Joseph Klein

Leviathan

(after W.S. Merwin)

for male voice, bass trombone, and intermedia

(1998)

for Joseph Hopkins & William Bootz

Supported in part by a grant from the University of North Texas.

Program Note

Leviathan is based upon the poem of the same name by American poet W.S. Merwin (b. 1927), from the collection entitled *Green With Beasts* (1956). Merwin's poem is an evocative depiction of the mythical beast, the "curling serpent that in ocean is, Sea-fright... the shadow under the earth." The present work explores the psychological implications of the poem through a variety of musical and visual elements — including 8-channel tape, live processing of the voice and bass trombone, video projections, and lighting.

The work is presented in five episodes, throughout which the relationship between the voice and bass trombone are continually changing. The vocalist elaborates upon the salient aspects of the poem, representing the conceptual and psychological aspects of leviathan, while the bass trombonist represents the physical and mythical manifestation of the beast. The 8-channel tape consists of three musical layers: a continuously transforming sonic "seascape", suggesting the "wastes gray-green crashing" described by Merwin; the spoken voice, presenting the poem in its entirety (and including additional references to the Biblical creature drawn from Job 41, Psalms 104:26, and Isaiah 27:1 in Episode 3); and a variety of processed nautical sounds (crossed with bass trombone and voice samples), creating a sonic link between myth and reality.

Leviathan was supported in part by a faculty research grant from the University of North Texas, and is dedicated to Joseph Hopkins and William Bootz. The pre-recorded audio tape part was realized at the UNT Center for Experimental Music and Intermedia, with the assistance of Morris Martin, Ed Baird, William Bootz, and Chris Gassler (audio sound sources), and Steve Willis (recording engineer). The video tape parts were rendered and edited by Jon L. Henry, under the supervision of the composer. The work was first performed by baritone Jeffrey Snider and bass trombonist William Bootz on November 9, 1998 at the University of North Texas.

Leviathan

This is the black sea-brute bulling through wave-wrack, Ancient as ocean's shifting hills, who in sea-toils Travelling, who furrows the salt acres Heavily, his wake hoary behind him, Shoulders spouting, the fist of his forehead Over wastes gray-green crashing, among horses unbroken From bellowing fields, past bone-wreck of vessels, Tide-ruin, wash of lost bodies bobbing No longer sought for, and islands of ice gleaming, Who ravening the rank flood, wave-marshalling, Overmastering the dark sea-marches, finds home And harvest. Frightening to foolhardiest Mariners, his size were difficult to describe: The hulk of him is like hills heaving, Dark, yet as crags of drift-ice, crowns cracking in thunder, Like land's self by night black-looming, surf churning and trailing Along his shores' rushing, shoal-water boding, About the dark of his jaws; and who should moor at his edge And fare on afoot would find gates of no gardens, But the hill of dark underfoot diving, Closing overhead, the cold deep, and drowning. He is called Leviathan, and named for rolling, First created he was of all creatures, He has held Jonah three days and nights, He is that curling serpent that in ocean is,

Sea-fright he is, and the shadow under the earth.
Days there are, nonetheless, when he lies
Like an angel, although a lost angel
On the waste's unease, no eye of man moving,
Bird hovering, fish flashing, creature whatever
Who after him came to herit earth's emptiness.
Froth at flanks seething soothes to stillness,
Waits; with one eye he watches
Dark of night sinking last, with one eye dayrise
As at first over foaming pastures. He makes no cry
Though that light is a breath. The sea curling,
Star-climbed, wind-combed, cumbered with itself still
As at first it was, is the hand not yet contented
Of the Creator. And he waits for the world to begin.

- W.S. Merwin

Psalms 104:26:

There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.

Isaiah 27:1:

In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan, that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

from Job 41:

Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an hook? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down? Canst thou put an hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn?

Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish spears?

Behold, the hope of him is in vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him? None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?

I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportion.

Who can open the doors of his face? his teeth are terrible round about.

Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out. Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a seething pot or cauldron. His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth out of his mouth.

When he raiseth up himself, the mighty are afraid. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood.

He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment.

Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear.

"Leviathan," from Green With Beasts. Copyright ©1955, 1956 by W.S. Merwin. Reproduced by permission of Georges Borchardt Inc. for the author

Performance Notes

The work is to begin in complete darkness. If there is a stage curtain, performers should be in position before the curtain is drawn (after the hall has gone dark); otherwise, the entrance of the performers should be as unobtrusive as possible. Eventually, lighting is slowly faded on (as indicated in the score), at first by music stand lights, later by flood lights mounted from the ceiling; all of these lights are to be fitted with blue-green gels and must remain at a fairly low setting throughout, thus giving the performers an eerie glow with heavy shadows. In Episode 3, a tight white spot light of significantly greater intensity is projected on the baritone as he steps forward from his original position. A fog machine may be used to produce a 6- to 10-inch layer of fog over the entire stage floor; if this effect is utilized, the fog must be evenly dispersed and continuous throughout the performance of the work.

Performers must wear black clothing: the vocalist (V) is to stand at stage right of center, facing inward at approximately 60 degrees. The bass trombonist (T) is to be seated on a black chair at stage left at least twelve feet away and even with the vocalist, facing inward at approximately 60 degrees. Both the vocalist and bass trombonist are to be amplified and processed throughout: the voice is to be projected through speaker 7; the bass trombonist is to be projected through speaker 1. The technical assistant (A) controls the intermedia "environment" from the center of the hall. In order to maintain the appropriate atmosphere, it is suggested that the technical assistant also use a blue-green gel on any necessary lighting. (See page iii for setup diagram.)

Effects processor settings:

Setting A: reverb (c. 3", large hall)

Setting B: reverb (c. 1", medium hall)

Setting C: reverb (c. 2", medium hall)

Setting D: reverb (c. 3", medium hall)

pitch bend (descending, approx. 2 semitones per second)

The intermedia "environment" requires the following equipment:

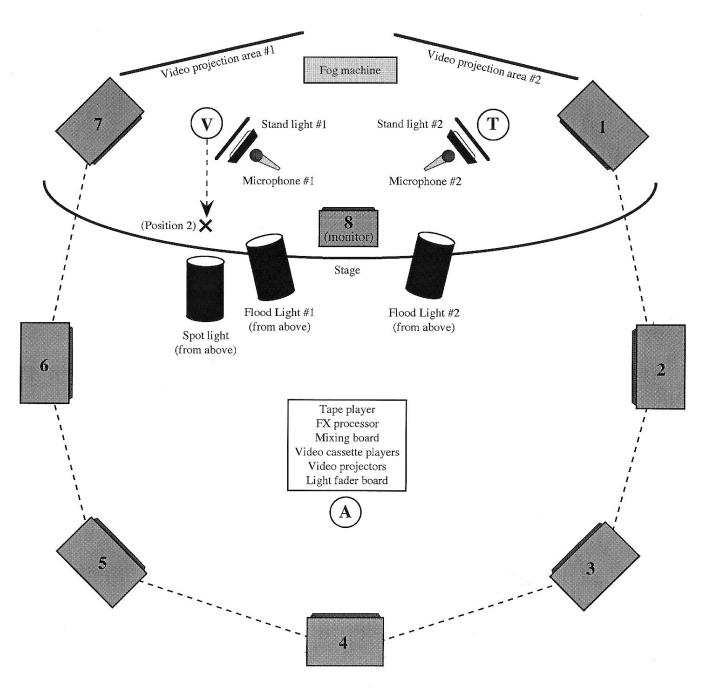
- Tape deck: ADAT for 8-channel capability; under less adequate circumstances, an optional 4-channel mix is available on ADAT tape, or a 2-channel mix of the recorded sounds may be played from DAT or CD;
- FX processor: multi-channel capability is required (e.g., one Ensoniq DP-4, or two Yamaha SPX-1000s);-
- Mixing board;
- VHS video cassette players (2);
- Video projectors (2);
- Music stand lights with blue-green gels (2);
- Flood lights with blue-green gels, ceiling-mounted (2);
- Spot light (white), ceiling-mounted (1);
- Light fader board
- Monitor speaker
- Fog machine (optional)

The pre-recorded sounds on tape consist of three elements, the first of which is a continuously transforming "seascape", which is heard throughout the work. The second recorded element is a recitation of the Merwin poem, which provides the impetus for the musical materials. The third element consists of processed nautical sounds (e.g., bells, horns, seagulls, waves), which are crossed with samples from the male voice and bass trombone; this element functions as a bridge between the live performers and the environment. The video projections consist of processed images which fade in and out during the course of the piece, creating the illusion of a spectre. The projections must be subtle and unobtrusive, rather than prominent and clearly defined; this effect is best achieved by projecting the images on dark curtains or stage walls, and not on flat white surfaces such as projection screens. In performance, these various elements should converge to create a unified aural and visual atmosphere, evoking the essence of Merwin's poem.

The 11-minute work is divided into five episodes, which are presented as part of a continuum rather than as distinct, contrasting sections. These episodes are distinguished primarily by shifting relationships between the performers and transformations in the environment, reflecting the changing perspectives presented in the poem. In Episode 1, the voice and bass trombone initially play in alternation, with the voice becoming gradually more prominent. In Episode 2, the two performers interact contrapuntally on equal terms, while in Episode 3, the lyrical bass trombone solo is set in sharp contrast to the dramatic vocal declamation. (It is recommended that the vocalist memorize his part in Episode 3, so as not to diminish the dramatic impact.) In Episode 4, the textural bass trombonist accompaniment recedes into the environment while the vocalist explores text fragments at his registral extremes. Episode 5 returns to the relationship established in the opening episode.

Accidentals apply only to the notes they immediately precede, with the exception of repeated notes (including those across broken barlines). Timings and pre-recorded text cues are indicated in the score as a guide to the live performers; precise coordination with the tape part is not critical.

Setup diagram



- iii -

Symbols

attack/release unnoticeably clean break in sound 9 [eindgel] International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols portamento voice: sprechstimme; spoken/whispered trombone: sung pitch; voice: falsetto voice $\Diamond \blacklozenge$ gradual change from one sound to another rapid change from one sound to another continuous fluctuation (ad libitum) $p \Leftrightarrow 3$ durational continuum (spatial notation) accelerando ritardando senza tempo cues/synchronization of parts play material within brackets (ad libitum) for the duration of the wavy line; interjections

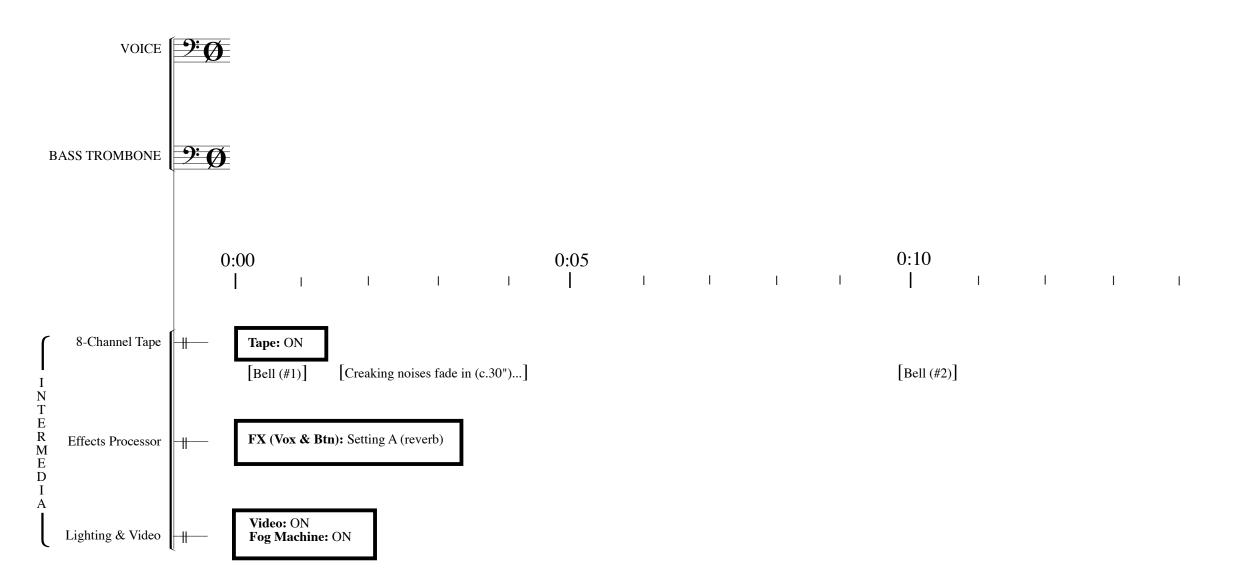
are indicated parenthetically.

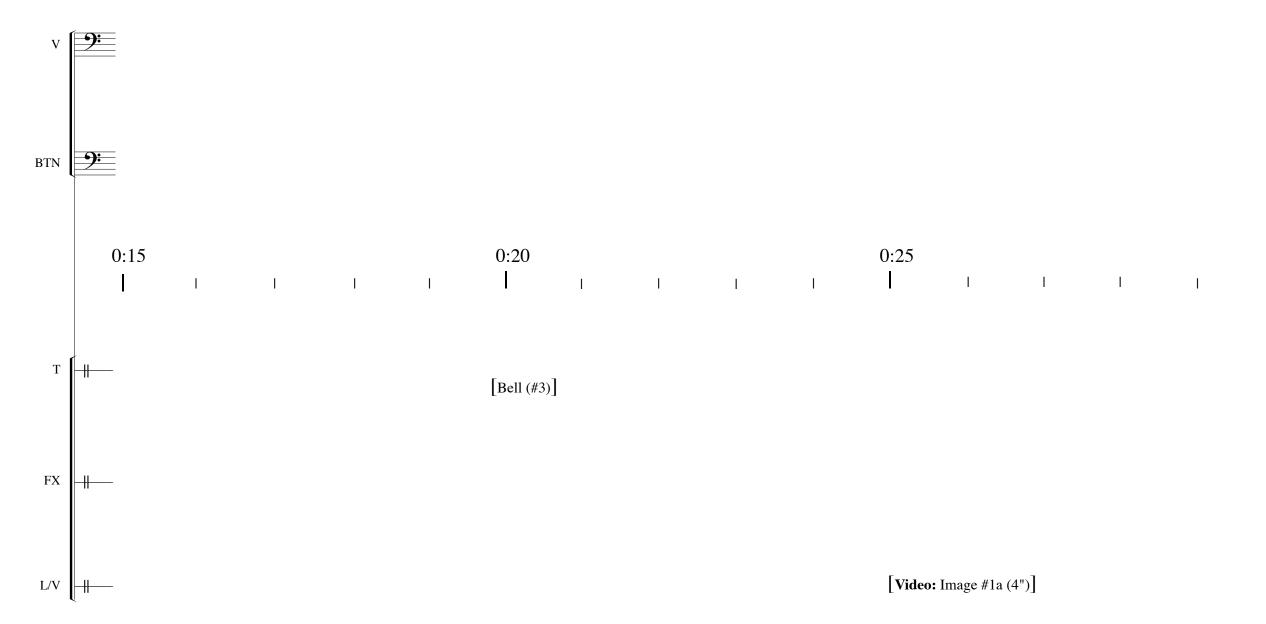


(after W.S. Merwin)

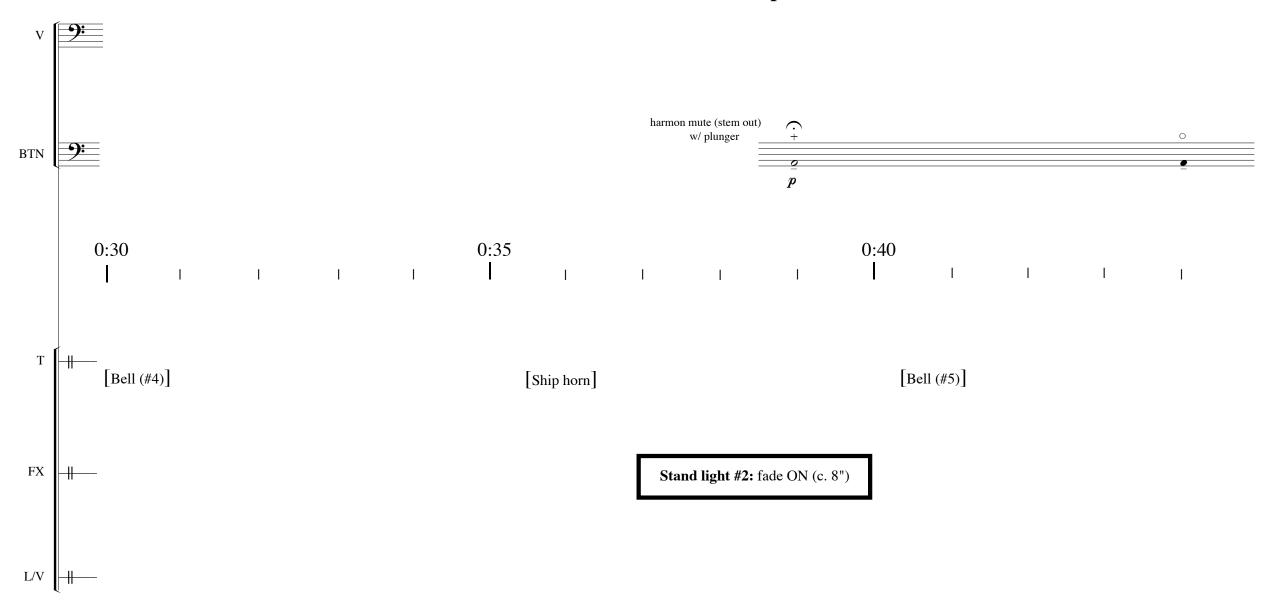
Joseph Klein (1998)

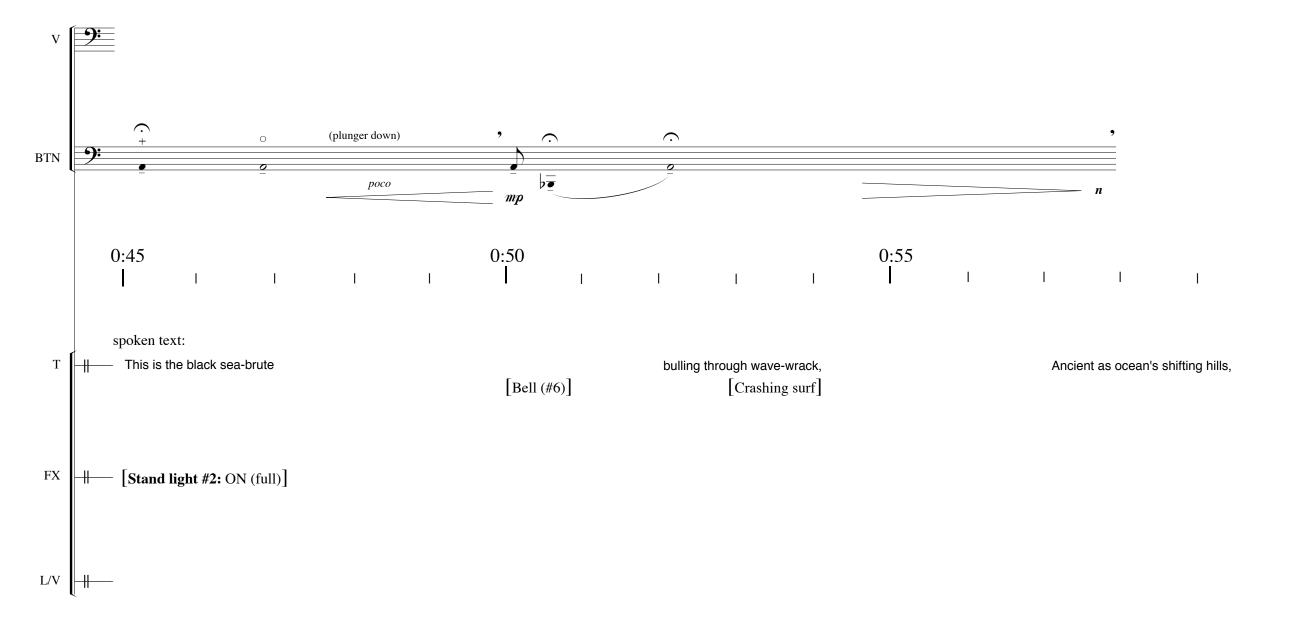
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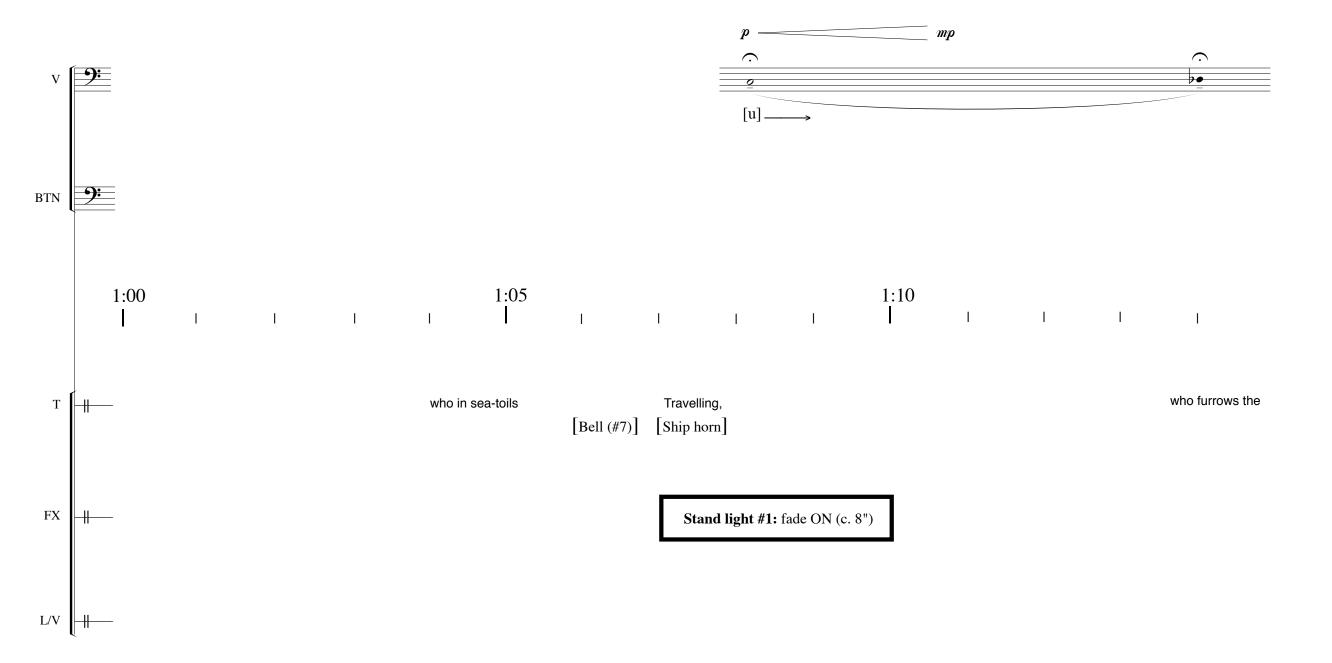


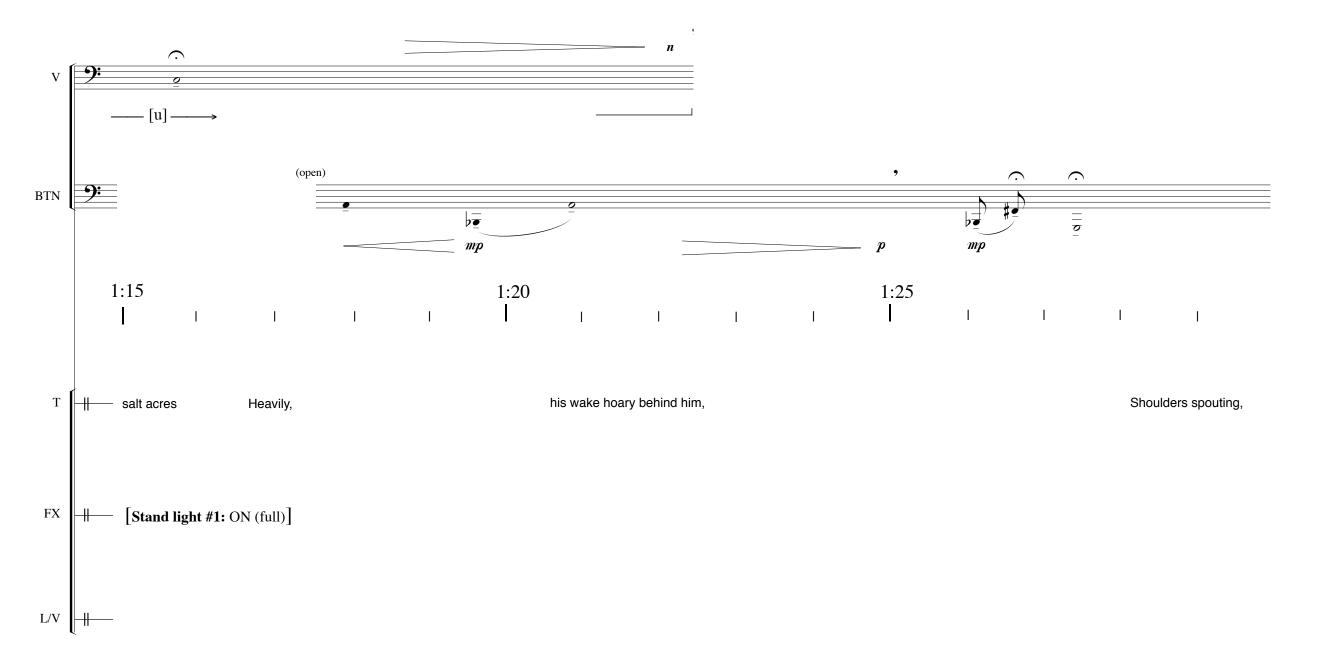


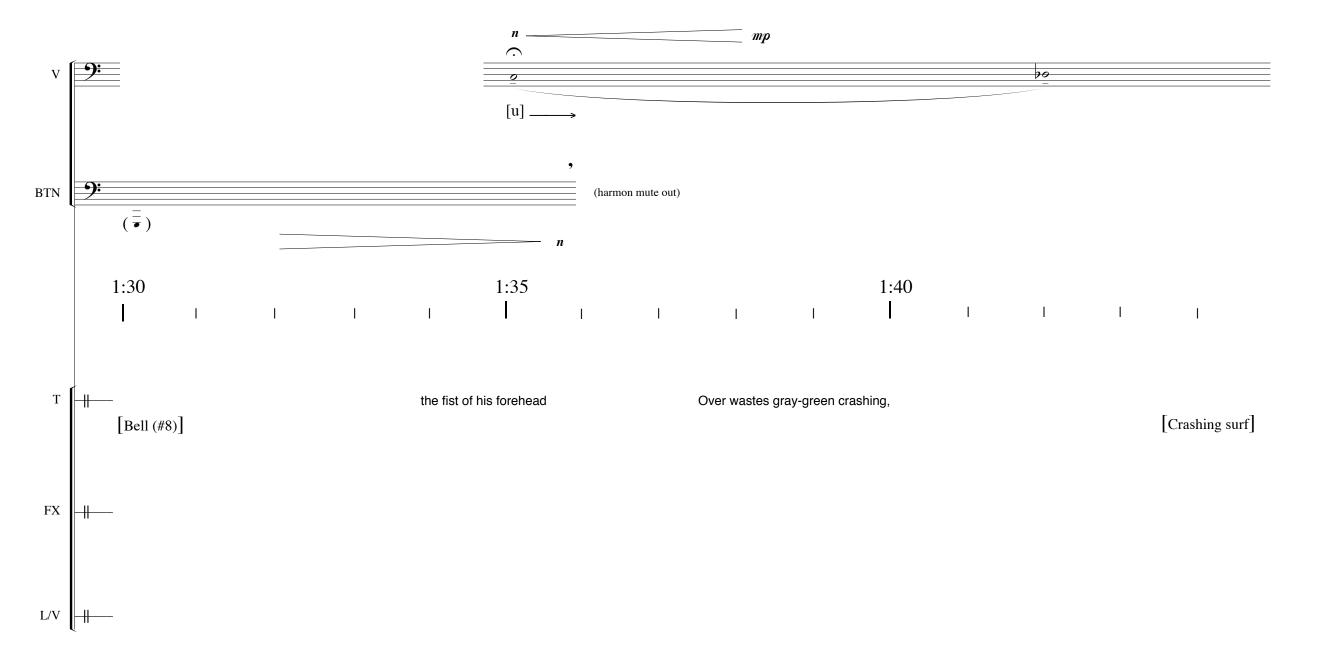
Episode 1

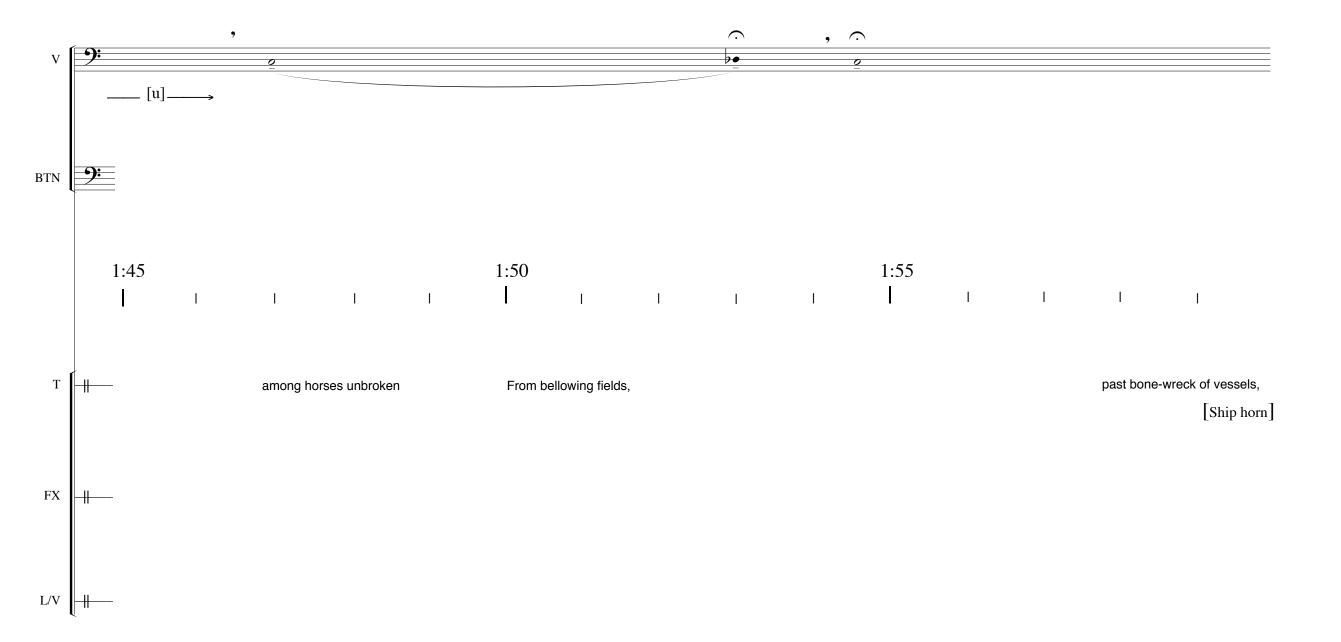


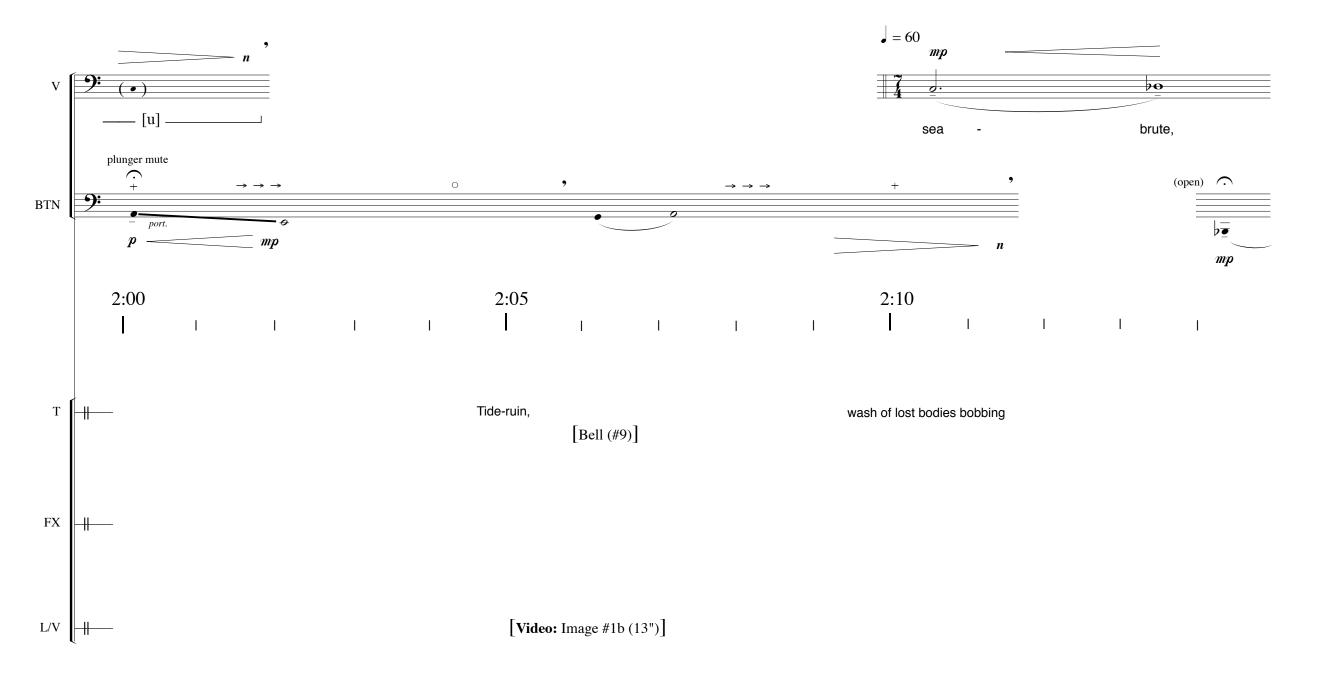


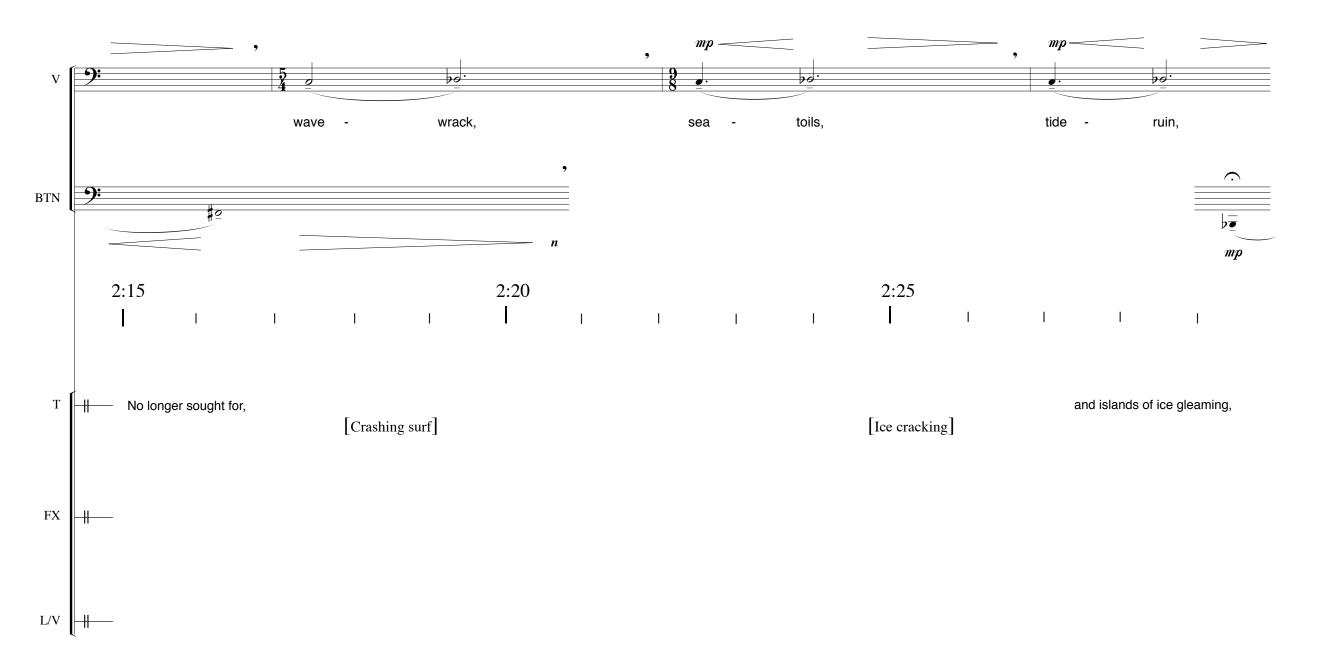


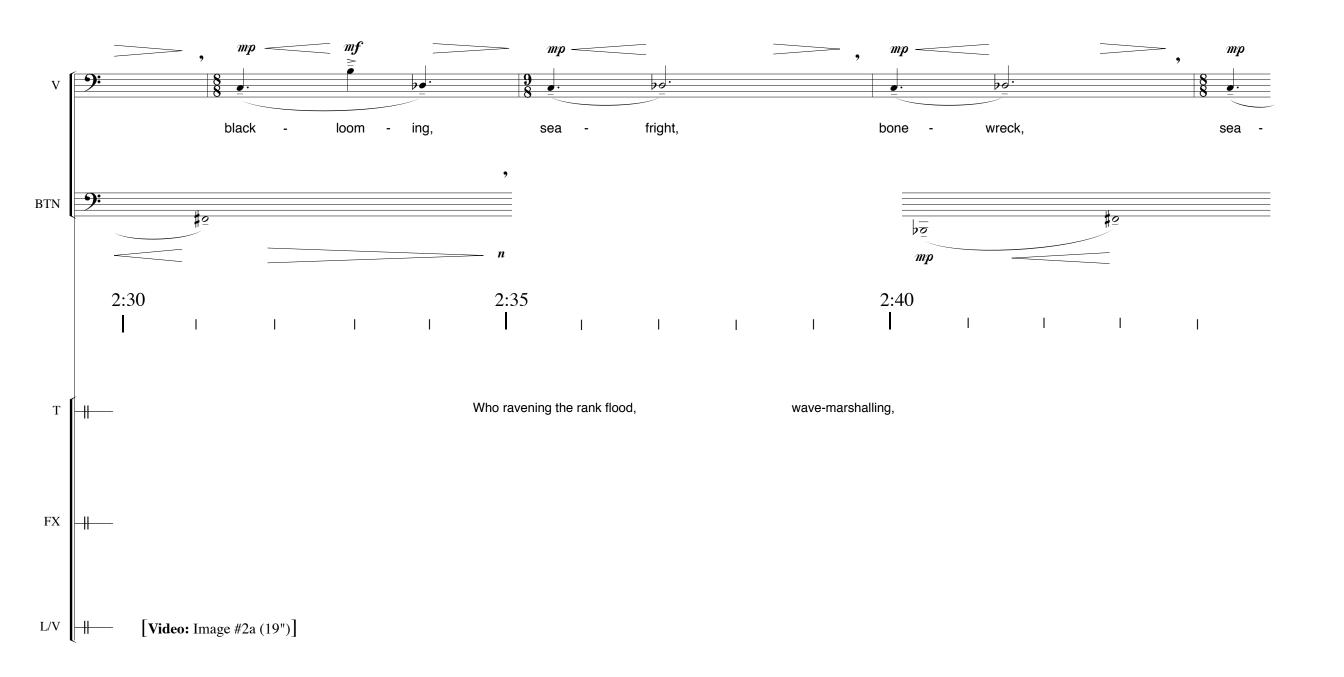


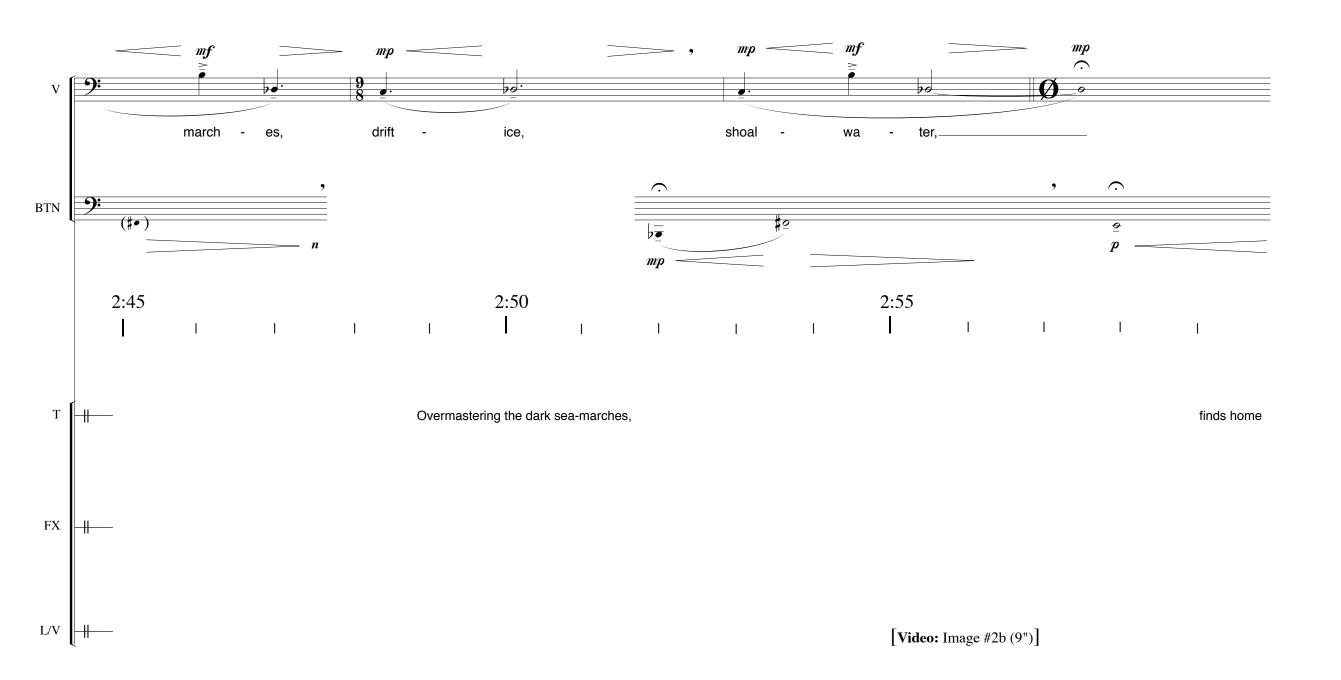


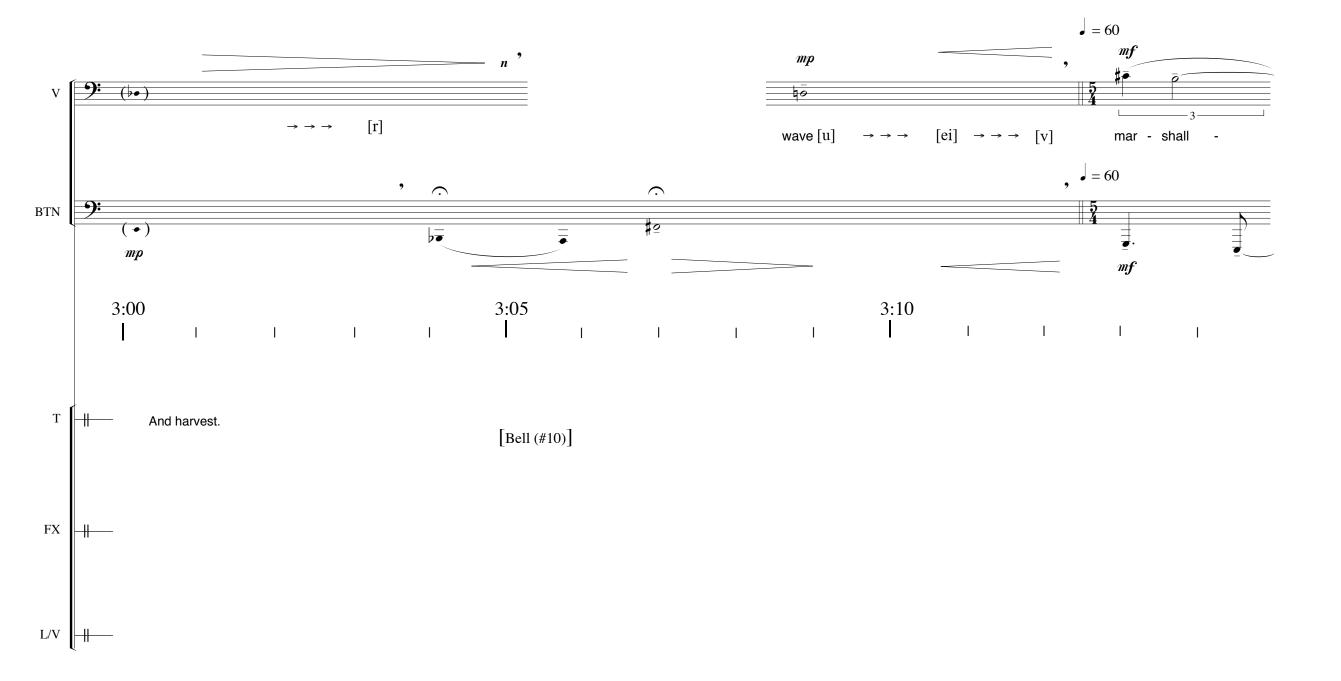


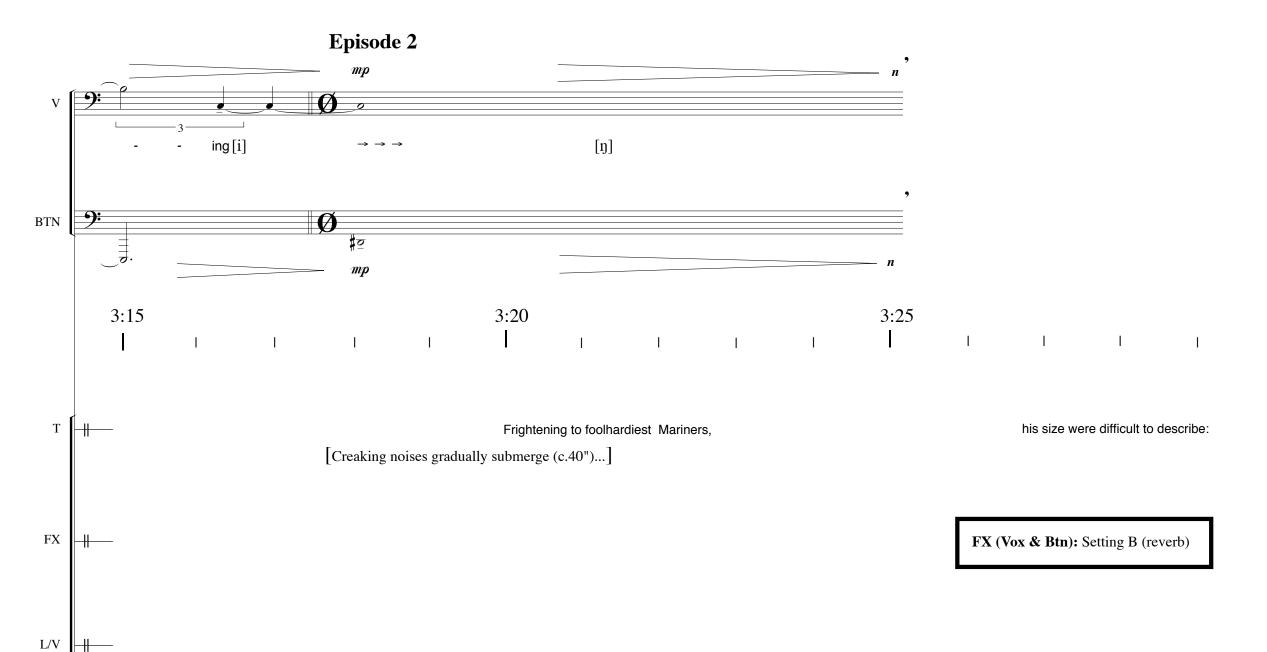


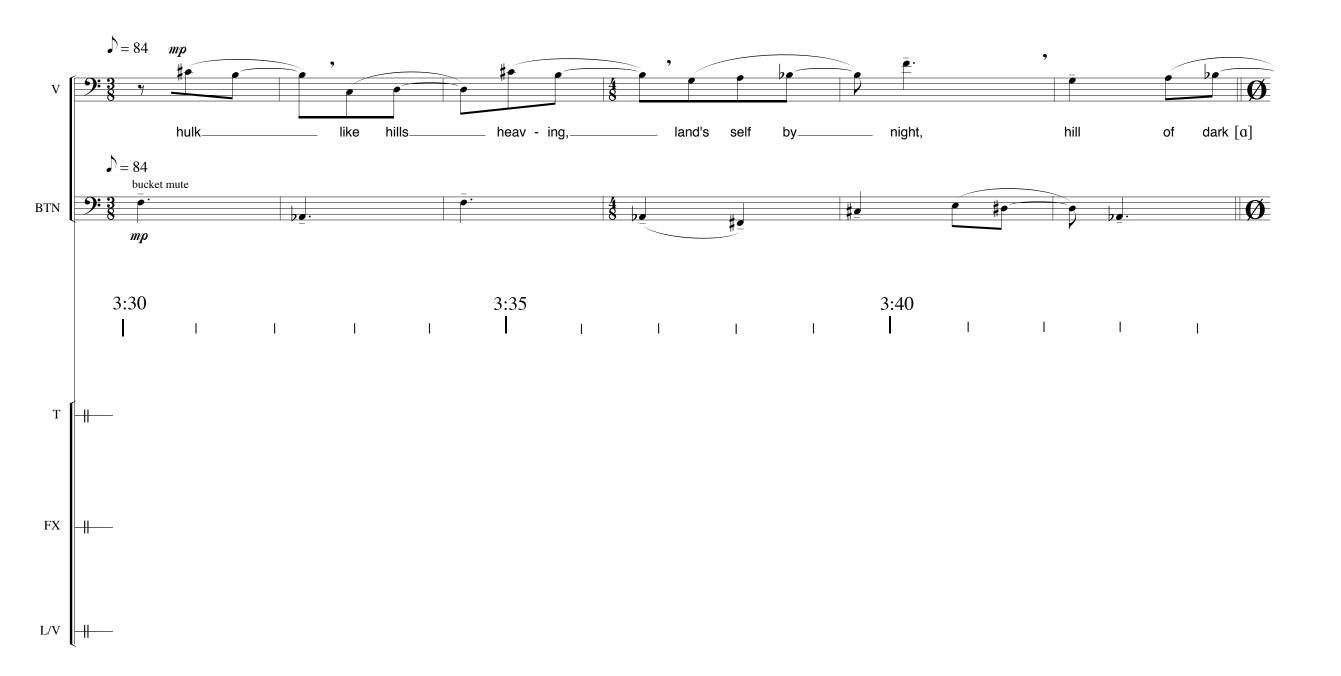


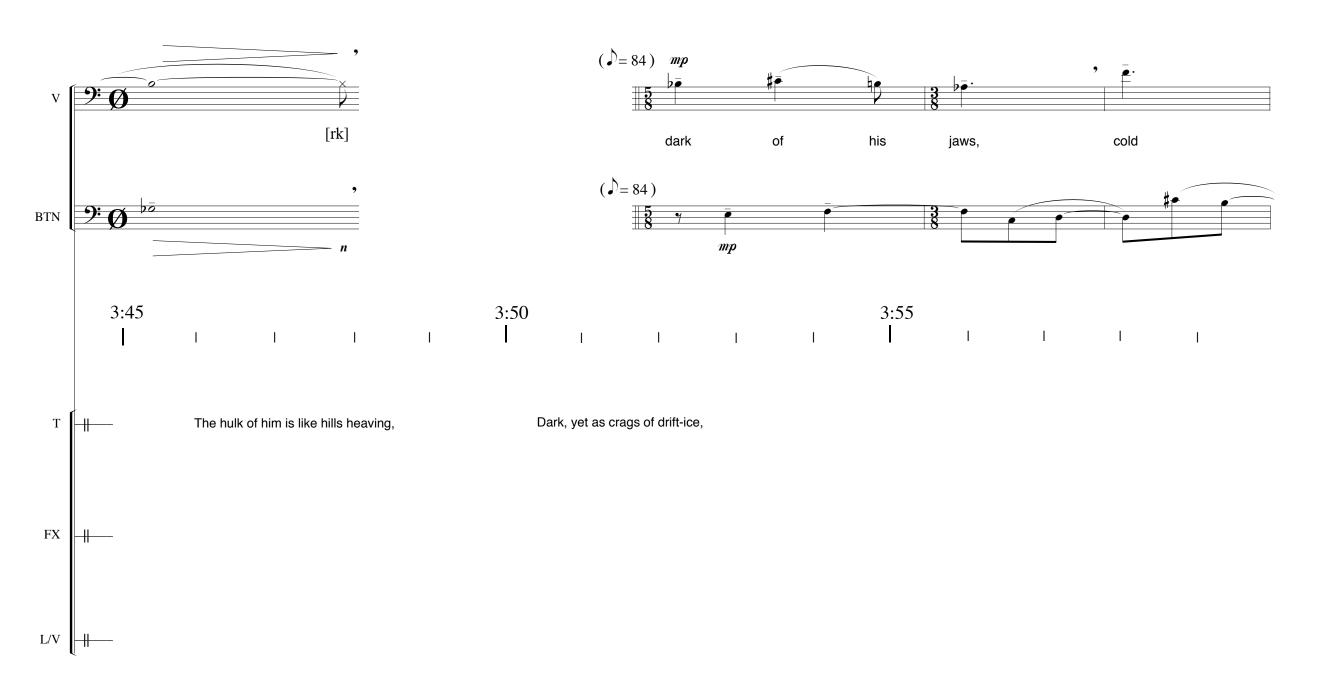


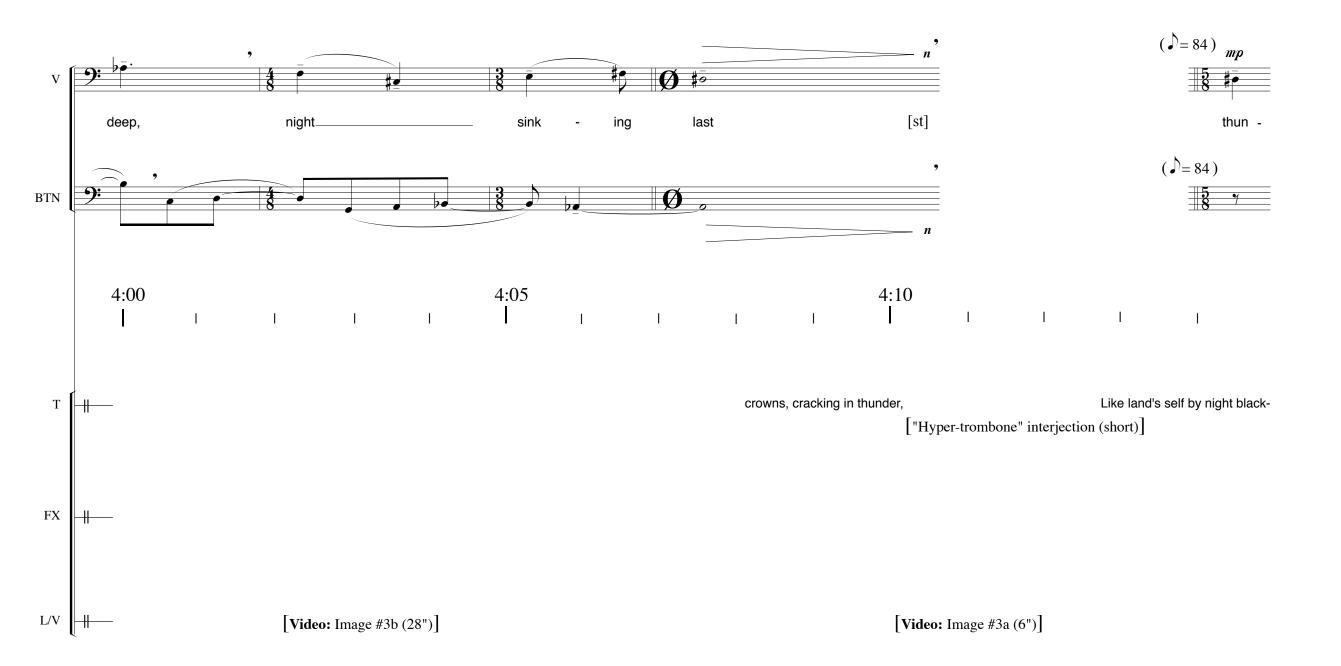


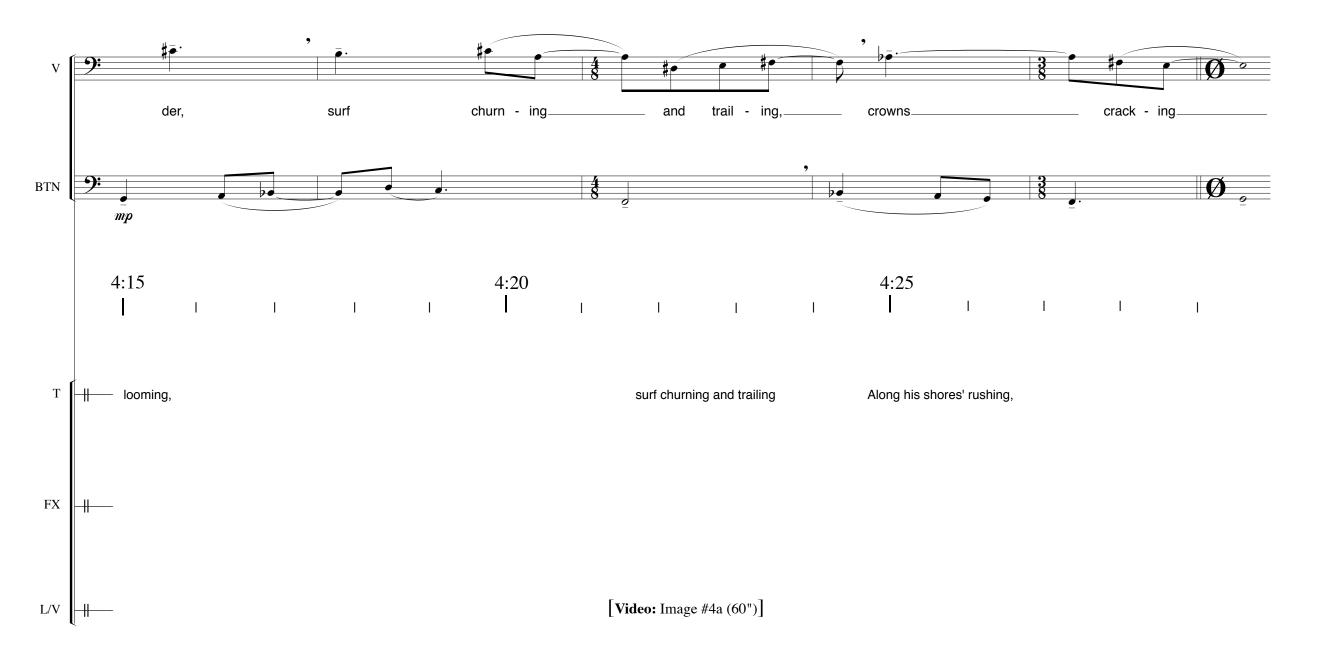


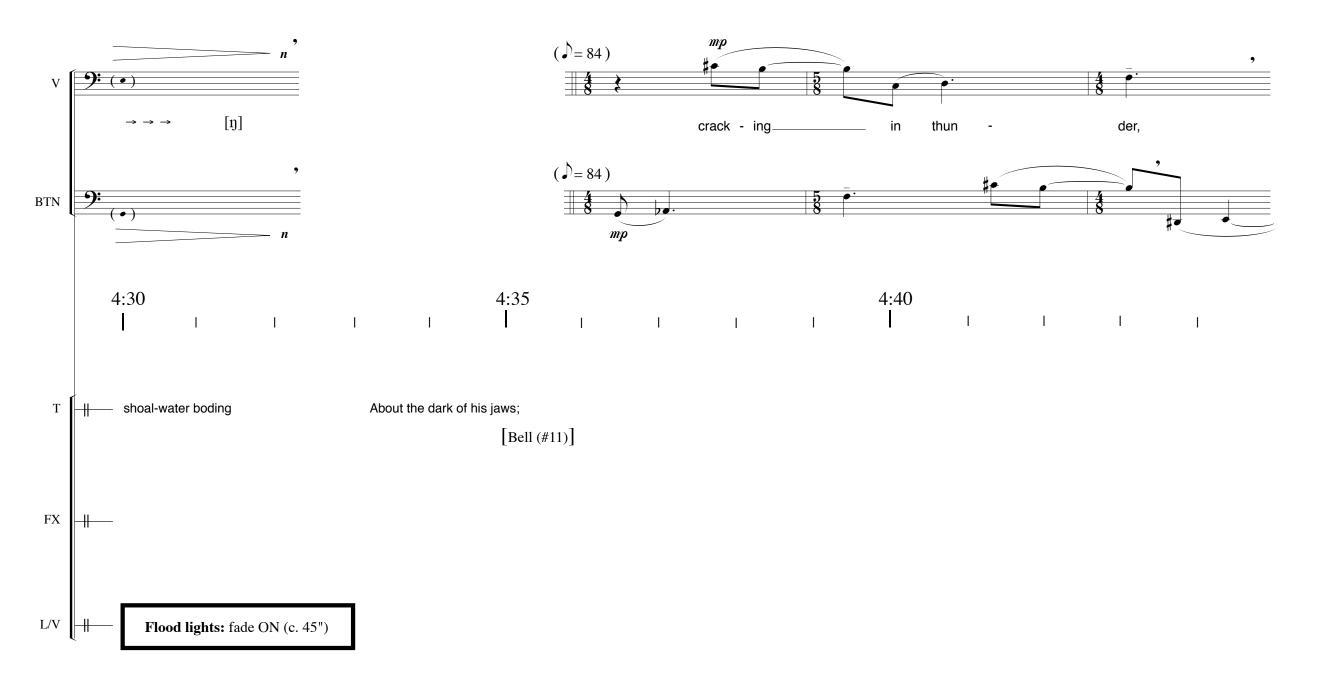


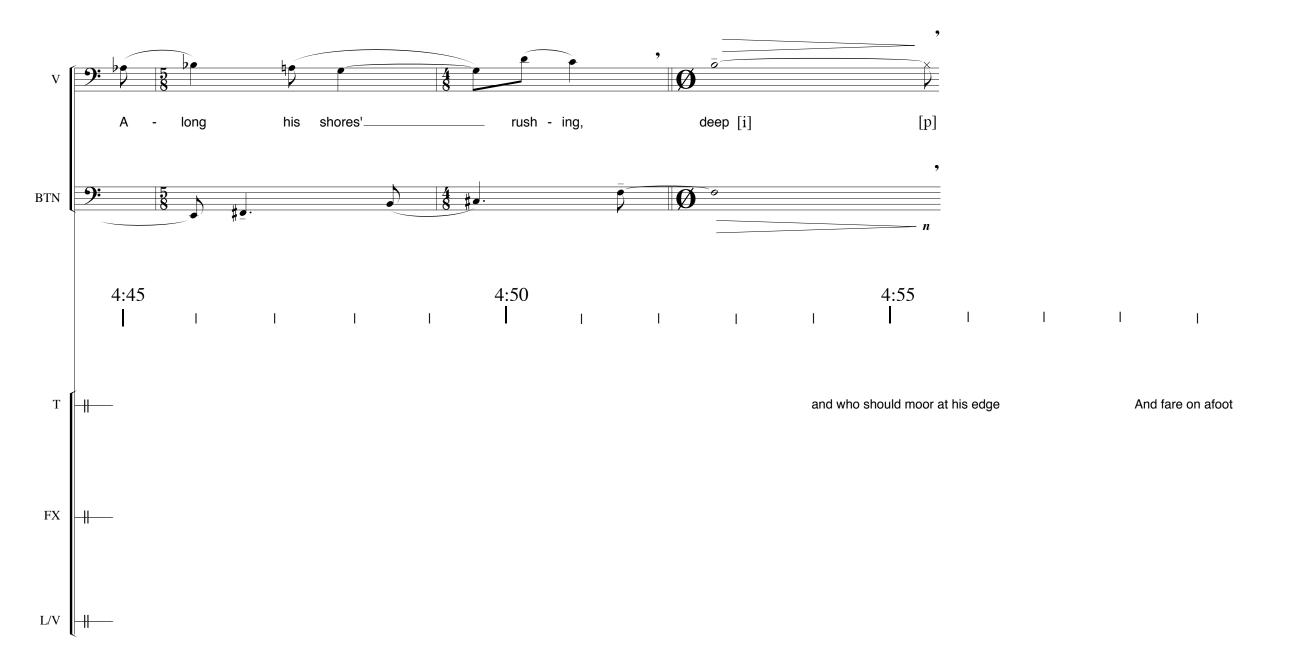


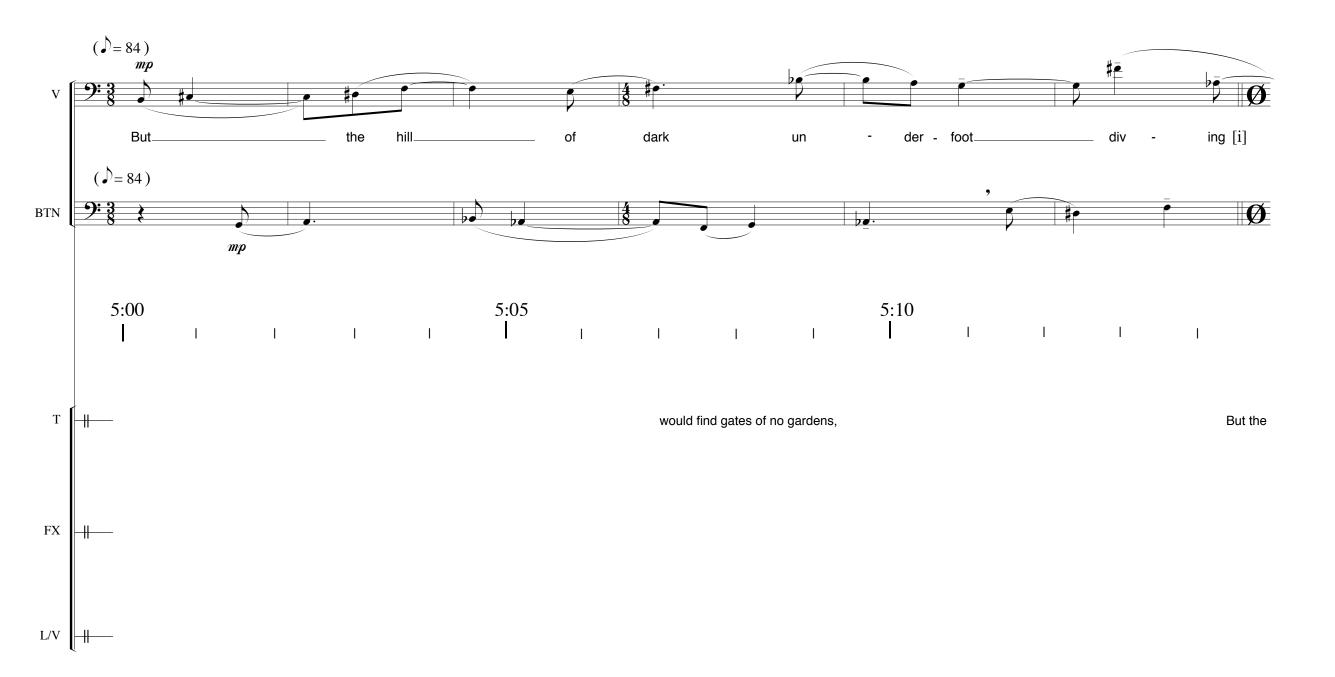


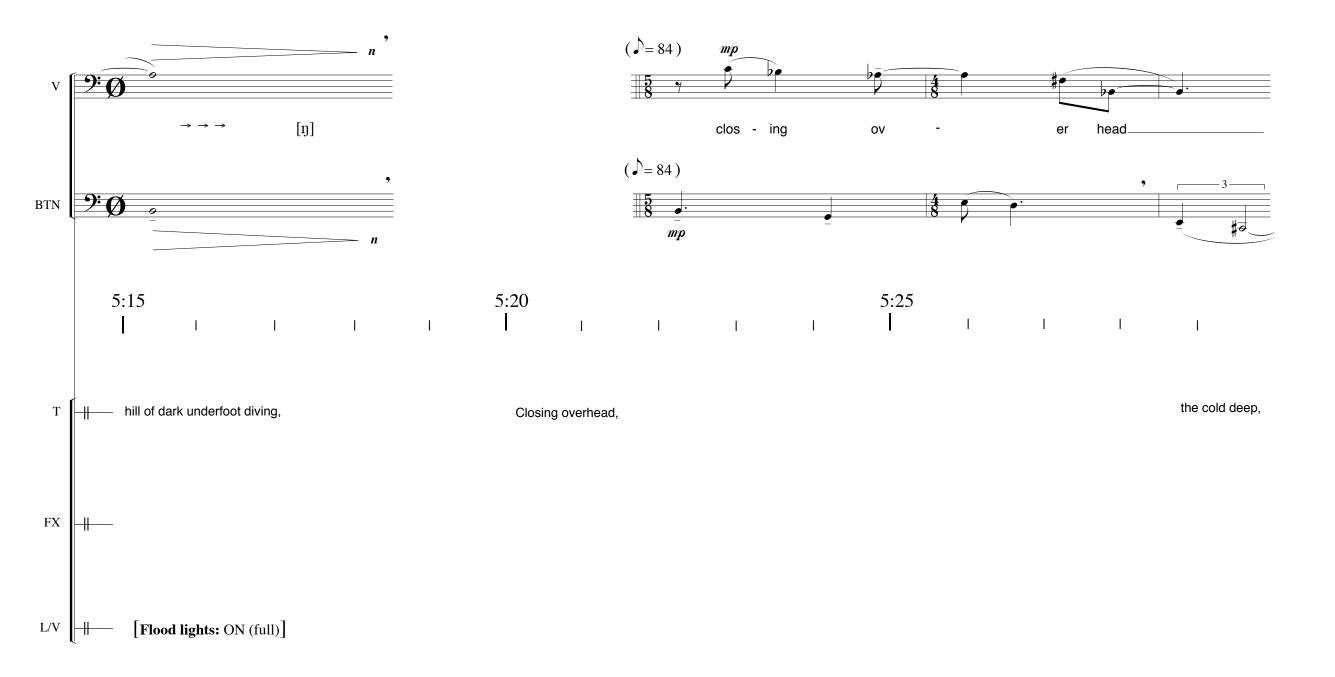


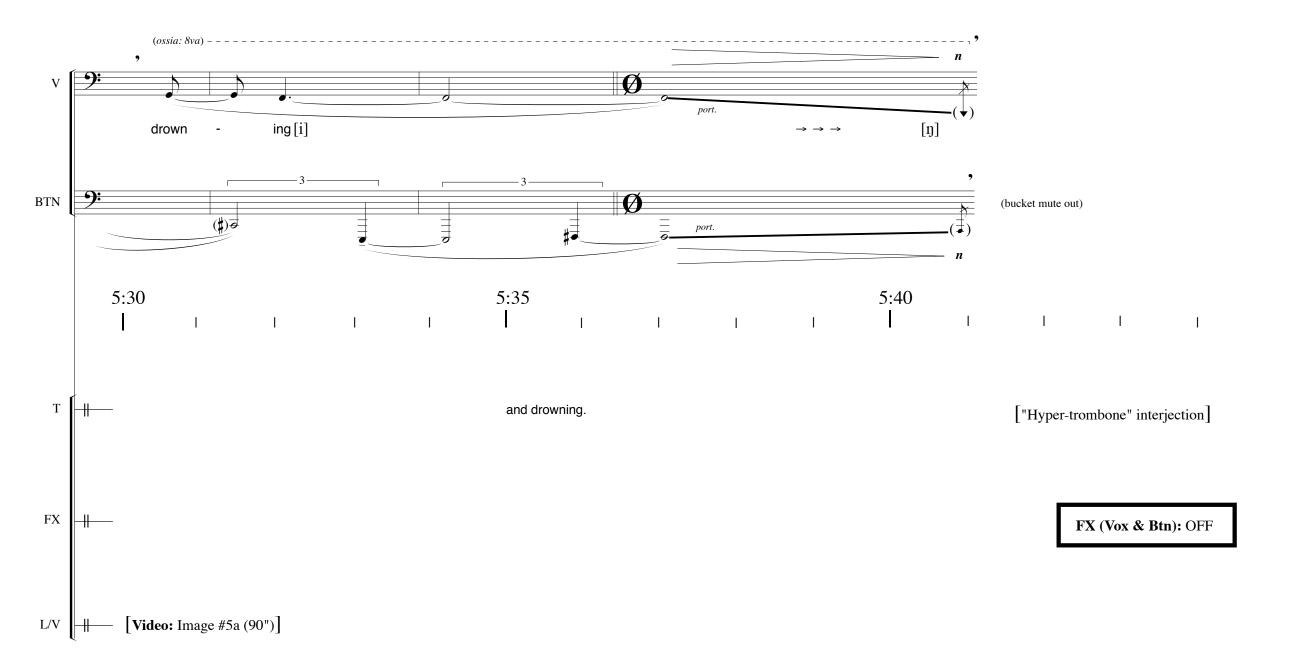


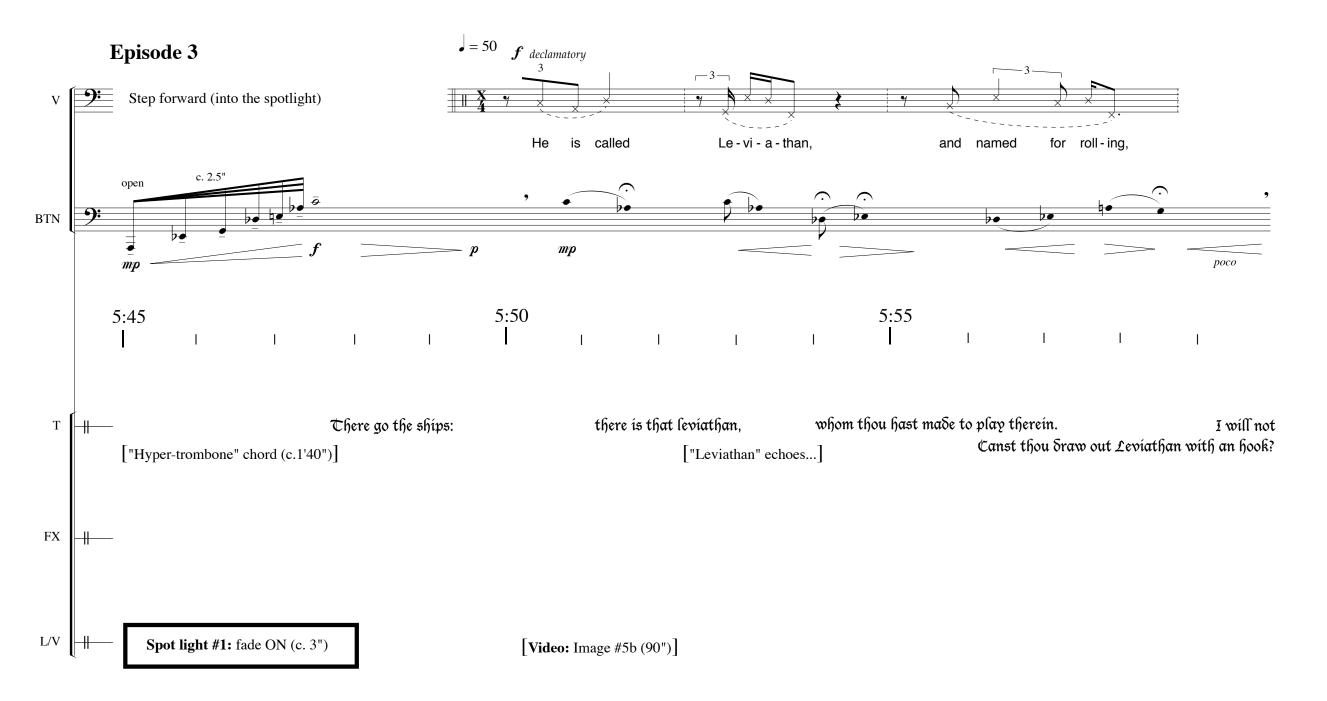


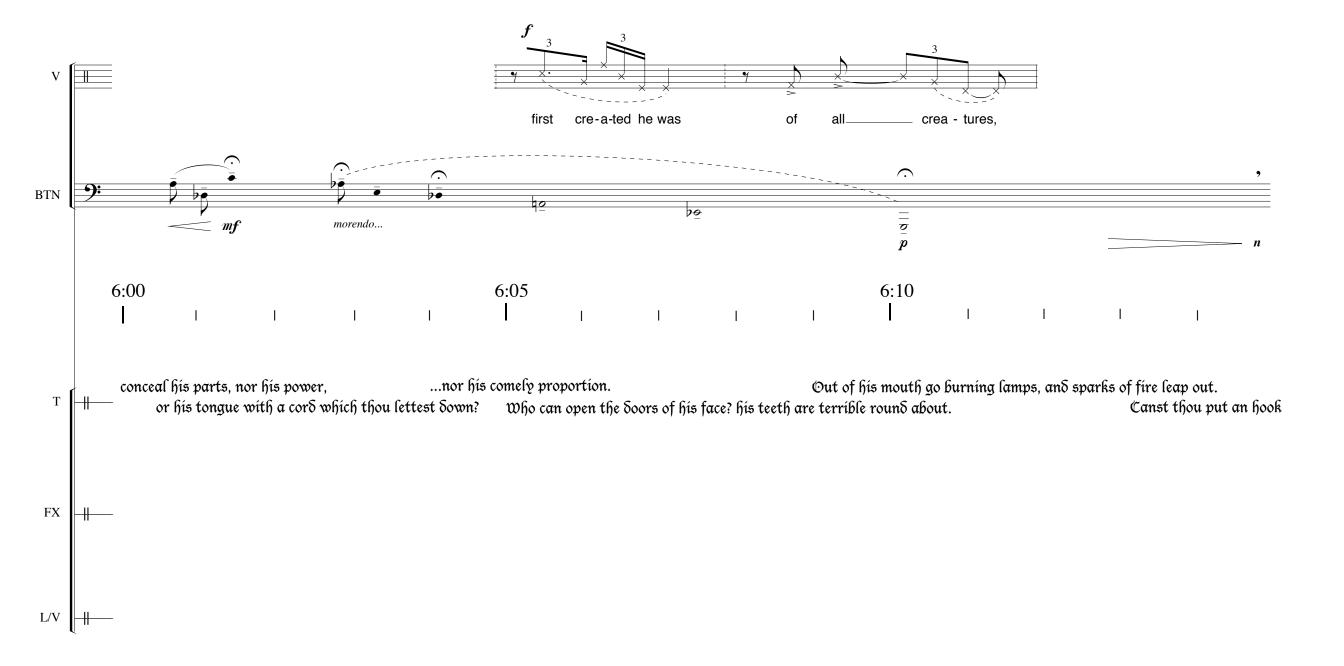


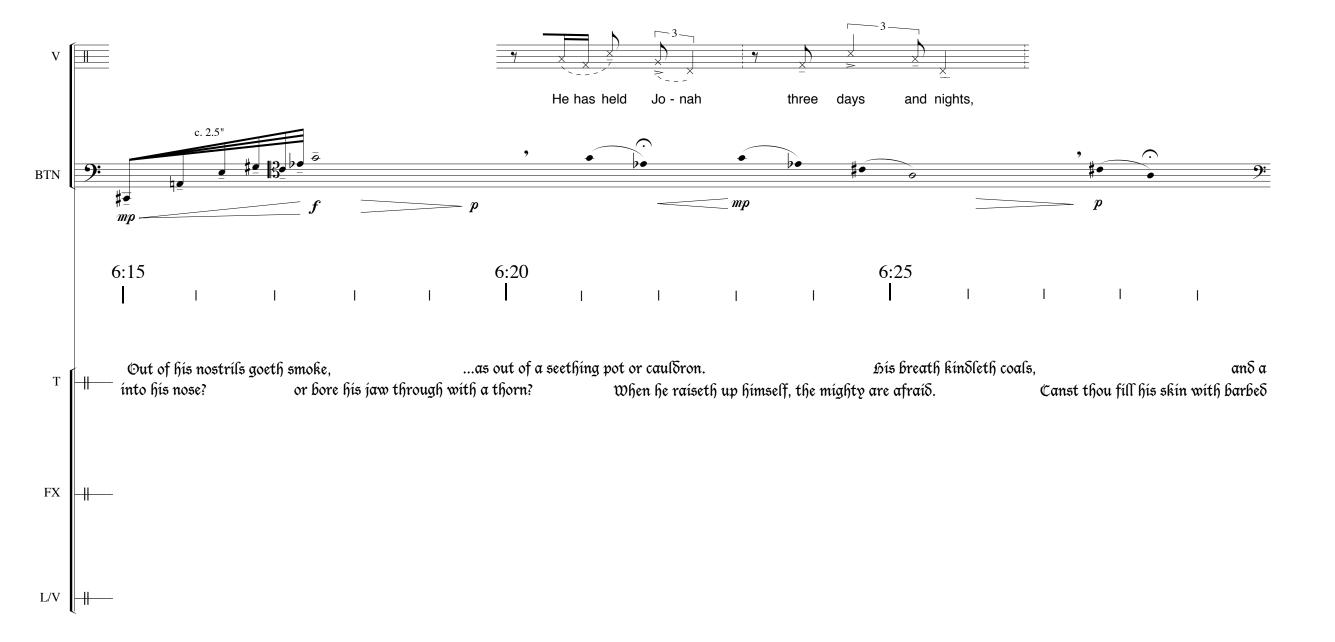


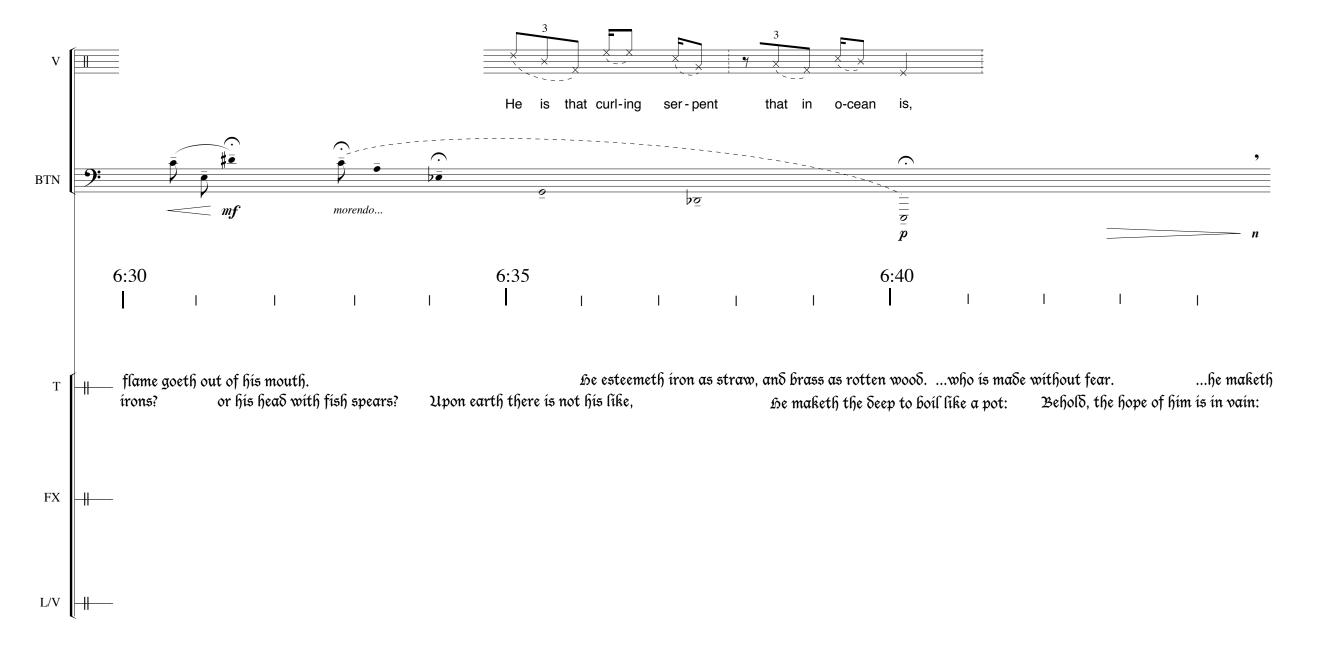


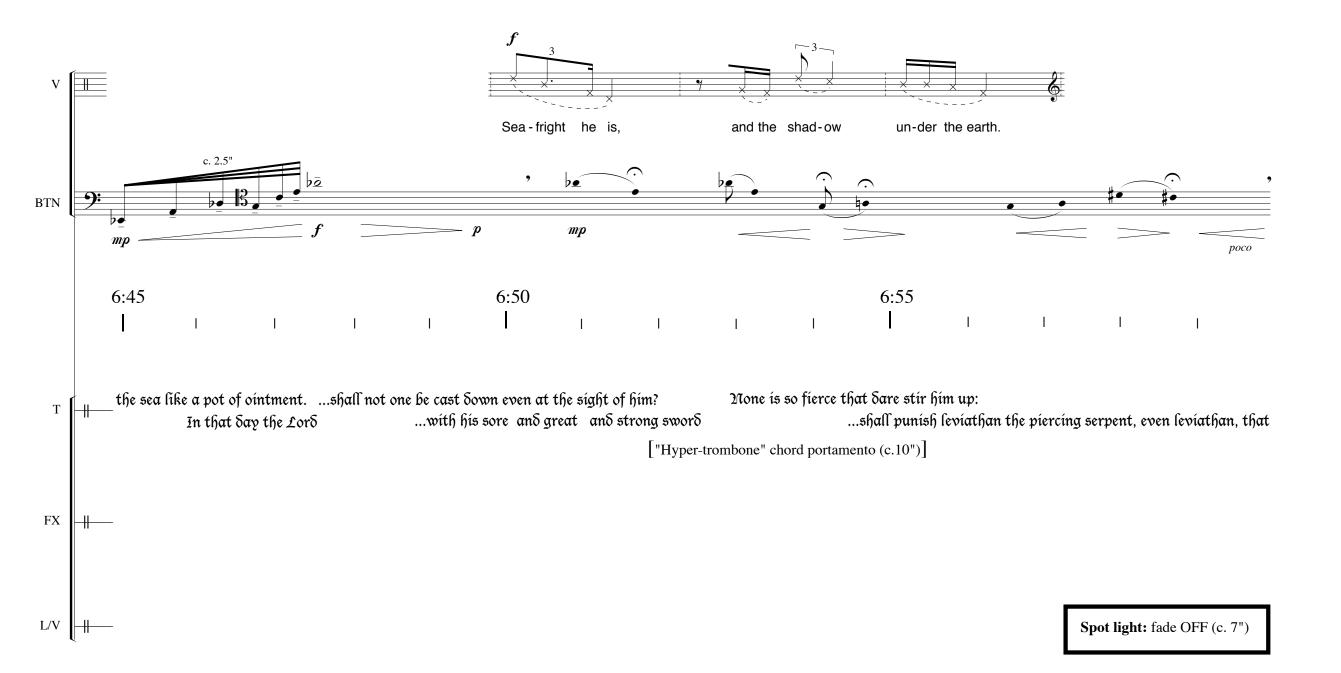


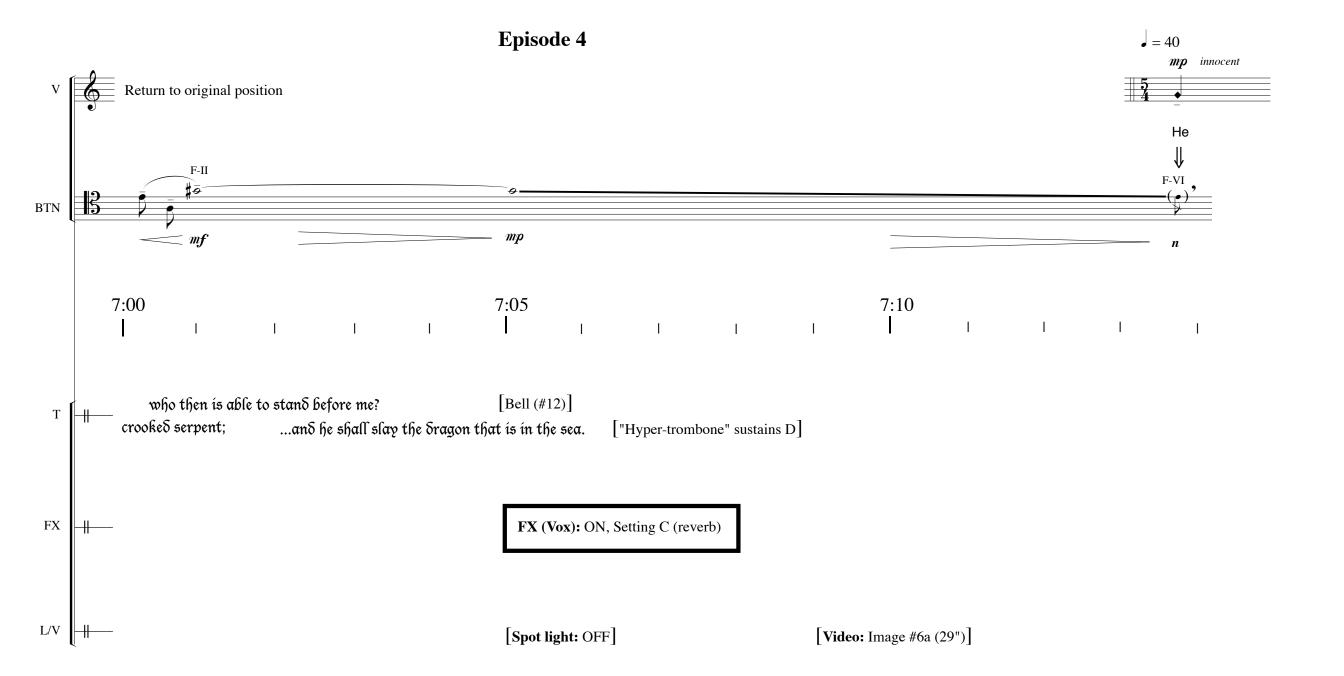


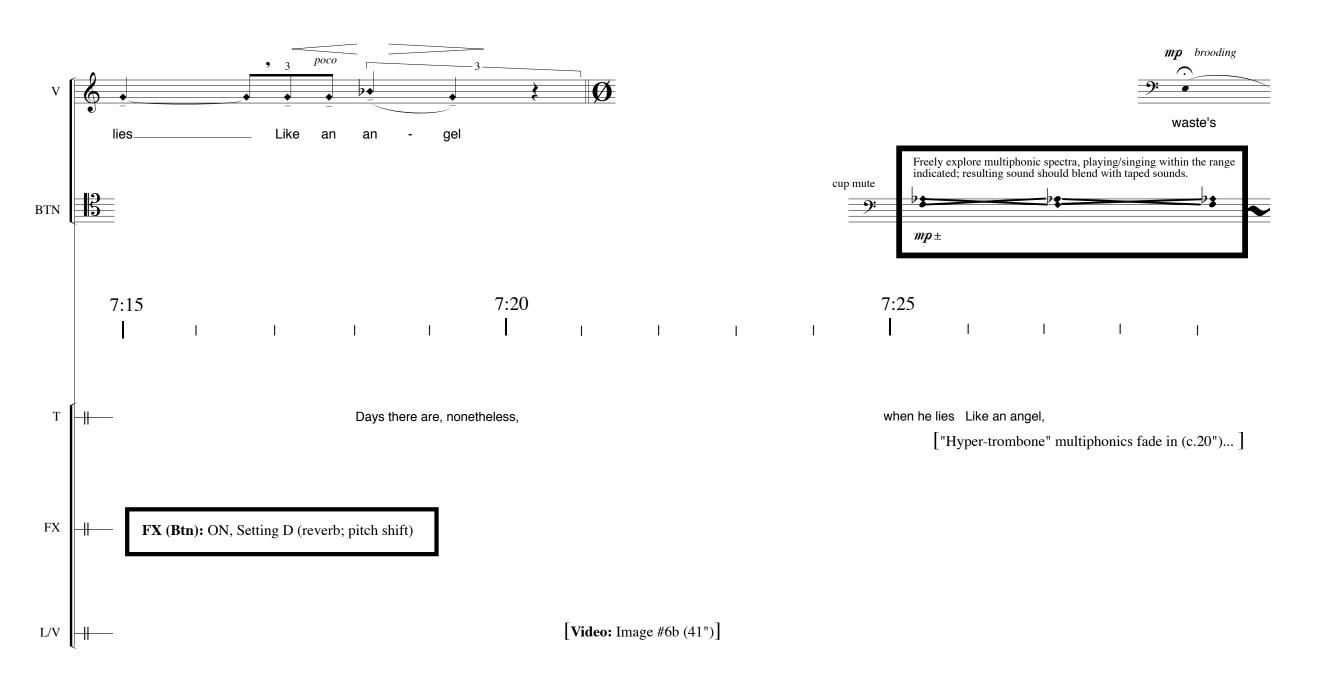


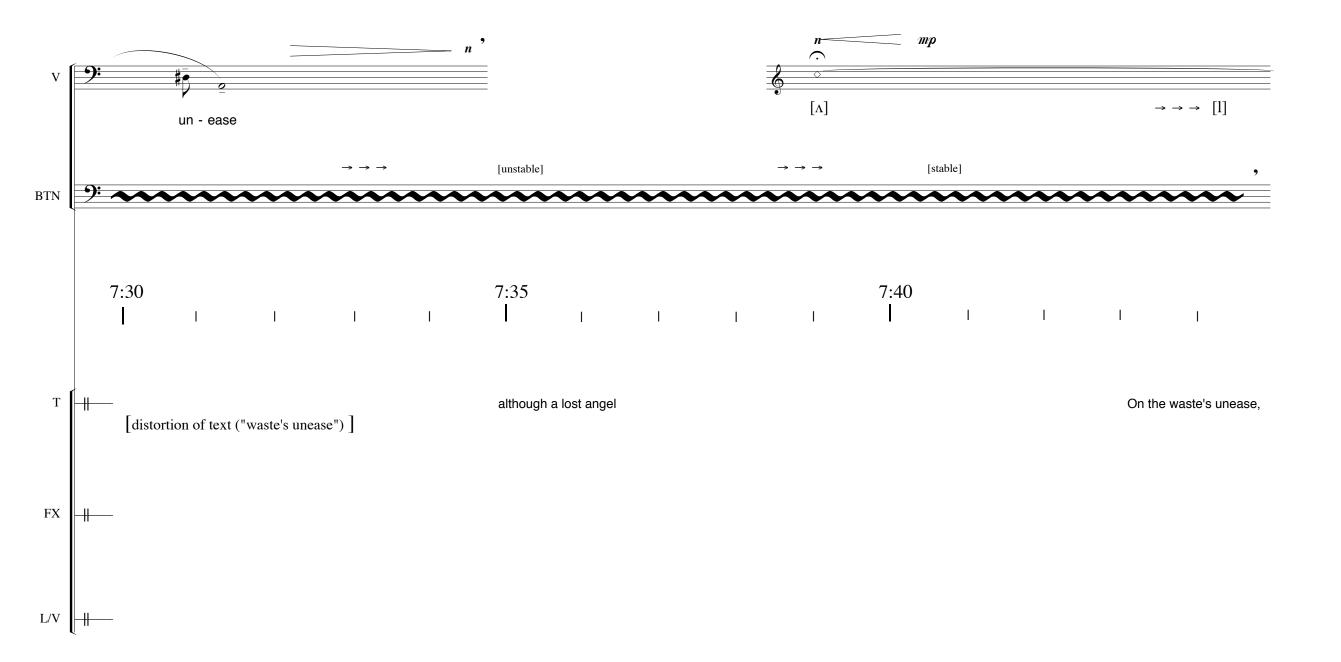


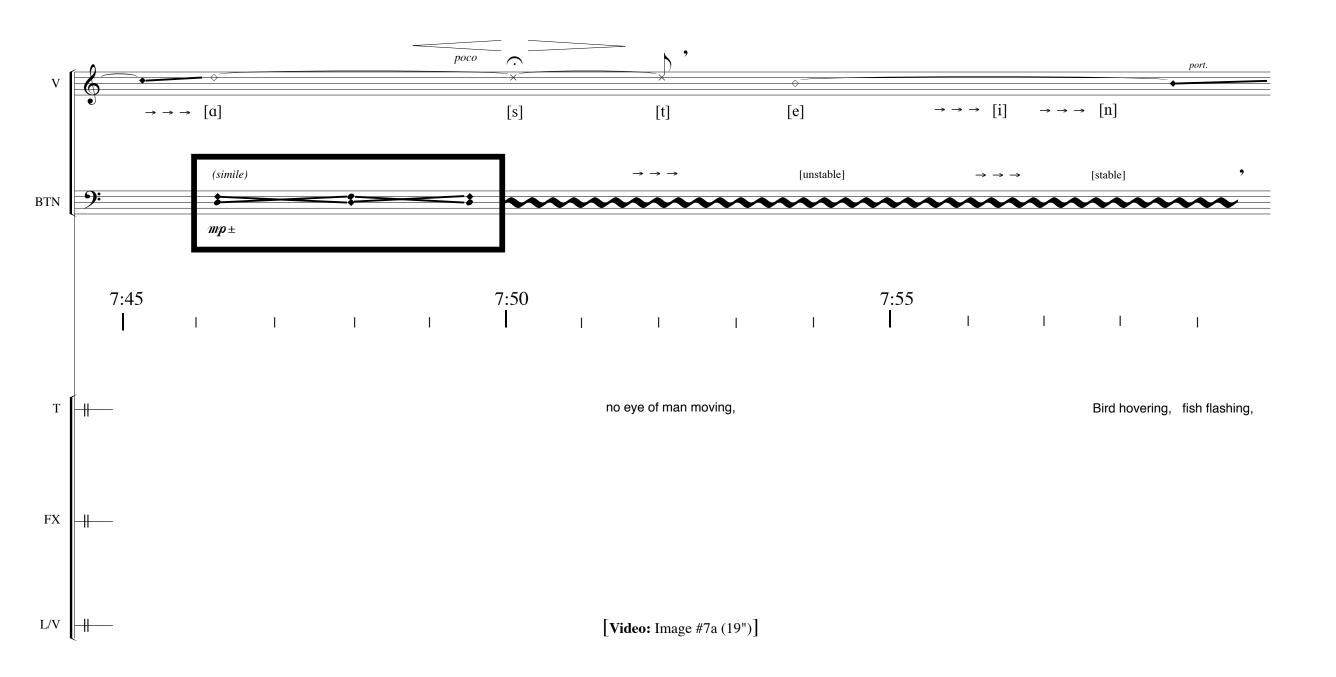


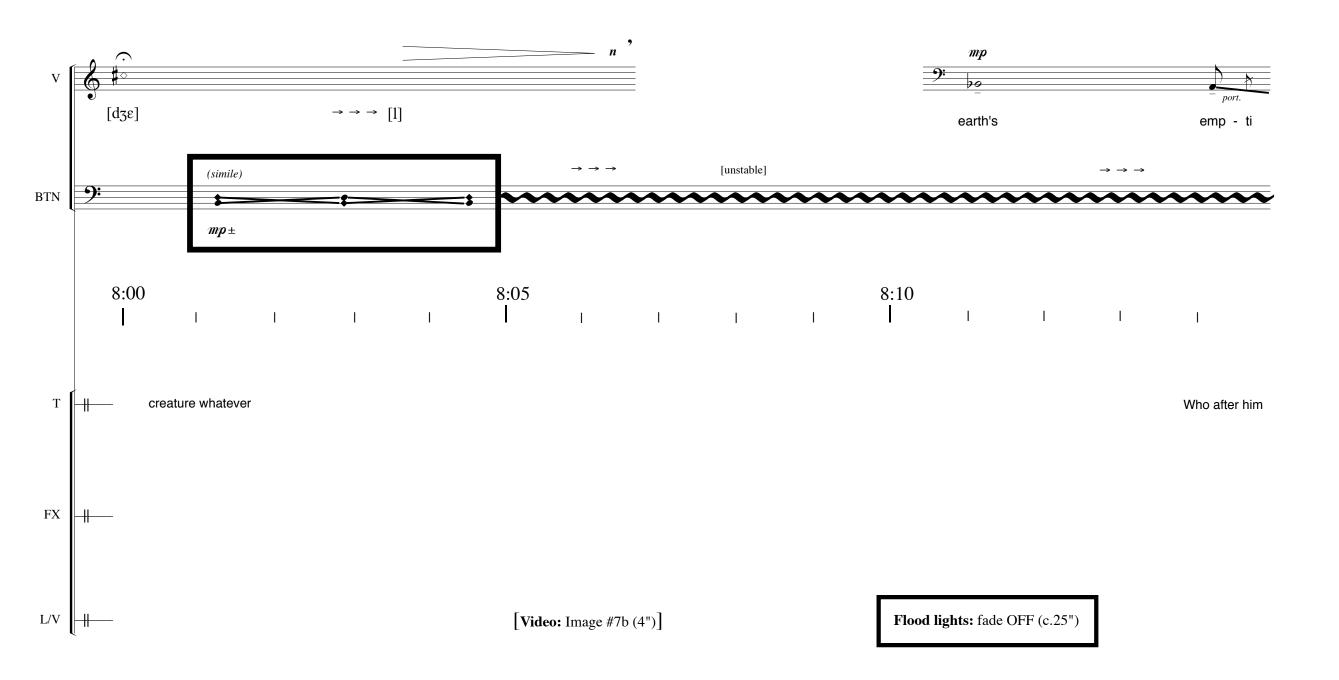


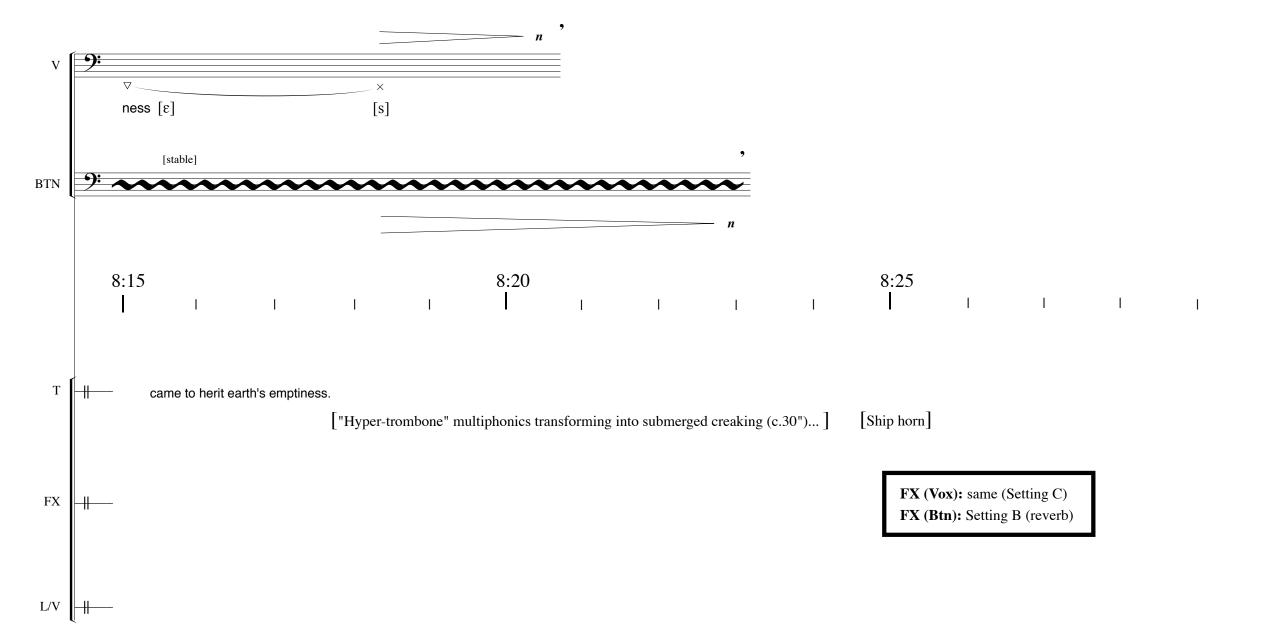












Episode 5

