meter from Lines 9 and 10 (displaced)	11 to 12
aligned	aligned	13 to 14

FIGURE 4.6: Metric characteristics of voice and piano in relation to the notated barline.

As shown in Fig. 4.6, the vocal meter is initially displaced from the piano in the first two couplets, but aligns at the end of each couplet; these realignments perhaps suggest the possibility that the speaker and God may resolve their differences. In the second quatrain, the vocal meter initially aligns with the piano: the speaker is trying to admit that God as "reason" should be enough to "defend" the speaker from Satan. As line 8 makes explicitly clear, however, it is not enough. It is at this point that the vocal meter is displaced again. So far there has been no sustained alignment of piano and voice meters, and therefore it might be possible to interpret the piano's shift at the opening at the sestet as an attempt to enact a change in the voice; however, the speaker maintains the displaced half pulse in lines 9 and 10 in ignorance or perhaps defiance of the piano's new metric character. Eventually at line 11, the vocal meter does switch to the new piano meter; however, it is too late. The piano has already abandoned this meter, returning to its original half pulse aligned with the notation. It is only in the final couplet that the vocal and piano meters

align. It is possible to interpret this moment of alignment as a resolution of the subject's fraught relationship with God; however, the text paints a different picture. The subject states that he shall never be free. His association with the Devil taints his relationship to God, and as such, he perceives God's acts in a perverse manner, ravishing him. The metric alignment at this point is ironic, as the resolution that the subject claims to desire turns out to be false as he reveals the true nature of relationship to God.

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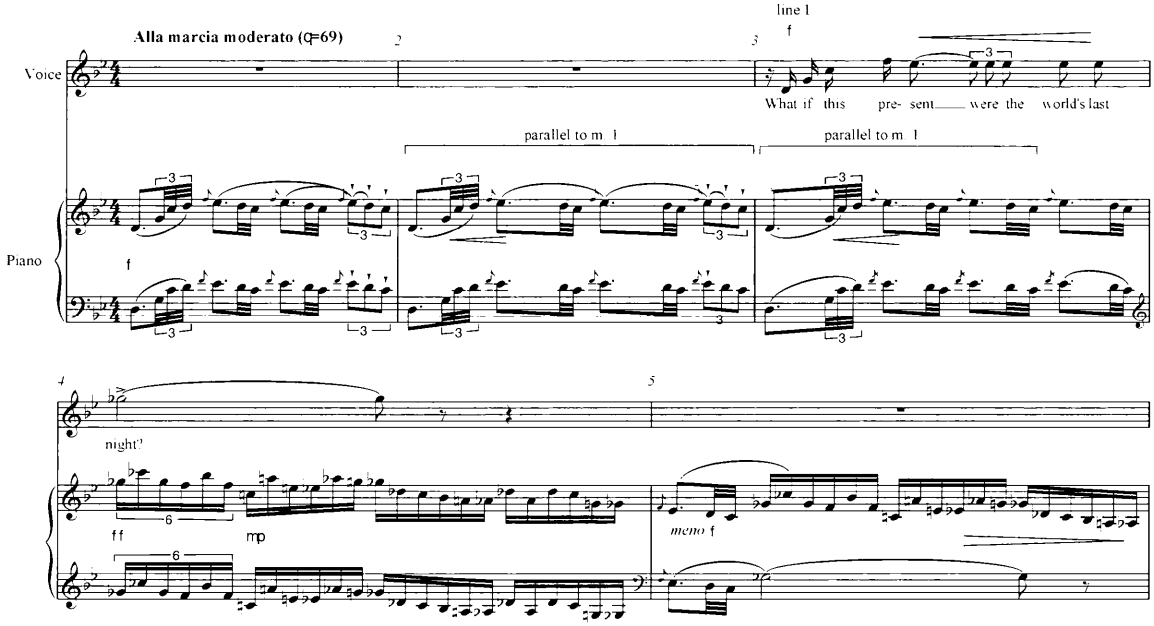
Britten's setting of song 5, "What if this present," is striking, and its metric approach separates it from the prior four songs. From its opening, shown in Example 4.14, the piano establishes stable quarter, half, and whole pulses aligned with the measure. The slowest pulse is supported through parallelism as m. 2 and m. 3 mostly repeat m. 1. While pulses slower than the quarter are stable, faster pulses are unstable. Measures 1 and 2 contain indirect grouping conflicts at multiple levels. In the first beat, a sixteenth-note duration divides triply, following a dotted-eighth attack, and then duply in the second and third beats. From the first to the second beats, one experiences a mild indirect grouping conflict: the duple thirty-second division is hard to find given the continued induction of the triplet thirty-second division. In the fourth beat, the quarter pulse divides triply into three triplet eighths. From the third to fourth beats, the listener experiences a mild indirect grouping conflict, as the triplet eighth division is hard to find, given the listener's induction to the prior eighth pulse. In sum, during the first measure, two different pulse levels generate indirect grouping conflicts—the triple thirty-second versus duple thirty-second pulses, and the triplet-eighth versus duple-eighth pulses. Additionally, in m. 2, the triplet-thirty-seconds

fit within the triplet eighths established at the end of m. 1, enabling the listener to continue the induction of both triplet eighths and thirty-seconds (also implying a triplet-sixteenth pulse). But from the second to third beats, one experiences a stronger form of grouping conflict (compared to the conflict between the first and second beats of m. 1): the duple thirty-second division is harder to find given the longer time spent inducing the prior triple division.

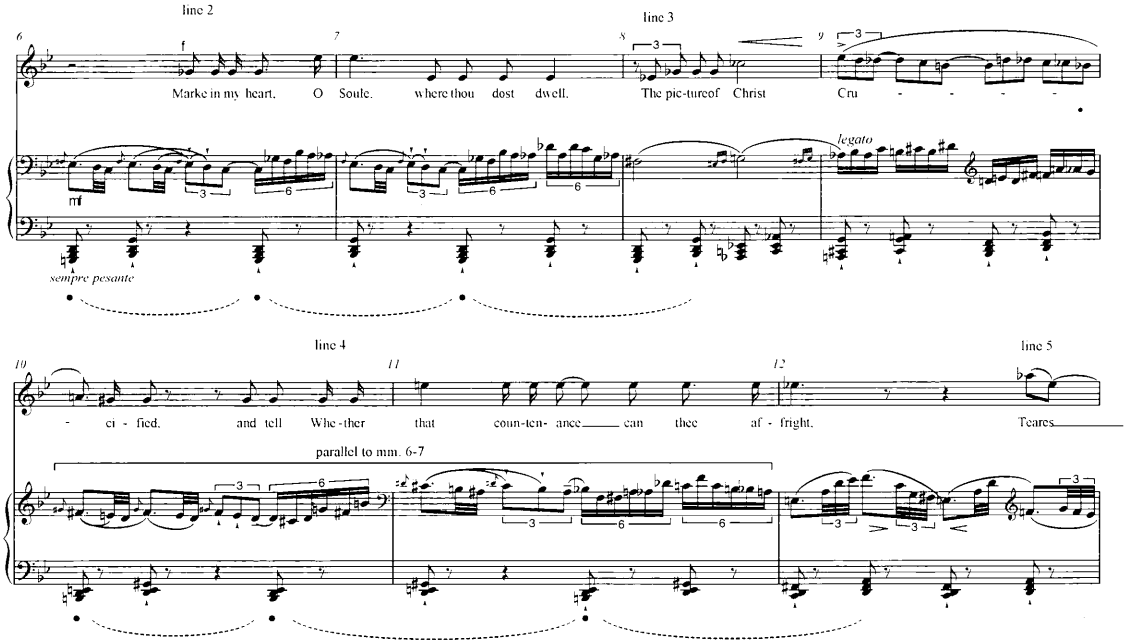


EXAMPLE 4.14: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 5, "What if this present?" mm. 1-5, piano introduction and line 1.

The voice's introduction in m. 3 increases the metric complexity by forming a number of direct grouping conflicts. In the first beat of m. 3, the piano's triplet sixteenths contrast the voice's duple sixteenths, forming a direct grouping conflict. In the third beat, the voice and piano trade divisions: the piano restores the duple divisions at the thirty-second note level, which enable a division of the quarter pulse into eighth and sixteenth pulses, whereas the voice switches to triplet eighths. The piano's dramatic *cadenza*-like descent in m. 4 introduces continuous triple sixteenths. These triplet-sixteenth attacks were intermittent in

mm. 1-3 but now generate an indirect grouping conflict with the prior sixteenth pulse initiated by the voice at the beginning of m. 3 and implied by the piano's triplet thirty-second attacks.

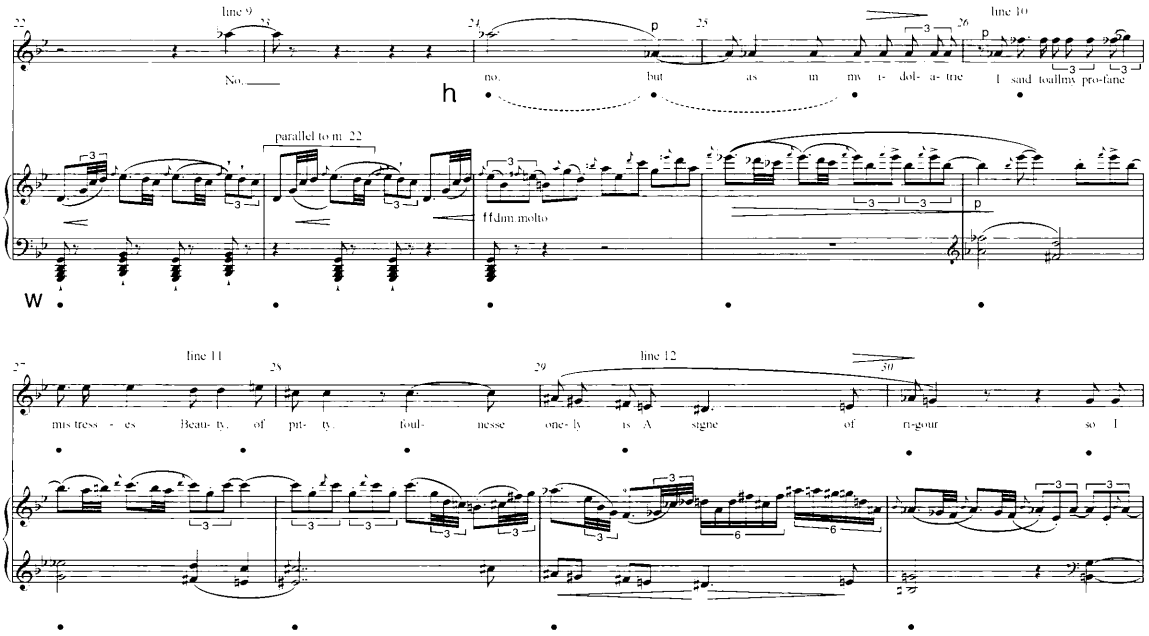
Britten maintains grouping conflicts in the remainder of the octave. As shown in Example 4.15, the piano right hand, in mm. 6-7, brings together three of the four different rhythmic gestures from mm. 1-5 (dotted-eighth plus two thirty-second-note attacks, three triplet-eighths pattern, and the six triplet-sixteenth figures). Changes between these motives generate indirect grouping conflicts: the duple thirty-second attacks and implied sixteenth pulse in mm. 6 and 7 conflict with their subsequent triplet eighths and triple sixteenths. In the setting of line 3, mm. 8-9, the metric roles of piano and voice are reversed: the voice divides the quarter pulse triply, through a stunning melisma on the first syllable of "Crucified," whereas the piano maintains sixteenth attacks. In line 4, mm. 10-12, triplet divisions return in the piano while the voice predominantly contains duple divisions.



EXAMPLE 4.15: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 5, "What if this present?" mm. 6-12, setting of lines 2 through 4.

Example 4.16 (on p. 126) excerpts the second section, lines 9 to 12.5. Britten marks the division of the sonnet as octave and sestet by increasing the depth of direct and indirect grouping conflicts. Consider the grouping conflicts formed at metric levels slower than the quarter pulse. For the first time in the cycle, Britten sets a single word, "No," separately, divorced from its sentential unit. Placed in the highest realms of comfort for a tenor, the $A^{\flat}$ punctuates the prior silence and marks m. 22's third beat, further priming a dotted-half pulse (intermittently seen in the octave) that is fully inducible starting in m. 24 (as shown by the dot diagram). The second "No," aligned with the downbeat, initiates a sustained dotted-half pulse, which is maintained by several factors: the large leap in the voice from $A^{\flat}_4$ to $A^{\flat}_3$ (heard as $A^{\flat}_5$ to $A^{\flat}_4$); the word-stresses of "said," the "mis-" of "mistresses," and the "foul-" of "foulness"; and the agogic accents on "no," "but," "said," and the "foul" of "foulness." In comparison to its earlier brief appearances (in the piano's left hand chords in the first section of the song), the dotted-half pulse is maintained for six complete measures, mm. 24-29, enabling a slower dotted-whole pulse and three- and six-measure hyperpulses.

In contrast to the voice's dotted-half pulse, the piano maintains a whole pulse via the return of the opening material and parallelism (between the first two beats of the right hand in mm. 22 and 23). This pulse groups duply into a two-measure hyperpulse via textural changes and rhythmic patterning in m. 24 and again in m. 26. And starting in m. 26, the piano left hand contains slower dyadic figures whose agogic accents fall on the downbeat of m. 28 (the double-dotted-half-note attack) and m. 30 (the half-note attack).



EXAMPLE 4.16: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 5, "What if this present?" mm. 22-30, beginning of the sestet and climax of grouping conflicts.

At faster pulses, Britten increases the number of different types of indirect and direct conflicts from the first section. In addition to dividing the quarter, eighth, and sixteenth pulses both duply and triply as before, he introduces two new divisions. First, in m. 24, each pair of the piano's triplets is marked by a grace note, generating a triplet-quarter pulse. This pulse could also group duply into a triplet half pulse, although this is not explicitly supported by further phenomenal accents. Regardless of whether this triplet quarter groups duply or triply, it forms a grouping conflict with the quarter pulse. Second, in mm. 24-25, the rhythmic setting of "but as in" divides the inducing dotted-half pulse, initiated by the second "No," duply into a dotted-quarter pulse. Thus, the quarter pulse, which had been stable during the octave, is now also brought into question with two competing pulse interpretations at the start of the sestet. The ski-hill graph, shown in Figure 4.7, represents the pulses established at the beginning of the sestet and their resulting grouping conflicts.

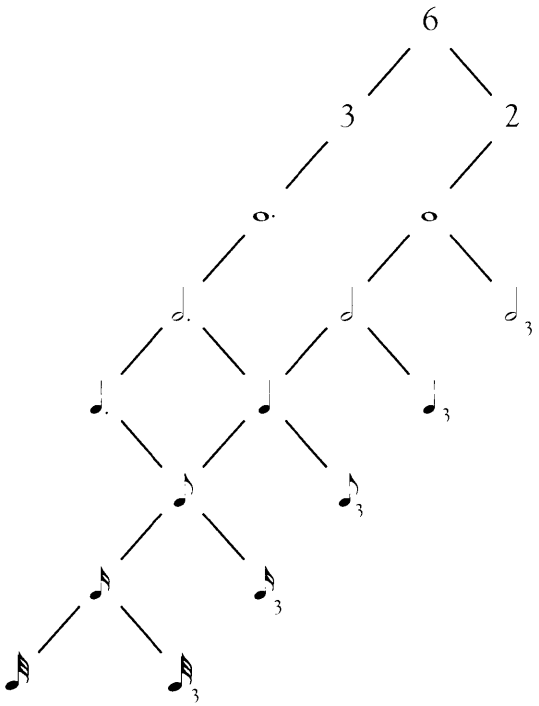
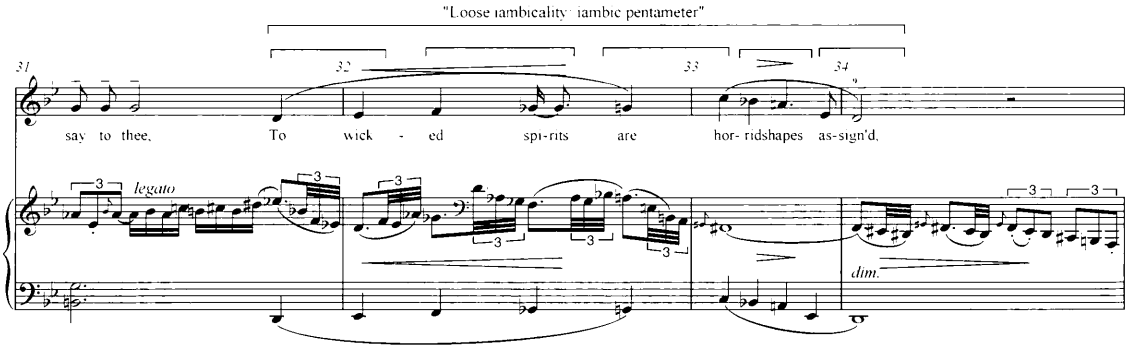


FIGURE 4.7: Ski-hill representation of indirect and direct grouping conflicts in mm. 6-12.

Britten marks the final couplet through a salient decrease in the number of grouping conflicts and restoration of the quarter pulse. As shown in Example 4.17, the piano's bass line now closely corresponds to the voice, and the right hand is far less frenetic in its shifting between different subdivisions of the quarter pulse. Thus, in mm. 32-33, triplet-sixteenth, eighth, quarter, half, and whole pulses that align with the measure are easily induced and contain neither direct nor indirect grouping conflicts. Britten's treatment of metric conflict in song 5 serves a twofold purpose; on the one hand, a comparison of the setting of opening and closing lines exemplifies the reduction in metric conflict with the calming of the subject, on the other, song 5 serves a more global, cycle-level function, by drastically contrasting to song 4 both in terms of the number of conflicting pulse levels and the change from displacement conflict to grouping conflict as a structuring agent.



EXAMPLE 4.17: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 5, "What if this present?" mm. 31-34, Britten's marking of the final couplet via a reduction in metric tension.

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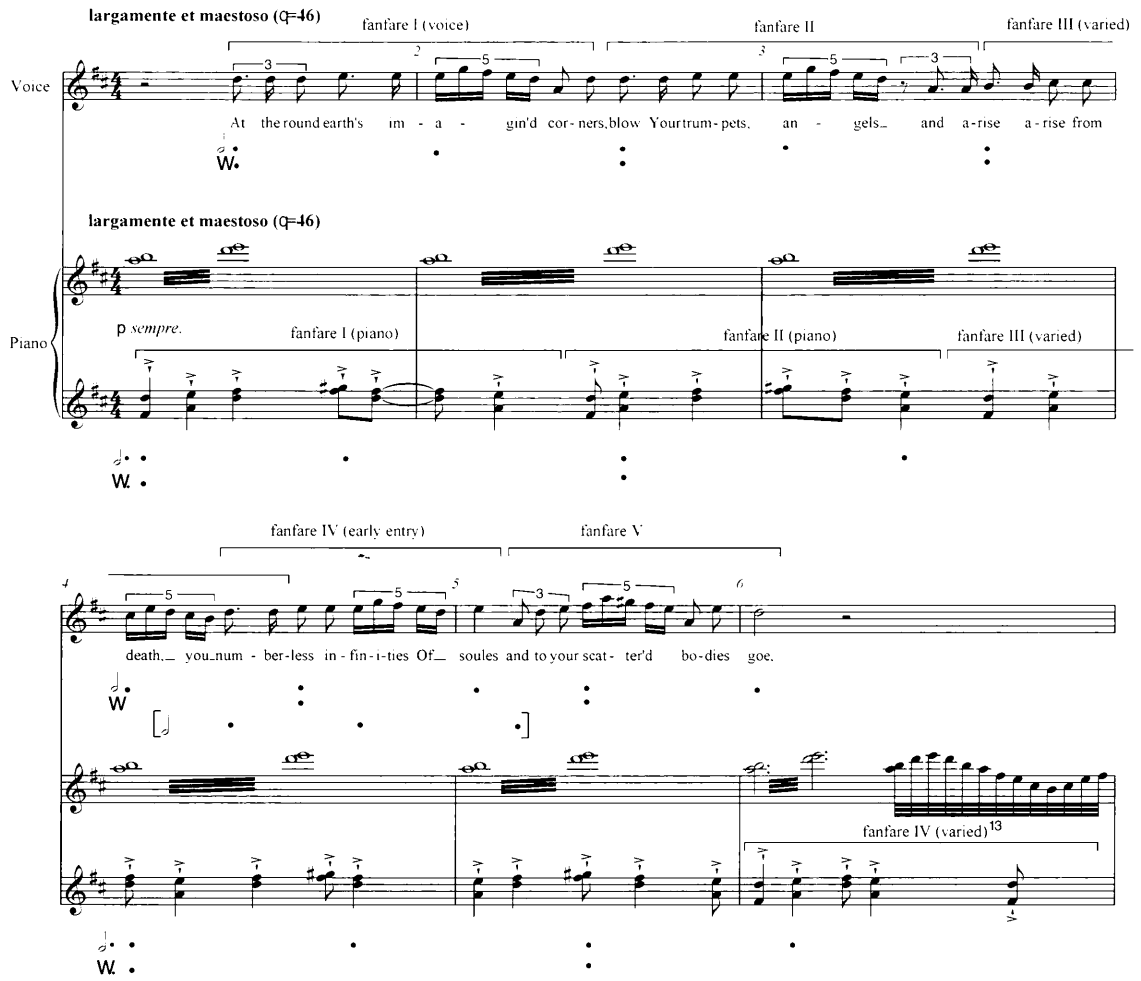
Before addressing song 6, the focus piece of this section, I examine songs 7 and 8. Like "What if this present," song 7, "At the round earth's imagined corners," also contains indirect grouping conflicts generated by changing rhythmic subdivisions of a quarter pulse. It employs two metrically competing trumpet-like fanfares in the voice and piano and a registrally distinct chordal *tremolo*. Example 4.18 introduces the two fanfare figures (see p. 130). In the voice, melodic and rhythmic parallelism enables half-pulse projections (shown via the dot diagram). The voice's initial fanfare figure, which spans mm. 1-2 with the text "At the round earth's imagined corners," repeats in mm. 2-3 with slight rhythmic variation: both contain the same sequence of pitch changes, (D_5, E_5, G_5, $F^{\sharp}_5$, E_5, D_5, A_4). In mm. 3-4, the third fanfare (setting "-rise, arise from death, you number") presents a transposed version down a third (the third fanfare begins on B compared to the first fanfare's D). Faster pulses, however, prove problematic as the rhythmic subdivision of the quarter tactus changes frequently. For example, the quarter pulse divides duply into eighth-note attacks in "corners" and "trumpets" in m. 2; triply into triplet-eighth-note attacks in "At the round" in m. 1, and "and to your" in m. 5; and quintuply into quintuplet-sixteenth-note attacks in

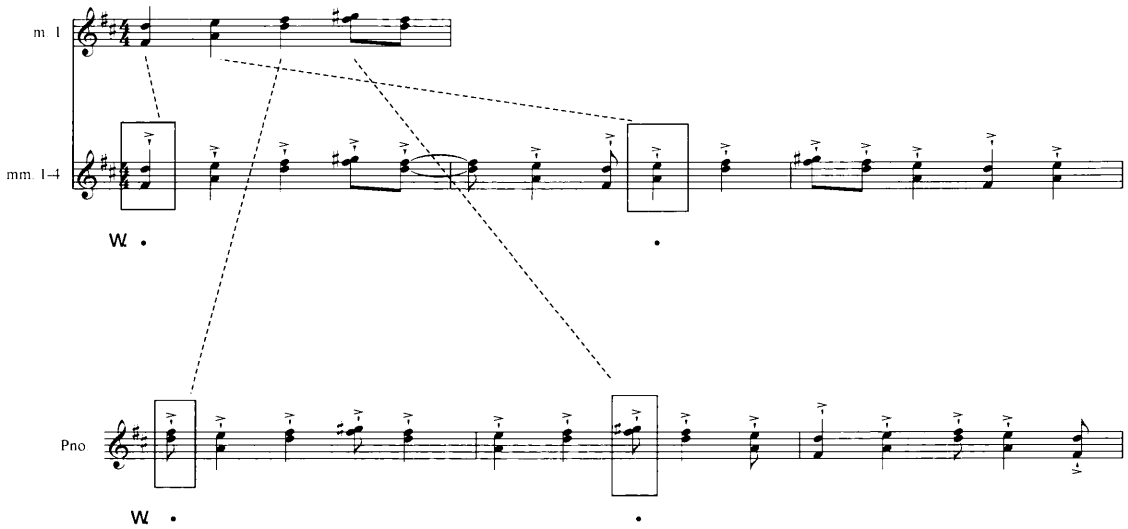
"Angels" in m. 3 and "death you" in m. 4. These changing divisions generate a series of indirect grouping conflicts. In the first three fanfare iterations, the quintuplet rhythmic flourish aligns with the half pulse; however, beginning in m. 4, the fourth fanfare's entry is unclear. Given the established phrase rhythm, the rhythm of "number-" of "numberless" is heard as the end of the third fanfare; melodically however, as the phrase continues, it is clear that the two D_5 attacks also function as the initiation of the fourth fanfare. The fourth fanfare undergoes further transformation and the quintuplet enters earlier than expected. The fanfare enters in line with the half pulse established by the first three fanfares, in the sense of coming exactly at the same time in the one-measure fanfare figure, but its displaced in terms of the established meter of the whole passage (indicated in brackets in the Example).



EXAMPLE 4.18: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 7, "At the round earth's," mm. 1-8, two fanfare patterns and the generation of a displaced grouping conflict.

In the piano, the quarter tactus at first does not group clearly due to the lack of regular phenomenal accents: all attacks are emphasized equally with the same accent marking; there are no phrase slurs to suggest larger groupings; and, there is no textural variance as the piano maintains dyads. However, it is possible to project and maintain a dotted-half pulse: the agogic accent on "earth's" and the piano's major-second dissonance marks the third beat of m. 1, and the agogic accent on "blow" confirms the projection. Consider also a dotted-whole pulse: tracing the attacks at dotted-whole-note intervals, as shown in

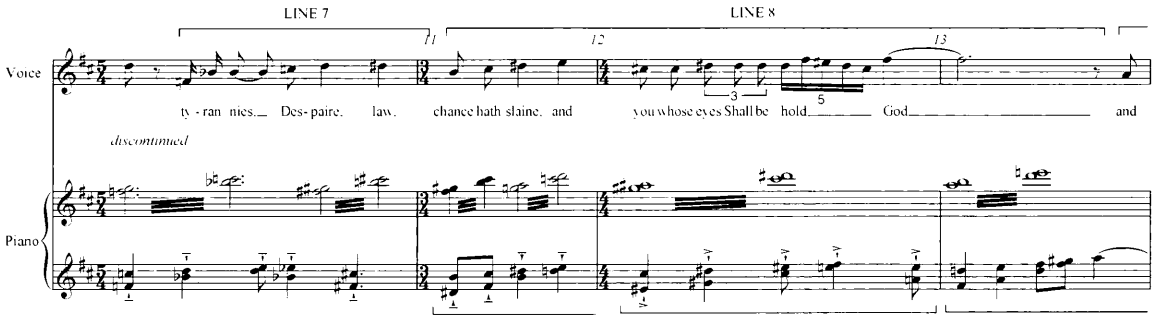
Example 4.19, one sees that Britten has structured a rhythmically augmented version of the first four notes of m. 1.



EXAMPLE 4.19: Rhythmic augmentation of the initial measure over the course of mm.1-4.

Combined, the pulses generated by both fanfare patterns form a weak double hemiola (as shown in Ex. 4.18): half versus dotted-half and whole versus dotted-whole pulses. The quarter pulse divides consistently as eighths in the piano, but varies in the voice (duply, triply, quintuply) maintaining a series of brief direct grouping conflicts throughout, lending the passage a hurried quality.

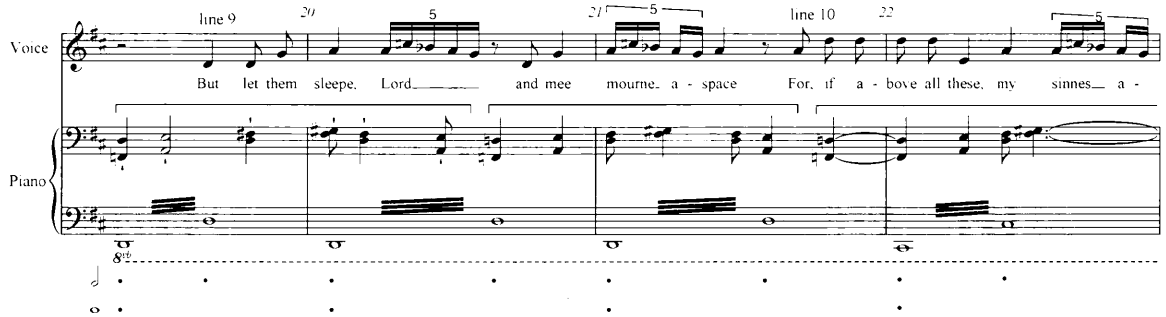
Example 4.20 excerpts the end of line 6 of the octave and the subsequent two lines. Here, both fanfare figures and the upper-register alternating dyads (that were harmonically static throughout the entire first quatrain) undergo dramatic rhythmic and harmonic transformations. Following an initial recapitulatory two measures in the dominant (that conform to the characteristics established in the first quatrain), the remainder of Britten's setting disrupts the slower pulses through a series of time-signature changes, as shown in the example. This instability continues through the end of the quatrain (not shown).



EXAMPLE 4.20: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 7, "At the round earth's," mm. 10-13, disruption of fanfare figures.

Destabilizing the fanfare figures in the octave allows Britten to mark the onset of the sestet through their stabilization. Shown in Example 4.21, an infusion of D-minor elements, the inversion and transformation of the *tremolo* figure into a bass pedal, and a more rhythmically restrained presentation of the fanfares mark Britten's setting of the sestet. This restraint involves several factors. First, the absence of the triplet division of the quarter pulse in the voice lessens the number of conflicting divisions in prior sections: in mm. 1-19, the constant tension between duple, triple, and quintuple divisions of the quarter pulse prevented faster pulses; in mm. 19-22, by contrast, only duple and quintuple divisions remain. Second, there are no further time signature changes. Third, the piano's fanfare now includes slower half-note attacks that increase the general length of each fanfare. Fourth, the combination of the piano and voice's fanfares generates a constant eighth pulse that groups into a duple metric interpretation rather than competing pulses: in mm. 20, 21, and 23, the voice's A aligns with the whole pulse and in m. 22 it aligns with the half pulse; agogic accents on "grace" and "there" align with the half pulse; and shifts in the piano's *tremolando* figure now align with both half and whole pulses.[90]

[90] While the entrance of the voice is itself displaced, as in the opening, the lack of phrase-structure parallelism in this later passage minimizes the salience of a possible displaced meter.



EXAMPLE 4.21: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 7, "At the round earth's," mm. 19-22, reduction of metric complexity established during the octave, marking the start of the sestet.

While song 7 employs the introduction and resolution of metric conflict to mark its sonnet's boundaries, song 8, "Thou hast made me," is the only song in the cycle not to employ a change in metric status at conventional sonnet boundaries; instead, the entire song is hypermetrically unstable, and the only respite from the *Presto agitato* tempo comes from the use of dramatic *rallentando* figures in the voice that link the opening and closing lines of the sonnet. In order to understand this change in Britten's approach, one must turn to the unusual lack of boundaries in the sonnet, which is listed in the Appendix. Barry Spurr argues that while the majority of Donne's sestets provide "the saving antidote for his poisoned octave," the sestet of "Thou has made me" is not one of them.[91]

The sonnet is highly deformational, as it does not offer a moment of resolution following the issue presented in the opening lines. Although line 14 offers a solution via God's grace, by drawing him like an iron to a magnet (adamant), it is too little too late. As Harold Skulsky states, the speaker "tries to equivocate to heaven, even though in the back

[91] Barry Spurr, "Salvation and Damnation in the *Divine Meditations* of John Donne," in *Praise Disjointed: Changing Patterns of Salvation in Seventeenth-Century English Literature*, ed. William P. Shaw (New York: Peter Lang, 1991): 165-74.

of his mind he knows ... that the ploy is doomed."[92] Unlike Donne's other sonnets, there is no resolution here, no dramatic turn of events that coincide with a Petrarchan sestet or a Shakespearean closing couplet; instead, the sonnet is framed by its first and last lines, in which the speaker's "religious panic takes the form of a nightmare chase in which the fugitive's escape is blocked at both ends of a corridor."[93] From this perspective, the speaker's opening interrogative clause and final-line equivocation border an internal twelve-line "panic" rather than traditional sonnet subdivisions. It is highly likely that Britten was aware of the sonnet's unusual properties (in comparison to the others in the collection), and so modified his metric approach accordingly.

The primary agent behind the song's unstable hypermeter is the piano. Throughout the song, the piano alternates between two motives, which constantly change in their overall span. While these motives support local-level eighth, quarter, and half pulses, their points of initiation and their alternation consistently problematize slower pulses. By avoiding the stabilization of hypermeter throughout the song, Britten metrically realizes the subject's panic; and by setting lines 1 and 14 with the same dramatic tempo decelerations and gestural material, he bookends the panic.

The song opens with the cycle's longest piano prelude and introduces the listener to its alternating motives, the stabilization of local-level meter, and issues of hypermetric induction. As shown in Example 4.22, both motives contain octave leaps but differ in that motive one contains leaps between the first/second and third/fourth attacks, whereas

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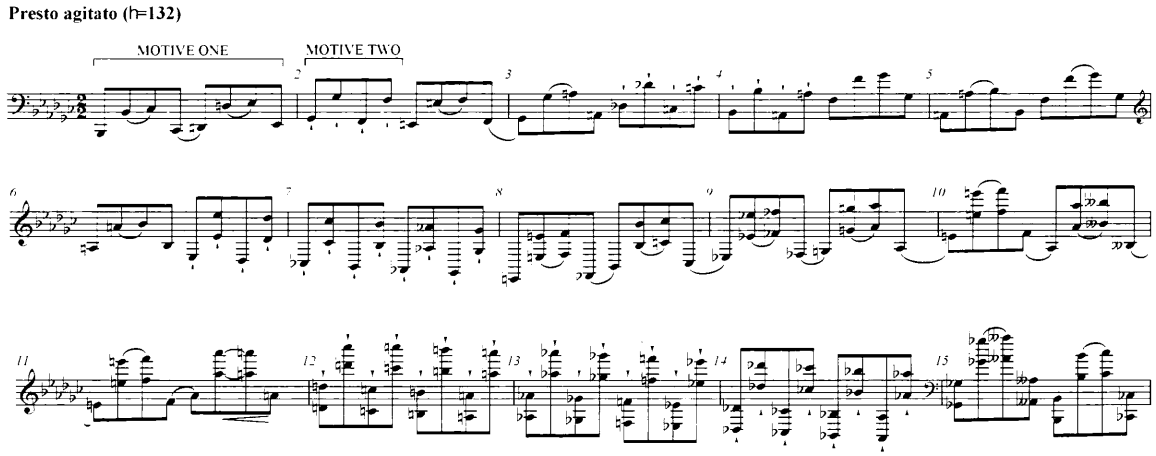
[92] Harold Skulsky, *Language Recreated: Seventeenth-Century Metaphorists and the Act of Metaphor* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 112.

[93] Ibid.

motive two leaps between all consecutive attacks. Their modes of articulation also differ: motive one contains several legato slurs between its second and third and fourth and first attacks, while motive two contains equally accented and separated attacks. The steady stream of eighth-note attacks establishes eighth, quarter, and half pulses: pitch change supports the quarter pulse and parallelism, and the repetition of the preceding motive or the alternation between motives supports the half pulse. However, hyperpulses beyond this half pulse are unclear. Each motive's duration is a multiple of a half-note span: for example, the *first* motive lasts for two half notes in both of its initial presentations (see mm. 1 and 2.5) and four and eight half-note spans in its third and fourth appearances respectively; however, the *second* motive lasts for one half note then two, three, and six half-note spans in subsequent iterations. Across mm. 1-15, individually, the motives' half-note spans, as they occur successively, differ, with (2+1), (2+2), (4+3), (8+6) and combined, their spans differ with 3, 4, 7, and 14 half notes respectively.



EXAMPLE 4.22: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 8, "Thou hast made me," mm. 1-15, piano reduction.

These motives generate two points of metric articulation via the alternation of each pair (i.e. between the two motives) and through the repetition of both motives as a pair.

While the 4/4 notated meter implies a duple grouping of the half pulse, the changing points of the piano's articulations via alternation and repetition of motives prevent a stabilization of hypermeter throughout the song. The lack of stabilization enhances the sense of panic implied by the sonnet's text and avoids emphasizing any of the sonnet boundaries marked in prior songs.

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While grouping conflict plays a central role in songs 5, 7, and 8, its most profound and unusual use is in song 6, "Since she whom I loved." This sonnet is regarded by many Donne scholars as having been influenced by the tragic death of Donne's wife, Anne More, with its course depicting his struggle to accept God's love as a replacement for her. The sonnet embeds both Petrarchan and Shakespearean formal elements. The first quatrain describes the death of Donne's beloved and her ascendance into heaven, causing him to shift his focus completely from earthly to "heavenly things."[94] However, in the second quatrain, even though the subject has turned to God, he is left wanting: "A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet." The sestet outlines the reason for his wanting: according to Joy L. Linsley, the sestet posits the speaker's "rather suspect sympathy to God for the problems God faces in wooing Donne."[95] This problem stems from God's jealousy to accept that the subject's love for him might not exceed that of the subject's love for Anne (presumably with Anne encoded as one of line 12's "Angels"). While Donne marks the border between

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[94] Hugh L'Anson Faussett, *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (London: J.M.Dent & Sons for Hague and Gill, 1938), ix-x.

[95] Joy L. Linsley, "A Holy Puzzle: John Donne's 'Holy Sonnet XVII'" in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, eds. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, AR: UCA Press), 206.

octave and sestet, it is the setting of the final two lines, and in particular the phrase "tender jealousy," that are central to understanding the subject's skepticism toward God. As Richard Gill points out, the pairing of tenderness and jealousy is important because its function is unclear: "Does it show that the poet recognizes that, in spite of his pain, God is compassionate, or does it clash with jealous as to show the poet's ambivalent feelings about what God has done to him—that is, taken away his beloved?"[96]

Britten's setting of "Since she whom I loved" features a largely conjunct flowing melody supported by an ebbing chordal piano triplet pattern, alternating between outer and inner configurations. Contrasting the angular melody and ever-changing rhythmic properties of the prior song's ("What if this present") vocal line (see pp. 122-129), this song comes the closest to what one might associate with a nineteenth-century song style. Rather than the previous song's rapid declamation of text and jagged rhythmic shifts, this song emphasizes a clear declamation of the text through carefully shaped phrases that foreground sentential and grammatical clarity with slow quarter- and eighth-note attacks.

Via phrase, melody, and harmony, Britten's setting follows the sonnet's fourfold division. The opening quatrain is comprised of four equally-sized phrases, with their rhyming partners of "debt" (line 1) with "sett" (line 4) and "dead" (line 2) with "-ed" (line 3) in the same position of the measure (compare this approach to songs 1 through 5, where there is little co-ordination between rhyme and phrase structure). The first three phrases are based on a similar melodic pattern, transposed, and based upon a central echapée figure: the interval of a rising second followed by a falling third—a standard echapée figure

[96] Richard Gill, *John Donne: Selected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 107.

with the escape tone as an anacrusis leading to the subsequent tone on a downbeat. Britten maintains the placement of these figures in the first three phrases, but alters its placement in the fourth.

In the second quatrain, the echapée figure is replaced with descending scalar sixth figures that connect lines 5 to 6, realizing Donne's enjambment. Line 7 receives its own descending sixth scale, and as in the first quatrain, Britten alters the final line of the second quatrain, replacing the descending sixths with an emphatically "iambic" setting that dances around the central pitches $E_5/E^{\flat}_5$.

In the third quatrain, lines 9 and 10 are melodically disjunct, preferring leaps over stepwise motion. Britten observes the text's sentential structure by setting the comma after "love" with a rest, the colons in line 10 with longer durations, and by connecting all other parts of the text with a faster eighth-note pace of syllabic declamation. The increased prevalence of eighth-note declamation in lines 9 and 10 continues into lines 11 and 12. The enjambment of these two lines, Britten's indication of "*cresecendo ed agitato,*" and the mono-syllabic setting drive the text forward, reaching a climax at the beginning of the final couplet. These final two lines begin like the opening, transposed up an octave, but are altered by embedding multiple descending transpositions of the echapée figure with the original melodic descent.

While changes in the treatment of melody and approach to phrase structure align with the sonnet's fourfold division, the most stunning feature of this song is Britten's use of hemiolas. Disruptions to these hemiolas via changes to pulses that conflict with that established align with sonnet's fourfold division. In two cases, the hemiolas are far from

normative and require several stages of unpacking to demonstrate their analytical applicability. Once Britten's use of hemiolas has been ascertained, it is possible to consider how the disposition of these hemiolas enables a reading of the text that foregrounds the acrimonious relationship between the subject and God, the role that the death of his beloved plays.

Britten's setting of the first quatrain spans sixteen measures, with each line of text set to a four-measure phrase (accounting for short anacruses). As shown in Example 4.23, the first three lines follow the same gestural blueprint with the placement of echapée figures on the second and third measures of lines 1-3. Combined with phrase entries, melodic parallelism generates stable one-, two-, and four-measure hyperpulses. The piano's harmonic rhythm also aligns with these hyperpulses: mm. 5-8 are a transposition of the prior harmonic progression ($E^{\flat}$ major to $D^{\flat}$ major to C major) down a fifth and mm. 9-12 are a variation of the prior harmonic progressions with the underlying triadic trajectory inverted.[97] Although slower pulses are metrically stable, faster pulses are not. The voice contains mainly eighth-note attacks aligned with the notated measure; however, the piano's consistent triplet attacks can group triply into a quarter pulse, agreeing with the voice (as shown in dot diagram form above the piano's right hand), or duply via parallelism into triplet quarters (as shown below the piano). This is a classic case of what Richard Cohn refers to as a conflict between parallel and switchback interpretations.[98]

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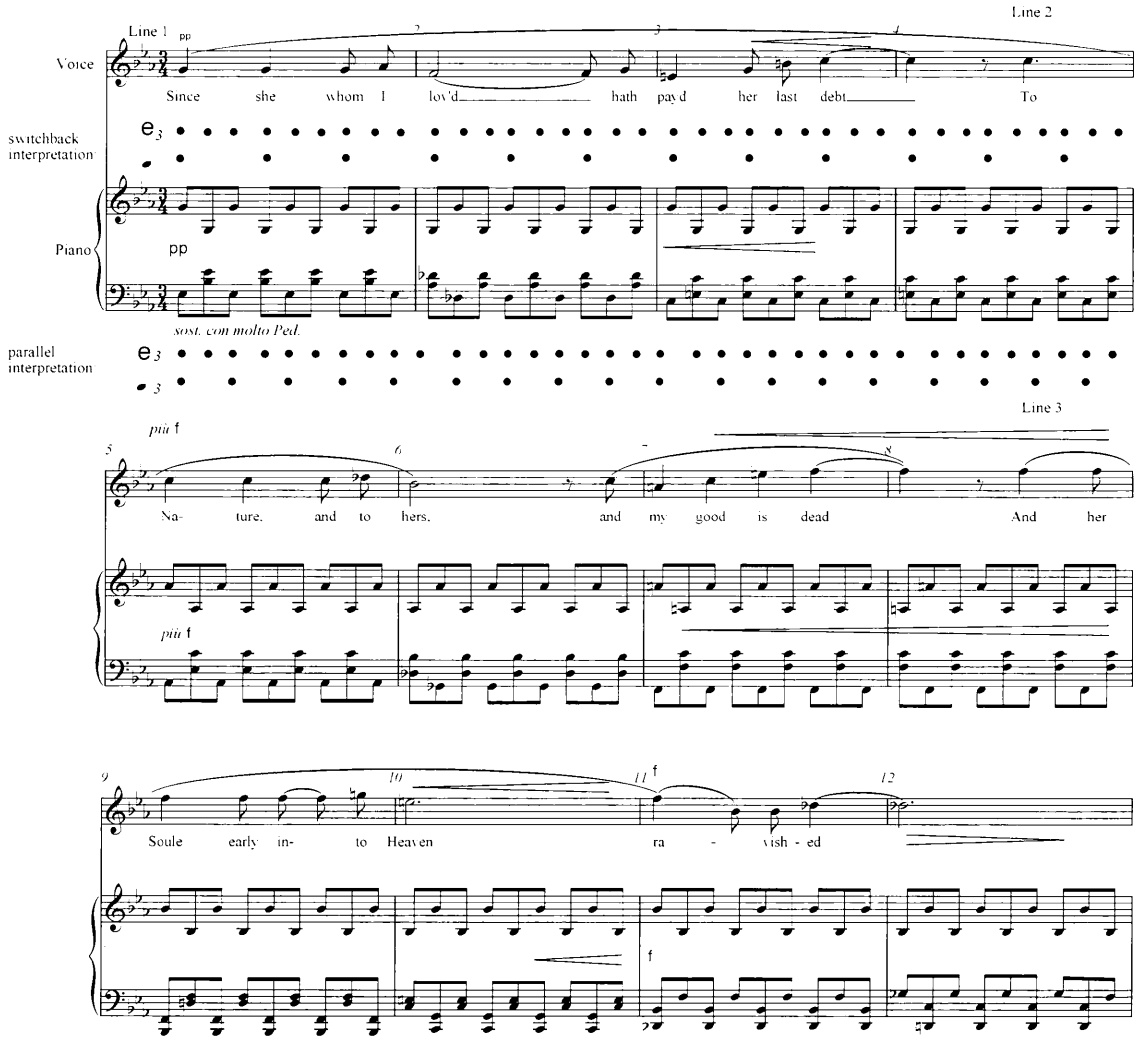
[97] More specifically, the harmony in mm. 9-12 rises from $B^{\flat}$ major to C major, before the bass melodically continues to the pitch $D^{\flat}$ as the third of a $B^{\flat}$ minor, instead of the expected $D^{\flat}$ major.

[98] See Cohn, "Dramatization of Hypermetric Conflicts in the Scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *Nineteenth Century Music* 15, no. 3 (1992): 22-40.



EXAMPLE 4.23: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 6, "Since She Whom I Loved," mm. 1-12.

The parallel interpretation, which favors the tripleted quarter pulse, is warranted by the consistent duple alternation of the piano's texture, even across the bar-lines when the harmony changes. This pulse is also explicitly stated in the voice at m. 7 with the triplet setting the text "my good is." The switchback interpretation, which favors the quarter pulse, is the only one that is consistent with the change-of-harmony accents that occur every nine attacks (since nine is divisible by 3, not by 2). The combination of these interpretations generates a double hemiola between the eighth and triplet-eighth pulses and the quarter and triplet-quarter pulses.

Consider the metric complexity of Britten's setting of lines 1-3 modeled as a ski-hill representation. Figure 4.8a maps out a 72-beat space and highlights the double hemiola via double-headed arrows. I trace three distinct paths generated by the voice and the piano's switchback and parallel interpretations. These paths are shown in Figure 4.8b. The vocal meter (path 1), represented as a continuous solid line, starts at the 4-measure span and travels down the left path (as if from the perspective of an observer, watching the skier descend the hill from a distant location) to the dotted-whole pulse (2-measure hyperpulse) and left again to the dotted-half pulse (one-measure pulse). From there, it turns right, dividing the one-measure pulse triply into a quarter pulse, left, into an eighth pulse, and then right, into the tripled-sixteenth-unit pulse (non-active).

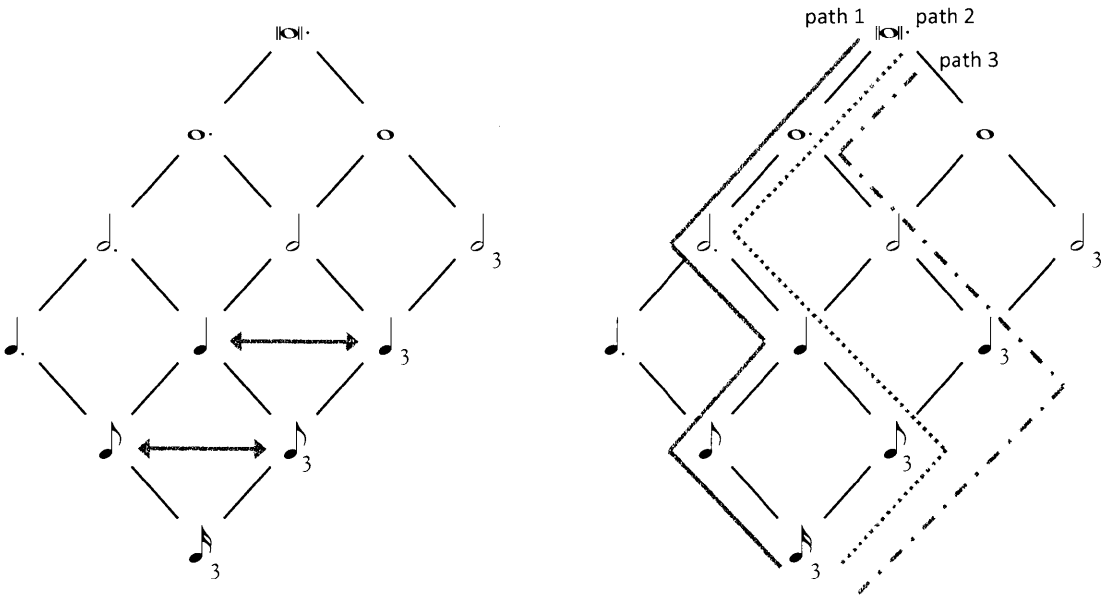


FIGURE 4.8: a) 72-beat space with hemiolas represented by double-headed arrows; b) 72-beat space with three distinct paths traversing the ski-hill.

The piano's switchback interpretation, which is represented as a continuous dotted line, starts with the span pulse and follows the same trajectory as the first path down to the

quarter pulse. At this point its path diverges with the quarter pulse divided triply, travelling the right path to a triplet eighth and then the left path to the unit pulse. Considering these two paths alone, a hemiola is formed between the eighth and triplet-eighth pulses, indicated by the double-headed arrow in the figure.

The final path is formed by the piano's parallel interpretation and is represented by an alternating dot and dash line; it is a little more challenging to map. Although it establishes two- and four-measure hyperpulses (as the piano's outer voice coincide with the changes of harmony), it is not clear whether the two-measure hyperpulse divides duply into the dotted-half pulse present in both the voice or triply into a half pulse. However, it is certain that the switchback continues down the slope to a triplet quarter, in which case one traverses the half pulse node. The triplet-quarter pulse then continues rightward, down to triplet-eighth and triplet-sixteenth-unit pulses. This half pulse is not explicitly active during these measures, problematized further by the salient harmonic changes that support a dotted-half pulse; however, its potentiality is realized in the setting of line 4.

Although the piano continues to project a dotted-half pulse and two- and four-measure hyperpulses in line 4, shown in Example 4.24, note how the voice introduces half and whole pulses (detailed in the dot diagram).[99] The echapée figure that sets "heavenly things" does not lead into the downbeat as it had in lines 1 to 3; instead, it leads into a second beat. This marks that second beat as accented, projecting a whole pulse that is then confirmed by the agogic accent at third beat of m. 15, "sett." This whole pulse divides duply into a half pulse as confirmed by the echapée figure that sets "my mind."

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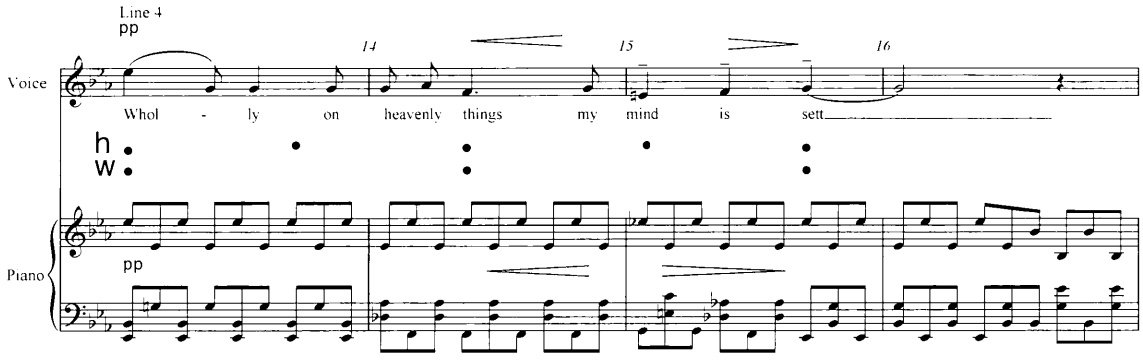
[99] Measures 13-16 combine prior versions (triadically, $E^{\flat}$ major to $D^{\flat}$ major to C major then back through $D^{\flat}$ major and $E^{\flat}$ major in mm. 15-16; melodically the bass line moves stepwise from $E^{\flat}$ to F to G and then back to $E^{\flat}$ via F).



EXAMPLE 4.24: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 6, "Since She Whom I Loved," mm. 13-16, setting of line 4.

The activation of the voice's half pulse prepared in lines 1-3, and its duple grouping into a whole pulse, extends the double hemiola further. Returning to the metric space, Figure 4.9 demonstrates the change of metric status in the voice on the 72-beat space. The voice (path 1) now descends rightward from the span pulse, then turns leftwards down past half, quarter, and eighth pulses before exiting rightward to the triplet-sixteenth pulse, forming a symmetrical path to the piano's switchback meter. The whole and half pulses, absent in lines 1-3, are now fully active and extend the hemiola from a double to a quadruple status as demonstrated by the four horizontal arrows between each level of conflicting pulses. This is not a disruption of the prior hemiola but an extension via elements already primed in lines 1-3.

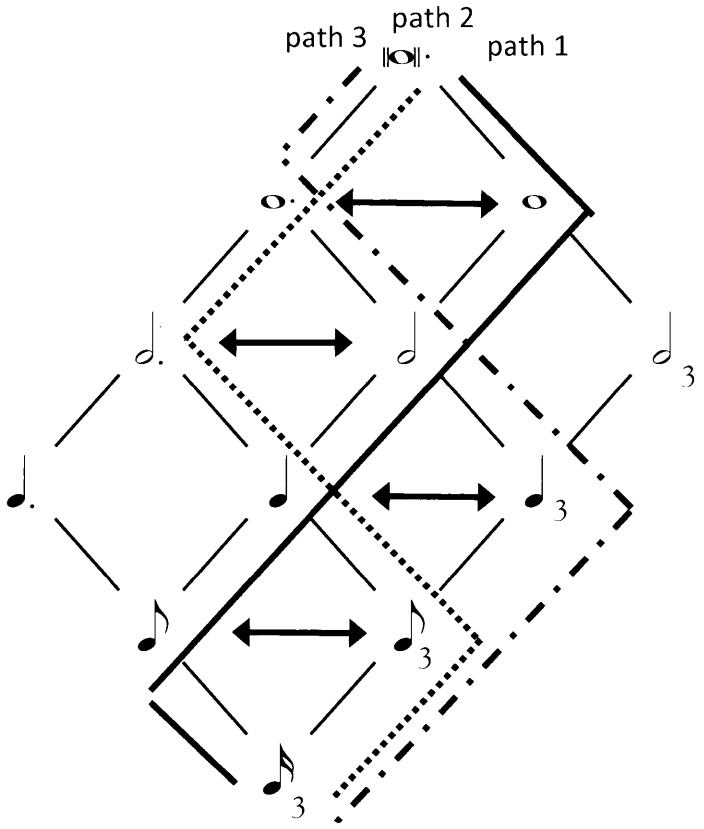
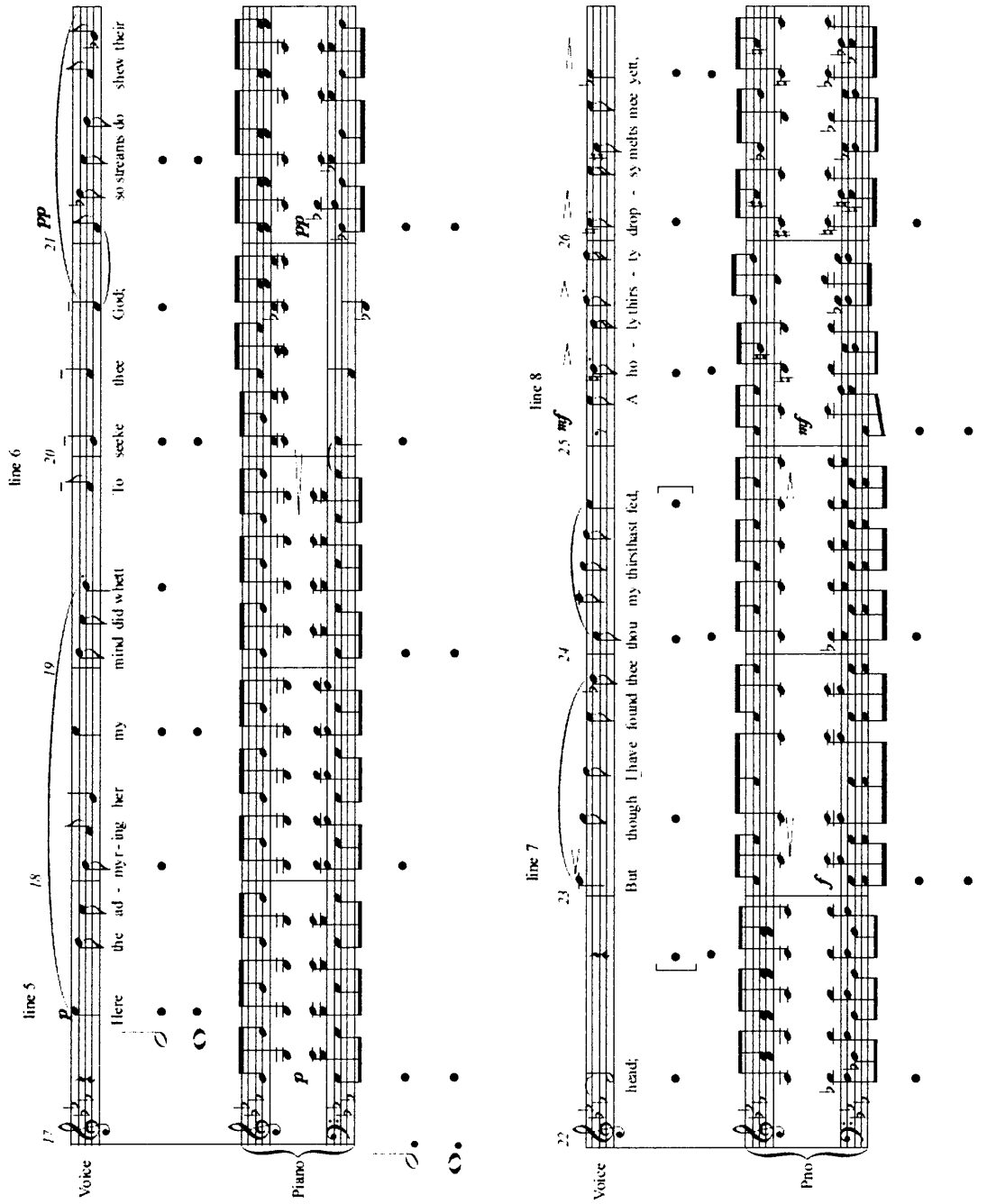


FIGURE 4.9: Reinterpretation of the piano's parallel interpretation in line 4, generating a quadruple hemiola.

The second quatrain, excerpted in Example 4.25, is marked by the disruption of the first quatrain's quadruple hemiola. This disruption is achieved via two means. First, the textual rhythm is compressed: in contrast to the first quatrain's sixteen-measure span, the second quatrain spans only ten measures, with lines 5 and 6 occupying three measures each, and lines 7 and 8 occupying two measures each. Second, the voice is initially dislocated from the notated downbeat.



EXAMPLE 4.25: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 6, "Since She Whom I Loved," mm. 17-26, grouping conflict between the voice's eighth, half and whole pulses and the piano's tripleted eighth, dotted-half and dotted-whole pulses (two-measure hyperpulse).

Naturally, the listener is inclined to continue the downbeat pulse, as well as the two- and four-measure hyperpulses into the second quatrain. The piano enables the listener to

continue at least the one- and two-measure projections: the harmony changes on the downbeat and is sustained for a dotted-half duration in mm. 17-19 and 22-24; the resolution from the implied V^7 of $A^{\flat}$ to the tonic marks the two-measure hyperpulse on m. 25; and while there is no change of harmony at m. 21 (at the expected hyperdownbeat), the resumption of the left hand's alternating textural figure and octave leap lends emphasis to this moment. The piano divides the ten measures as 2+2+2+2+2. The voice, on the other hand, divides the ten measures as 3+3+2+2, given the textural compression. Thus mm. 17-22 establish a slower conflict between the piano's two- and the voice's three-measure hyperpulses. In addition, the piano's switchback and parallel interpretations combined with the voice's eighth pulse maintain the double hemiola present in the first quatrain between eighth and triplet eighth, and quarter and triplet quarter pulses.

Where the second quatrain differs from the first is in the disruption of the double hemiola. The piano maintains the dotted-half and dotted-whole pulses aligned with the notated 3/4 meter; however, the voice's half and whole pulses are displaced. Following the dot diagram underneath Example 4.25, the half and whole pulses begin on "Here" in m. 17, and are subsequently maintained by agogic accents, the parallelism of the descending scalewise sixths starting in mm. 17 and 18 respectively, and the textually-stressed trochaic "Here the" and remaining iambic elements (such as "to seeke" and "thee God"). Although maintaining the half and whole pulses during line 7 is problematic (with "But" aligning

with m. 23 and the parallel "my" on the second eighth time point of m. 24), these pulses are reinitiated at expected attack points with the setting of line 8.[100]

Imagine, for a moment, a hypothetical re-composition of mm. 17-20 where the vocal line was shifted leftwards by a quarter note. Such a re-composition would align the beginning of line 8 with the notated downbeat. The subsequent attacks would form a double hemiola between the piano's dotted-half and dotted-whole pulses and the voice's half and whole pulses. Given the other conflicts already discussed, this re-composed passage would generate a quintuple hemiola. As represented in Figure 4.10, Britten distorts the hemiola by displacing two of its internal pulse layers. It is possible to understand this passage as formed from a two-stage process: first, he constructs the quintuple hemiola, extending the established quadruple hemiola; then, he shifts the vocal line later by a quarter note, disrupting two internal layers of the hemiola.

[100] Here, Britten realizes the only strictly iambic pentameter line in the sonnet with an explicit duple grouping of the quarter pulse: stressed syllables receive agogic accent and change of pitch (with the exception of "mee yett").

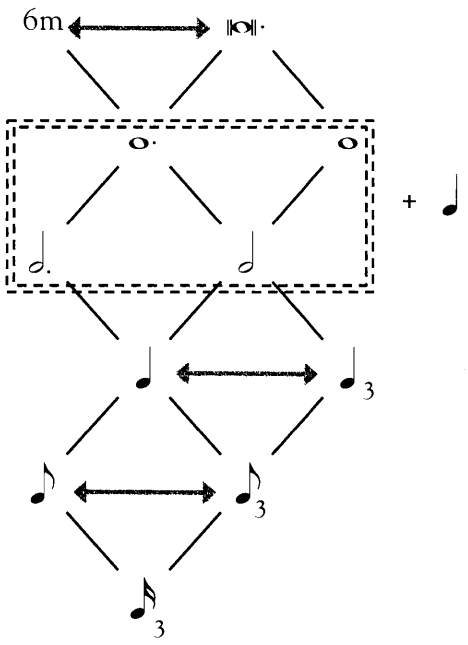
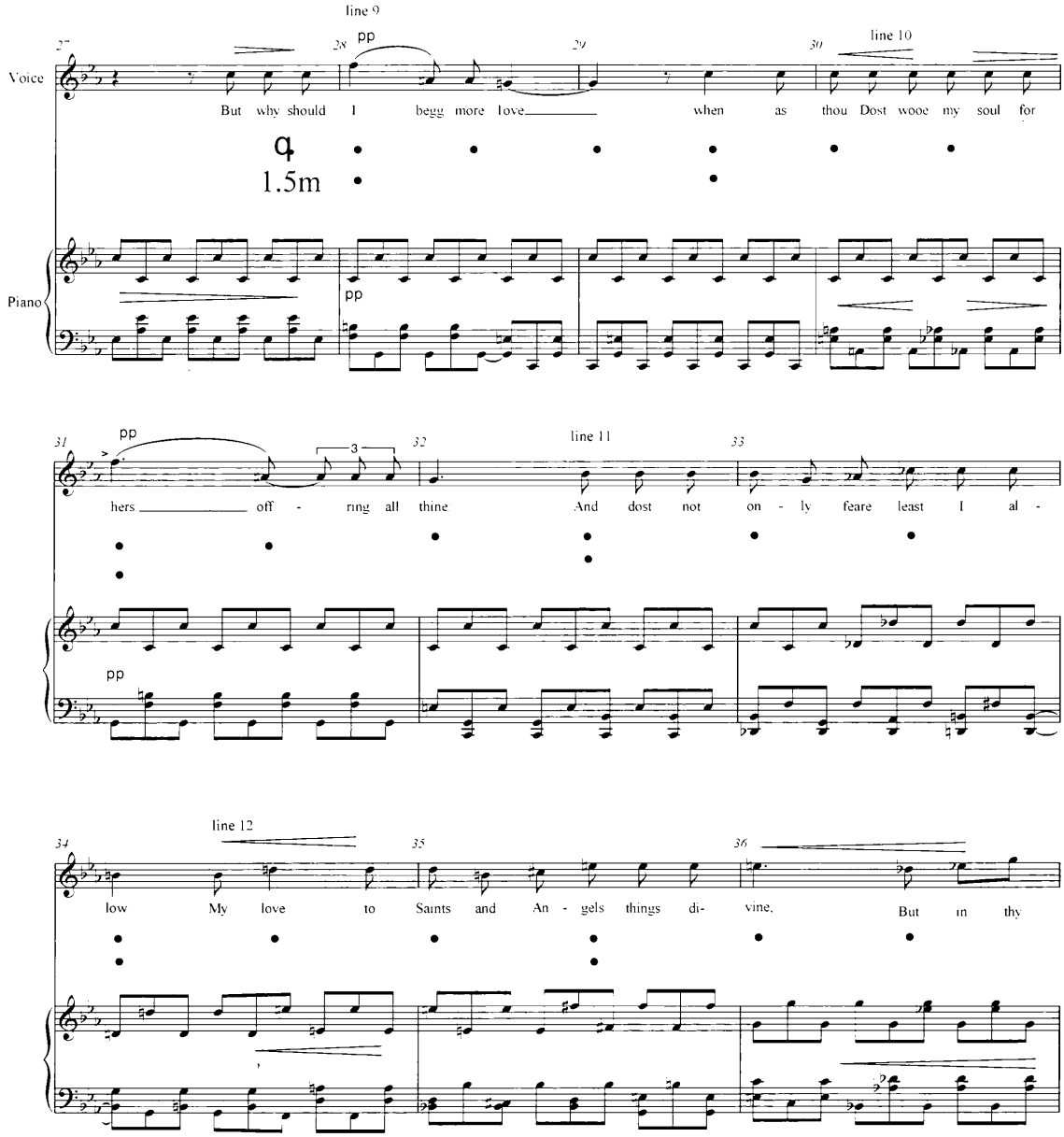


FIGURE 4.10: Ski-hill representation of the second quatrain with the displacement of two internal hemiola elements.

The beginning of the sestet contains another change in the type of hemiola employed. Shown in Example 4.26, line 9 divides into two phrases, with the latter part enjambed to line 10. Line 11 starts a new phrase based on the three-eighth upbeat motive in m. 32 and is enjambed to line 12. While the phrase initiation no longer aligns with individual lines (as it did in the opening quatrain), moments of climax on F_5 generate a three-measure hyperpulse (primed in the second quatrain) aided by the parallelism between mm. 28-29 and 31-32. This hyperpulse is also supported by the piano's return to a G-major harmony in mm. 28, 31, and 34 (which in the first two cases is followed by a C-major harmony).



EXAMPLE 4.26: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 6, "Since She Whom I Loved," mm. 27-36, triple hemiola generated by piano and voice, marking the division between sestet and octave.

While the voice and piano's three-measure hyperpulses align, conflict remains at faster pulses. In addition to the established conflicts between eighth and triplet-eighth and quarter and triplet-quarter pulses, Britten introduces a new conflict via the introduction of

a dotted-quarter pulse that divides the notated measure in half.[101] This pulse, detailed in Ex. 4.26, is generated by agogic accents on the midway points of mm. 29, 31, and 34 and by the hairpin dynamics in m. 30. This pulse conflicts with the piano's quarter pulse. The dotted-quarter pulse also groups triply into a 1.5 measure hyperpulse. The placement and agogic accent of "when," in m. 29, initiates this 1.5 hyperpulse that is then maintained by the melodic leap to F^5 in m. 31, the initiation of line 11 in m. 32, and the agogic accent on the downbeat of m. 34.[102]

The ski-hill graph shown in Figure 4.11 captures the new arrangement of grouping conflicts. The voice and piano are no longer displaced, as in the second quatrain. They form a triple hemiola: the piano's tripleted eighth and quarter pulses form a double hemiola with the voice's eighth and dotted-quarter pulses at the local level, which is extended to a triple hemiola as the 1.5 measure hyperpulse conflicts with the one-measure pulse.

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[101] It is also primed in the opening quatrain. Returning to Ex. 4.23, note how the initial words of lines two and three, "To" in m. 4 and "And" in m. 8, are agogically accented and enter mid-measure, rather than at later timepoints that would function better as anacruses. In the first case, the dotted-half-note "To" is merely syncopated in relation to surrounding vocal attacks, but primes the second case. In the second, the subsequent agogically accented "Soule," the "in-" of "into," and "Heaven" creates a dotted-quarter pulse.

[102] This notion of dividing the measure in half can also be seen in the piano in m. 30, where of the nine eighth-note attacks, the central one receives the shift in harmony.

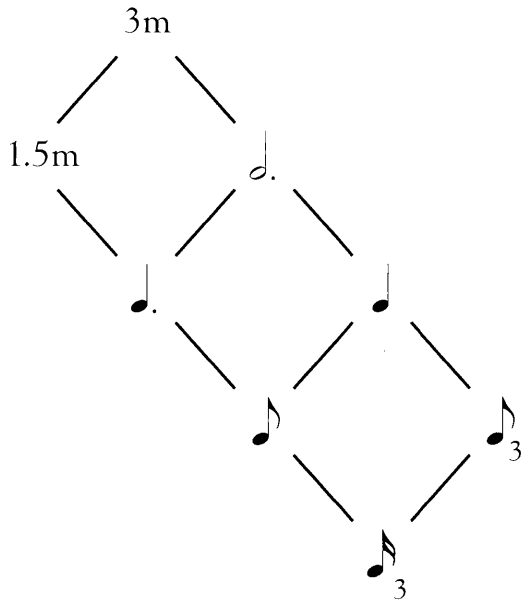
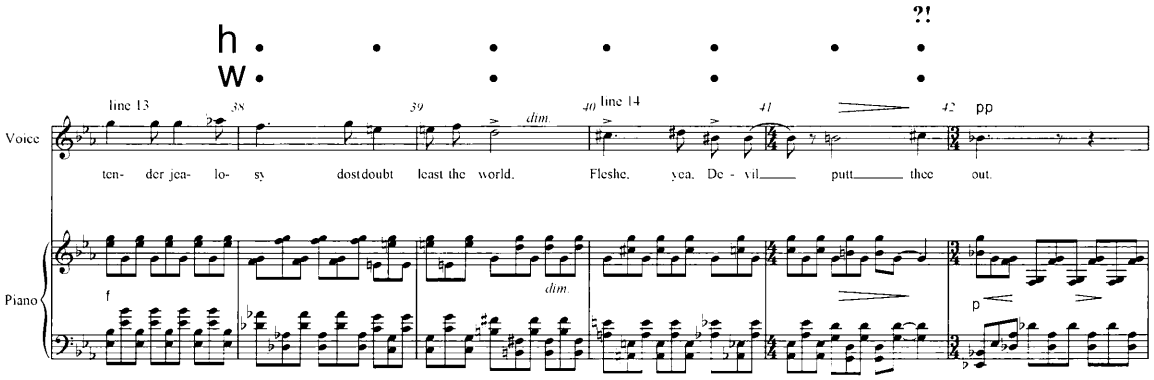


FIGURE 4.11: Ski-hill representation of the sestet's triple hemiola.

Britten marks the final two lines with the most complex treatment of meter in the song and perhaps of the cycle. As shown in Example 4.27, the voice and piano in m. 37 return to the opening theme in m. 37, climactically placed an octave higher. Immediately, one recalls the opening quatrain's stable dotted-half pulse and brings to mind its two- and four-measure hyperpulses. I hear m. 37 as a strong hypermetric downbeat. However, as one attempts to project the dotted-half pulse into the ensuing measures (in expectation of the fulfillment of two- and four-measure hyperpulses), Britten introduces a roadblock. He has altered the continuation of the theme starting in its second measure, m. 38. By altering the voice's rhythmic values, the placement of echapée figures, and by changing the piano's harmonic rhythm, he interrupts the prior dotted-half projection with a new half-note (and accompanying whole-note) projection. This half-note projection continues as the piano consistently changes harmony every half note (from $D^{\flat}$ major to C major in mm. 38-39, from B major to A major in mm. 39-40, to $A^{\flat}$ major to G major in mm. 40-41) and

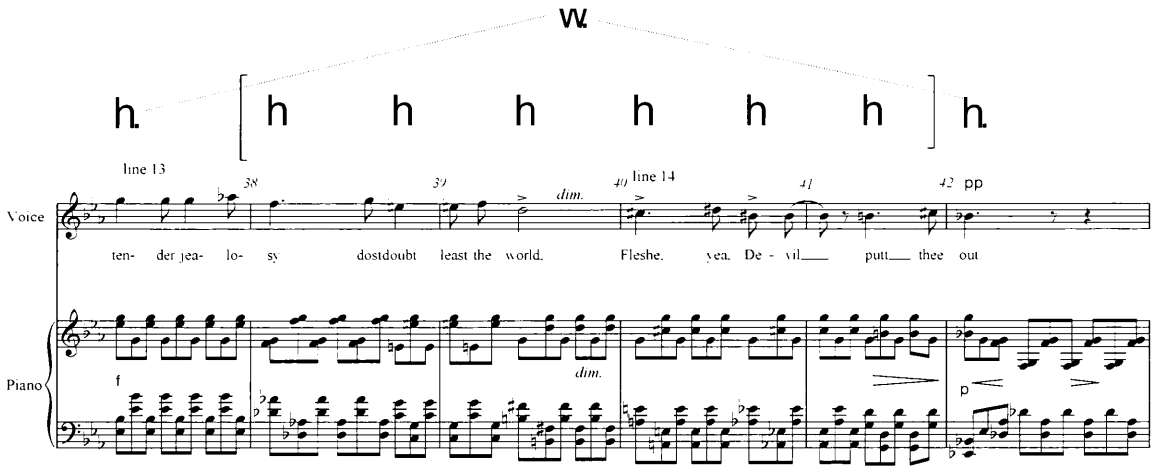
through the placement of attacks and agogic accents in the voice: "world," "Fleshe," the "De-" of "Devil," "putt" and "thee." This half pulse continues into the highly unusual single 4/4 measure, the only change of time signature in the song; however, maintaining this pulse would place an accent on the anacrustic "thee" rather than the agogically accented and harmonically stable $B^{\flat}$ in m. 42. The arrival of the tonic, coupled with the outer voice configuration of the piano and the voice's $B^{\flat}$ pitch, suggests a transferal of the hypermetric downbeat to the downbeat of m. 42. This transferal is coupled with an indirect grouping conflict as the induced half pulse is replaced with a dotted-half pulse to the song's close.



EXAMPLE 4.27: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 6, "Since She Whom I Loved," mm. 37-42, lines 13 and 14 and Britten's inserted hemiola.

Before considering this passage in further detail, I will examine a re-composed version shown in Example 4.28. This example normalizes Britten's 4/4 measure into a 3/4 measure by changing the rhythmic values of "putt" and "thee." The remainder of the re-composition is the same as Britten's. Notational symbols above the example track the pulses that have been described above. The re-composition demonstrates how one might conceive of the passage as containing two separate metric identities, with one inserted within the other: the first is a dotted-whole span that has been split into two constituent dotted-half pulses, mm. 37 and 42; the second is two dotted-whole span divided into a half

pulse that is then *inserted* into the first (the analytical information above the score demonstrates the insertion). In other words, the initial dotted-half span is split from its dotted-half partner, and the gap is filled by the half-pulse division (2,2,2,2,2,2), resulting in a (3,2,2,2,2,2,2,3) structure.



EXAMPLE 4.28: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, "Since She Whom I Loved," hypothetical re-composition of mm. 37-42, normalizing m. 41's 4/4 to 3/4.

Measures 37-42 correspond to the opening, mm. 1-6, (see Ex. 4.23) traversing the same downward pitch distance from the G_5 and $A^{\flat}_5$ in m. 1 to the $B^{\flat}_4$ in m. 6. It is a repetition of mm. 1-6 with the internal four measures removed and replaced with a prolonged version of the echapée figure. This figure had originally supported the dotted-half pulse in lines 1-3, but in line 4 it enabled a half pulse. Thus it is possible to see how the earlier passage primes this later more complex and extended use of the echapée figure.

Comparing Britten's version of mm. 37-42 to the re-composed version, there is one central difference: in the original, Britten extends m. 41 through a 4/4 measure. By expanding this measure, he delays the completion of the hemiola by a quarter note. While "thee" should sound like a downbeat, given the induction of the half pulse, its status as the

anacrusis part of the echapée figure and the only pause in the piano's alternating texture pushes the downbeat onto m. 42. Similar to the way in which quatrain 2's displacement of the voice late by a quarter note disrupts quatrain 1's quadruple hemiola, the final couplet disrupts the prior hemiola by parenthetically inserting a quarter extension to the final member of the induced duple pulse.

Why the extension? Is the delay a form of word painting, embodying the text's "putt thee out" through a metric analogy? Or is it because if Britten had not put in the extra beat, then the piano's alternating texture would have aligned its internal voices with "out" rather than the more salient outer voices? Either way, this form of hemiola is, out of all Britten's early vocal music discussed throughout Chapters 1 through 3, the most deformational.

Over the course of "Since she whom I loved," Britten employs four differently constituted hemiolas that align with Donne's division of the sonnet as both Petrarchan and Shakespearean by marking both the beginning of the sestet and the closing two lines. Figure 4.12 summarizes all four sections with their attending ski-hill graphs. The first and third hemiolas are the most standard of the four presented, the second and fourth the most non-normative and requiring a two-stage compositional process to understand their hemiolaic roots. Regardless of the type of hemiola, Britten sustains grouping conflict throughout the setting of the text. There is no resolution, as there had been in the *Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard*, which highlighted narrative aspects. Perhaps this is because there is no narrative resolution, no sanctuary to which the subject can turn to replace his lost love. Consider Gill's interpretation of the ambiguity in the final two lines: does the poet recognize God's compassion despite his pain? Or are his feelings toward God

one of anger given his beloved's death?[103] It would seem that Britten's setting, with an unusual hemiola, denies the resolution that an interpretation of "compassion" would bring; instead, the subject follows the path of anger as the song's conclusion. Of all the songs in the cycle, Britten presents the most sustained use of grouping conflicts in song 6, marking salient boundaries of the sonnet through changes in the composition and complexity of hemiolas.

[103] See Gill, *John Donne: Selected Poems*.

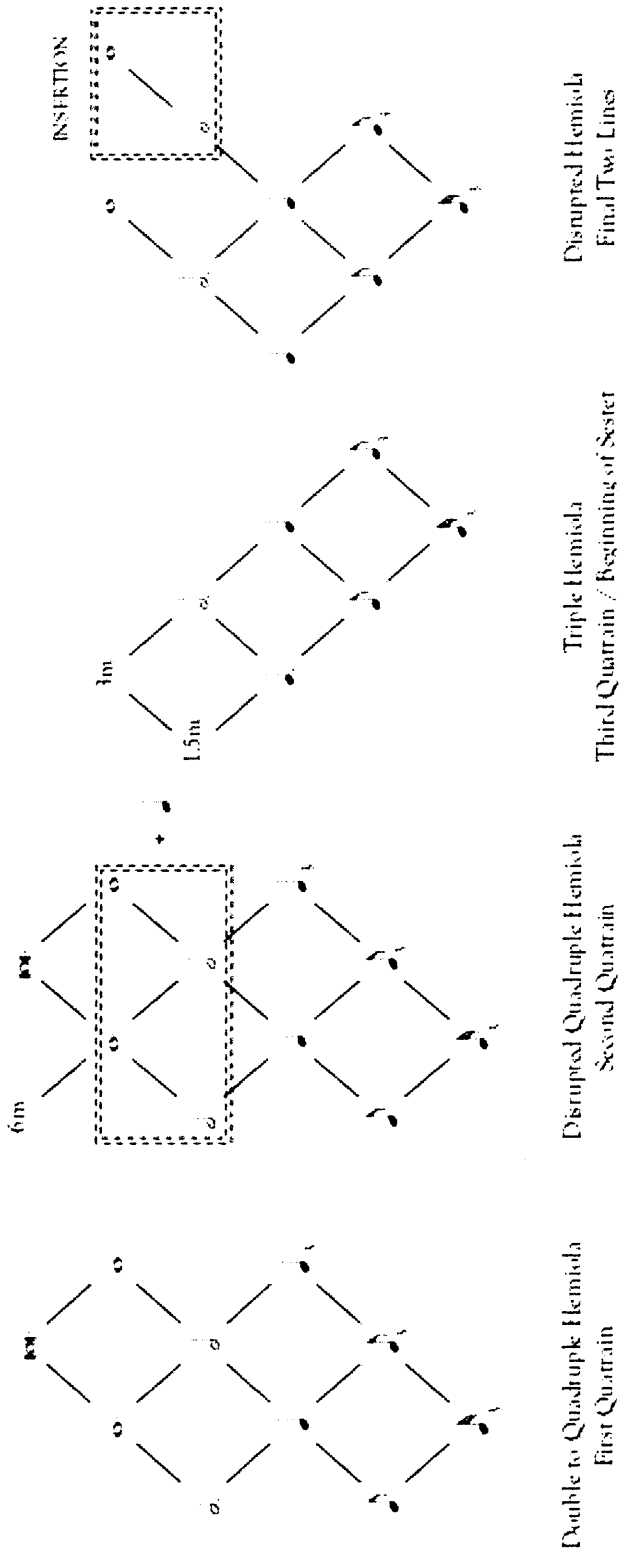


FIGURE 4.12: Overview of Hemiolas and their treatments in defining the four-part structure of "Since She Whom I Loved."

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The final song of the cycle, "Death be not proud," is unique in its metric approach, combining elements of both displacement and grouping conflict. While songs 1-4 contained moments of grouping conflicts, songs 5-8 largely contained little to no displacement conflict. Therefore, the return of displacement conflict is saliently experienced, marking song 9.

The sonnet "Death, be not proud" is one of Donne's most optimistic poems. Death is a common theme that connects all of his *Holy Sonnets*; and the speaker's relationship to it in prior songs has been an antagonistic one, fueling anger, fear, panic, and so forth. But in *this* sonnet, the speaker no longer fears death, but rather pities him. As evinced in line 1's "Death be not proud," line 2's "poore death," line 9's "thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men," and line 12's "why swell'st thou then," the speaker turns the table on death. He implies that Death is but a stepping-stone, rather than the end; it is "one short sleepe" from which one then receives eternal life.[104]

Like many of Donne's sonnets, "Death be not Proud" fuses both Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet elements: the octet takes the form of a Petrarchan rhyme scheme, but the sestet divides into quatrain plus couplet. The octave divides into two quatrains through punctuation and ideas presented. The first quatrain outlines the speaker's position on Death. Although some consider it to be mighty, the speaker does not; Death cannot truly kill him. A brief moment of confusion ensues, as the listener puzzles over the speaker's method for avoiding death. The second quatrain resolves this confusion by

[104] Phillip Mallett, *John Donne: Selected Poems* (Harlow: Longman York Press, 1983), 53.

elaborating that while physical death is possible, it cannot destroy his soul. In the sestet's quatrain, the speaker mocks Death. Even Death is subject to death, and if that is the case then "why swell'st thou then?" asks the speaker. The culmination of the sestet and the sonnet as a whole starts in the final couplet as the speaker describes how the soul lives on past physical death and ends with one of the strongest final endings of all Donne's *Holy Sonnets*: "Death, thou shalt die."

While the majority of syntactic and poetic line breaks coincide (with the exception of the first couplet) and each line consists of ten syllables, Donne pushes against the underlying iambic pentameter.[105] For example, the opening two syllables of lines 1 and 2 ("Death be" and "Mighty") suggest a trochaic rather iambic reading; however, note that maintaining an iambic reading highlights the rhyming of their second syllables "be" and "ty." The reversal of two-syllable verse feet followed by an iamb is central to Donne's play with poetic rhythm throughout "Death be not proud." Thus the first four syllables of lines 1 and 2 can be read as "*Death* be not *Proud*" and "*Migh*-ty and *Dread*-" both followed by iambs. Similarly line 4's "*Die* not, poor *Death*," line 8's "*Rest* of their *bones*," and line 13's "*One* short sleepe *past*" can be read as trochee/iamb combinations. While all of these examples occur at the beginning of their respective lines, Donne saves one for the climax of the sonnet: at the end of line 14, "*Death,* thou shalt *die*," interrupts the established prior iambic flow.

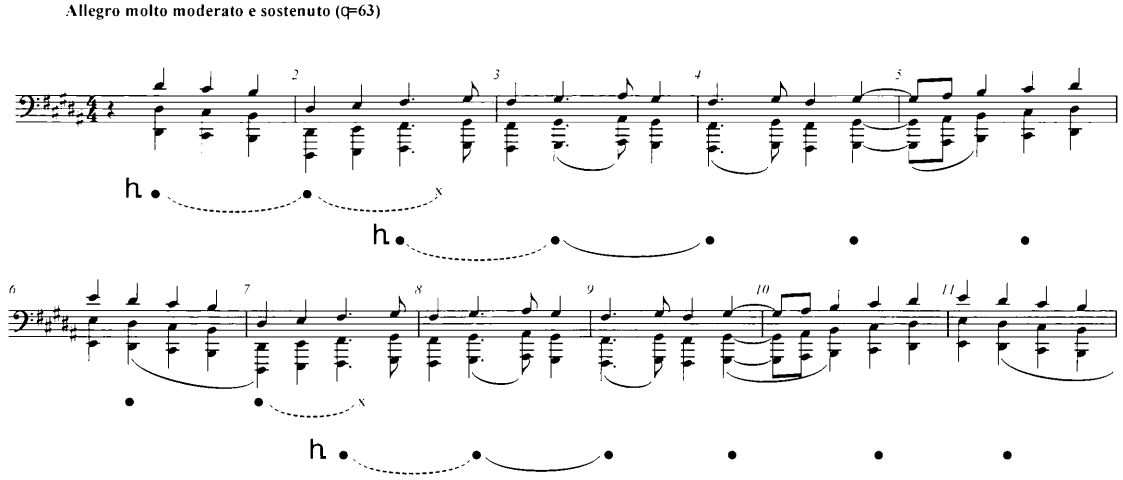
[105] While lines 9 and 11 appear to contain 11 syllables, it is very common in Donne's sonnets to elide consecutive sounds in the form of a diphthong. Thus, line 9 combines "Thou" and "art" into one syllable and line 11 combines the two syllables of "-py" of "poppy" and "or." Britten is sensitive to both of these elisions, as evinced by their setting in mm. 36 and 45 respectively.

Another means by which Donne pushes against iambic pentameter is found in Line 9, the beginning of the sestet. Here, "Chance," which receives equal accent to its surrounding "Fate" and "kings," can be read as "Thou art *slave* / to *Fate,*/ *Chance, kings* /and *des-*/p'rate *men,*" disrupting the iambic flow midline. It can still be read as pentameter, but with an internal spondee (two stressed syllables) replacing the established iamb.

Britten's setting of "Death be not proud" is notated in 4/4, yet it is the triple grouping of a quarter pulse that takes center stage. Until the very last moments of the song, on the words "Death thou shalt die," a dotted-half pulse cuts against the notated barline. This is all the more unusual, given that the cycle privileges duple groupings of the tactus, suggesting a loose adherence to Donne's iambic poetic meter. Removed temporally from the conventions in which Donne was working, perhaps Britten interprets Donne's line initiations (which involve the iambic and trochee combination) not as four syllables symmetrically employed, but as three-syllable dactyls (where the first receives the accentual weight). From this perspective, one can then project the three-syllable-dactylic units into several of the lines: for example, line 7 becomes "as *soon*-est our *best* men with *thee*"; or line 2, which becomes "*Migh*-ty and *Dread*-ful for, *thou* art not *soe*." While there is no contemporaneous evidence consistent with the idea that Donne would have undermined iambic pentameter convention through dactylic verse-feet, Britten is of course free of these constraints and is able to read the sonnet more freely.

This triple grouping plays a role not only in the voice but also in the piano, which divides into two registrally distinct strands. The most prominent of these strands is a passacaglia pattern, consisting of a 20-beat cycle that repeats eleven times with only changes

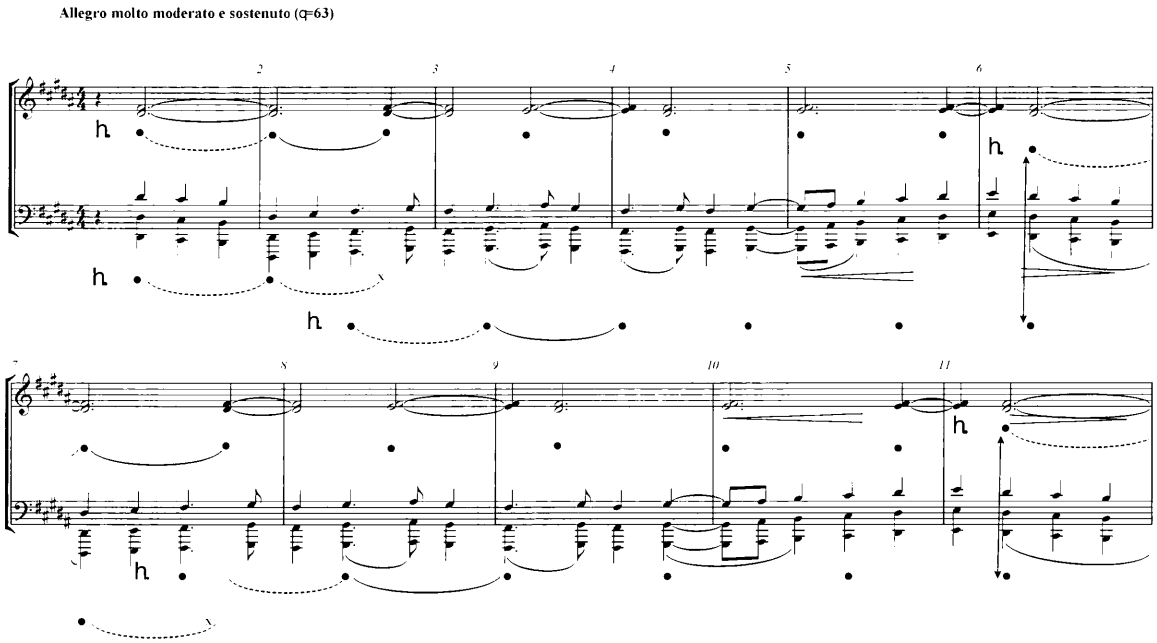
in registral position in relation to the voice and the second piano strand. Only the twelfth and final repetition undergoes significant modification. Example 4.29 shows two iterations of the piano's passacaglia pattern. What is most striking about the passacaglia is its lack of adherence to the 4/4 time signature. Starting with the descending scale-wise D♯, C♯, B followed by the downward leap, a dotted-half pulse is induced; however, its second projection is interrupted by a new dotted-half projection starting with the dotted quarter F♯ (m. 2), continued by the dotted quarter G♯ (m. 3), and established by the return to the dotted quarter F♯ (m. 4). The passacaglia's 20-beat cycle is dominated by threeness; three does not divide twenty evenly, it leaves a remainder of two. Using terms recently developed by Cohn, I view the passacaglia theme as 3-generated across a 20-beat cycle; since 3 does not divide 20 evenly, a 2-beat "comma" is needed.[106] This comma first occurs in m. 2. It interrupts the projection of the initial dotted-half pulse generated by the first three descending quarter notes D♯, C♯, B and subsequent leap to a D♯ and generates an indirect displacement conflict.



EXAMPLE 4.29: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not proud," mm. 1-11, dotted-half pulse in the passacaglia piano strand.

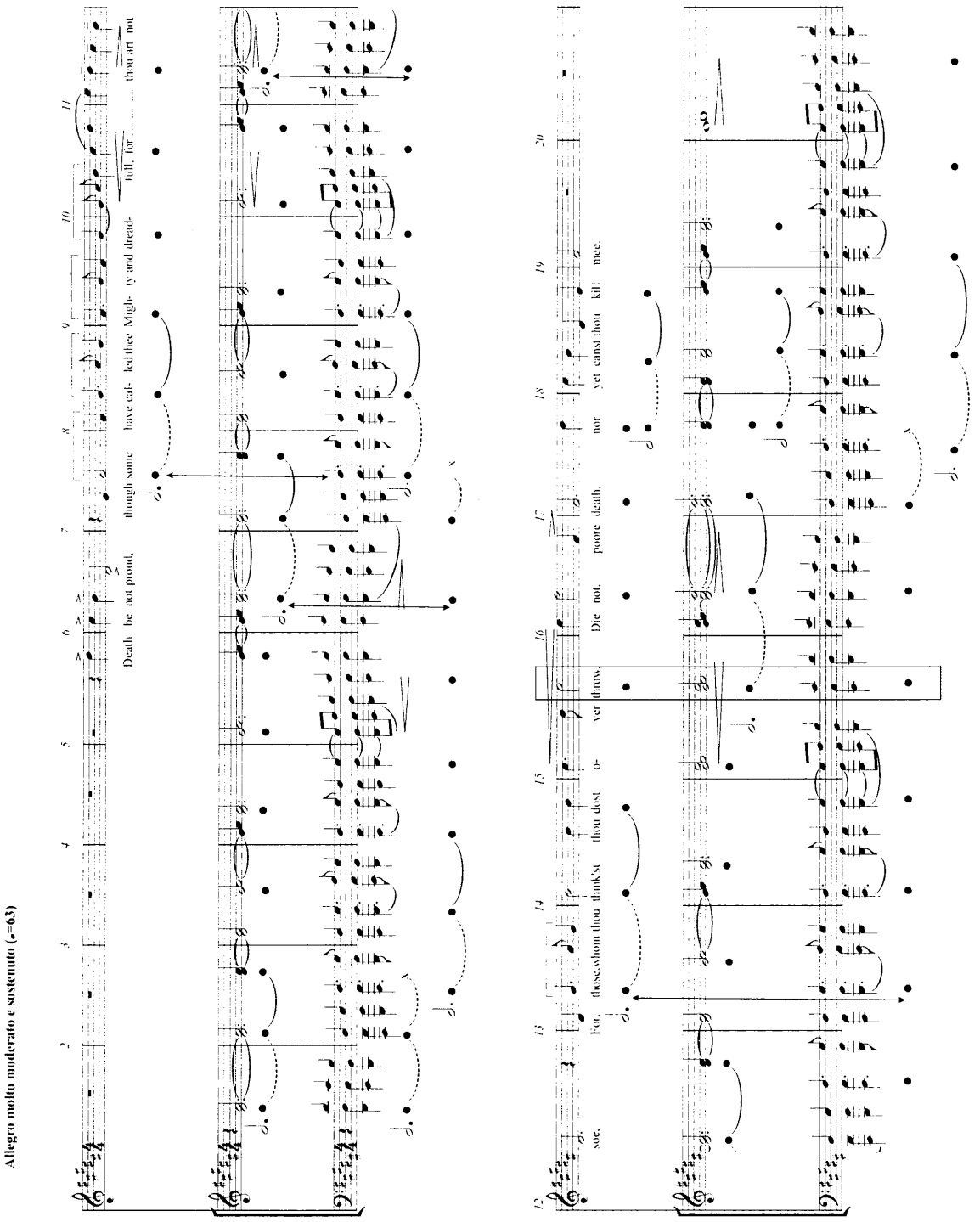
[106] Richard Cohn, "A Platonic Model of Funky Rhythms," *Music Theory Online* 22, no. 2 (2016).

Examine the second piano strand. It begins as a dyad but transforms into a triadic figure at the end of the first quatrain, leading to further alterations in subsequent quatrains. Example 4.30 excerpts both the passacaglia and second piano strand. Like the passacaglia, the dyads establish and maintain a dotted-half pulse that initially aligns with the passacaglia; however, while the passacaglia's dotted-quarter F♯ in m. 2 initiates a displaced dotted-half pulse, the dyads maintain the dotted-half pulse beginning in m. 1, forming a direct displacement conflict. This direct conflict resolves in m. 6, when the final projection of the dyad's pulse in m. 5 is cut short, with a duple grouping. It is this duplet that allows the dyad's subsequent dotted-whole-note duration to align with the passacaglia (shown via the vertical arrows). As in the passacaglia, Britten uses a 2-beat comma to divide the 20-cycle triply, but its location is at the end, rather than the beginning, of the cycle.



EXAMPLE 4.30: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not proud," mm. 1-11, two iterations of the passacaglia pattern and dyad strand in the piano.

Example 4.31 excerpts the first quatrain and demonstrates the interaction of the voice with the two piano strands. The first iteration functions as piano prelude, then three consecutive iterations roughly align with each quatrain. The entry of the voice on "Death," when viewed from the perspective of the 4/4 measure, acts as an anacrusis to "be" on the notated downbeat; however, induced to the passacaglia and second piano strand's dotted-half pulse, "Death" falls on a strong beat. Given the motivic parallelism between the passacaglia's $D^{\#}$, $C^{\#}$, B stepwise descent and subsequent leap down to $D^{\#}$ with the voice's first four notes, the listener is primed to hear the voice's entry as not duple, grouping the quarter tactus into a half pulse (that would align with the notated meter), but triply.



EXAMPLE 4.31: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not proud," mm. 1-20, the interaction of the three metric strands in Britten's setting of the opening quatrain.

It is a challenge to hear the voice as duple in the first place, in spite of Britten's use of a 4/4 time signature that strongly suggests that quarter, half, and whole pulses will play a

role. The triple pulse is further supported by Britten's unusual use of brackets above the score, indicating, for the performer, the "grouping" of the vocal line. It marks out a dotted-half pulse from the middle of m. 7 straight through to the middle of m. 10. Then the slur (setting "for") and the three tenuto signs continue that dotted-quarter pulse straight through to the downbeat of m. 12.

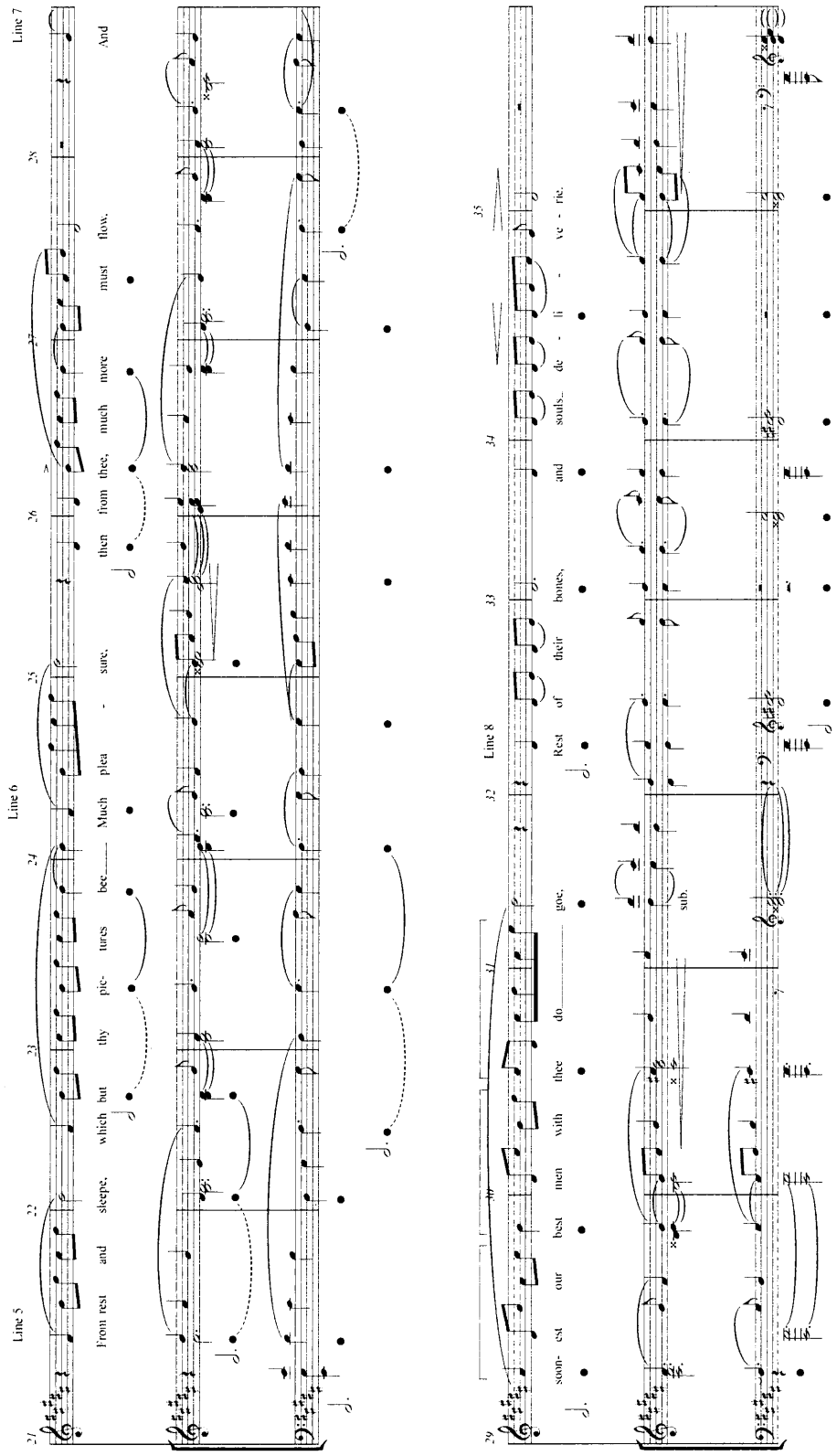
Over the course of the first quatrain, the voice locks onto the passacaglia in two places, after the 2-beat comma at the end of m. 6 and from beat 3 of m. 12. The dyad line also locks onto the passacaglia but at different points to the voice. Its two-beat commas occur at beats 3 of mm. 10 and 15. There are only two points where the pulses of all three strands align, at beat 2 of m. 11 and beat 3 of m. 15. At all other points the three strands maintain direct displacement conflicts.

Although the opening of the song is shaped by a prevalence of dotted-half pulses, Britten also primes a half pulse that heightens the direct displacement conflict further by engaging a grouping conflict. In m. 15 the dyad strand introduces several consecutive half-note attacks that align with the measure and support "o'erthrow," priming this pulse for its longer return in mm. 17-19. This brief appearance of the half pulse also generates an indirect grouping conflict (hemiola) with the dyadic strands of the previous measure. In mm. 17-19, attacks establish a displaced half pulse that again forms an indirect grouping conflict with the prior triple pulse.

Overall, the initiation of the second quatrain, shown in Example 4.32, is marked by the alignment of all three strands, by the shift in registral positions of the piano's strands (the dyads are now registrally displaced within the ground bass pattern), and by the conflict

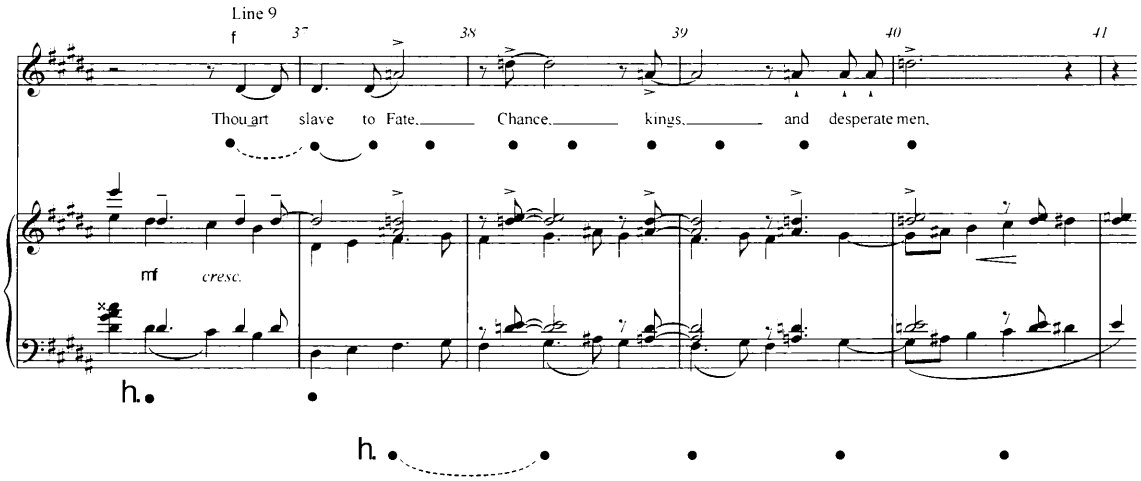
between voice and piano. At the end of the second passacaglia iteration of the second quatrain, m. 31, the three strands shift registral positioning: the passacaglia now occupies the highest register, while the third strand, comprised of triads, occupies a lower registral position that at times overlaps the passacaglia. The voice is now in the lowest registral position (excepting the two low bass octave attacks), presents the most restricted ambitus of any line setting in the song, and restores its displaced duple pulse.

In addition to the continued displacement of the dotted-half pulse, the half note primed in the first quatrain takes on a more dominant role in the voice. Beginning halfway through line 5 and continuing into line 6, iambic pairings support a displaced half pulse. In lines 5 and 6, Britten sets each stressed syllable (except for the final one) to the pitch B_4: starting with "but" in m. 22, each subsequent B_4 pitch spans a half note displaced from the barline (see "pic," and "bee"). Subsequent attacks on "then," the performatively accented "thee," and the agogically accented "more" in mm. 25-27 reinstate this pulse. Additionally, note how the piano's dyad line, starting on beat 2 of m. 26, supports the half-pulse. Both lines 7 and 8 re-establish the dotted-half pulse, which is again explicitly indicated by Britten through the use of brackets above the voice in mm. 29-31; however, the lower piano's triadic figure starting in m. 32 stimulates a duple reading. Preceded by anacrustic bass octaves, the half-note attacks in mm. 32-35 align with the notated meter and lend support to an iambic reading of line 8. This being said, the parallel use of a long, short, short, long pattern between "Rest of their bones" and "and souls de-li-ve-" suggests the maintenance of the dotted-half pulse.



EXAMPLE 4.32: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not proud," mm. 21-35, second quatrain and displaced duple vocal pulses.

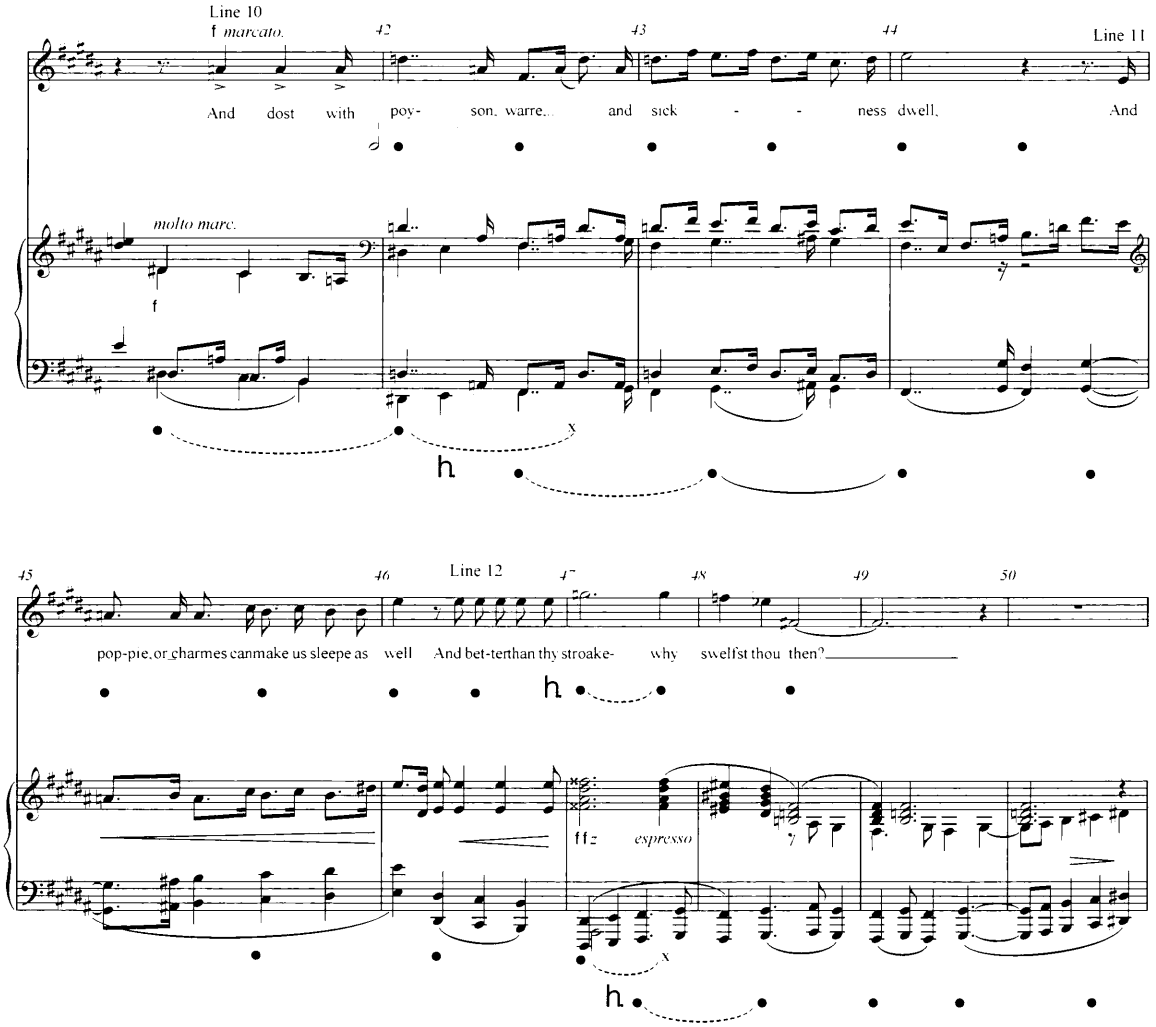
While the passacaglia pattern continues unaltered, Britten introduces a dotted-quarter pulse in the voice, marking the beginning of the sestet. As shown in Example 4.33, the phrase "Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, Kings, and desperate men" establishes a dotted-quarter pulse via attacks on "Thouart" (pronounced as one syllable via elision as "thahrt,") "slave," "to," "Chance," "Kings," and "and." This pulse forms a direct grouping conflict with the piano's quarter pulse. However, one might be metrically swayed by the agogically accented "slave," "Fate" (also melodically accented), and "men" (melodically and performatively accented), engaging a half pulse aligned with the notated meter, forming a conflict with the piano's dotted-half pulse. Starting at line 9, the second piano line is absorbed into the vocal line, where it not only rhythmically engages with the vocal line, but also doubles its pitches (with an extra pitch added). The combination of these pulses leads to two sets of grouping conflicts that reflect the most poetically irregular line in the sonnet.



EXAMPLE 4.33: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not proud," mm. 36-41, the voice's dotted-quarter pulse marks the beginning of the sestet.

Shown in Example 4.34, Britten reintroduces and sustains the half pulse for the longest extended period in the song. Beginning at line 10's "poyson" and maintained through the alignment of stressed iambic syllables, agogic accents, and melismatic stress

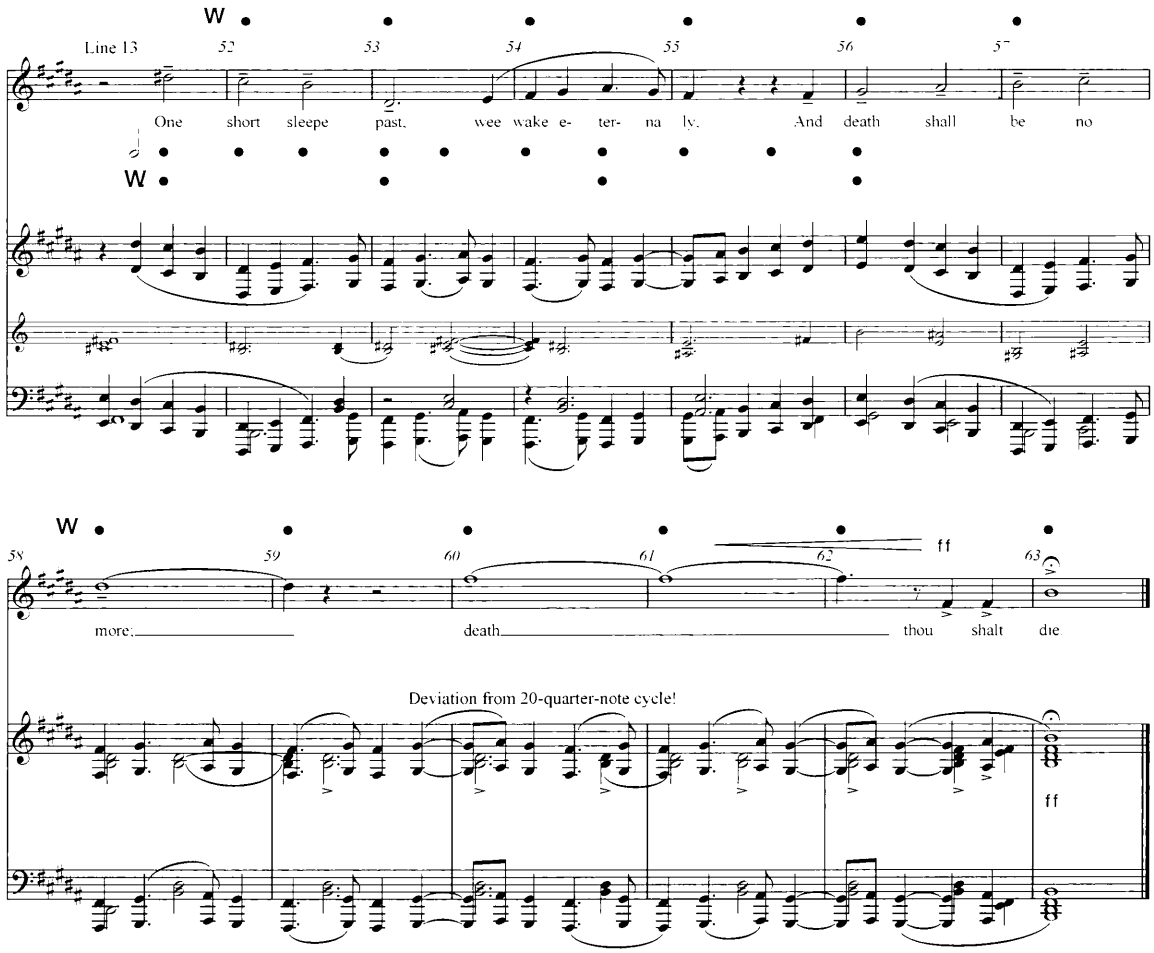
until m. 47's "stroake," the voice's half pulse is supported by continued absorption and heterophony with the second piano strand. Beginning midway through m. 42 and maintained until the downbeat of m. 47, the passacaglia pattern and the voice/second piano strand form a hemiola between the half and dotted-half pulses. While primed earlier, prior hemiolas were unclear due to the displacement conflict generated between the piano dyads and passacaglia; here, without the displaced second piano strand, the hemiola comes to the fore.



EXAMPLE 4.34: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not proud," mm. 41-50, longest extension of the half-pulse in lines 10-12.

The increased speed of iambic presentation in line 11 and line 12's "And better than thy" generates a rhythmic climax that culminates in m. 47's "stroake." Prior to this point, iambic pairings generally spanned a half note; here they span a quarter note. The accented syllables of "pop-" of "poppie," "charmes," "make," "sleepe," "bet-" of "better," and "thy" fall on subsequent quarter-attacks time points, and the majority receive agogic accent. The metric effect of this rhythmic acceleration propels the listener forward to "stroake," dynamically accented and coupled with fully textured chords in the second piano strand. This moment is further accented by the abandonment of the half pulse as the voice locks back into the melodic and rhythmic properties of the passacaglia pattern, setting the iamb/trochee combination as a triple foot "*why* swelst thou *then?*"

The abandonment of the half pulse, the resumption of the passacaglia theme in the voice, and the slowing of textual declamation continue in line 13 and 14, shown in Example 4.35. The example inserts an extra staff between the piano's right and left hands in order to demonstrate the re-initiation of an independent second piano strand. Britten marks these last two lines by setting the voice exclusively with a half pulse, which continues the half pulse *versus* dotted-half pulse conflict between passacaglia and voice formed at the opening of the sestet. However, while the voice re-instates the half pulse, it can be grouped triply into a dotted-whole pulse rather than a whole pulse. Primed by the slowing of textual declamation, the durational augmentation of the passacaglia theme, and having associated the initial $D^{\sharp}$ pitch of the passacaglia theme and the downward leap of a sixth with downbeat locations, the listener hears the half pulse grouped triply for the duration of line 13.



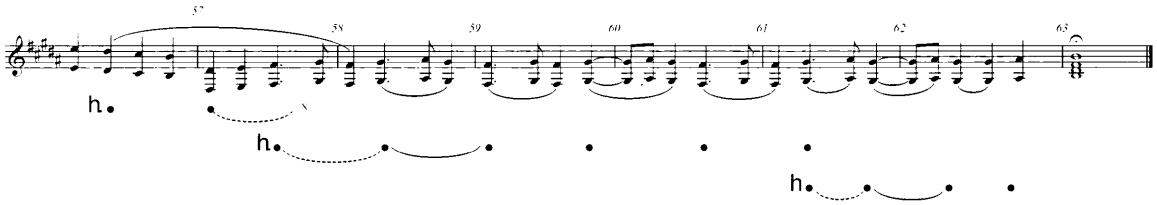
EXAMPLE 4.35: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not proud," mm. 51-63.

With this being said, it is also possible to hear the voice's half pulse as grouping duply into a whole pulse (as shown above the vocal part). This hearing is prepared by the whole-note attack in the second piano strand in m. 52, whose projection of whole pulse is continued by the passacaglia's downward leap of a sixth onto the downbeat of m. 52, and confirmed by the voice's agogically accented "past" in m. 53. If one hears the voice in this manner, then starting at m. 52 through to m. 55 the whole pulse of the voice conflicts with the re-initiation of the dotted-half pulse in the second piano strand, forming a hemiola. Note also how the passacaglia's displaced dotted-half pulse on the third beat of m. 52 also forms a hemiola with the voice's half pulse through to the completion of m. 55. But the

two hemiolas formed by the combination of voice and second piano strand and voice and passacaglia do *not* align. One is offset from the other. There is prior motivation for understanding this passage in this manner, given a similar approach in the second quatrain of "Since she whom I loved," where internal elements of a hemiola were shifted from outer elements.

The final line divides into two parts: mm. 56-59, "And death shall be no more," and mm. 60-63, "death thou shalt die." Over the course of both parts, Britten gradually expunges the triple-related elements. Starting in mm. 56-59, there is little to motivate the listener to maintain the induced triple grouping of the half pulse; instead one hears a whole pulse that is supported by the dyadic leap in the second piano strand across mm. 56 and 57. In m. 60, the most dramatic sustained vocal note of the entire cycle, "death," is accompanied by one last flurry of dotted-half pulse activity in the second piano strand. The downbeat of m. 60 also marks the only point in the cycle where the passacaglia pattern is altered. Excerpted in Example 4.36, this final iteration extends beyond the established twenty-quarter-note span and diverges from the established pattern at the seventeenth-quarter-note time point. Britten replaces the prior rising quarter-note attacks with several repetitions of the dotted-quarter, eighth, quarter rhythmic figure (based around the pitches F♯/G♯ and G♯/A). Note how he changes the phrase markings of the two final repetitions of this figure, replacing the dotted-half span with half spans (as shown in the example) and establishing a half pulse displaced from the barline. Thus in the closing moments, the bass line abandons the dotted-half pulse for the only time in the song in favor of the half pulse. At this point, the second piano strand also abandons its dotted-half pulse for a half pulse,

aligned with the measure. Thus in the final two measures of the song, the dotted-half pulse, present in some capacity up to now, ceases.



EXAMPLE 4.36: *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, song 9, "Death be not Proud," mm. 56-63, final iteration of the passacaglia.

Over the course of "Death be not proud," Britten maintains a complex interweaving of three registrally distinct strands whose interaction produces and maintains a direct displacement conflict between dotted-half pulses. These conflicts are generated by the differing locations of two-beat commas within a 20-beat cycle, outlined by the passacaglia pattern. While the direct displacement conflict only resolves in the final two measures, Britten marks the sonnet's structure via the gradual priming and realization of a half pulse and the alignment of the three strands. In the first quatrain, he highlights the textual units of line 3's "overthrow" and line 4's "nor yet canst thou kill me." Following the alignment of all three strands that mark the second quatrain, he prolongs the length of the half pulses, this time highlighting line 5's "but thy pictures bee" and line 6's "then from thee much more must flow." The gradual expansion of the half pulse passages during the octave culminates in its longest appearance in the sestet, encompassing line 9 through to line 12's "better than thy stroake"—the subject's most extensive and extreme attack on Death's character. From Britten's setting of line 1 of the poem to this point, the voice's half pulse has gradually swayed the third strand to the point where it is now absorbed into the vocal line itself in line 9. In spite of a brief reappearance of the dotted-half pulse, dyad form at

the end of line 12 into 13 and the marking line 14's dramatically set "death," the duple pulse is still dominant. The final iteration of the passacaglia pattern ultimately also gives way to the half pulse in the final moments, bringing the tension of a song notated in 4/4 but heard in terms of 3/4 to a satisfying close.

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In addition to observing Donne's poetic fusion of Petrarchan (8+6) and Shakespearean (4+4+4+2) forms, this chapter has demonstrated how Britten employs either changes in the type of metric conflict or shifting between metrically stable and unstable passages to metrically articulate Donne's boundary points in each individual sonnet. From a more global perspective, the chapter has demonstrated how Britten articulates the transition from song 4 to song 5 by switching from displacement to grouping conflict. And he articulates the transition to song 9 by restoring the displacement conflict. Thus, through changes in the type of conflict, the cycle divides as songs 1-4, 5-8, and 9. David Brown, Bryan N. S. Gooch, and Arnold Whittall have all examined the *Holy Sonnets* from the perspective of the cycle as a whole. Brown and Gooch divide the cycle as a 1-5,6-8, and 9 and as 1-5, 6, and 7-9, respectively, and Whittall divides the cycle non-contiguously. The analysis and resulting division proposed here, songs 1-4, 5-8, and 9, is feasible given Britten's experimentation with meter throughout 1943 to 1945. Over these years, Britten's engagement with metric conflict deepened, finding its culmination in the *Holy Sonnets.*

Epilogue

Britten's emigration to the United States was not a success. He returned to British shores in 1942. But upon leaving the United States, US Customs seized and confiscated all of his scores. Thus, during the journey home and the immediate months that followed, Britten started from scratch. As scholars have noted, his return to the United Kingdom was a salient moment in his career. What this dissertation suggests is that this turning point was decidedly metric in nature. All of his vocal works during 1943 to 1945 were guided by an evolving fascination with metric experimentation. From the *Serenade*, to the *Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard, Festival te Deum, Peter Grimes,* and finally the *Holy Sonnets of John Donne,* employ meter and metric conflict in diverse ways, emphasizing specific moments in their respective texts. Among these pieces, *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* presents an apex in Britten's compositional experimentation. While the *Serenade, Festival te Deum,* and *Peter Grimes* utilized short sections of metric conflict and resolution to highlight certain sections of text, and the *Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard* expanded this approach to an entire piece, the *Holy Sonnets of John Donne* engaged metric conflict on a multi-movement scale.

Obviously Britten set himself a compositional challenge, but it is possible that the employment and level of metric conflict in his music could be linked to his personal life. And while this is of course speculation, it is compelling to consider that Britten's first major public success with *Peter Grimes* (on June 7th 1945 at Sadler's Wells in London) brought to a close the traumatic and transitional period since his return to England. One might conceive of his use of metric conflict during 1943-1945 as a compositional

manifestation of the challenges he faced in his own life. As Brian McMahon has argued, Britten struggled with these challenges: "Here was someone with an acute sense of morality and justice, but who avoided the conflict and only engaged in the public debate when victory was assured."[107] Perhaps Britten's metric experimentations in the compositions of 1943-1945 offered a musical refuge for his own feelings of conflict that he could not reveal publically.

It is my contention that 1943-45 was an intense period of experimentation in meter for Britten, which yielded tools he would use and develop to varying degrees across the remainder of his career. Many of his later works feature uses of metric conflict have their roots in the vocal music examined here. One might consider the use of the boys' choir in the *War Requiem*, Quint in *Turn of the Screw*, or Tadzio in *Death in Venice* from the perspective of Britten's metric experimentation from the 1940s. Applying the models presented in this dissertation can add to our understanding of both Britten's technique as well as his political and dramatic statements.

[107] McMahon, "Why did Britten Return to Wartime England?" 182.

Appendix: Sonnet texts from Britten's *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*

Song 1: Oh my blacke Soule!"

1. Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned
2. By sicknesse, death's herald, and champion;
3. Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
4. Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled,
5. Or like a thiefe, which till death's doome be read,
6. Wisheth himselfe deliver'd from prison;
7. But dam'd and hal'd to execution,
8. Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.

9. Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
10. But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
11. Oh make thyselfe with holy mourning blacke,
12. And red with blushing, as thou are with sinne;
13. Or wash thee in Christ's blood, which hath this might
14. That being red, it dyes red soules to white.

Song 2: "Batter my heart"

1. Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for, you
2. As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
3. That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
4. Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
5. I, like an usurpt towne, to another due,
6. Labor to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
7. Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend
8. But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.

9. Yet dearly I love you and would be loved faine,
10. But am betroth'd unto your enemie:
11. Divorce mee, untie or breake that knot againe,
12. Take mee to you, imprison mee, For I
13. except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
14. Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

Song 3: "O might those sighes and teares"

1. O might those sighes and teares returne againe
2. into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
3. That I might in this holy discontent
4. Mourne with some fruit, as I have mourn'd in vaine;
5. In mine Idolatry what showr's of rain
6. Mine eyes did waste? what griefs my heart did rent?
7. That sufferance was my sinne; now I repent;
8. 'Cause I did suffer, I must suffer paine.

9. Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night-scouting thiefe,
10. The itchy Lecher, and selfe tickling proud
11. Have the remembrance of past joyes for reliefe
12. of comming ills. To poore me is allow'd
13. No ease; for, long, yet vehement griefe hath been
14. Th'effect and cause, the punishment and sinne.

Song 4: "Oh, to vex me"

1. Oh, to vex me, contraryes meet in one:
2. Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott
3. A constant habit; that when I would not
4. I change in vowes, and in devotione.
5. As humorous is my contritione
6. As my profane Love and as soone forgott:
7. As ridlingly distemper'd, cold and hott,
8. As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.

9. I durst not view Heav'n yesterday; and to day
10. In prayers, and flatt'ring speaches I court God:
11. To morrow I quake with true feare of his rod.
12. So my devout fitts come and go away,
13. Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
14. Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.

Song 5: "What if this present"

1. What if this present were the world's last night?
2. Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,
3. The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
4. Whether that countenance can thee affright,
5. Teares in his eyes quench the amazing light,
6. Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell.
7. And can that tongue adjudge thee into hell,
8. Which pray'd forgivenesse for his foes fierce spight?

9. No, no; but as in my idolatrie
10. I said to all my profane mistresses,
11. Beauty, of pitty, foulnesse onely is
12. A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,
13. To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
14. This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde.

Song 6: "Since she whom I loved"

1. Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt
2. To nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
3. And her Soule early into Heaven ravished,
4. Wholly in heavenly things my mind is sett.
5. Here the admyring her my mind did whett
6. To seeke thee God; so streams do shew their head;
7. But though I have found thee and thou my thirst hast fed,
8. A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett.

9. But why should I begg more love, when as thou
10. Dost wooe my soul for hers: off'ring all thine:
11. And dost not only feare least I allow
12. My love to Saints and Angels things divine,
13. But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
14. Least the world, Fleshe, yea, Devill putt thee out.

Song 7: "At the round earth's imagined corners"

1. At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
2. Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
3. From death, you numberless infinities
4. Of souls, and to your scatter'd bodies goe,
5. All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
6. All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
7. Despair, law, chance hath slaine, and you whose eyes
8. Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.

9. But let them sleepe, Lord and mee mourne aspace,
10. For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
11. 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,
12. When we are there; here on this lowly ground,
13. Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
14. As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

Song 8: "Thou hast made me"

1. Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
2. Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
3. I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
4. And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
5. I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
6. Despair behind, and death before doth cast
7. Such terror, and my feebled flesh doth waste
8. By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh.

9. Only thou art above, and when towards thee
10. By thy leave I can look, I rise again;
11. But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
12. That not one hour I can myself sustain;
13. Thy grace may wing me to prevent his art,
14. And thou like adamant draw mine iron heart.

Song 9: "Death, be not proud"

1. Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
2. Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe,
3. For, those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
4. Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
5. From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures bee,
6. Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
7. And soonest our best men with thee do goe,
8. Rest of their bones, and souls deliverie.

9. Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
10. And dost with poison, warre, and sickness dwell,
11. And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
12. And better than thy straoke; why swell'st thou then?
13. One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally
14. And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

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