

A child said,  
What is the Grass?

*for Choir, Harp, and Vibraphone*

*Spring 2010*  
*Duration: 11 Minutes*

**Nick DiBerardino**  
*(b. 1989)*

*A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full  
hands;  
How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what it  
is any more than he.*

*I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful  
green stuff woven.*

*Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,  
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,  
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we  
may see and remark, and say Whose?*

*Or I guess the grass is itself a child. . . the produced babe  
of the vegetation.*

*Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,  
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow  
zones,  
Growing among black folks as among white,  
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the  
same, I receive them the same.*

*And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.*

*Tenderly will I use you curling grass,  
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,  
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them;  
It may be you are from old people and from women, and  
from offspring taken soon out of their mother's laps,  
And here you are the mother's laps.*

*This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old  
mothers,  
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,  
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.*

*O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues!  
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths  
for nothing.*

*I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men  
and women,  
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring  
taken soon out of their laps.*

*What do you think has become of the young and old men?  
What do you think has become of the women and  
children?*

*They are alive and well somewhere;  
The smallest sprouts show there is really no death,  
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait  
at the end to arrest it,  
And ceased the moment life appeared.*

*All goes onward and outward. . . and nothing collapses,  
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and  
luckier.*

-Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman

# A child said, What is the grass?

Nick DiBerardino

With gentle wonderment ♩ = 56

\*L.V. throughout, unless otherwise indicated

Vibraphone

Harp

Soprano Solo

Tenor Solo

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

*ppp* *mp*

*p rubato*

*ppp* *mp*

hands

unis.

A child said What is the grass? fetch-ing it to me with full hands How could I an-swer the child? I do not

hands

*8*

Vib. *p* *mp* *p* *p*

Hp. *p* *mf* *mp* *mp* *p* *p*

B → B $\flat$   
A → A $\flat$

S. *ppp* *mf* unis. *pp* *n*  
know what it is a-ny more than he

A. *mf* unis. *pp* *n*  
know a - ny more than he

T. *mf* unis. *n*  
know more than

B. *ppp* *mf* unis. *n*  
know more

16

**A**

Vib. *p mp mp*

Hp. *mp p*

*B $\flat$  → B $\sharp$   
A $\flat$  → A $\sharp$*

*D C B  
E $\flat$  F G A* *mf*

**A**

S. *p rubato*

I do not know\_\_ I do not know a-ny more than\_\_ he\_\_ *unis.*

A. *p rubato*

A child said\_\_ What is the grass? *"A child"*

T. *\* pp*

*"A child"*

B. *\* pp*

*"A child"*

\* The singers should improvise rhythmic fragments on their given pitch, so that the first word (i.e., "a" or "I") is assigned a short rhythmic value and the second word is assigned a long rhythmic value. Individual singers should continue to rearticulate short-long patterns with varied overall duration, overlapping with others to create an ensemble effect of controlled rhythmic randomness in which many consonants quietly sound.

22

Vib.

*mp* *mf*

Hp.

*mf*

D → D $\flat$   
A → A $\flat$

3 3

B → B $\flat$   
A $\flat$  → A $\sharp$

D $\flat$  → D $\sharp$   
F → F $\sharp$

T. Solo

*f dolce*

I guess I guess it is the flag of my dis-po-si-tion

S.

*mf* *mp* *unis. p*

he Ah out of ho-peful green stuff

A.

*mf* *mp* *unis. p*

Ah out of ho-peful green stuff

T.

*mf* *mp* *unis. p*

Ah out of ho-peful green stuff

B.

*mf* *mp* *unis. p*

Ah out of ho-peful green stuff

28

Vib.

Hp.

DCB $\flat$   
E F $\sharp$  G A

*mp* *f*

*f as possible*  
Soprano Solo

Or I guess I guess it is the hand-ker-chief of the Lord the Lord A scent-ed gift and re-mem-bran-cer de

S.

*fp* *mf*

wo-ven\* "I guess"

A.

*fp* *mf*

wo-ven\* "I guess" "I guess"

T.

*fp* *mf*

wo-ven\* "I guess"

B.

*fp* *mf*

wo-ven\* "I guess"

\*Closed "n"

molto rall. . . . . Gong

**T.t.** *33* Suddenly Faster ♩ = 66 molto rall. . . . . Gong

**Vib.** *mp* *f*

**Hp.** B♭ → B♮  
A → A♯ D C B  
E F♯ G A♯

**S. Solo** Suddenly Faster ♩ = 66 molto rall. . . . .

**S.** *mf cresc. poco a poco* *f*

Bear-ing the own-er's name some way in the cor-ners\_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?

**A.** *mf cresc. poco a poco* *f*

Bear-ing the own-er's name some-way in the cor-ners\_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?

**T.** *mf cresc. poco a poco* *f*

Bear-ing the own-er's name some-way in the cor-ners\_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?

**B.** *mf cresc. poco a poco* *f*

Bear-ing the own-er's name some-way in the cor-ners\_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?

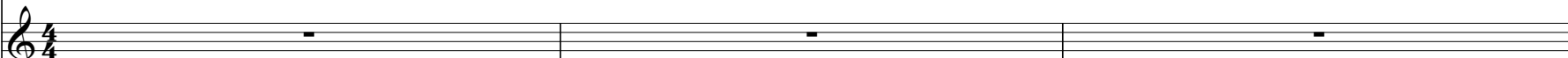


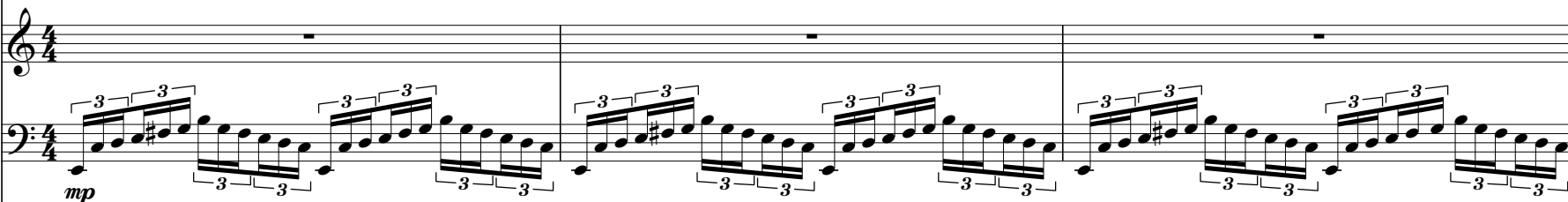
With energy; billowing ♩ = 72

7

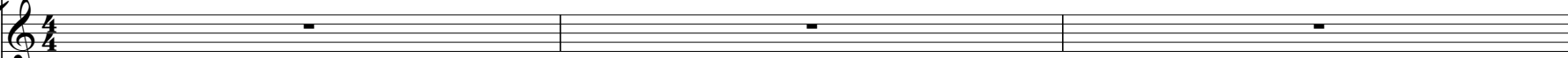
40

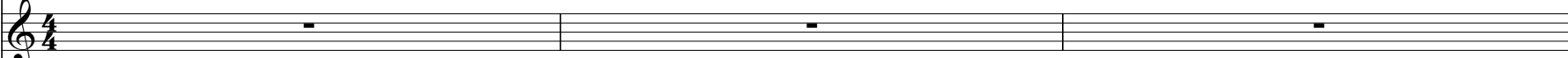
T.t. 

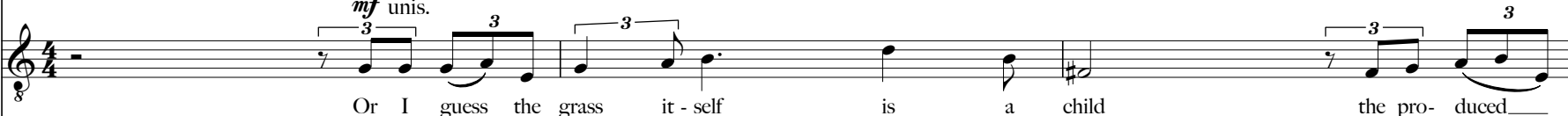
Vib. 

Hp.   
*mp*

With energy; billowing ♩ = 72

S. 

A. 

T.   
Or I guess the grass it - self is a child the pro- duced

B.   
*mp*  
"Hm"

43

Vib.

Hp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

*mf* *gliss*

*mp*

*p*

*mf* *with energy*

Or I guess I

babe of the ve - ge - ta - - - - - tion

"Hm"

A# → A $\flat$

46

Vib.

Hp.

A → A#

A# → A

Soprano 1

"Hm"

Soprano 2

Alto 1

Alto 2

T.

B.

*niente*

*mp*

*mp*

*mp*

*mp*

guess it is a u-ni-form a u-ni-form

guess it is a u-ni-form

a u - ni -

a u ni-form a

a u - ni - form

a u - ni - form

49

Vib.

Hp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

form a u - ni - form a u - ni form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic

u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic it means sprou-ting a -

a u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic

a u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic

a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic and it means sprou-ting a - like in

a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic

*f*

*mf strong, with energy*

*mf*

*f strong!*

*mf*

*mf*

*f strong!*

*mf*

*tutti*

*tutti*

*A → A#*

*A# → A*

53

Vib.

Hp.

S.

Alto

A.

T.

B.

like in broad\_ and nar - row zones and gro - wing a - mong black folks as a - mong

broad zones\_ and nar - row zo - nes and gro - wing a - mong black folks as a - mong

Rubber mallets (or suspended cymbal, if available)

*mp*

Vib.

Hp. *cresc. poco a poco* *f* *A → A#*

S. white a mong black as\_\_ a-mong white a - mong black as\_\_ a - mong white a mong black as\_\_ a-mong

A. *mf* Ka-nuck Tuck-a-hoe Con-gress-man a mong black as\_\_ a-mong *f*

T. *8* white a-mong black as\_\_ a-mong white a - mong black as\_\_ a-mong white a mong black as\_\_ a-mong

B. *mf* Ka-nuck Tuck-a-hoe Con-gress-man



**62**

**Vib.**

**Hp.**

**S.**

**A.**

**T.**

**B.**

**63**

**64**

**65**

**66**

**67**

**68**

**69**

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**366**

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**369**

**370**

**371**

<



66

Vib.

Tempo One ♩ = 56

*mf* *mf* *f* *mp*

Hp.

*mp* *f* *mp*

C → C<sub>b</sub>  
A → A<sub>b</sub>

Tempo One ♩ = 56  
Soprano Solo  
*mf* *dolce*

Ten - der - ly

S.

*mp* *mf* *un.* *f* *n*

it seems to me the beau-ti-ful un-cut hair of graves.

A.

*mf* *f*

it seems to me the beau-ti-ful un-cut hair of graves

T.

*mf* *f*

it seems to me the beau-ti-ful un-cut hair of graves

B.

*mf* *f*

it seems to me the beau-ti-ful un-cut hair of graves

71

Vib.

Hp.

S. Solo

Ten-der - ly will I use you cur-ling grass

It may be you tran-spire from the

S.

*p* *subito pp*

It may be

A.

*p* *subito pp*

It may be

T.

*p* *subito pp*

It may be

B.

*p* *subito pp*

It may be

75

Vib. *fp* *fmp*

Hp. *mf* 3 3 D → D $\flat$

S. Solo  
breasts of young men It may be if I had known them if I'd known them if I'd known them I'd have loved them I'd have

S. *n* *mp* *subitop*  
it may be

A. *n* *mp* *subitop*  
It may be

T. *n* *mp* *subitop*  
It may be

B. *n* *mp* *subitop*  
It may be

79

Vib. *f* *fp*

Hp. *f* 3 3

S. Solo *f* 3 3 3 3 3 3  
loved them it may be you are from old peo-ple and from wo-men and from off-spring

S. *mf* *subitomp*  
it may be

A. *mf* *subitomp*  
it may be

T. *mf* *subitomp*  
it may be

B. *mf* *subitomp*  
it may be

82

Vib.

Hp.

S. Solo

S.

A.

T.

B.

*Db → D $\sharp$  B $\flat$  → B $\sharp$  C → C $\sharp$*   
*E $\flat$  → E $\sharp$  A $\flat$  → A $\sharp$*

DC $\sharp$ B  
EFGA

*very strong!*

*pp*

*f*

*pp*

*f*

*mf*

*pp*

*f*

*mf*

*f*

*niente*

*f*

*secco*

*f*

*P.D.T.*

*mp*

*p*

tak - en soon out of their moth er's laps

laps

laps

ta - ken soon out of their moth-er's laps

laps

ta-ken soon out of their moth - er's laps

ta - ken soon out of their moth-er's laps

ta - ken soon out of laps

86

Vib. *secco* *mf* *L.V.* *sim.*

Hp. *mp* *f* *very strong!*

S. *whispered crisply* *p* the mo-ther's laps

A. *whispered crisply* *p* the mo-ther's laps

T. *whispered crisply* *p* the mo-ther's laps

B. *f* And here you are— the mo-ther's laps

89

Vib.

Hp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

*mp* 3 *p* 3 3 3

mo-ther's laps This grass is ve-ry dark to befrom the white heads of old mo-thers

*pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

*pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

*pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

*mp* *cresc. poco a poco*  
Dark-er than the co-lor - less beards of

93

Vib. *mute*

Hp. *mute*

S. *mf* *f*

A. *mf* *f*

T. *mf* *f*  
Dark — Dark to come from un-der the faint red roofs of mouths! O unis.

B. *mf* *f*  
old men O unis.

Measure 93: Vib. and Hp. are muted. S. and A. have a melodic line starting on a whole note. T. and B. have a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. Measure 94: Vib. and Hp. remain muted. S. and A. continue their melodic line. T. and B. continue their rhythmic accompaniment. The time signature changes to 4/4 at the end of measure 94.



90 ♩ = 56

Vib.

*mf* *cresc. poco a poco* *ff*

Hp.

DC#B  
EFGA

*mf* *cresc. poco a poco* *ff*

S.

O *"A child"* *"Dark"* *fff*

A.

O *"A child"* *"I guess"* *fff*

T.

O *"A child"* *fff*

B.

O *"A child"* *"Life"* *fff*

The musical score is for page 23 of a composition. It features five staves: Vibraphone (Vib.), Harp (Hp.), and four vocal parts (Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.)). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as 90 beats per minute, with a quarter note equal to 56. The Vibraphone and Harp parts both start with a *mf* dynamic and a *cresc. poco a poco* instruction, leading to a *ff* dynamic. The Harp part includes a chord sequence: DC#B, EFGA. The vocal parts have lyrics: Soprano: "O", "A child", "Dark"; Alto: "O", "A child", "I guess"; Tenor: "O", "A child"; Bass: "O", "A child", "Life". The vocal parts end with a *fff* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

105

Vib.

Hp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

*ff* *mf*

O I per-ceive af-ter all so ma-ny ut-ter-ing tongues! And I per-ceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for no-thing

B → B $\flat$  C $\sharp$  → C $\natural$   
A → A $\flat$



11/3

Vib.

Hp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

*mf*  
G → G $\flat$

*mf*

late trans - late the hints a - bout the dead

dead

dead

unis.

D $\flat$  → D $\sharp$

Detailed description: The musical score is for page 26. It features five staves: Vibraphone (Vib.), Harp (Hp.), Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The Vibraphone part has a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure, and a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The Harp part has a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure, and a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The Soprano part has lyrics: "I wish I could trans - late the hints a - bout the dead". The Alto part has lyrics: "late trans - late the hints a - bout the". The Tenor part has lyrics: "dead". The Bass part has lyrics: "dead". The score includes dynamic markings (mf) and a key signature change (D $\flat$  → D $\sharp$ ). The score is written in 11/3 time.

116

Vib.

Hp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

*mf*

*f*

*mf*

*mf*

and old men and mo-thers

dead young men and wo-men and the off - spring ta-ken soon out of their laps. O

dead

dead O

F → F $\flat$

120

Gong

*f*

molto rall. . . .

Gong

*p*

T.t.

Vib.

Hp.

*f* *3* *3* *3* *p*

tutti

molto rall. . . .

S.

What do you think has be-come of the young and old men? \* "n"

*f* *3* *3* *3* *p*

A.

What do you think has be-come of the young and old men? \* "n"

*f* *3* *3* *3* *3* *p*

T.

What do you think has be-come of the wo-men and child - ren? \* "n"

*f* *3* *3* *3* *3* *p*

B.

What do you think has be-come of the wo-men and child - ren? \* "n"

\*Closed "n"

D $\flat$  C $\flat$  B $\flat$   
E $\flat$  F G A $\flat$

125  $\text{♩} = 72$

T.t.  $\text{f}$

Vib.

Hp.  $\text{mf}$  *gently*

T. Solo  $\text{mf}$  *gently*

They are al-ive and well some - where the small-est sproutsshow there rea-ly is\_\_ no\_\_\_\_\_ death no

S.  $\text{fp}$   $n$   
Ah

A.  $\text{fp}$   $n$   
Ah

T.  $\text{fp}$   $n$   
Ah

B.  $\text{fp}$   $n$   
Ah

30

Rubber mallets (or susp. cymbal, if available)

*p*

T.t.

Vib.

Hp.

T. Solo

S.

A.

T.

B.

*mf*

*pp*

death no death and if ev-er there was it led for-ward life and does not wait at the end to ar

O



136

T.t. *mp* *p*

Vib.

Hp. *f*

T. Solo

S.

A.

T.

B.

rest it and ceased and ceased the mo-ment life\_\_\_\_\_ ap-peared

A $\sharp$ →A $\flat$  F→F $\sharp$  B $\flat$ →B $\sharp$  B $\sharp$ →B $\flat$  A $\flat$ →A $\sharp$  A $\sharp$ →A $\flat$

4/4 Gong (ord.) molto rit. ♩ = 56

T.t. *p*

Vib.

Hp. *mp dim. poco a poco*

S. molto rit. ♩ = 56

A. *mp*  
O

T. *p*  
All O All *mp*

B. *mp*  
All unis. O All

148

Vib.

Hp.

S.

*mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

All O All goes on-ward and out - ward and no-thing col lap - ses\_ And to die\_\_\_\_\_ to

A.

*mf* *f* *ff*

All O All goes on-ward and out - ward and no-thing col lap - ses\_ And to die\_\_\_\_\_ to

T.

*mf* *f* *ff*

O\_\_\_\_\_ All goes on-ward and out - ward and no-thing col lap - ses\_ And to die\_\_\_\_\_

B.

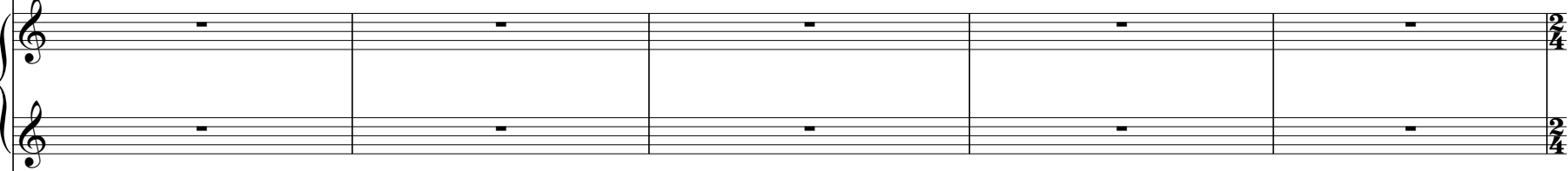
*mf* *f* *ff*

and no-thing col lap - ses\_ And to die\_\_\_\_\_ to

molto rit. . . . .

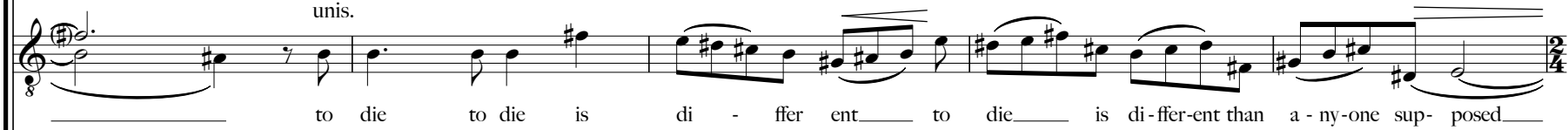
154

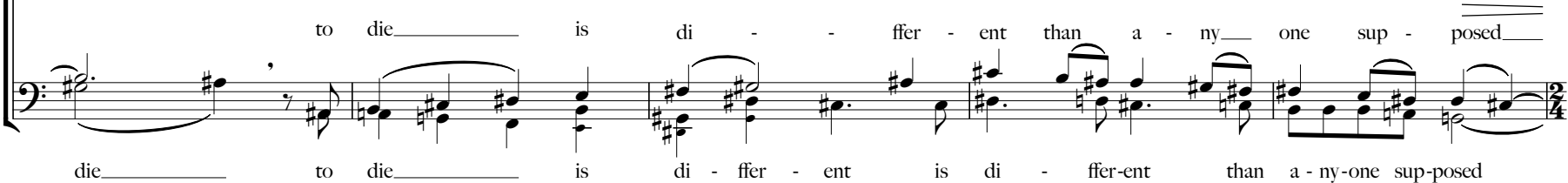
Vib. 

Hp. 

S. 
  
die\_\_\_\_\_ and to die\_\_\_\_\_ is di-ffer-ent than a - ny-one sup-posed

A. 
  
die\_\_\_\_\_ to die\_\_\_\_\_ to die\_\_\_\_\_

T. 
  
\_\_\_\_\_ to die to die is di - ffer ent\_\_\_\_\_ to die\_\_\_\_\_ is di-ffer-ent than a - ny-one sup- posed\_\_\_\_\_

B. 
  
die\_\_\_\_\_ to die\_\_\_\_\_ is di - ffer - ent is di - ffer-ent than a - ny-one sup-posed

150  $\text{♩} = 58$  rit.

Vib. *p* *pp*

Hp. *mf*  
 D# C# B  
 E F# G A#

S.

A.

T. *mp* *pp* 3  
 and luck - i - er luck-i - er

B. *unis. mp* *pp* 3  
 and luck - i - er luck-i - er