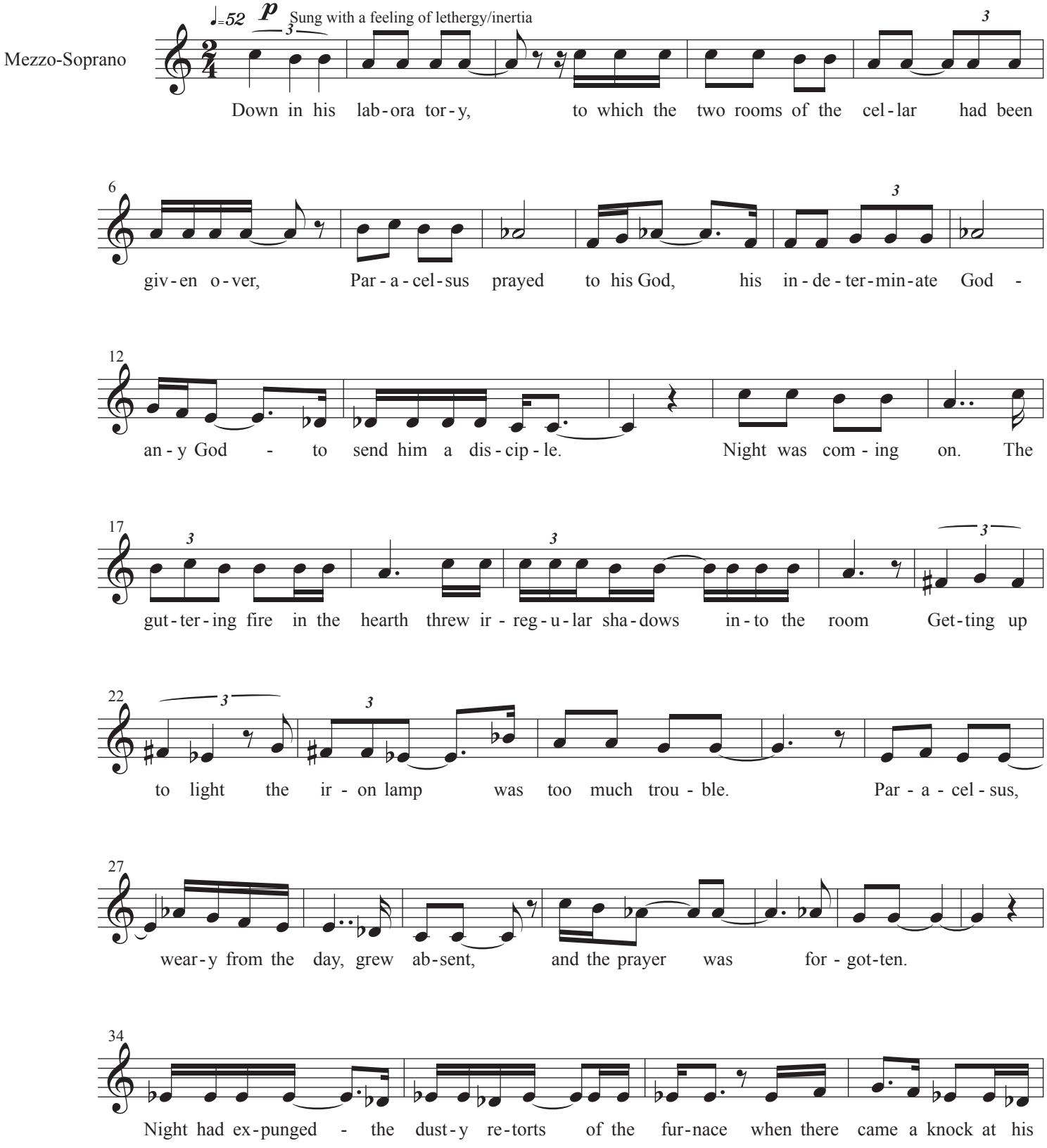
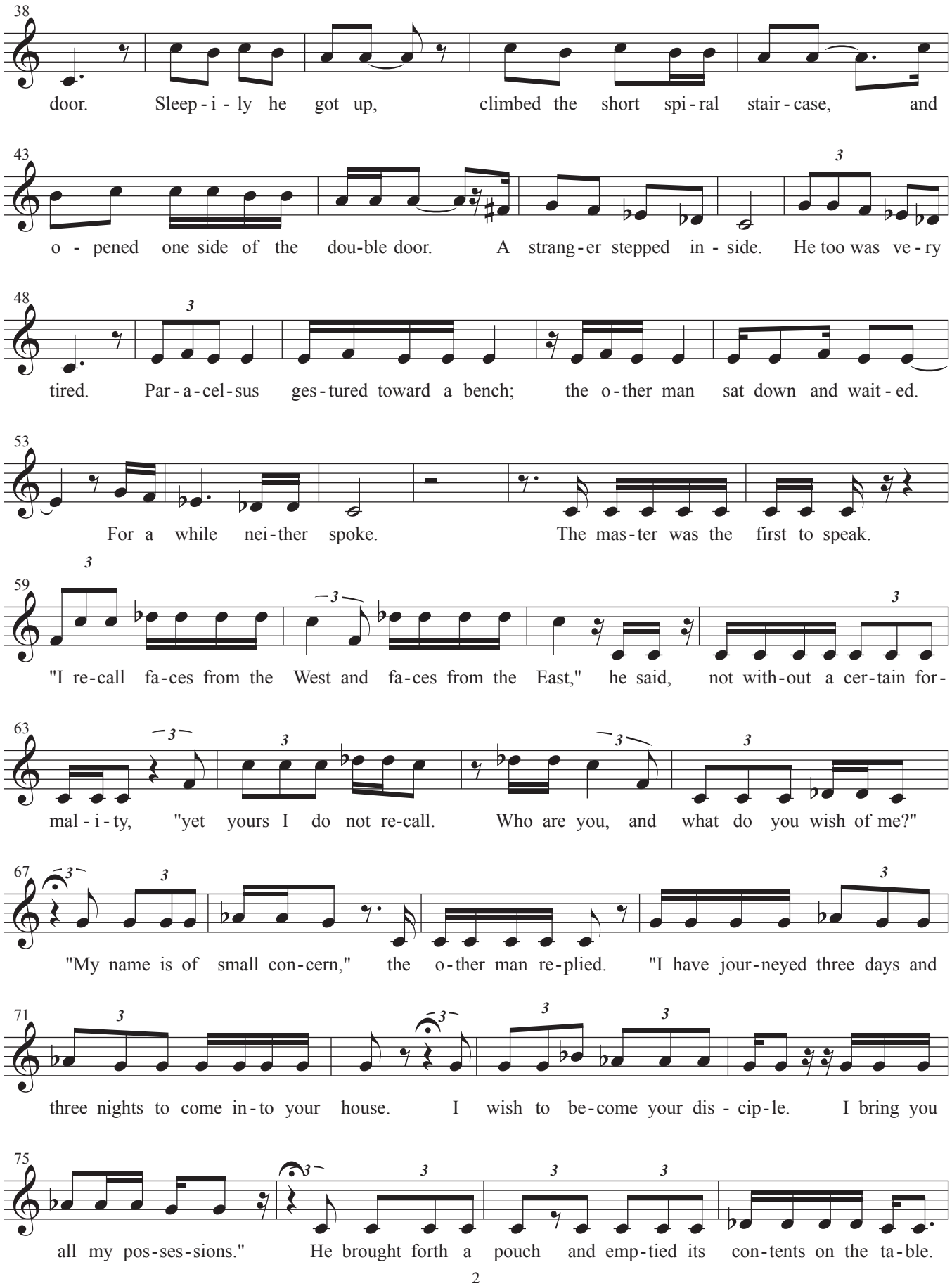
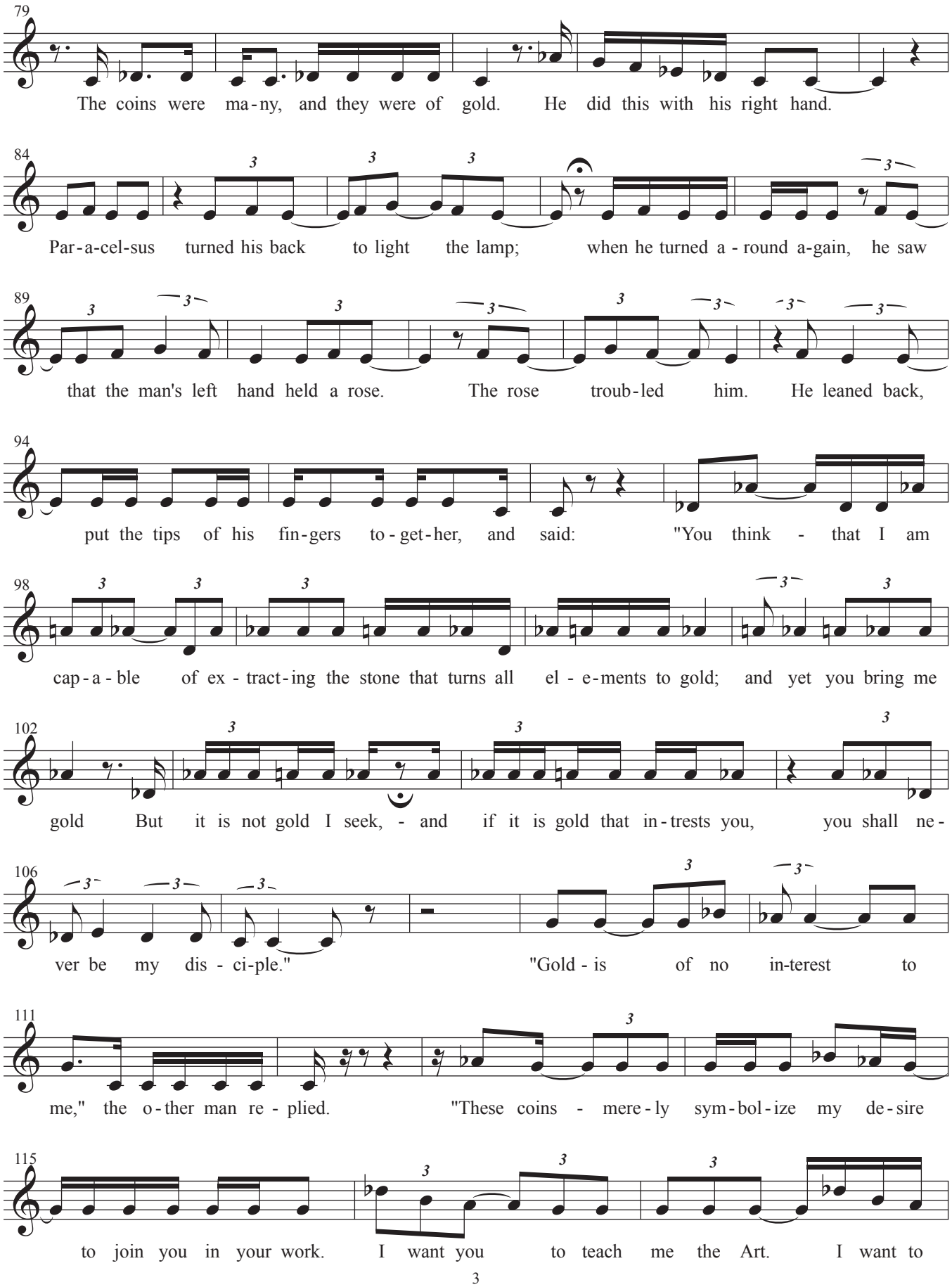
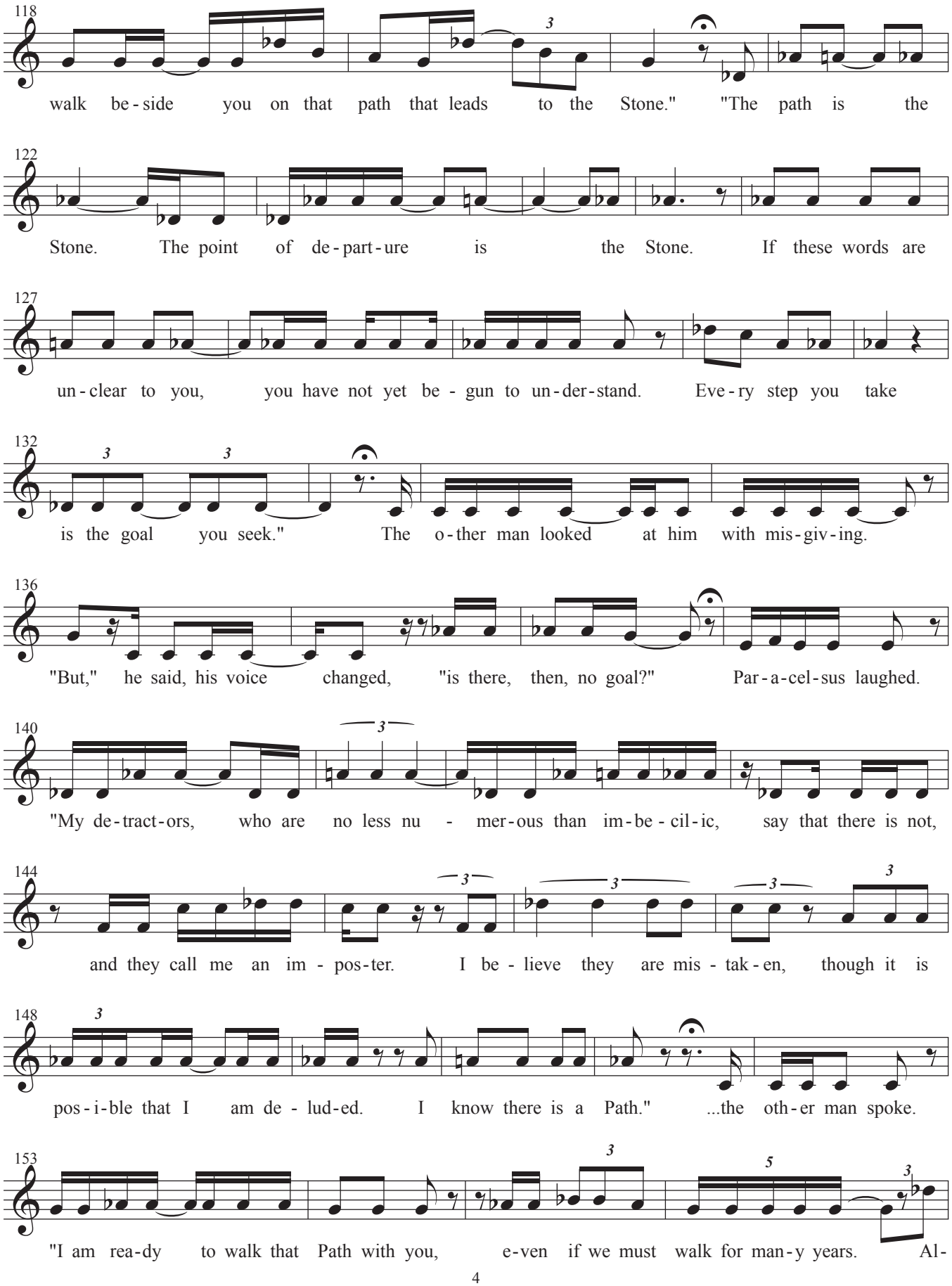
The Rose of Paracelsus

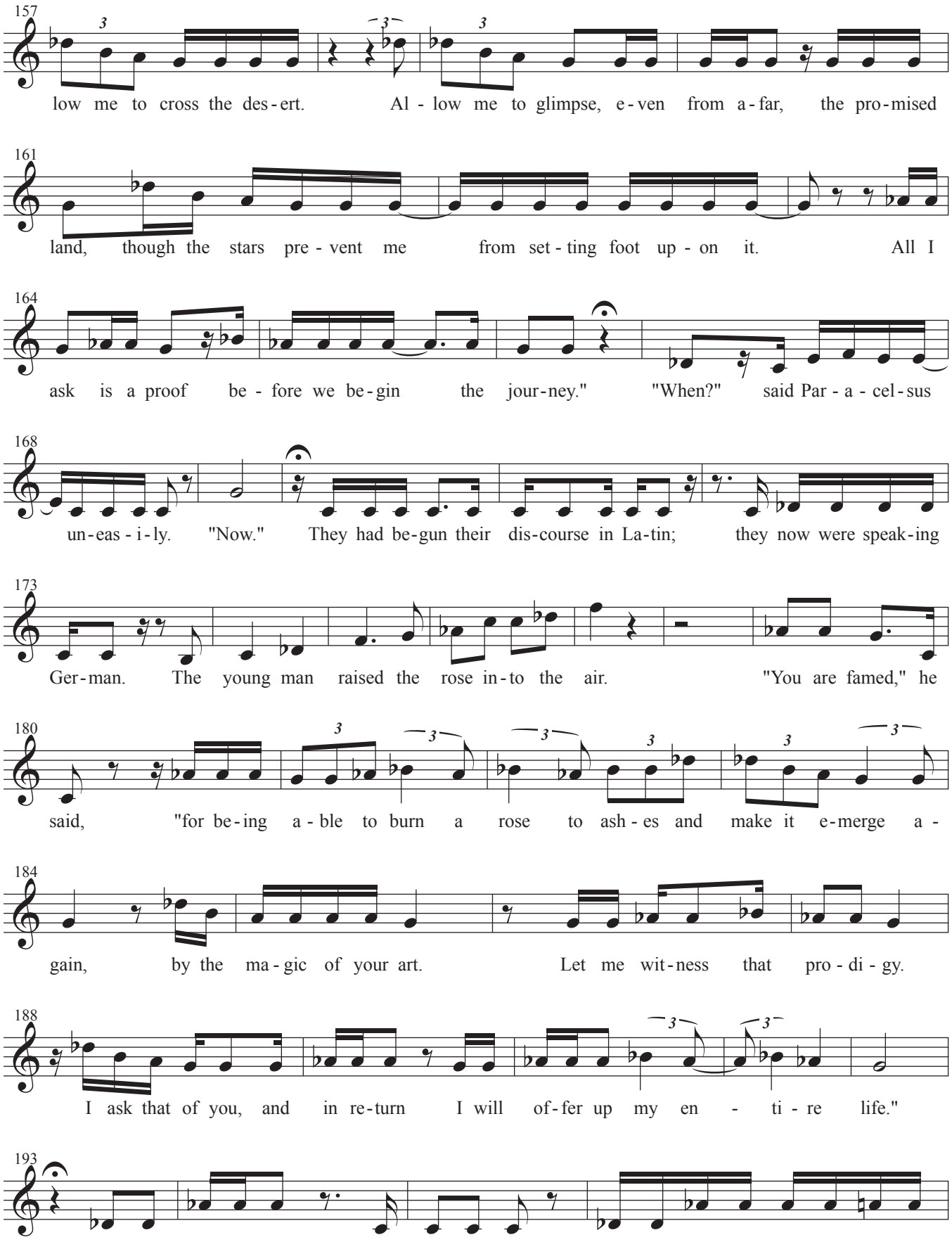
Stephen Dickman
Jorge Louis Borges

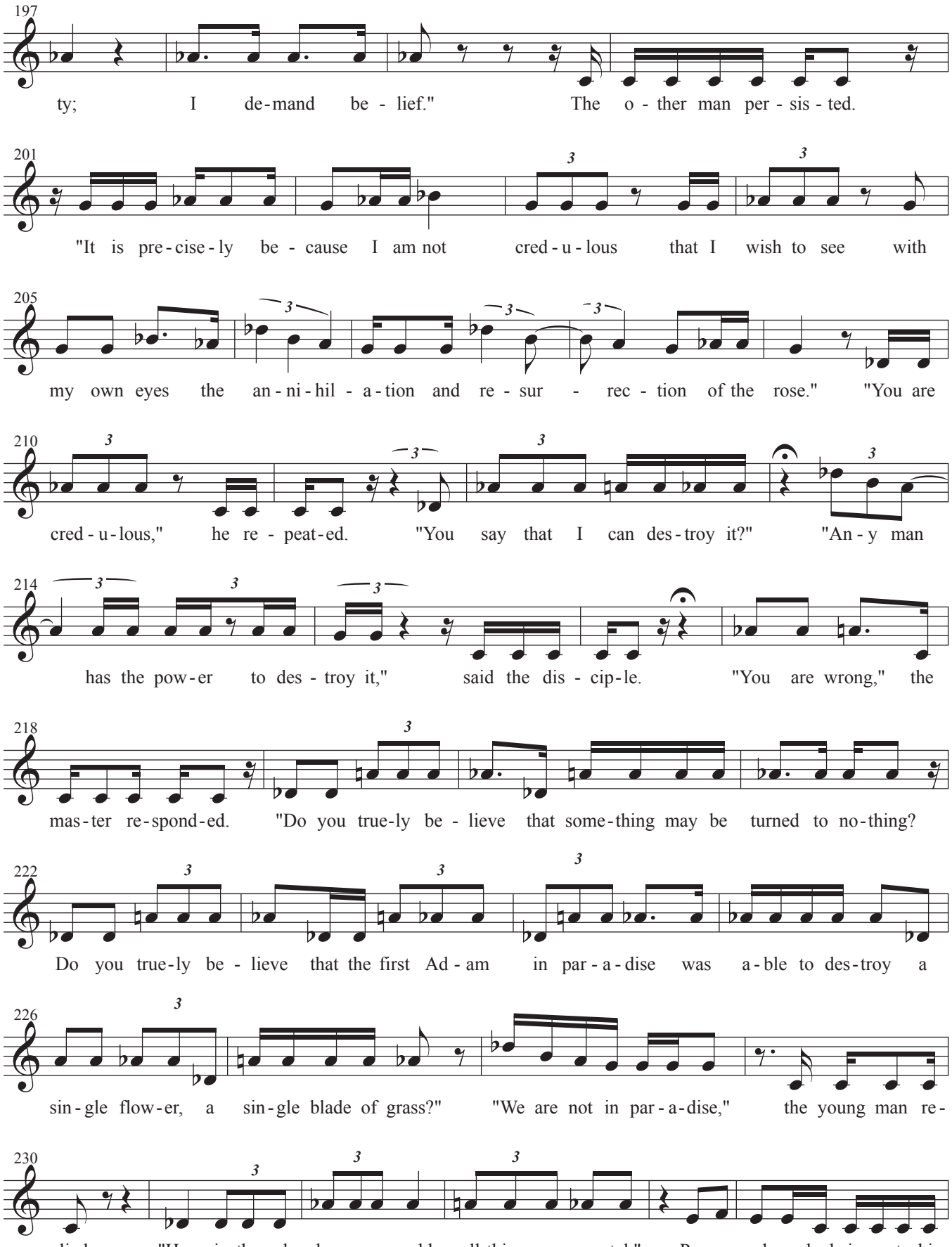


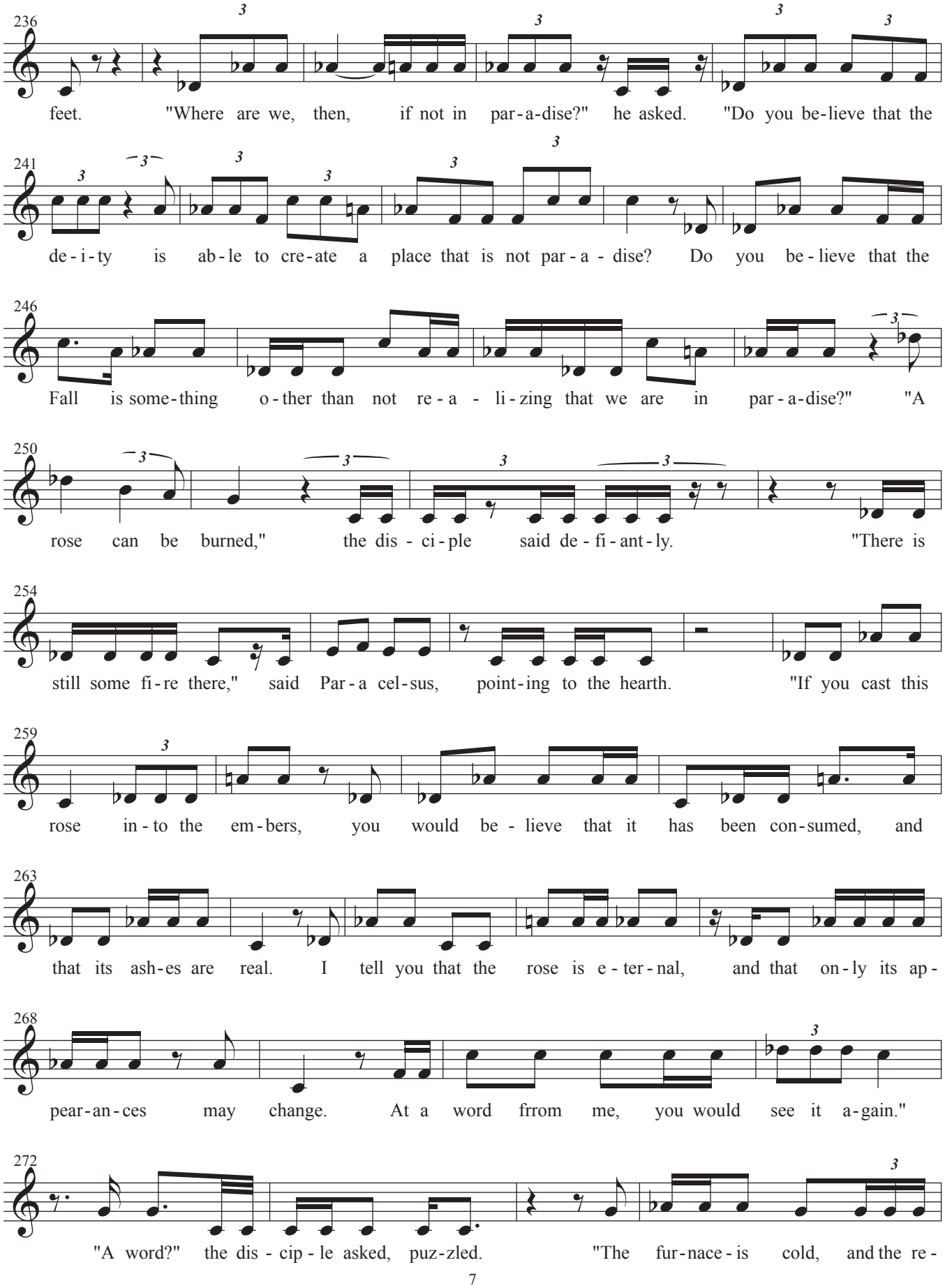

38
door. Sleep - i - ly he got up, climbed the short spi - ral stair - case, and
43
o - pened one side of the dou-ble door. A strang - er stepped in - side. He too was ve - ry
48
tired. Par - a - cel - sus ges - tured toward a bench; the o - ther man sat down and wait - ed.
53
For a while nei - ther spoke. The mas - ter was the first to speak.
59
"I re - call fa - ces from the West and fa - ces from the East," he said, not with - out a cer - tain for -
63
mal - i - ty, "yet yours I do not re - call. Who are you, and what do you wish of me?"
67
"My name is of small con - cern," the o - ther man re - plied. "I have jour - neyed three days and
71
three nights to come in - to your house. I wish to be - come your dis - cip - le. I bring you
75
all my pos - ses - sions." He brought forth a pouch and emp - tied its con - tents on the ta - ble.

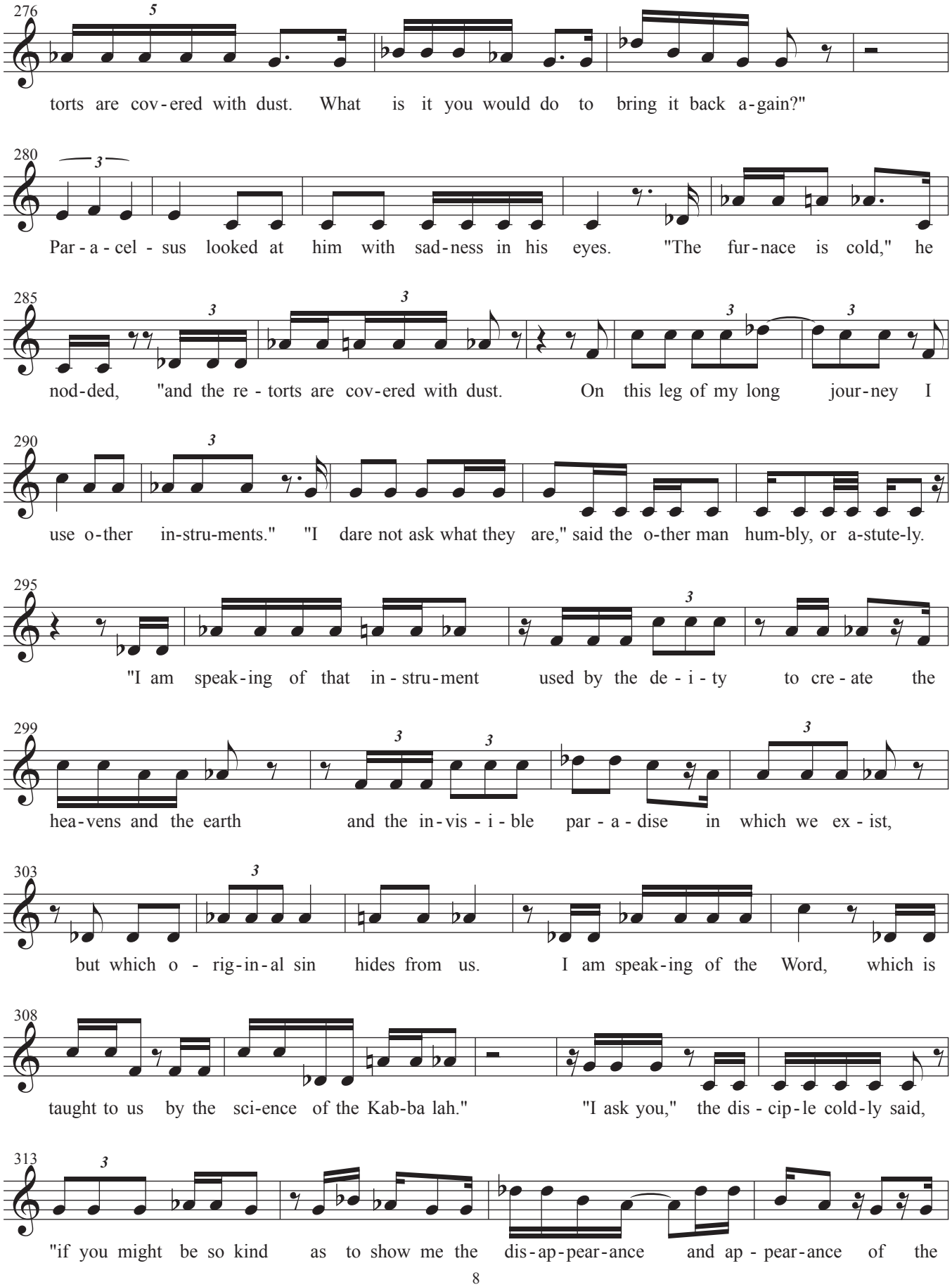

79
The coins were ma-ny, and they were of gold. He did this with his right hand.
84
Par-a-cel-sus turned his back to light the lamp; when he turned a-round a-gain, he saw
89
that the man's left hand held a rose. The rose troub-led him. He leaned back,
94
put the tips of his fin-gers to-get-her, and said: "You think - that I am
98
cap-a-ble of ex-tract-ing the stone that turns all el-e-ments to gold; and yet you bring me
102
gold But it is not gold I seek, - and if it is gold that in-trests you, you shall ne-
106
ver be my dis-ci-ple." "Gold-is of no in-terest to
111
me," the o-ther man re-plied. "These coins - mere-ly sym-bol-ize my de-sire
115
to join you in your work. I want you to teach me the Art. I want to


118
walk be - side you on that path that leads to the Stone." "The path is the
122
Stone. The point of de - part - ure is the Stone. If these words are
127
un - clear to you, you have not yet be - gun to un - der - stand. Eve - ry step you take
132
is the goal you seek." The o - ther man looked at him with mis - giv - ing.
136
"But," he said, his voice changed, "is there, then, no goal?" Par - a - cel - sus laughed.
140
"My de - tract - ors, who are no less nu - mer - ous than im - be - cil - ic, say that there is not,
144
and they call me an im - pos - ter. I be - lieve they are mis - tak - en, though it is
148
pos - i - ble that I am de - lud - ed. I know there is a Path." ...the oth - er man spoke.
153
"I am rea - dy to walk that Path with you, e - ven if we must walk for man - y years. Al -


157
low me to cross the des - ert. Al - low me to glimpse, e - ven from a - far, the pro - mised
161
land, though the stars pre - vent me from set - ting foot up - on it. All I
164
ask is a proof be - fore we be - gin the jour - ney." "When?" said Par - a - cel - sus
168
un - eas - i - ly. "Now." They had be - gun their dis - course in La - tin; they now were speak - ing
173
Ger - man. The young man raised the rose in - to the air. "You are famed," he
180
said, "for be - ing a - ble to burn a rose to ash - es and make it e - merge a -
184
gain, by the ma - gic of your art. Let me wit - ness that pro - di - gy.
188
I ask that of you, and in re - turn I will of - fer up my en - ti - re life."
193
"You are cred - u - lous," the mas - ter said. "I have no need of cred - u - li -


197
ty; I de-mand be - lief." The o - ther man per - sis - ted.
201
"It is pre-cise-ly be - cause I am not cred - u - lous that I wish to see with
205
my own eyes the an - ni - hil - a - tion and re - sur - rec - tion of the rose." "You are
210
cred - u - lous," he re - peat-ed. "You say that I can des - troy it?" "An - y man
214
has the pow-er to des - troy it," said the dis - cip-le. "You are wrong," the
218
mas-ter re-spond-ed. "Do you true-ly be - lieve that some-thing may be turned to no-thing?
222
Do you true-ly be - lieve that the first Ad - am in par - a - dise was a - ble to des-troy a
226
sin - gle flow-er, a sin - gle blade of grass?" "We are not in par - a - dise," the young man re -
230
plied. "Here, in the sub - lun-ar-y world, all things are mor-tal." Par - a - cel-sus had ris-en to his


236
feet. "Where are we, then, if not in par-a-dise?" he asked. "Do you be-lieve that the
241
de-i-ty is ab-le to cre-ate a place that is not par-a-dise? Do you be-lieve that the
246
Fall is some-thing o-ther than not re-a-li-zing that we are in par-a-dise?" "A
250
rose can be burned," the dis-ci-ple said de-fi-ant-ly. "There is
254
still some fi-re there," said Par-a cel-sus, point-ing to the hearth. "If you cast this
259
rose in-to the em-bers, you would be-lieve that it has been con-sumed, and
263
that its ash-es are real. I tell you that the rose is e-ter-nal, and that on-ly its ap-
268
pear-an-ces may change. At a word frrom me, you would see it a-gain."
272
"A word?" the dis-cip-le asked, puz-zled. "The fur-nace-is cold, and the re-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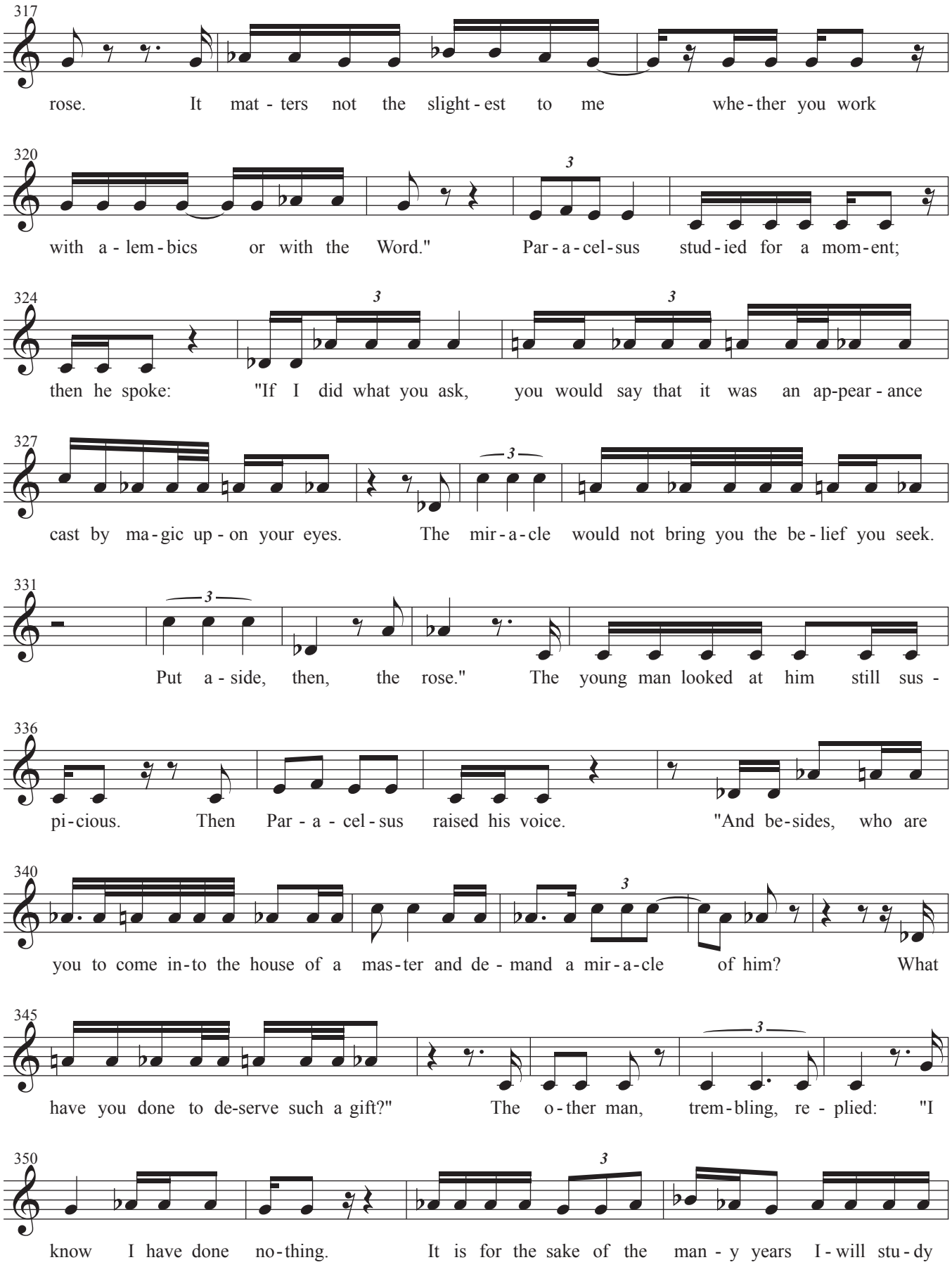
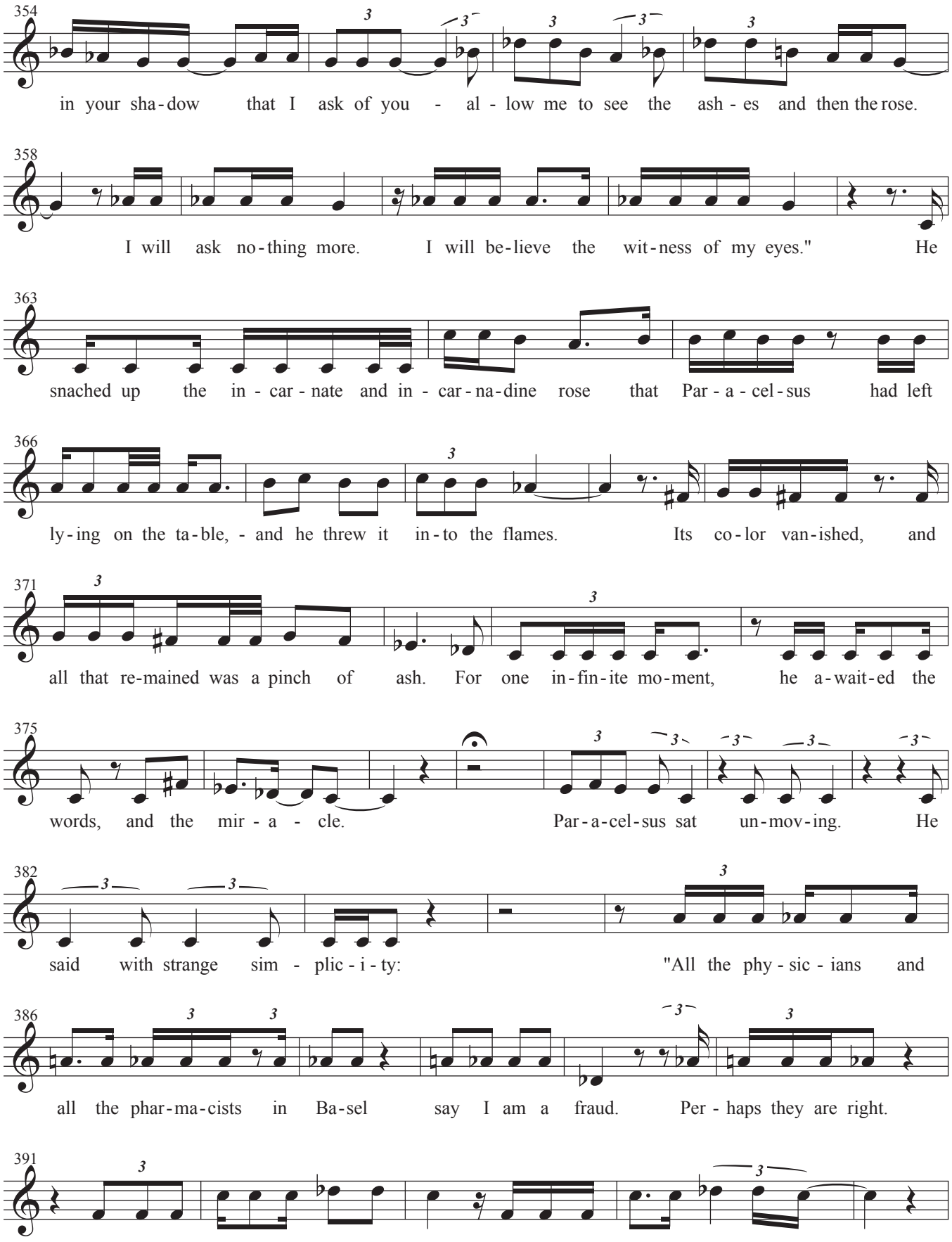
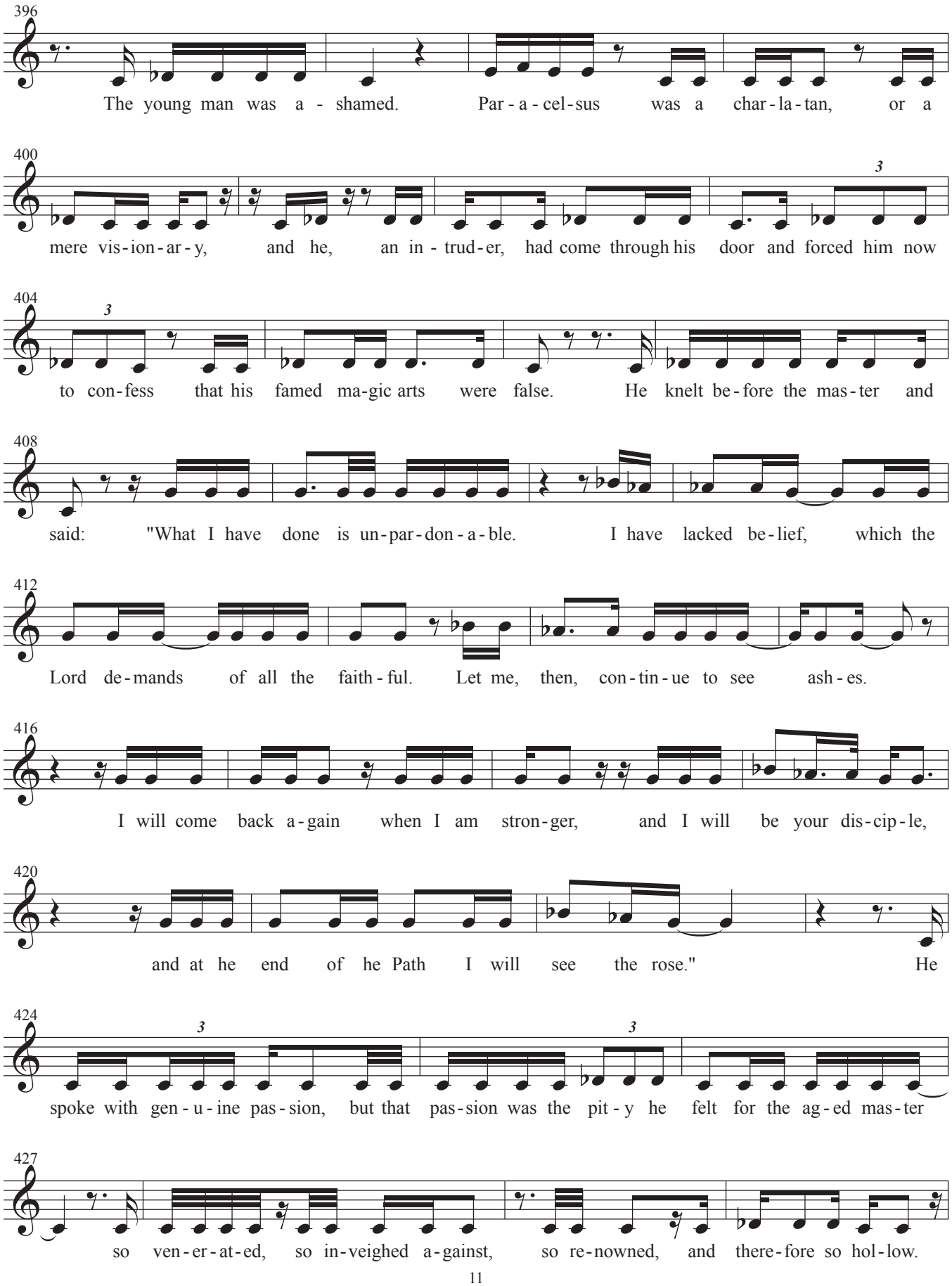
torts are cov-ered with dust. What is it you would do to bring it back a-gain?"
280
Par-a-cel-sus looked at him with sad-ness in his eyes. "The fur-nace is cold," he
285
nod-ded, "and the re-torts are cov-ered with dust. On this leg of my long jour-ney I
290
use o-ther in-stru-ments." "I dare not ask what they are," said the o-ther man hum-bly, or a-stute-ly.
295
"I am speak-ing of that in-stru-ment used by the de-i-ty to cre-ate the
299
hea-vens and the earth and the in-vis-i-ble par-a-dise in which we ex-ist,
303
but which o-rig-in-al sin hides from us. I am speak-ing of the Word, which is
308
taught to us by the sci-ence of the Kab-ba lah." "I ask you," the dis-cip-le cold-ly said,
313
"if you might be so kind as to show me the dis-ap-pear-ance and ap-pear-ance of the


317
rose. It mat - ters not the slight - est to me whe - ther you work
320
with a - lem - bics or with the Word." Par - a - cel - sus stud - ied for a mom - ent;
324
then he spoke: "If I did what you ask, you would say that it was an ap-pear - ance
327
cast by ma - gic up - on your eyes. The mir - a - cle would not bring you the be - lief you seek.
331
Put a - side, then, the rose." The young man looked at him still sus -
336
pi - cious. Then Par - a - cel - sus raised his voice. "And be-sides, who are
340
you to come in - to the house of a mas - ter and de - mand a mir - a - cle of him? What
345
have you done to de-serve such a gift?" The o - ther man, trem - bling, re - plied: "I
350
know I have done no - thing. It is for the sake of the man - y years I - will stu - dy


354
in your sha-dow that I ask of you - al - low me to see the ash - es and then the rose.
358
I will ask no-thing more. I will be-lieve the wit-ness of my eyes." He
363
snached up the in - car - nate and in - car-na-dine rose that Par - a - cel-sus had left
366
ly-ing on the ta-ble, - and he threw it in-to the flames. Its co-lor van-ished, and
371
all that re-mained was a pinch of ash. For one in-fin-ite mo-ment, he a-wait-ed the
375
words, and the mir - a - cle. Par-a-cel-sus sat un-mov-ing. He
382
said with strange sim - plic - i - ty: "All the phy - sic - ians and
386
all the phar-ma-cists in Ba-sel say I am a fraud. Per - haps they are right.
391
There are the ash-es that were the rose, and that shall be the rose no more."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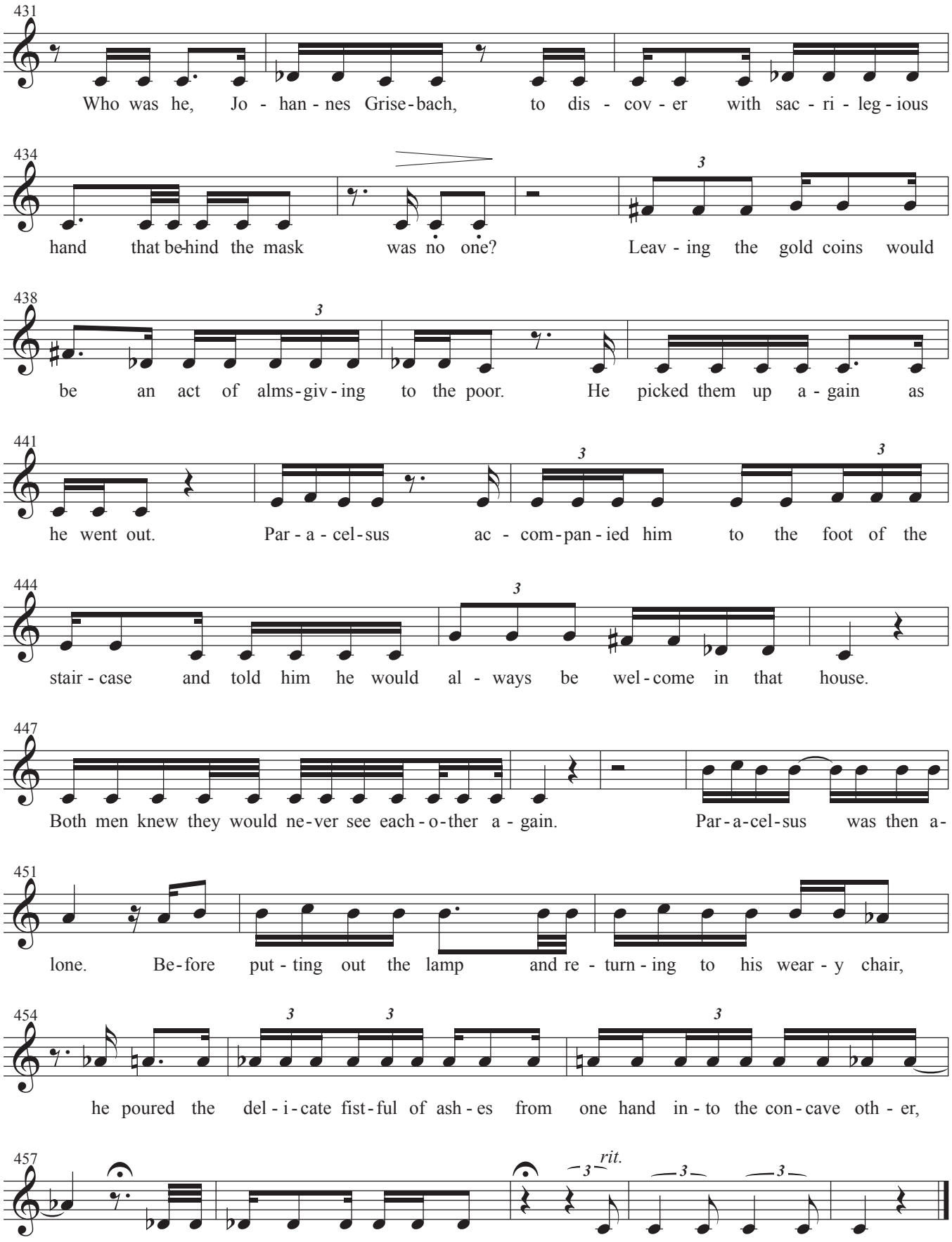
The young man was a - shamed. Par - a - cel - sus was a char - la - tan, or a
400
mere vis - ion - ar - y, and he, an in - trud - er, had come through his door and forced him now
404
to con - fess that his famed ma - gic arts were false. He knelt be - fore the mas - ter and
408
said: "What I have done is un - par - don - a - ble. I have lacked be - lief, which the
412
Lord de - mands of all the faith - ful. Let me, then, con - tin - ue to see ash - es.
416
I will come back a - gain when I am stron - ger, and I will be your dis - cip - le,
420
and at he end of he Path I will see the rose." He
424
spoke with gen - u - ine pas - sion, but that pas - sion was the pit - y he felt for the ag - ed mas - ter
427
so ven - er - at - ed, so in - veighed a - gainst, so re - nowned, and there - fore so hol - low.


431
Who was he, Jo - han - nes Grise - bach, to dis - cov - er with sac - ri - leg - ious
434
hand that be-hind the mask was no one? Leav - ing the gold coins would
438
be an act of alms - giv - ing to the poor. He picked them up a - gain as
441
he went out. Par - a - cel - sus ac - com - pan - ied him to the foot of the
444
stair - case and told him he would al - ways be wel - come in that house.
447
Both men knew they would ne - ver see each - o - ther a - gain. Par - a - cel - sus was then a -
451
lone. Be - fore put - ting out the lamp and re - turn - ing to his wear - y chair,
454
he poured the del - i - cate fist - ful of ash - es from one hand in - to the con - cave oth - er,
457
and he whis - pered a sin - gle word. The rose ap - peared a - gain.
rit.