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Brian Mark

A Eulogy to Words

a multimedia work for Chamber Orchestra, tape, and pre-recorded electronics

November, 2012

A Eulogy to Words

A Eulogy to Words is a multi-media composition for chamber orchestra, pre-recorded electronics, and tape, featuring the audio document of Virginia Woolf's BBC Broadcast from 29 April 1937 ("Words Fail Me" series). The Society of Authors in London, who hold rights and ownership of this document, had granted permission for me to use this recording in my composition. *A Eulogy to Words* was premiered at the Royal Academy of Music's Composers Platform concert on 21 November, 2012, conducted by Michael Alexander Young. Below is the transcript from the surviving audio file:

...Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries. And that is one of the chief difficulties in writing them today – that they are stored with other meanings, with other memories, and they have contracted so many famous marriages in the past. The splendid word "incarnadine," for example – who can use that without remembering "multitudinous seas"? In the old days, of course, when English was a new language, writers could invent new words and use them. Nowadays it is easy enough to invent new words – they spring to the lips whenever we see a new sight or feel a new sensation – but we cannot use them because the English language is old.

You cannot use a brand new word in an old language because of the very obvious yet always mysterious fact that a word is not a single and separate entity, but part of other words. Indeed it is not a word until it is part of a sentence. Words belong to each other, although, of course, only a great poet knows that the word "incarnadine" belongs to "multitudinous seas." To combine new words with old words is fatal to the constitution of the sentence. In order to use new words properly you would have to invent a whole new language; and that, though no doubt we shall come to it, is not at the moment our business. Our business is to see what we can do with the old English language as it is. How can we combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth? That is the question.

And the person who could answer that question would deserve whatever crown of glory the world has to offer. Think what it would mean if you could teach, or if you could learn the art of writing. Why, every book, every newspaper you'd pick up, would tell the truth, or create beauty. But there is, it would appear, some obstacle in the way, some hindrance to the teaching of words. For though at this moment at least a hundred professors are lecturing on the literature of the past, at least a thousand critics are reviewing the literature of the present, and hundreds upon hundreds of young men and women are passing examinations in English literature with the utmost credit, still – do we write better, do we read better than we read and wrote four hundred years ago when we were un-lectured, un-criticized, untaught? Is our modern Georgian literature a patch on the Elizabethan? Well, where then are we to lay the blame? Not on our professors; not on our reviewers; not on our writers; but on words. It is words that

are to blame. They are the wildest, freest, most irresponsible, most un-teachable of all things. Of course, you can catch them and sort them and place them in alphabetical order in dictionaries. But words do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind.

If you want proof of this, consider how often in moments of emotion when we most need words we find none. Yet there is the dictionary; there at our disposal are some half-a-million words all in alphabetical order. But can we use them? No, because words do not live in dictionaries, they live in the mind. Look once more at the dictionary. There beyond a doubt lie plays more splendid than Antony and Cleopatra; poems lovelier than the Ode to a Nightingale; novels beside which Pride and Prejudice or David Copperfield are the crude bunglings of amateurs. It is only a question of finding the right words and putting them in the right order. But we cannot do it because they do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind. And how do they live in the mind? Variously and strangely, much as human beings live, ranging hither and thither, falling in love, and mating together. It is true that they are much less bound by ceremony and convention than we are. Royal words mate with commoners. English words marry French words, German words, Indian words, Negro words, if they have a fancy. Indeed, the less we enquire into the past of our dear Mother English the better it will be for that lady's reputation. For she has gone a-roving, a-roving fair maid.

Thus to lay down any laws for such irreclaimable vagabonds is worse than useless. A few trifling rules of grammar and spelling is all the constraint we can put on them. All we can say about them, as we peer at them over the edge of that deep, dark and only fitfully illuminated cavern in which they live – the mind – all we can say about them is that they seem to like people to think before they use them, and to feel before they use them, but to think and feel not about them, but about something different. They are highly sensitive, easily made self-conscious. They do not like to have their purity or their impurity discussed. If you start a Society for Pure English, they will show their resentment by starting another for impure English – hence the unnatural violence of much modern speech; it is a protest against the puritans.

They are highly democratic, too; they believe that one word is as good as another; uneducated words are as good as educated words, uncultivated words as good as cultivated words, there are no ranks or titles in their society. Nor do they like being lifted out on the point of a pen and examined separately. They hang together, in sentences, paragraphs, sometimes for whole pages at a time. They hate being useful; they hate making money; they hate being lectured about in public. In short, they hate anything that stamps them with one meaning or confines them to one attitude, for it is their nature to change.

Perhaps that is their most striking peculiarity – their need of change. It is because the truth they try to catch is many-sided, and they convey it by being many-sided, flashing first this way, then that. Thus they mean one thing to one person, another thing to another person; they are unintelligible to one generation, plain as a pikestaff to the next. And it is because of this complexity, this power to mean different things to different people, that they survive.

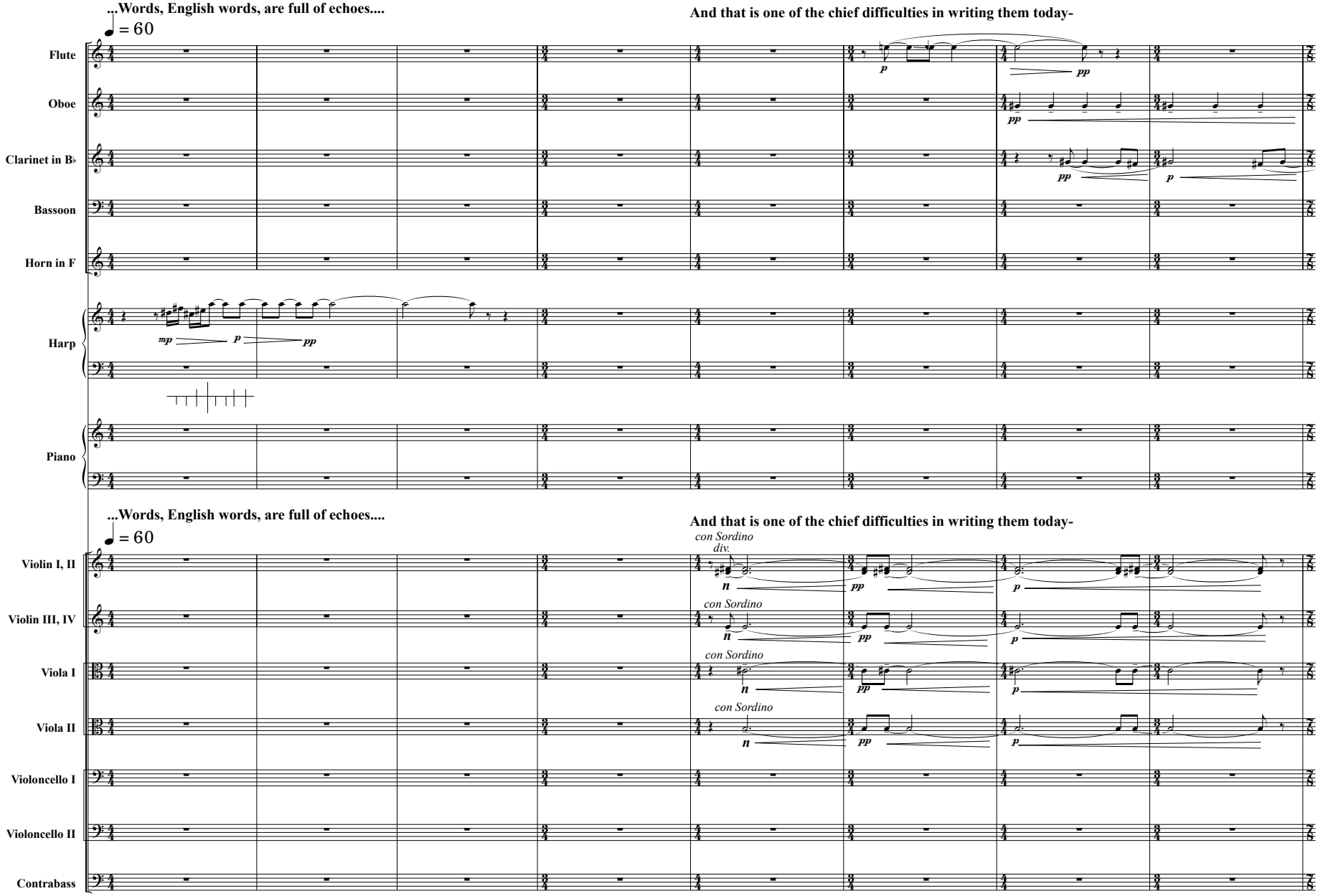
Perhaps then one reason why we have no great poet, novelist or critic writing today is that we refuse to allow words their liberty. We pin them down to one meaning, their useful meaning, the meaning which makes us catch the train, the meaning which makes us pass the examination...

Duration: 10'

Transposed Score

A Eulogy to Words

Brian Mark



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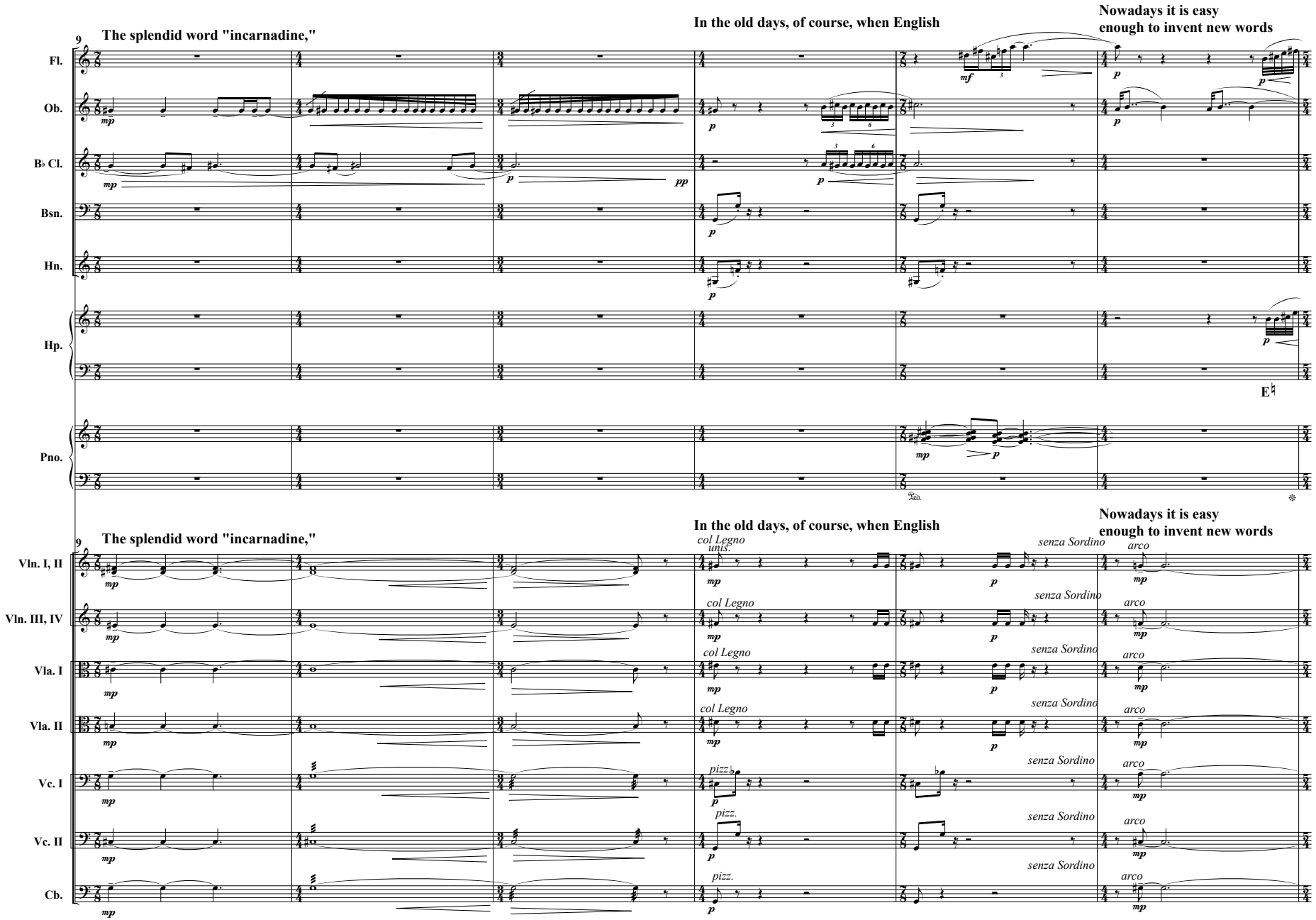
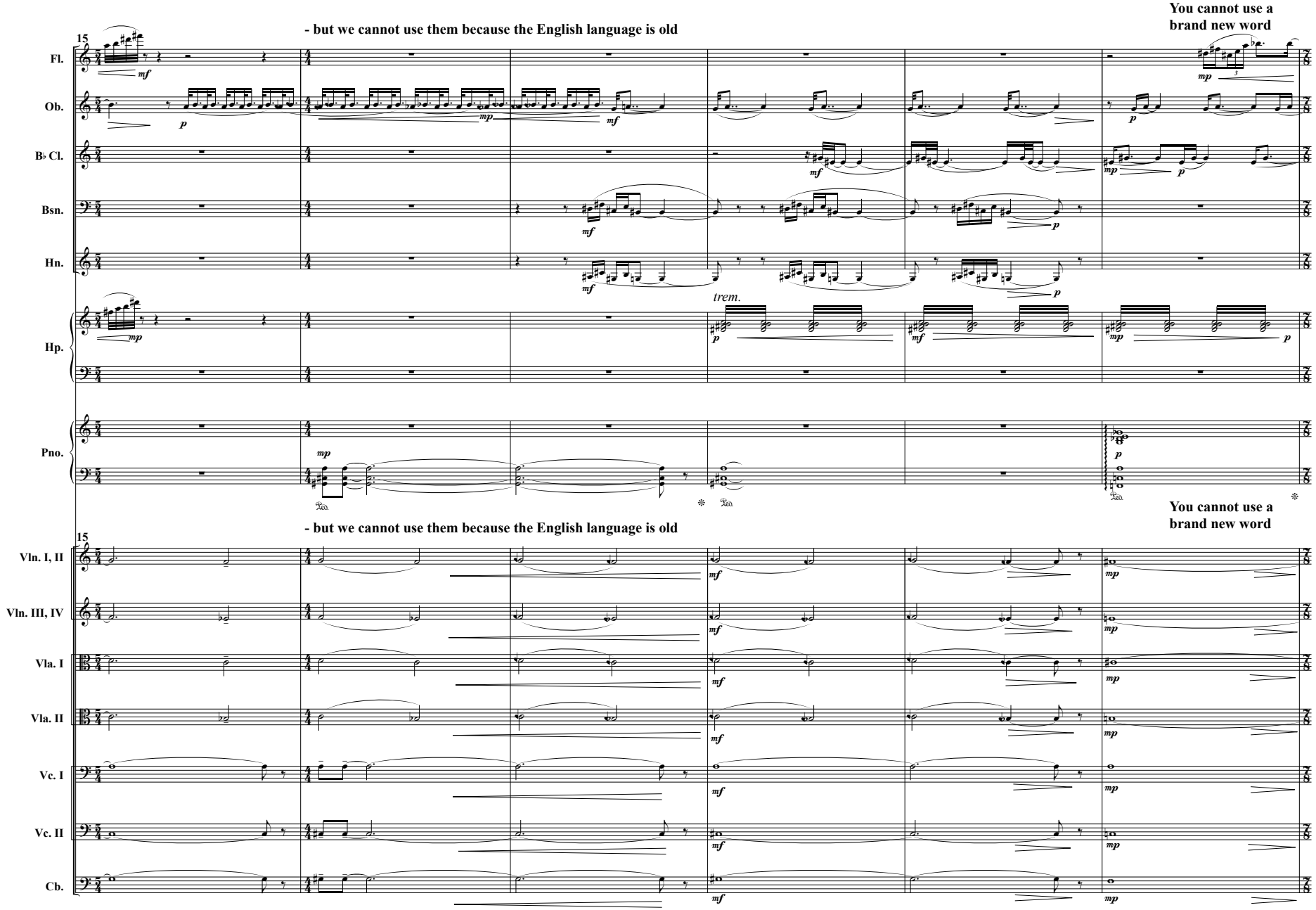
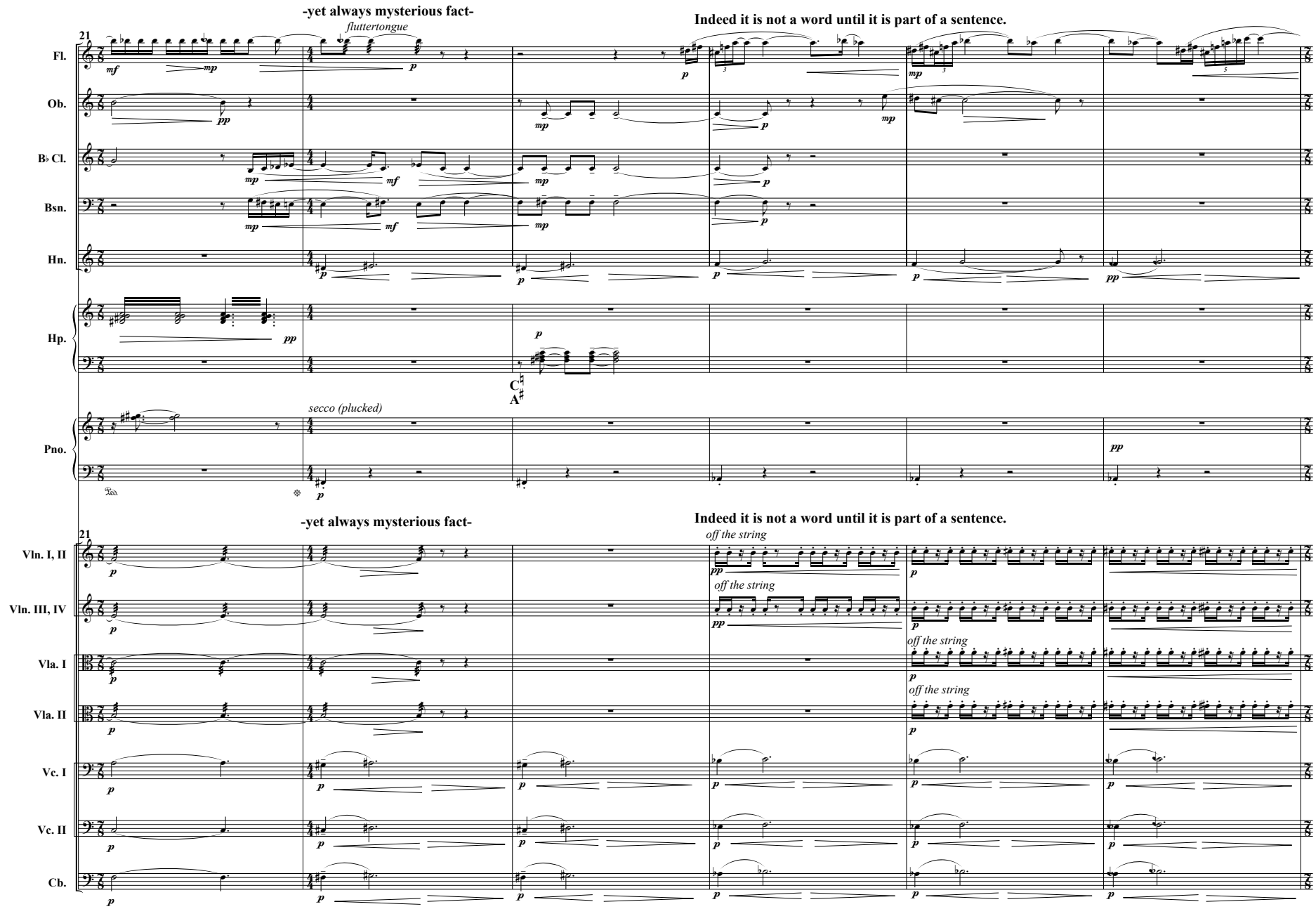
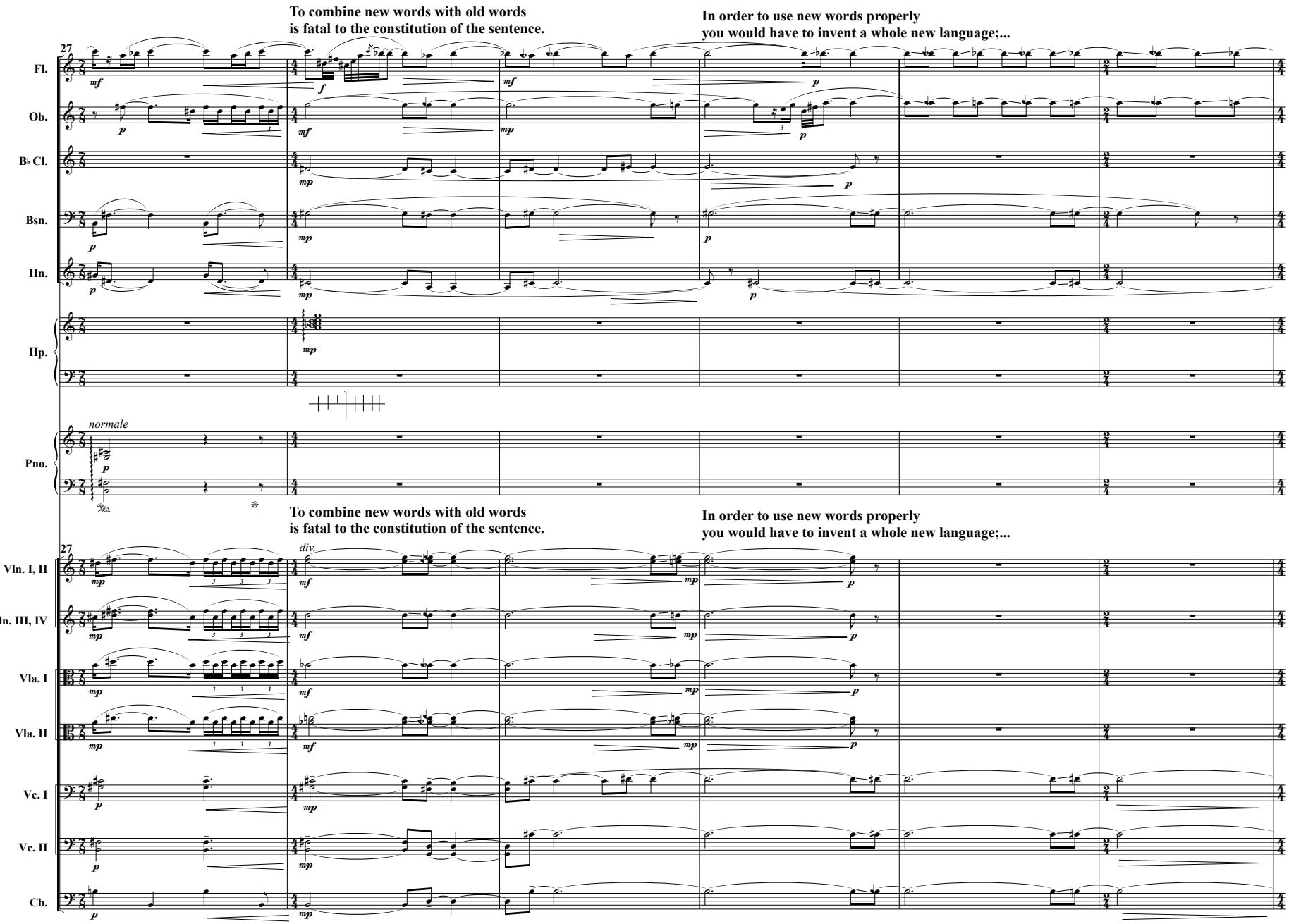
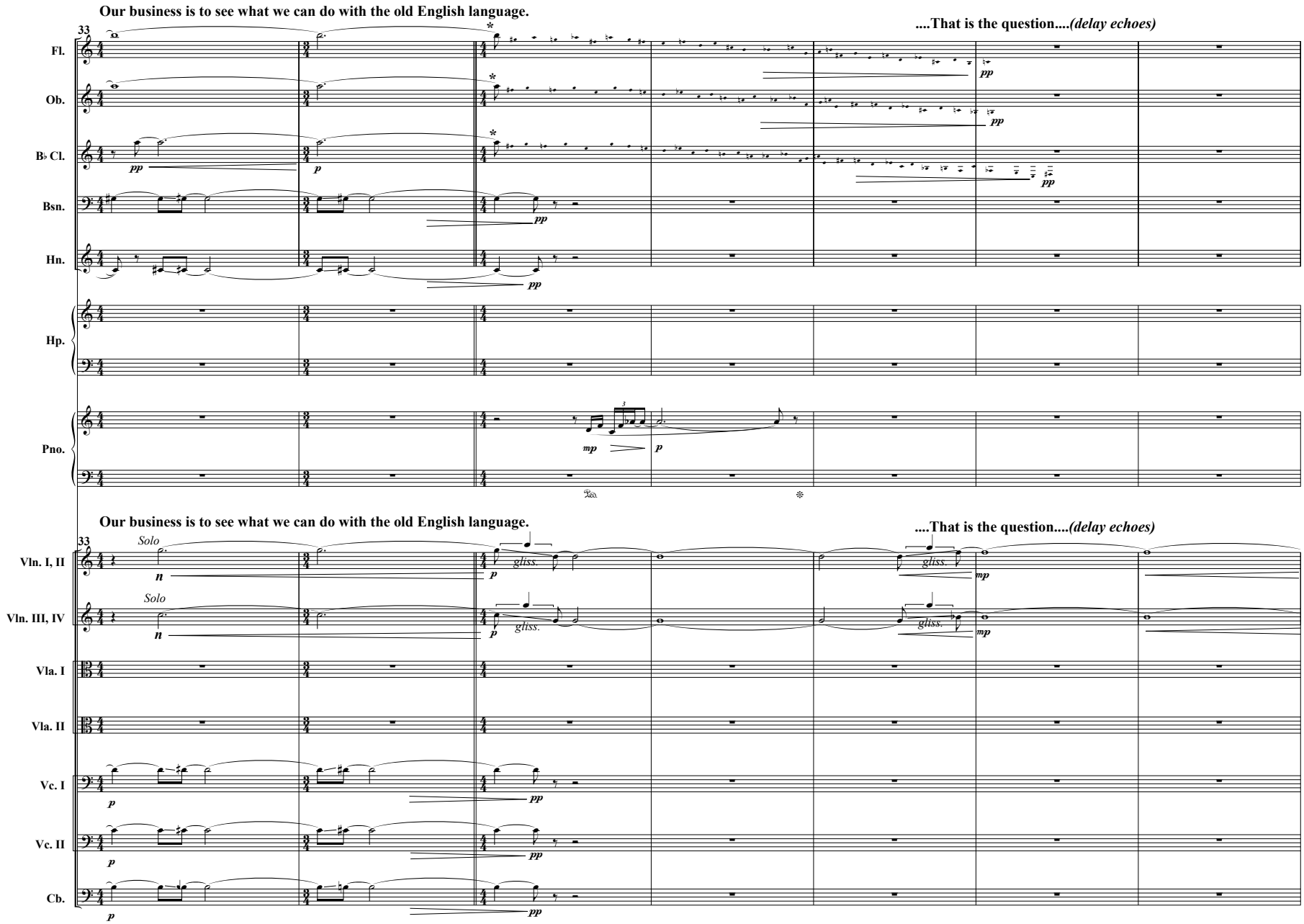
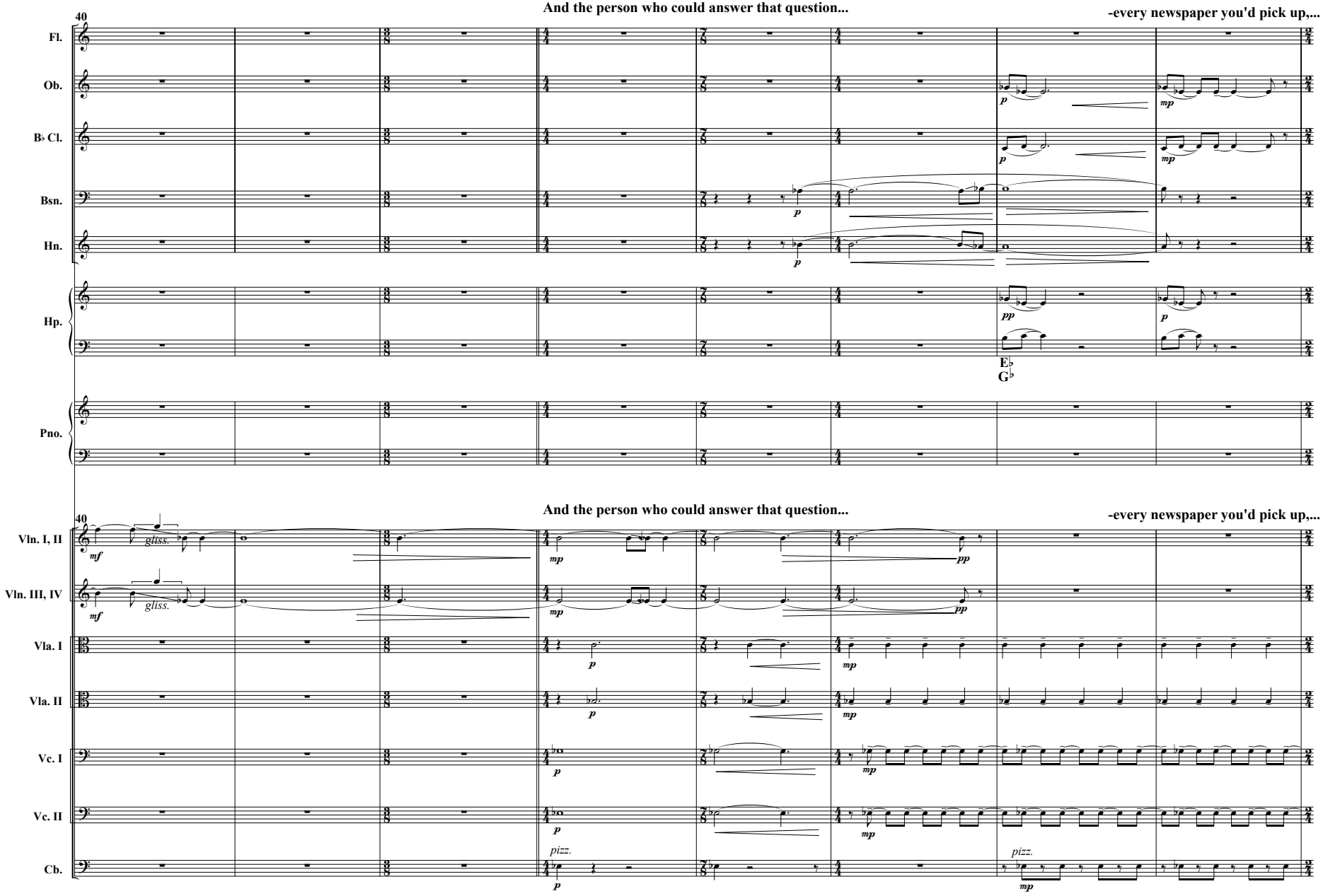

9
The splendid word "incarnadine,"
In the old days, of course, when English
Nowadays it is easy enough to invent new words
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
E♮
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
col Legno
unis.
pizz.
senza Sordino
arco

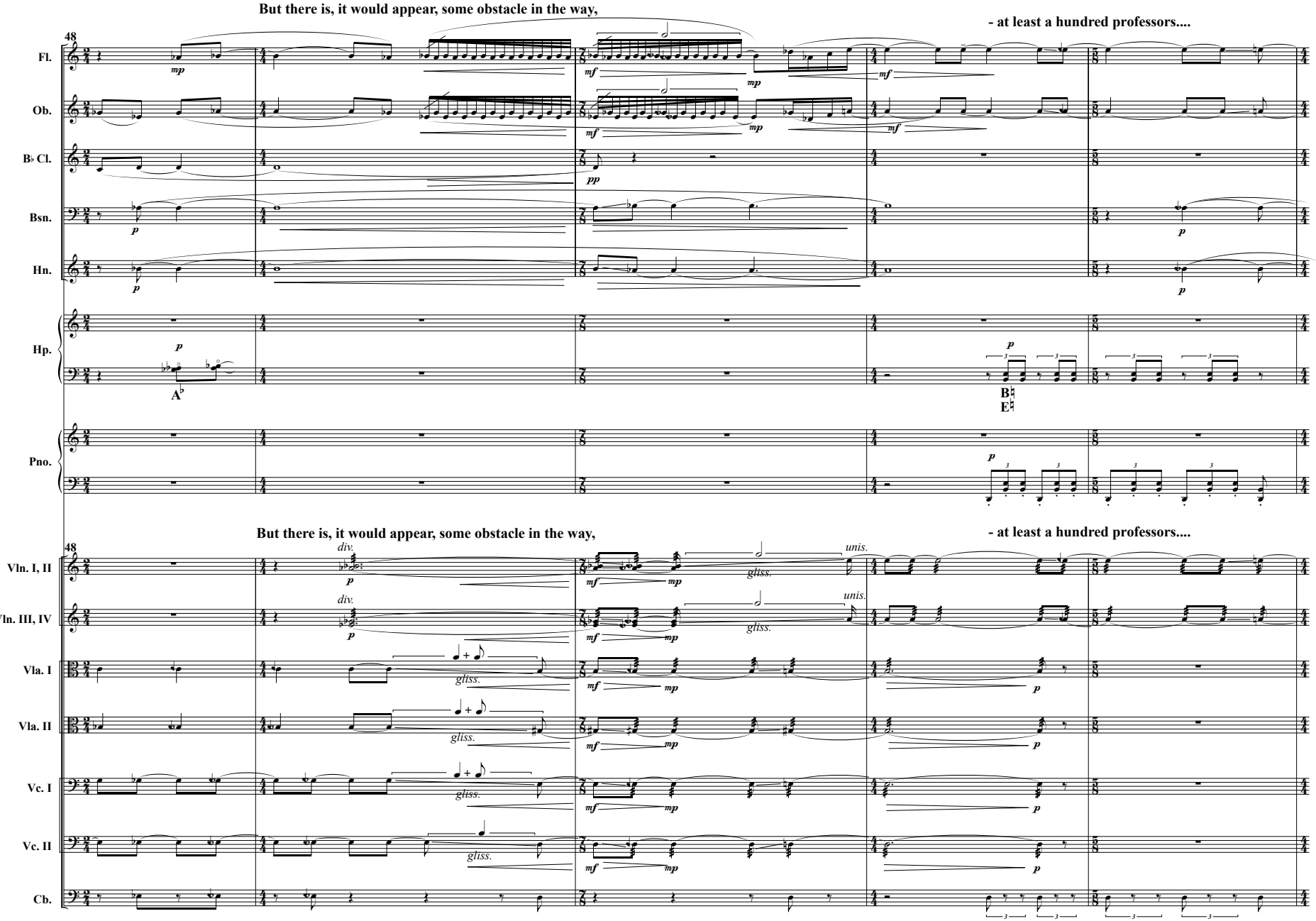

15
- but we cannot use them because the English language is old
You cannot use a brand new word
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
trem.
15
- but we cannot use them because the English language is old
You cannot use a brand new word
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.

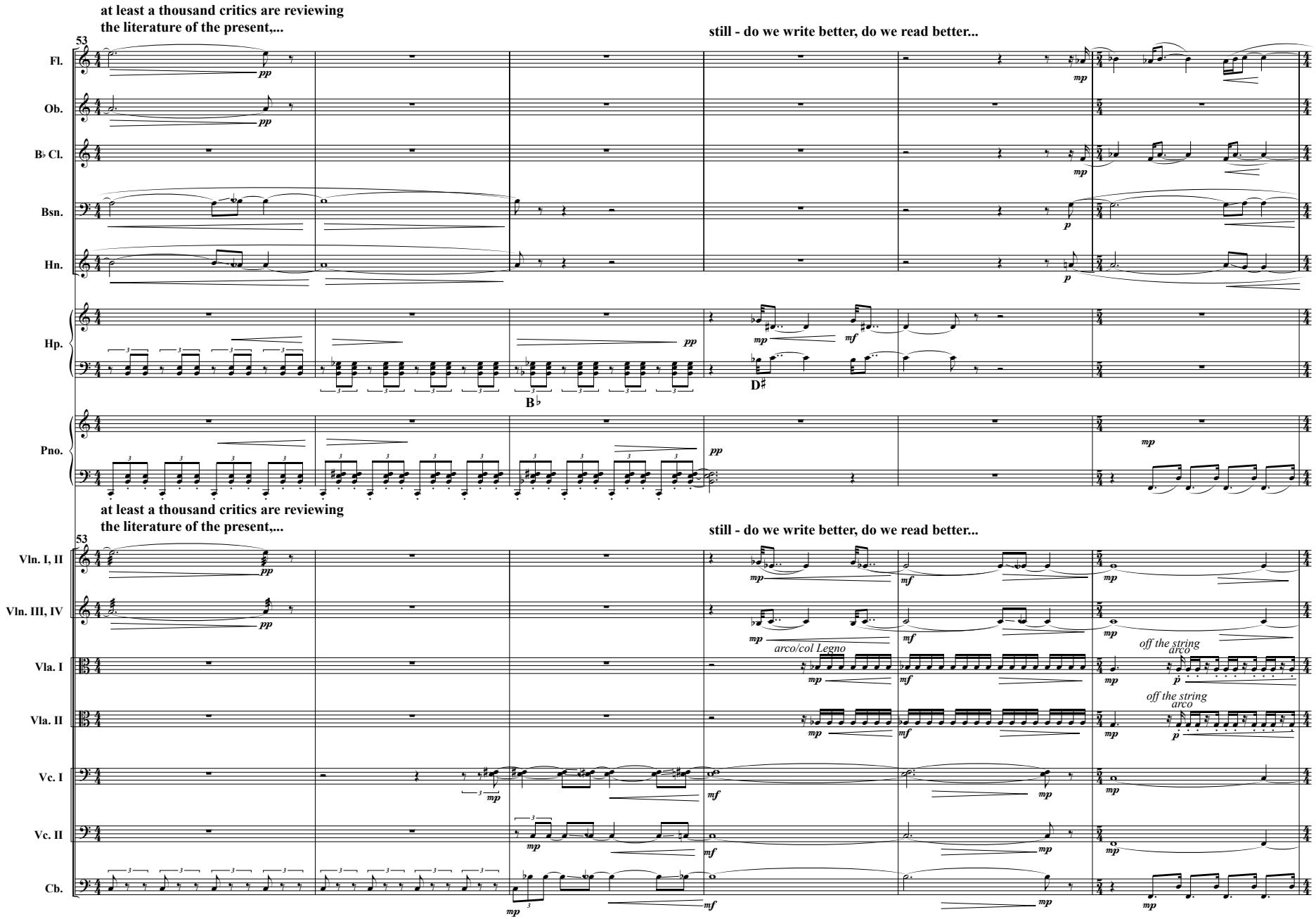

-yet always mysterious fact-
Indeed it is not a word until it is part of a sentence.
21
fluttertongue
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
C
A
secco (plucked)
Pno.
-yet always mysterious fact-
Indeed it is not a word until it is part of a sentence.
21
off the string
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.

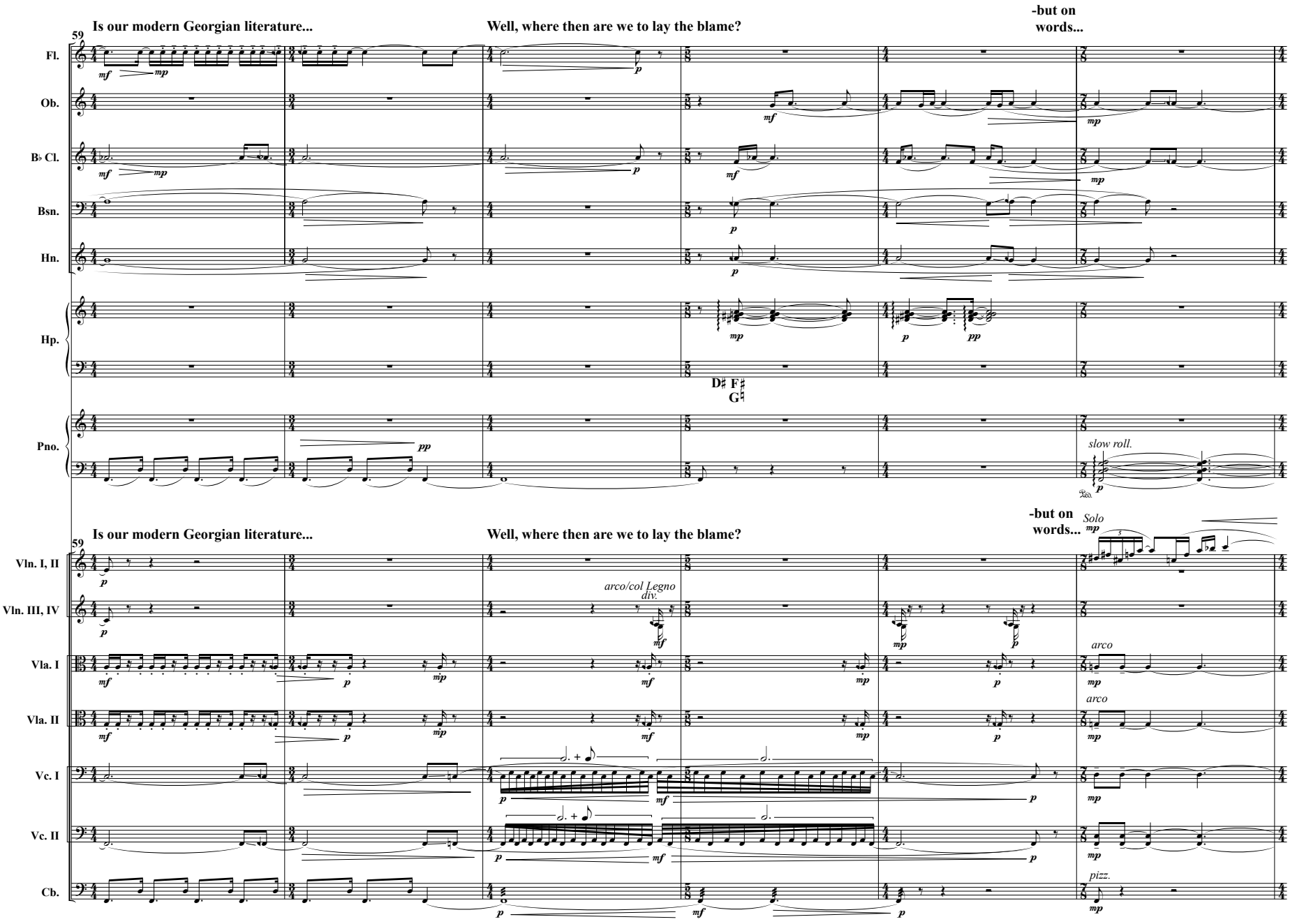

To combine new words with old words
is fatal to the constitution of the sentence.
In order to use new words properly
you would have to invent a whole new language;...
27
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
normale
Pno.
To combine new words with old words
is fatal to the constitution of the sentence.
In order to use new words properly
you would have to invent a whole new language;...
27
div.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.

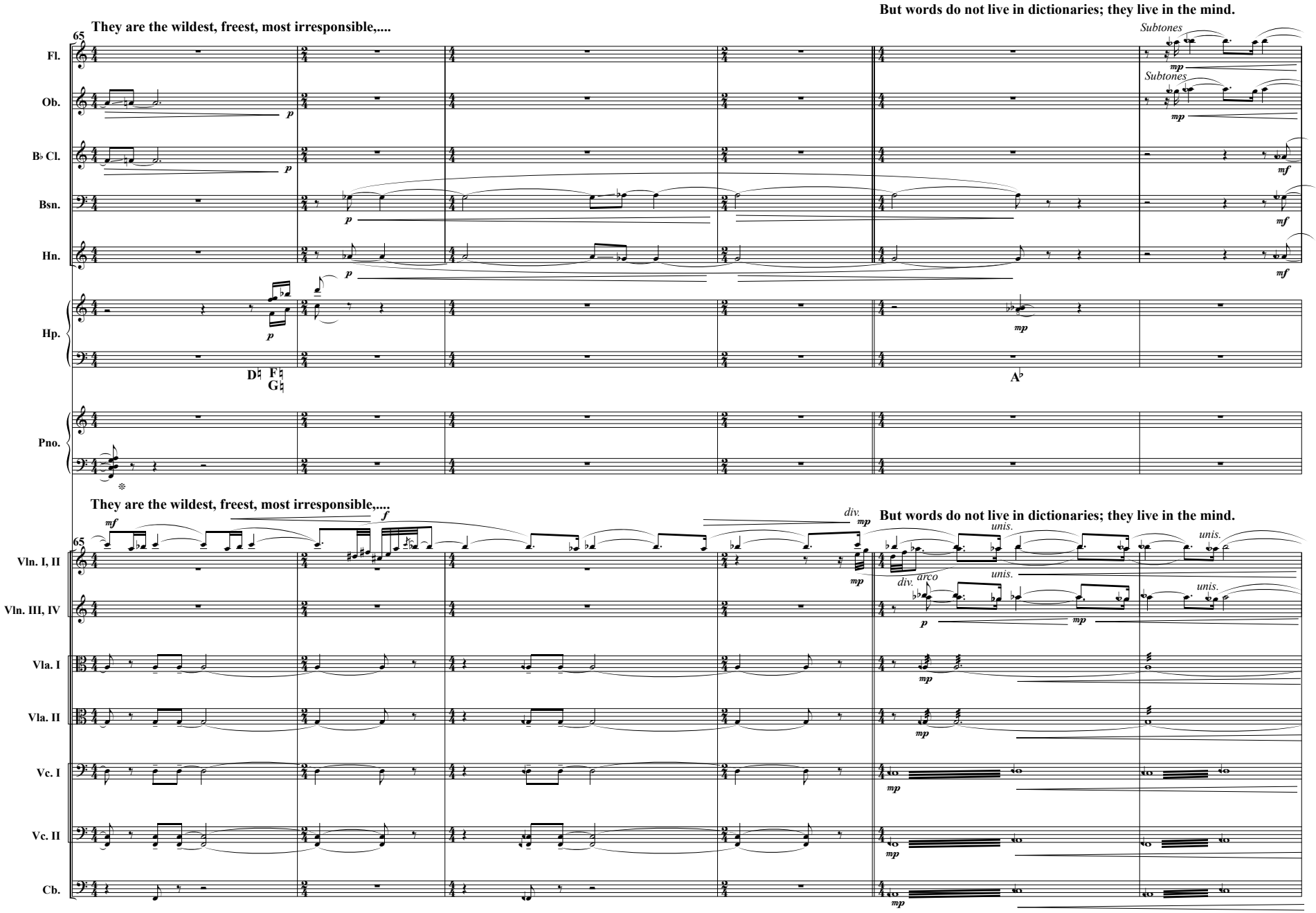

Our business is to see what we can do with the old English language.
....That is the question....(delay echoes)
33
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
Solo
gliss.
* Start slowly and then accelerate the rhythm of the notes until the end of the passage.

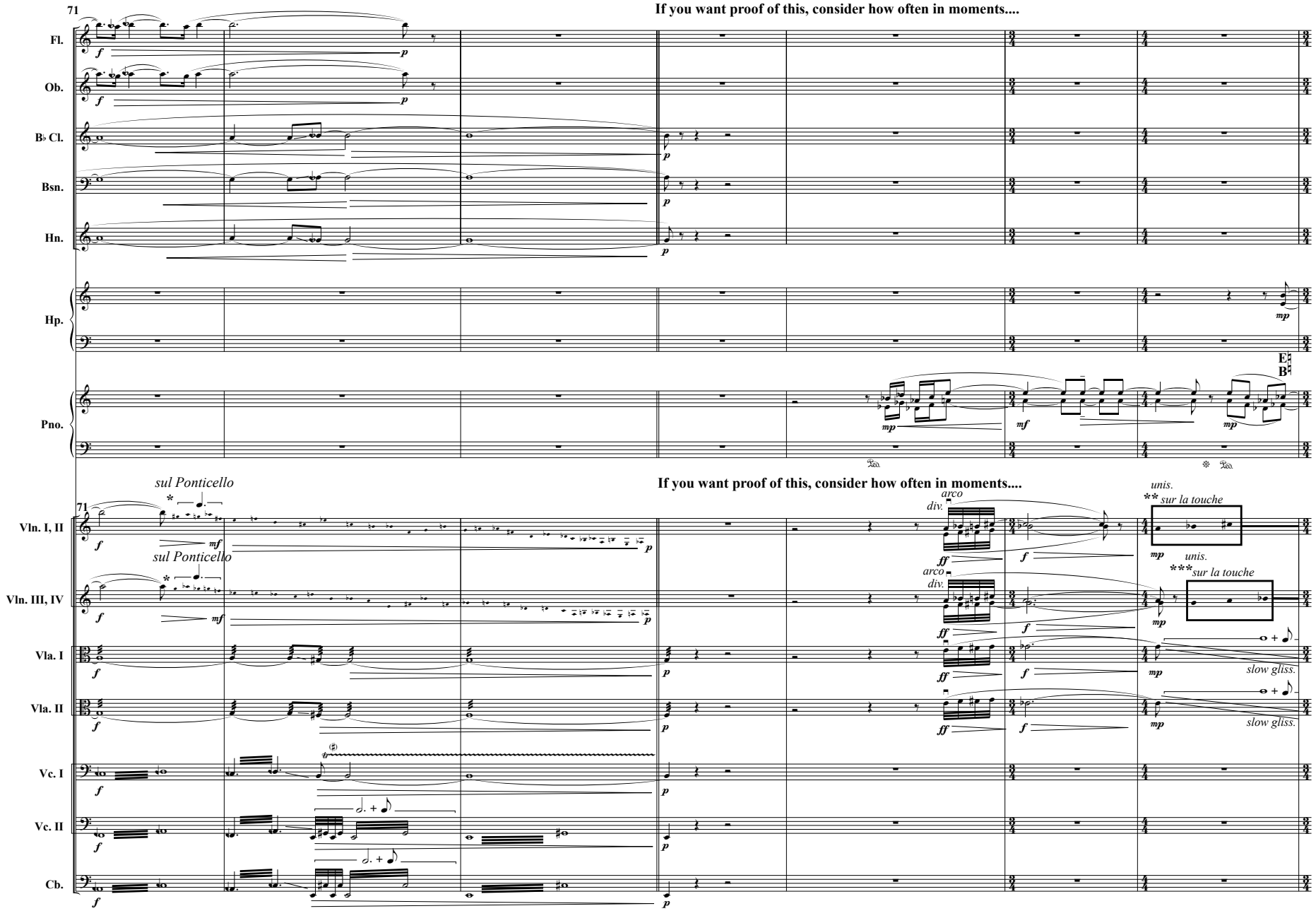

40
And the person who could answer that question...
-every newspaper you'd pick up,...
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
E♭
G♭
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
gliss.
pizz.


But there is, it would appear, some obstacle in the way,
- at least a hundred professors....
48
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
A♭
B♮
E♮
But there is, it would appear, some obstacle in the way,
- at least a hundred professors....
48
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
div.
unis.
gliss.


at least a thousand critics are reviewing
the literature of the present,...
still - do we write better, do we read better...
53
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
B♭
D♯
arco/col Legno
off the string
arco


59
Is our modern Georgian literature...
Well, where then are we to lay the blame?
-but on words...
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
D♯ F♯ G♯
Pno.
slow roll.
Is our modern Georgian literature...
Well, where then are we to lay the blame?
-but on words...
Solo
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
arco/col Legno div.
Vla. I
arco
Vla. II
arco
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
pizz.

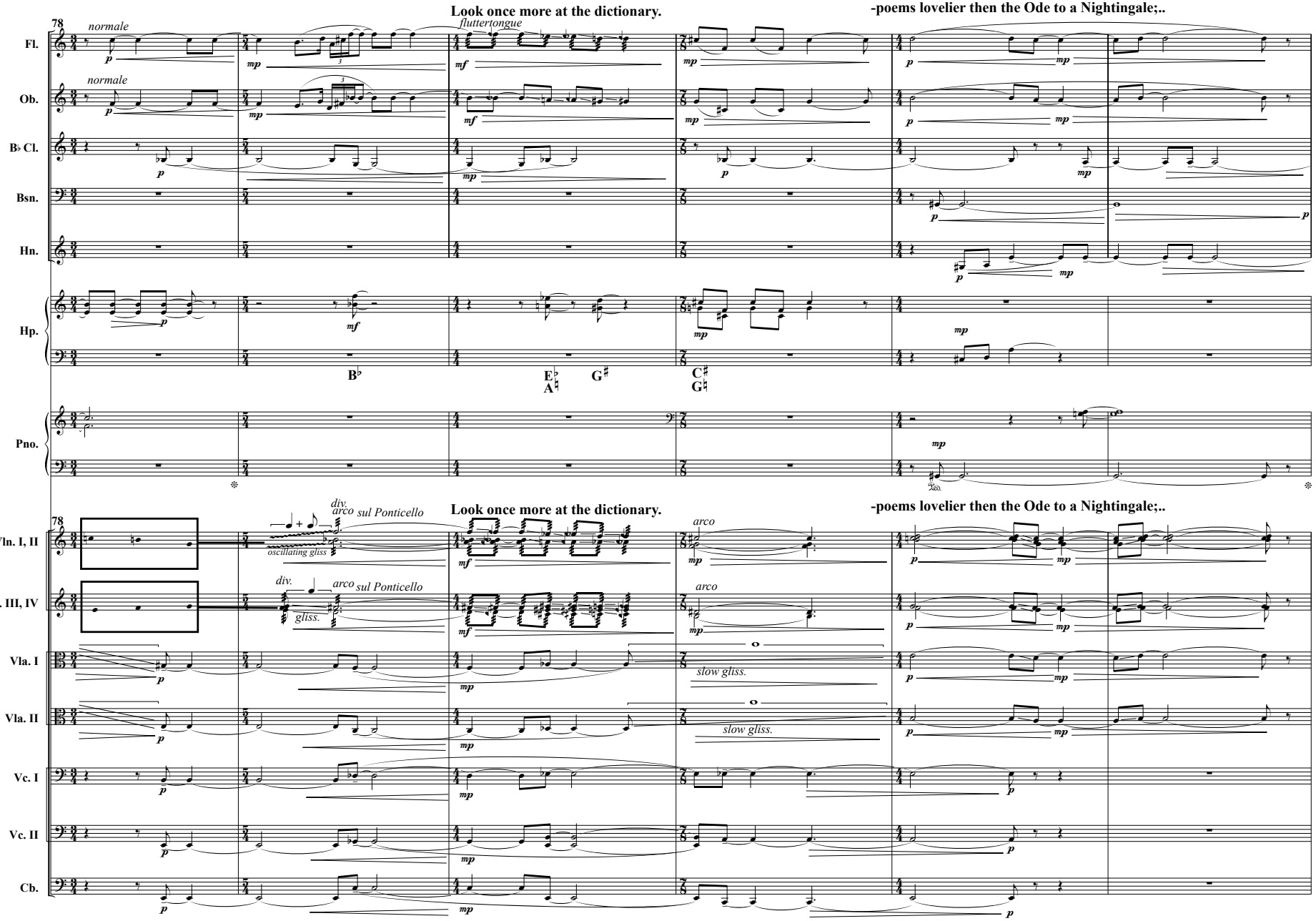

They are the wildest, freest, most irresponsible,....
But words do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind.
65
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Subtones
Subtones
D♮ F♮ G♮
A♭
They are the wildest, freest, most irresponsible,....
But words do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
div.
unis.
arco



*** Start slowly and then accelerate the rhythm of the notes until the end of the passage.**

**** Play notes in any random order as fast as you can. Change pattern in notes when indicated. Start to oscillating gliss on second eighth of 1st beat of bar 79 to given notation on beat 3.**

***** Play notes in any random order as fast as you can. Change pattern in notes when indicated. Proceed to normal notation from second eighth of beat 1 in bar 79.**


78
Look once more at the dictionary.
-poems lovelier then the Ode to a Nightingale;..
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
normale
fluttertongue
arco
sul Ponticello
div.
oscillating gliss
gliss.
slow gliss.

-only a questions of finding the right words...

And how do they live in the mind?

It is true that they are much less bound by cermony and convention than we are...

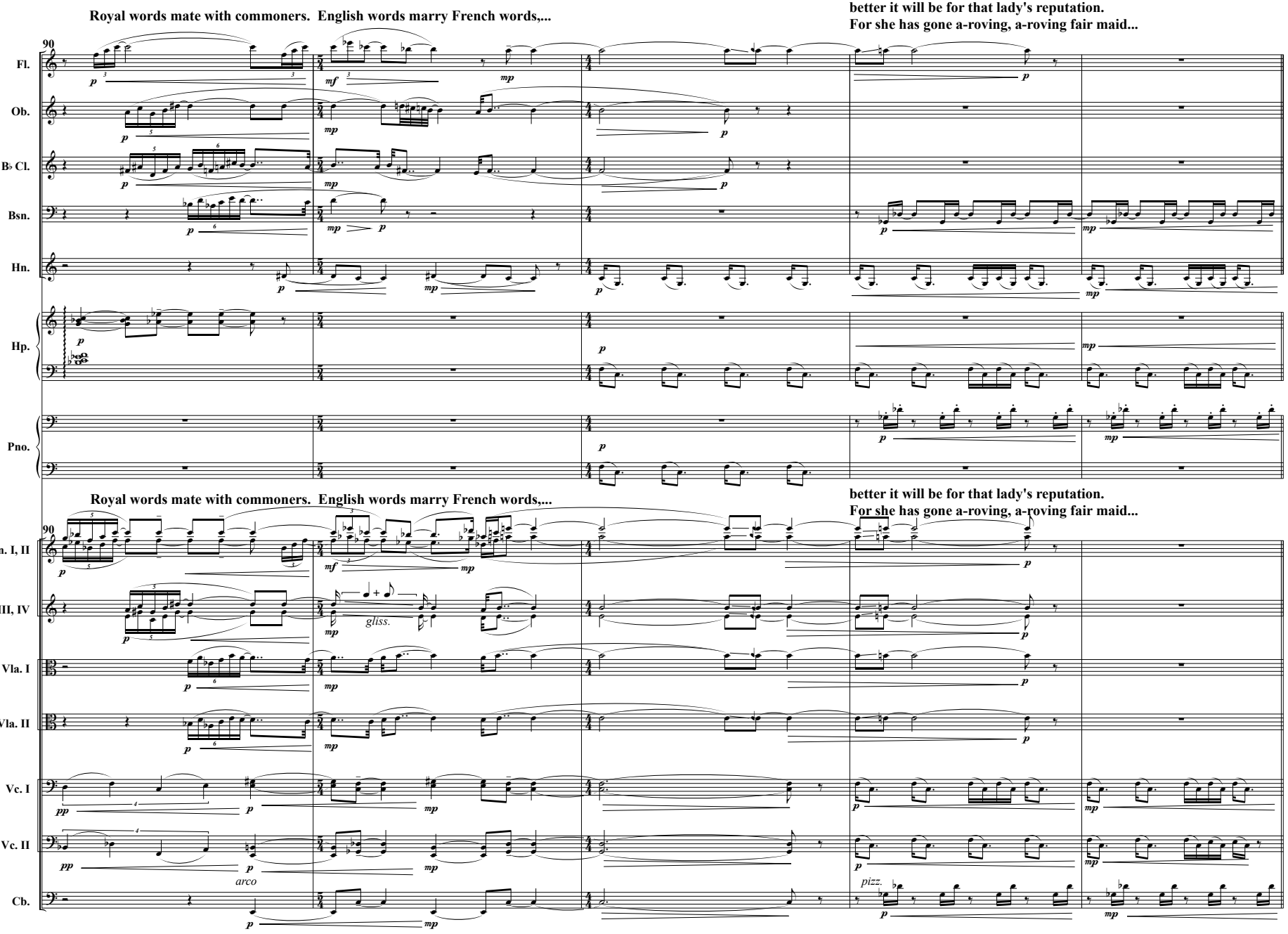
84

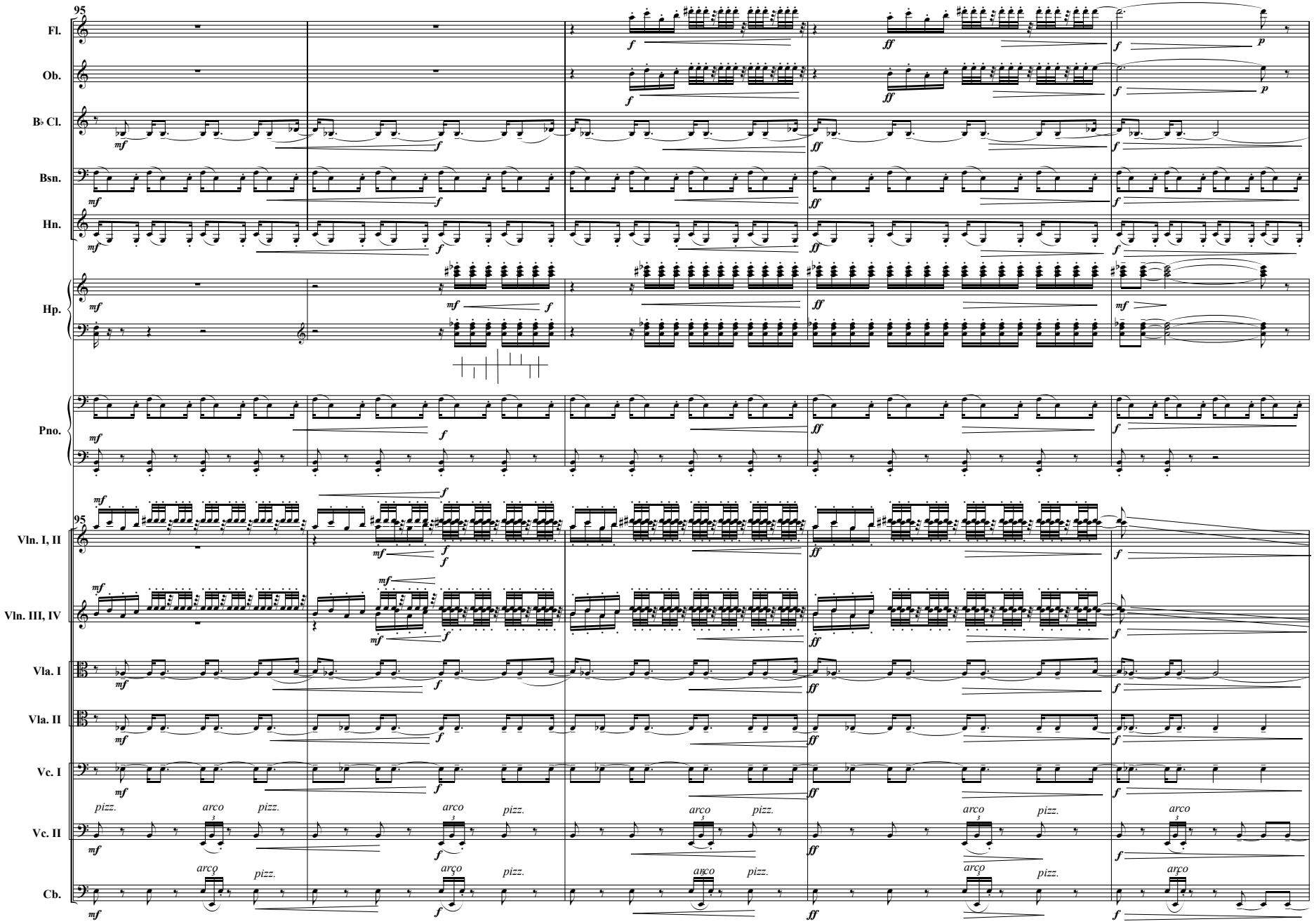
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.

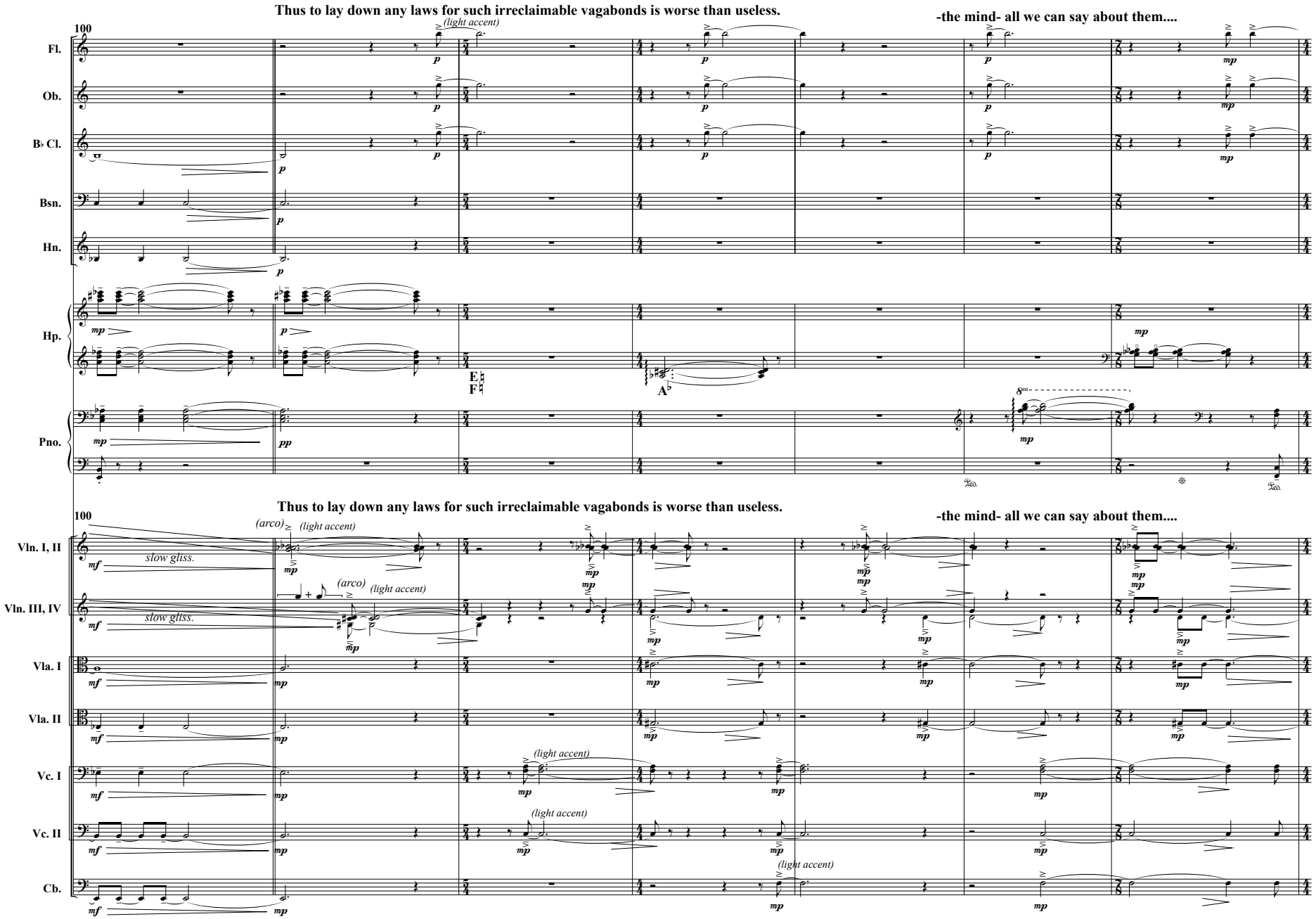
B♮ B♭ D♭ A♭

Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.

pizz.


Royal words mate with commoners. English words marry French words,...
better it will be for that lady's reputation.
For she has gone a-roving, a-roving fair maid...
90
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Royal words mate with commoners. English words marry French words,...
better it will be for that lady's reputation.
For she has gone a-roving, a-roving fair maid...
90
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
gliss.
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
arco
Cb.
pizz.


95
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
95
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.


Thus to lay down any laws for such irreclaimable vagabonds is worse than useless.
-the mind- all we can say about them....
100
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
(light accent)
(arco)
slow gliss.
E
F
A♭

18 -but to think and feel about them,
but about something different...

They do not like to have their purity or their impurity discussed.

-they will show their resentment....

accel. ♩ = 90

107

Fl. Ob. B♭ Cl. Bsn. Hn. Hp. Pno.

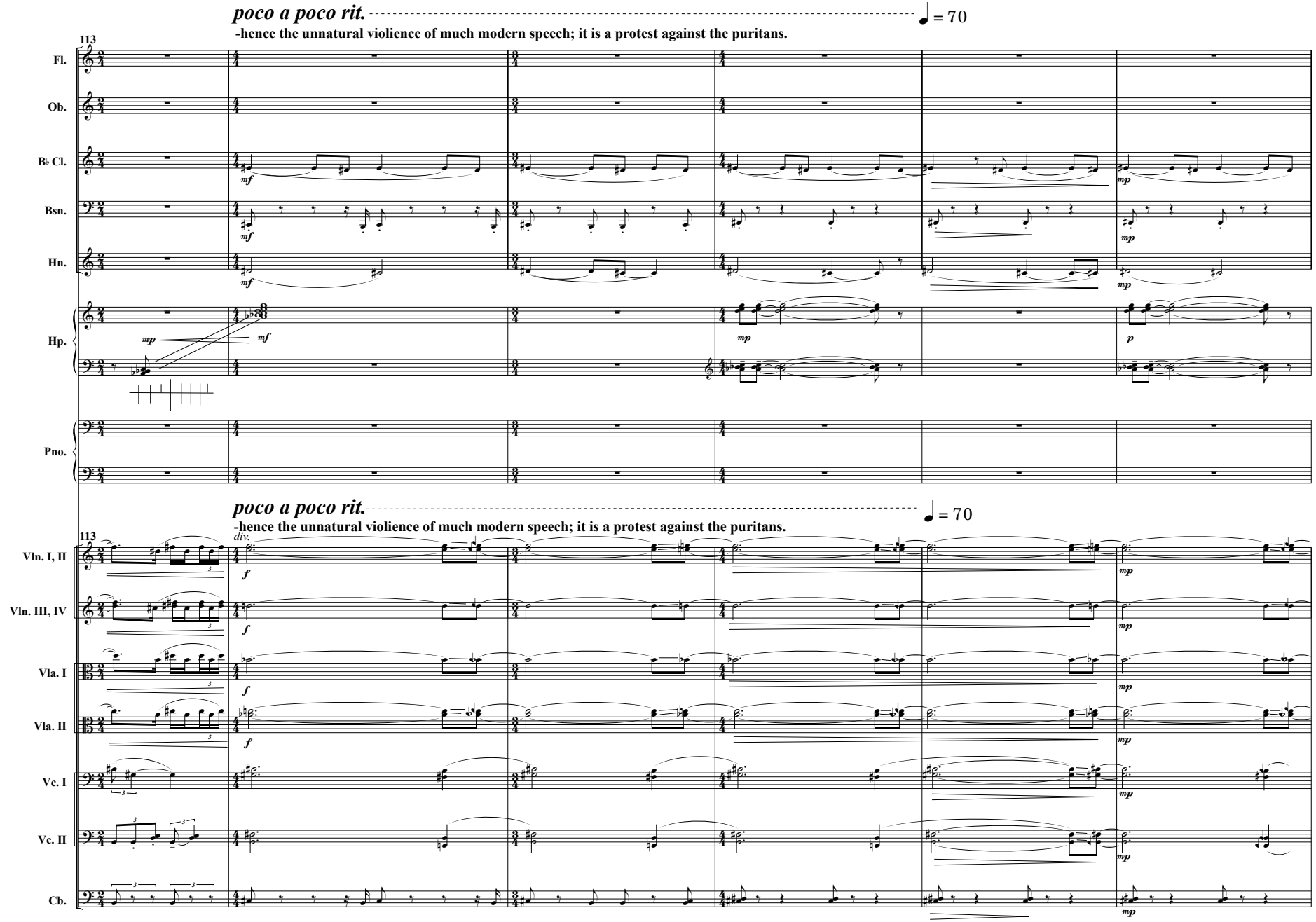
Vln. I, II Vln. III, IV Vla. I Vla. II Vc. I Vc. II Cb.

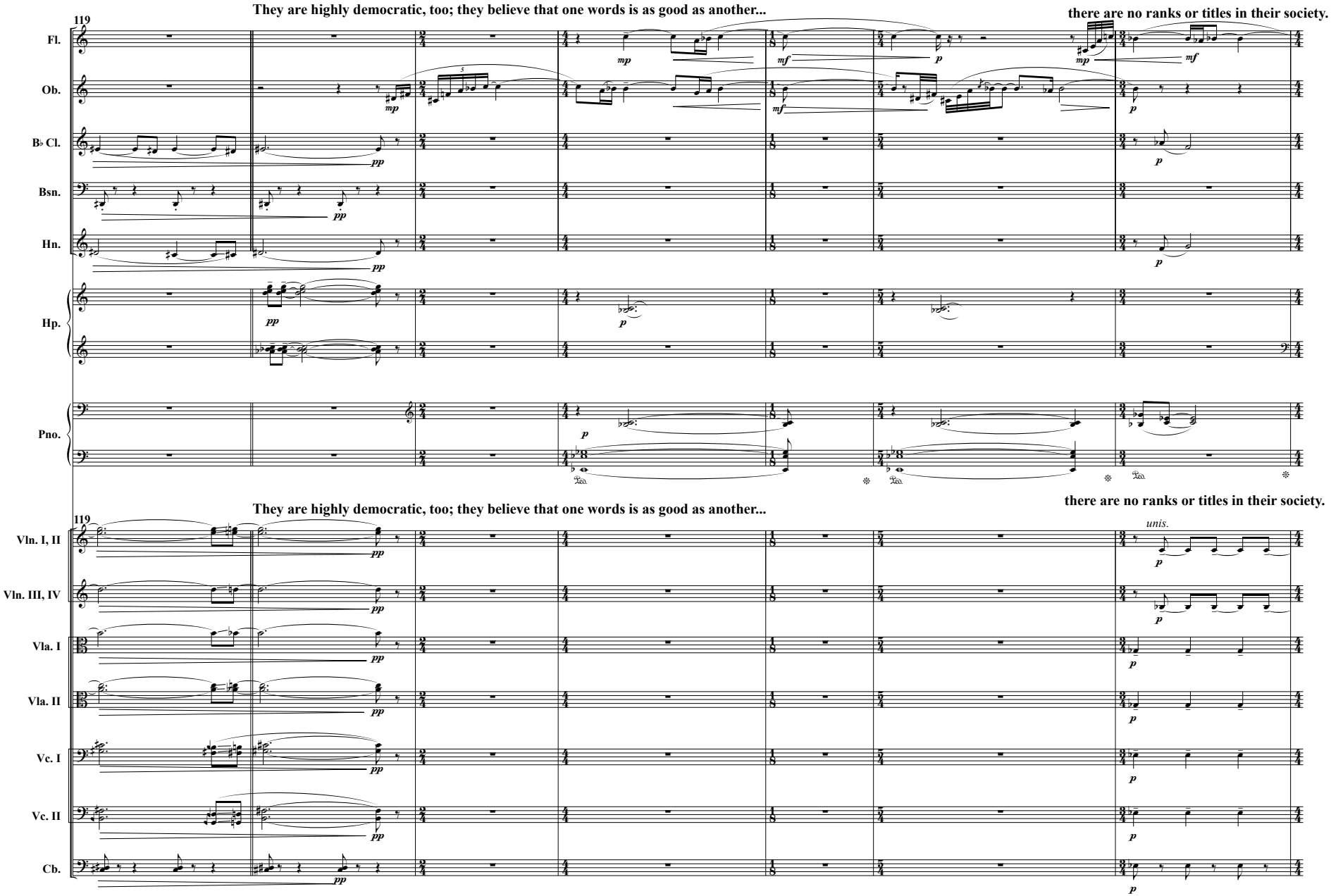
off the string
unis.

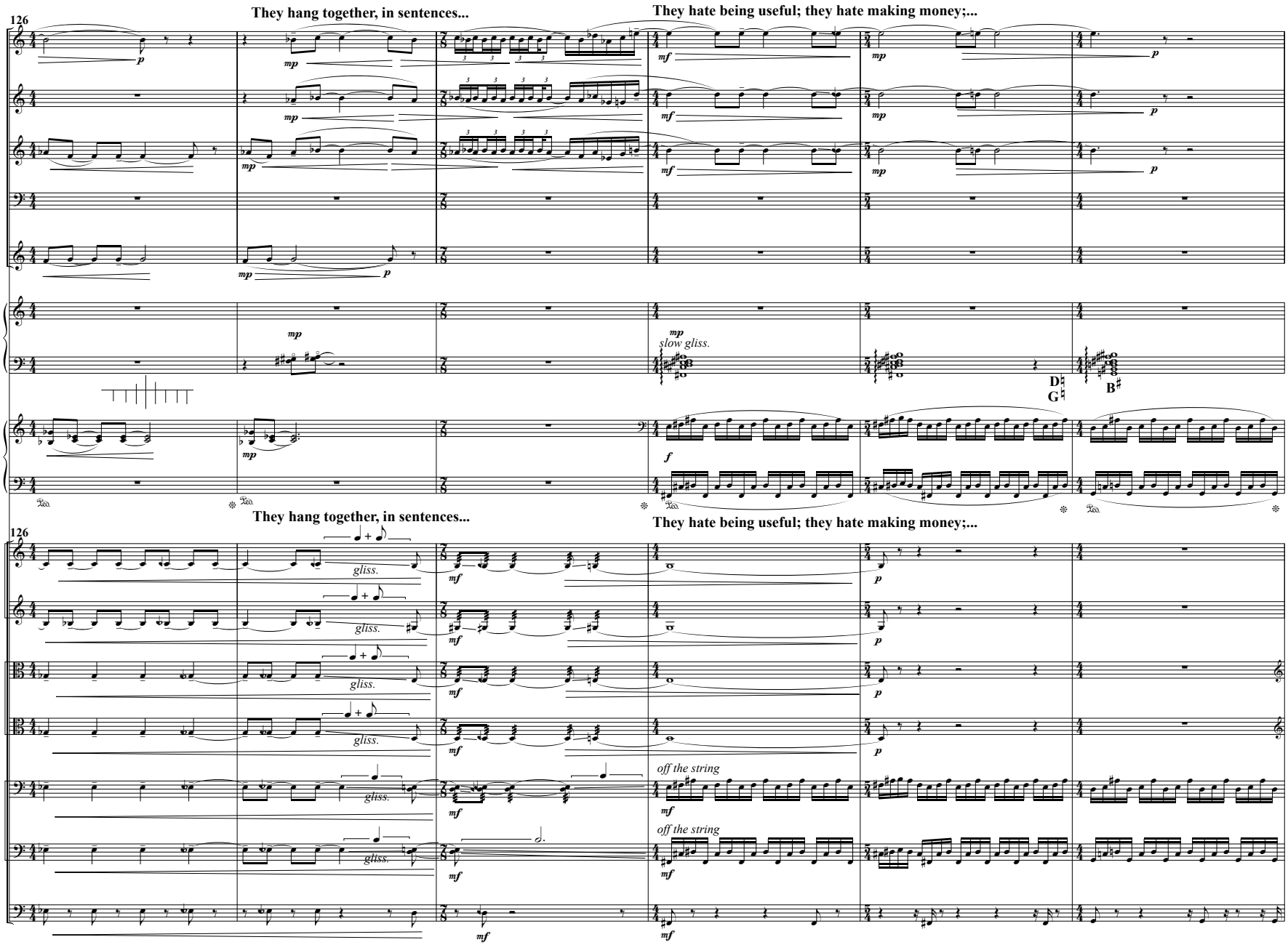
unis.

oscillating gliss

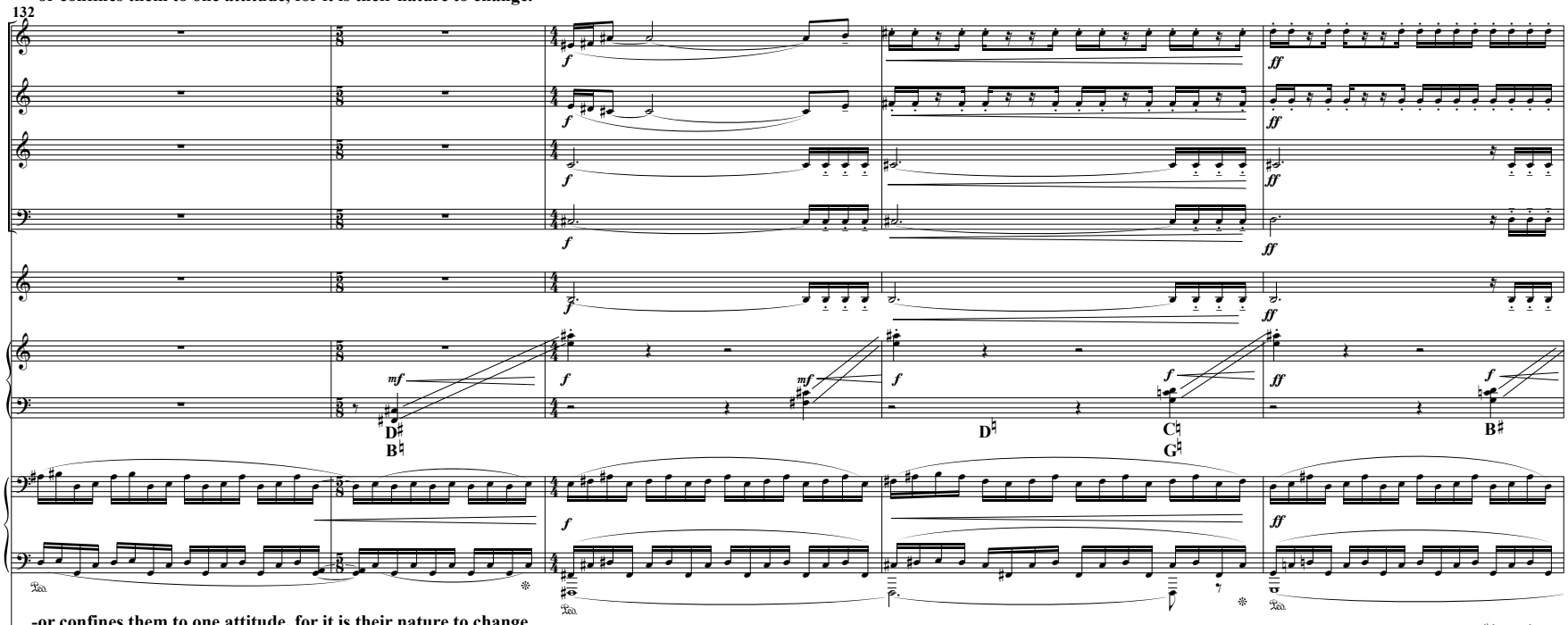
* Start slowly and then accelerate the rhythm of the notes until the end of the passage.
** Secco notes slowly accelerating until a rapid, accented tremelo is attained.
*** ad lib. in similiar matter


poco a poco rit.
= 70
-hence the unnatural violience of much modern speech; it is a protest against the puritans.
113
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
div.

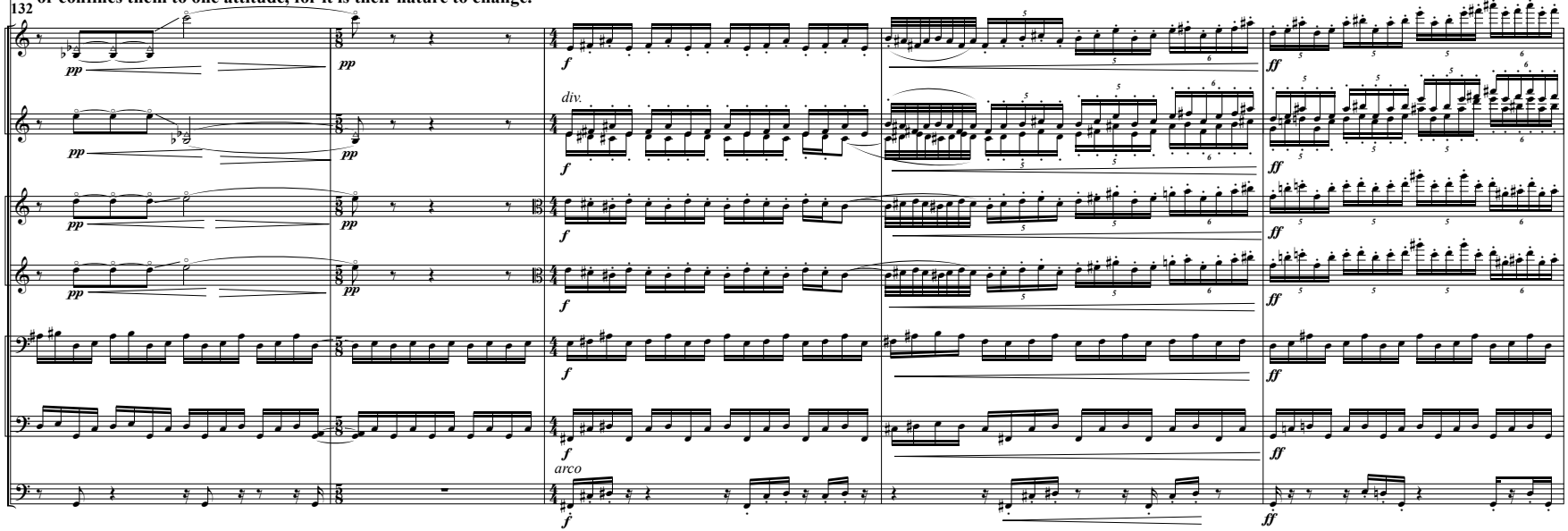

They are highly democratic, too; they believe that one words is as good as another...
there are no ranks or titles in their society.
119
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
unis.


126
They hang together, in sentences...
They hate being useful; they hate making money;...
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
slow gliss.
D
G
B
126
They hang together, in sentences...
They hate being useful; they hate making money;...
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.
gliss.
off the string

-or confines them to one attitude, for it is their nature to change.



-or confines them to one attitude, for it is their nature to change.



137

It is because the truth they try to catch is many-sided,...

Fl.

Ob.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Hp.

Pno.

Vln. I, II

Vln. III, IV

Vla. I

Vla. II

Vc. I

Vc. II

Cb.

ff

mf

mp

p

slow gliss.

div.

unis.

arco

pizz.

142

-flashing first this way, then that.---

Fl.

Ob.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Hp.

Pno.

142

-flashing first this way, then that.---

Vln. I, II

Vln. III, IV

Vla. I

Vla. II

Vc. I

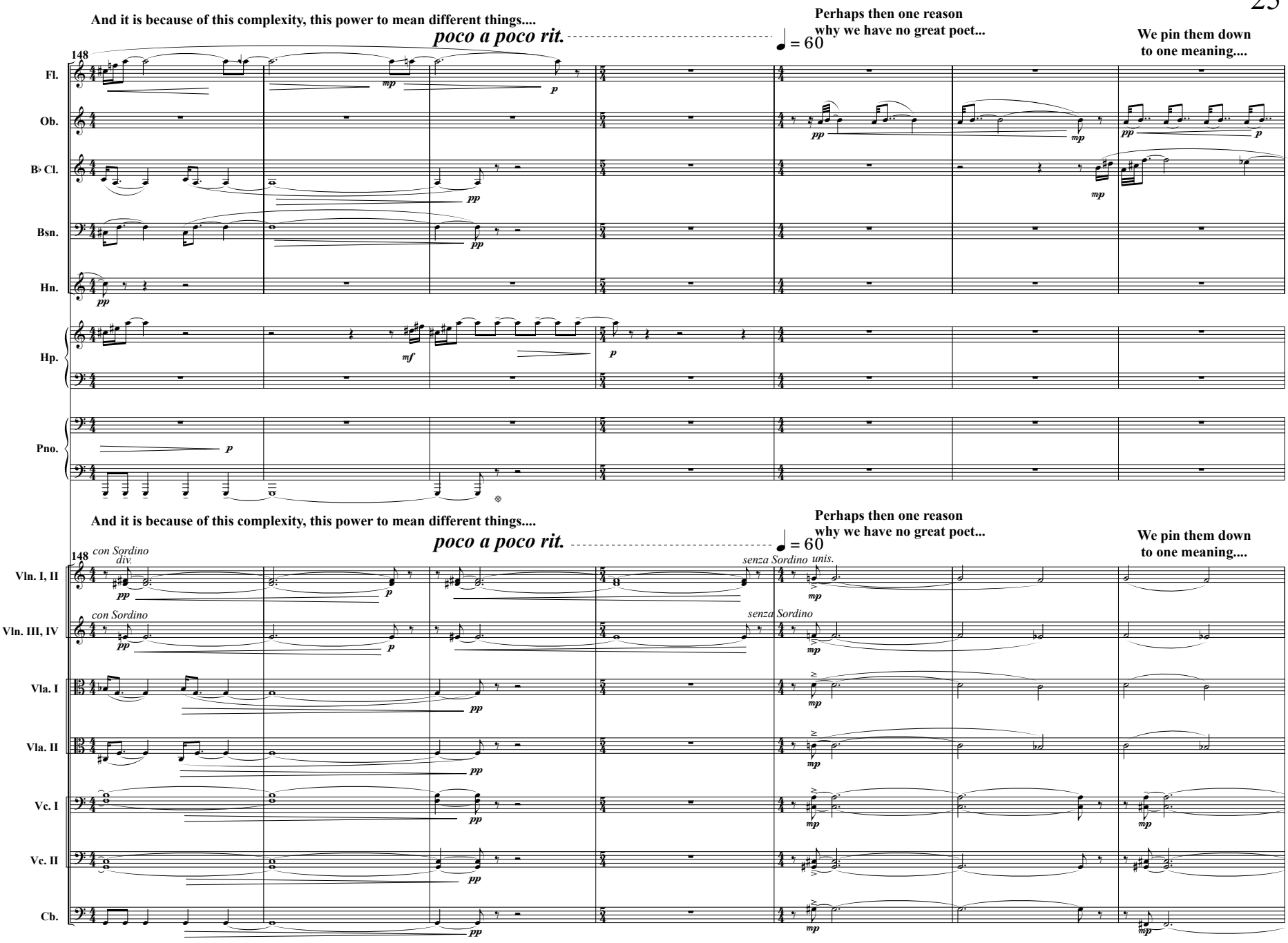
Vc. II

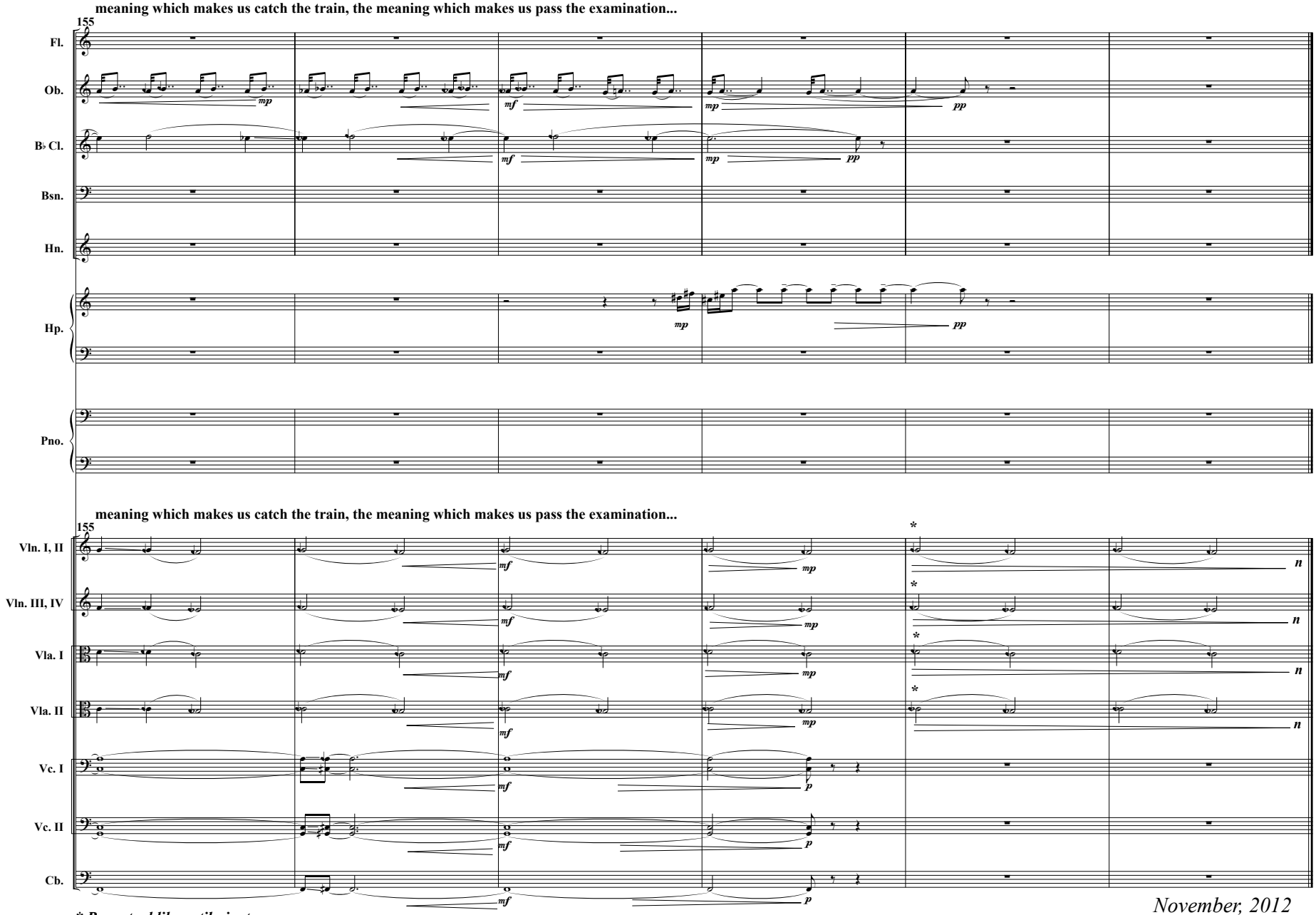
Cb.

gliss.

gliss.

arco


And it is because of this complexity, this power to mean different things....
poco a poco rit.
Perhaps then one reason why we have no great poet...
We pin them down to one meaning....
148
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hp.
Pno.
con Sordino
div.
senza Sordino
unis.
Vln. I, II
Vln. III, IV
Vla. I
Vla. II
Vc. I
Vc. II
Cb.



** Repeat ad lib. until niente*

November, 2012
London, UK