

The World Is Filled With Empty Places

for spoken word and piano

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

Twenty-two poems by
Samuel Jay Keyser

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“A good image is never alone”

— René Magritte

I

This is not a poem

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 88

Narrator

This is not a poem. It is an image of a poem. Imagine a word, say apple.

Piano

You speak its name. The sound fades. There,

3/4 p cresc. *mp* *3/4 p cresc.* *12/8*

8vb

behind it, is the fruit. You say it is round. That won't do. You move the word aside to see the

12/8 mp *3/4 p cresc.* *12/8 mp* *3/4*

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - I

roundness. } How round | it is, you think. } · In that | } the apple

p cresc. *mp* *cresc.*

7 vanishes.

mf *

mp *f*

II

Things without names are the ghosts of things

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 80

Narrator

Things without names are the ghosts of things, images bobbing in empty air. dark street, cobbled, a gas-

Piano

mp

light flickering at the corner. To your right is a brick wall, to your left an open field sprawling to the horizon. You are alone. Something brushes your cheek.

rit. * *A tempo*

5

9

mf

mp

rit. * *p*

III

There is no color in an empty place

Samuel Jay Keyser

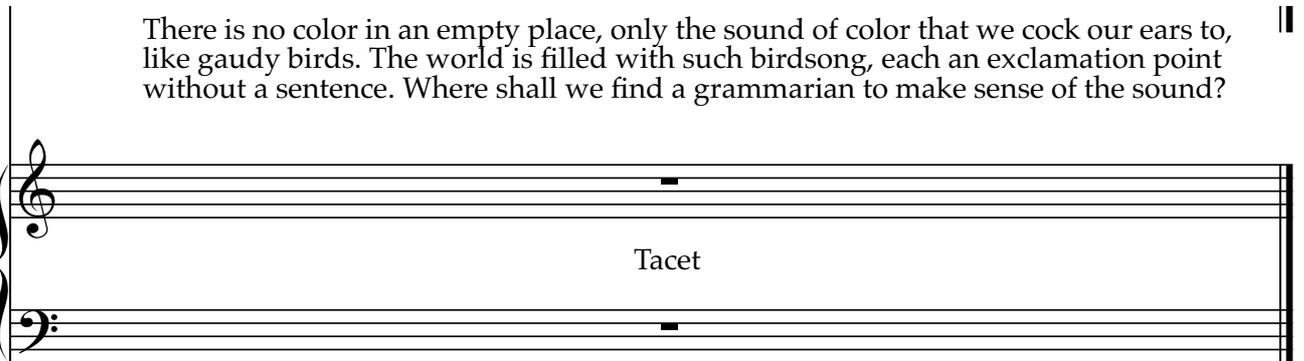
Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

Narrator

There is no color in an empty place, only the sound of color that we cock our ears to, like gaudy birds. The world is filled with such birdsong, each an exclamation point without a sentence. Where shall we find a grammarian to make sense of the sound?

Piano

Tacet



IV

It is late on a spring day

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 100

Narrator | It is late on a | spring day on a country road. | — | Clouds open and |

Piano

pp

3
like a guitar, always legato

close like the petals | of a flower. |

v

3/4

Inside the edges of the | noon objects compose | themselves, } a farmhouse, |

after-

4

3/4

5/4

mp

4/4

— a porch swing, | } } a barn, | —

4/4

3/4

2/4

cresc. poco a poco

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - IV

They have become their names, | scrawled across the evening. |

mf *pp* short

A haymow is smoldering | in the coppery light. |

3 *v*

When it bursts into flame, | will it burn, { or | decompose into fragments |
of

v *f* *3*/*4* *5*/*4*

spent type strewn about the ground | - | like some printer's |

mp *5*/*4* *4*/*4* *3*/*4*

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - IV

upended alphabet?

cresc. poco a poco *mf* 9/16

Più mosso ♩ = 144

mp *cresc. poco a poco* 9/16

8va *f* *

V

Eden is just another name for need

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 69

Narrator

Eden | is just another name for | garden is in the gardener. |
need. The

Piano

serene

When the gardener | Everything is
sleeps, it is winter. | fungible. |

9

VI Imagine a table

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 132$

Narrator

Imagine a table surrounded by guests.

mf *ben marcato*

Piano

$\frac{6}{16}$ *f* $\frac{12}{16}$ *pp*

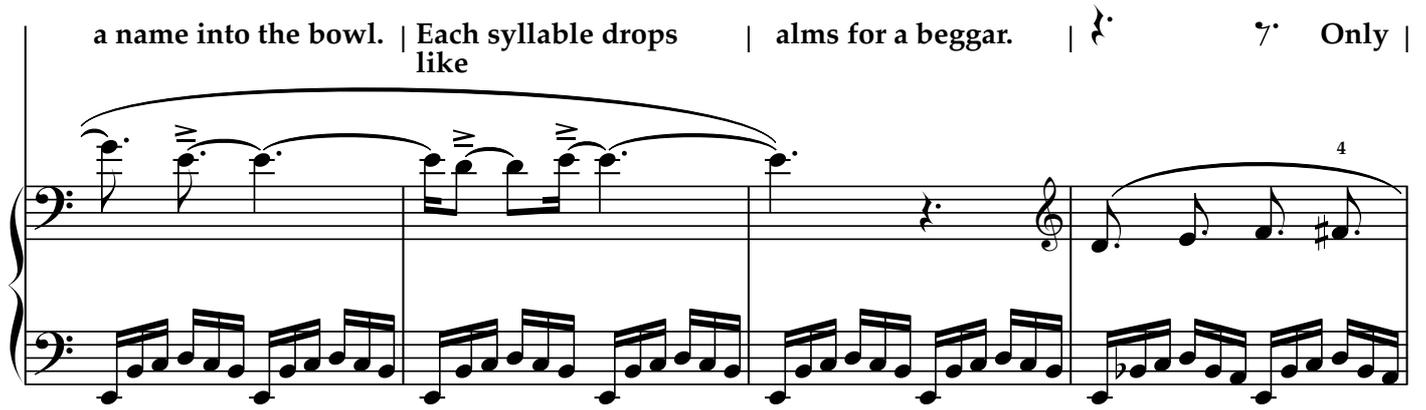
dolcissimo e legato

They eat. | They smoke. | They laugh. | Suddenly someone |

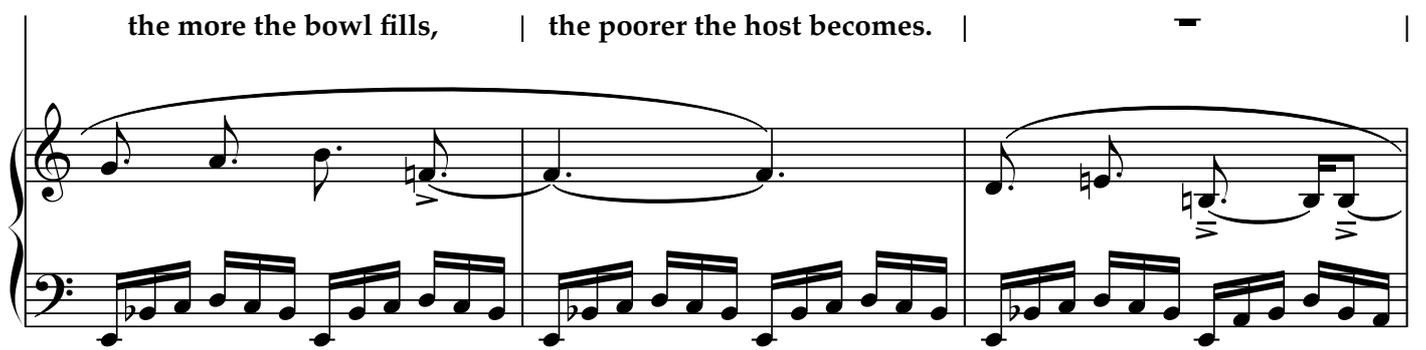
vanishes. | In anguish the host | cups his hands, whispers |

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - VI

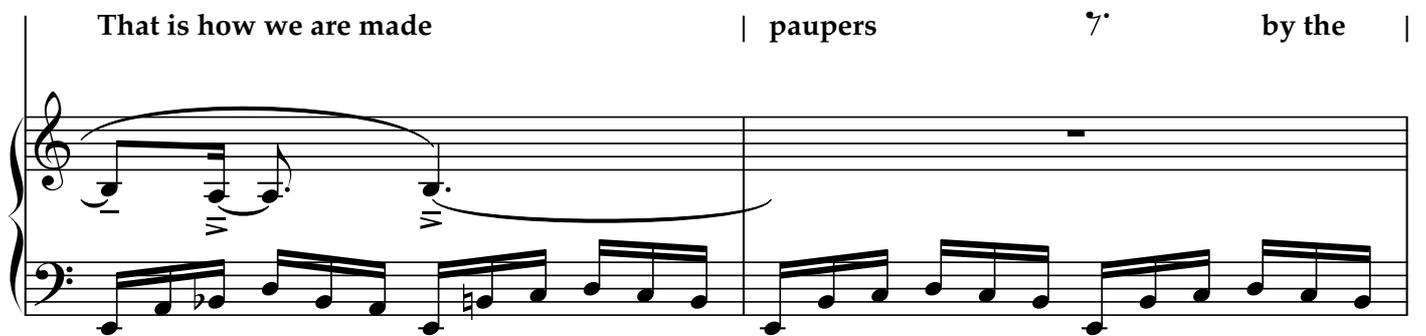
a name into the bowl. | Each syllable drops
like | alms for a beggar. | Only |



the more the bowl fills, | the poorer the host becomes. |



That is how we are made | paupers | by the



names of those we love. |

molto rit.

f



The World Is Filled With Empty Places - VI

♩ = ca. 200

First system of music, measures 1-4. The piece begins with a double bar line and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first measure is marked *mf*. The second measure is marked *mp* and has a time signature of 14/16. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices and a wavy line in the first measure.

Second system of music, measures 5-8. The music continues with the same texture and dynamics as the first system. The eighth measure is marked with a time signature of 6/16.

Third system of music, measures 9-12. The first measure is marked *più f* and has a time signature of 6/16. The second measure is marked *mf non legato* and has a time signature of 8/8. The third measure is marked *mp legato* and has a time signature of 12/16. The fourth measure is marked with a time signature of 6/16. The system ends with a time signature of 8/8.

Fourth system of music, measures 13-16. The first measure is marked *mf non legato* and has a time signature of 8/8. The second measure is marked *mp legato* and has a time signature of 12/16. The third measure is marked with a time signature of 6/16. The fourth measure is marked with a time signature of 12/16. The system concludes with a double bar line and a final chord.

VII

There can be no argument in an empty place

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 92

Narrator: There can be no argument in an empty place, only the air of an argument. For example,

Piano: $\frac{6}{4}$ *mp* mysteriously $\frac{3}{4}$ *mf* $\frac{4}{4}$

two people leave the hall. Each thinks the other follows. In the

Piano: $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{6}{4}$ *mp* $\frac{3}{4}$ *mf* $\frac{4}{4}$

black street a lamp is burning. Each walks toward the light. It is

Piano: $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{6}{4}$ *8va*

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - VII

the color of an old man's teeth. | at the same time. Each turns to | No one
Both arrive | the other. | is there. |

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "the color of an old man's teeth. | at the same time. Each turns to | No one", "Both arrive | the other. | is there. |". The lower staff is a piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 6/4. The music features a long melisma in the vocal line, indicated by a slur and a fermata, with a "8va" marking above it. The piano accompaniment has a similar melisma in the bass line. The system ends with a double bar line.

The second system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "the color of an old man's teeth. | at the same time. Each turns to | No one", "Both arrive | the other. | is there. |". The lower staff is a piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The music features a long melisma in the vocal line, indicated by a slur and a fermata, with a "mf" marking below it. The piano accompaniment has a similar melisma in the bass line. The system ends with a double bar line.

VIII

A stuccoed house

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

$\text{♩} = 80$

Narrator A stuccoed house, white on a green hill, the wind blowing through its untended windows, raising the curtains on an old argument.

Piano

pp

8vb

Inside, a table, dusty, an upturned glass, in the corner a dead moth fluttered

mp

by the breeze. Why are these images of emptiness? They are bookmarks without a book.

mp

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - VIII

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a melodic line in the upper staff with various ornaments and a bass line in the lower staff. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present. The system concludes with a 5/4 time signature change.

The second system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a melodic line in the upper staff with various ornaments and a bass line in the lower staff. The system concludes with a 5/4 time signature change.

The third system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in bass clef and the lower staff is in treble clef. The time signature is 5/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a melodic line in the upper staff with various ornaments and a bass line in the lower staff. A dynamic marking of *molto rit.* is present. The system concludes with a 4/4 time signature change and a final chord marked *gva*.

IX

There can be no sound in empty air

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 92

Narrator

There can be no sound in empty air, | only the sense of sound | You sit, for example, | on a stone bench. | The bougainvillea places you |

Piano

4/4 p 3/4 2/4 4/4 3/4

in a hot clime. | The sky is a shade of | blue you will never see again. | White rollers lick the shore. | Perspiration gathers at the back of your neck. |

3/4 2/4 4/4 mp 3/4 4/4

poco rit. . . . *A tempo*

It is your turn to speak. | You adjust your collar, | take a handkerchief to your brow. | The wet air swallows | the dregs of your sentences. |

2/4 4/4 mp

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - IX

8va⁻¹ *cresc. poco a poco* *f* *mf* short

This system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in bass clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, marked with *8va⁻¹*. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a harmonic accompaniment. Dynamics include *cresc. poco a poco*, *f*, and *mf*. A *short* marking is present at the end of the system.

rit. **A tempo** ♩ = 84 *mp* 5

This system features two staves. The upper staff is in bass clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. It includes a tempo change from *rit.* to **A tempo** with a metronome marking of ♩ = 84. Time signatures change from 3/4 to 4/4. Dynamics include *mp*. A *5* marking is present at the end of the system.

8va⁻¹ *8va⁻¹*

This system consists of two staves in treble clef. It continues the melodic and harmonic development with various chords and slurs. *8va⁻¹* markings are present above the upper staff.

(8) *rit.*

This system consists of two staves in treble clef. It concludes the piece with a final cadence. A *rit.* marking is present. A circled *8* is at the beginning of the system.

X

Who is the diva who sings Dame Vida?

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

$\text{♩} = 60$

Narrator

Who is the diva
who sings

Piano

Dame Vida? Her strings are sea | birds; basso ostinato, | the hum of the ocean.

On cloudy quays | she sings threnodies that | leave the heart
gaping.

When there is no one to | she is her own song.

rit. a tempo

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - X

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains three measures of music. The lower staff is in bass clef and also contains three measures. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody in the upper staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note F#, a half note G, and a half note A. The bass line starts with a half note G, followed by quarter notes F# and G, and then a half note A.

The second system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains three measures. The lower staff is in bass clef and also contains three measures. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody in the upper staff begins with a half note G, followed by a quarter rest, a quarter note A, and a half note B. The bass line starts with a half note G, followed by quarter notes F# and G, and then a half note A. The word "rit." is written above the bass staff in the third measure. The system concludes with a double bar line.

XI

I bite into a peach

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 126

Narrator

I bite into a peach. It is bitter. This does not stop me

Piano

$\frac{4}{4}$ *mp* expressive

from eating. Orchards of bitterness are everywhere. I live in their shade.

mp

A tempo rit. . . . long

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XI

A tempo

mf expressive

cresc.poco a poco

This system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is in a minor key, indicated by a single flat. The first staff features a series of chords with a melodic line on top, while the second staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'A tempo'. Dynamics include 'mf expressive' and 'cresc.poco a poco'.

ff

mp

dim.

p

rubato al fine

molto rit.

This system continues the piece. It features a variety of dynamics: 'ff', 'mp', 'dim.', and 'p'. The tempo is marked 'molto rit.' (molto ritardando). The phrase 'rubato al fine' is written above the music. The system concludes with a double bar line. The music is characterized by expressive phrasing and a gradual deceleration.

XII

Someone strung a wire over town

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

$\text{♩} = 72$

Narrator: Someone strung a wire over town, says Mr. Porzone. Have you seen it? | No, says Mrs. Porzone, hefting a melon for weight. I have, says Mr. Porzone.

Piano: $\frac{4}{4}$ *p* $\frac{2}{4}$

When the wind blows, it sets to thrumming. | Have you heard it? No, says Mrs. Porzone. | What would you like for dinner? | Dead souls hang from that wire, says

Mr. Porzone they flap like | laundry in the wind. | Alvin, from the market, died last month. | He's up there flapping now.

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XII

poco rit.

Hard for Alice now | Mrs. Porzone. } Dead | wet, says Mr. | them out to dry. |
he's gone, says souls are Porzone. God hangs

3/4 4/4 dim. 3/4

A tempo

Sooner or later } How does pot roast says, Mrs. Porzone.
we'll all be up sound? there, flapping.

3/4 4/4 p 8va

21 poco cresc. poco più f 8va

25 rit.

XIII

Our mouths tiny o's of desire

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

Narrator

Our mouths, tiny o's of desire, we are lonely monologs.

Piano

Tacet

The image shows a musical score for a narrator and piano. The narrator part consists of a single line of text: "Our mouths, tiny o's of desire, we are lonely monologs." The piano part consists of two staves, one for the right hand (treble clef) and one for the left hand (bass clef). Both staves are marked "Tacet" and have a double bar line at the end of the piece.

XIV

In the nursery the Madonna suckles her babe

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 120

Narrator

Piano

ff

mp

mf

In the nursery | the Madonna suckles her babe,

cradles it gently against her breast. She stares through an open

into the blue and white sky. Life streams from her nipple.

ff

mp

mf

ff

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XIV

accel.

rit.

The babe

begins to tremble.

Musical score for the first system. The piano part is in 7/4 time, marked *mf*. The bass part is in 7/4 time. The system concludes with a change to 6/4 time in the piano part and 4/4 time in the bass part.

molto accel.

♩ = 100

8va

molto cresc.

Musical score for the second system. The piano part is in 4/4 time, marked *molto cresc.*. The bass part is in 4/4 time. The system concludes with a change to 1/8 time in the piano part and 4/4 time in the bass part.

8va

fff

8va

red.

Musical score for the third system. The piano part is in 4/4 time, marked *fff*. The bass part is in 4/4 time. The system concludes with a change to 8va in the piano part and 8va in the bass part.

(8)

Musical score for the fourth system. The piano part is in 4/4 time, marked *fff*. The bass part is in 4/4 time. The system concludes with a change to 8va in the piano part and 8va in the bass part.



XV

The architect declares the building

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 108

♩ = 88

Narrator

The architect declares the building. Facades take on an air of air.

Piano

mf expressive

He fingers his lapel. There is a monument. He closes his eyes. The monument crum- bles. Entire cities

mp

float below the surface of his brow } where the sun } nor } It is always } day and the day after. }
neither rises } sets. } the next } Light }

poco rit. *A tempo*

mf *mp*

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XV

plays on the walls of his sala. | } Alas, } when light goes out; | the door will shut on sable hinges. ||

rit.

5 1

3 4

4

f

3

$\text{♩} = 69$

mp

poco rit.

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 88$

p dolce

mp

poco rubato

molto rit.

XVI

A mind filled with empty places is a mind filled

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

$\text{♩} = 100$

Narrator

A mind filled with empty places is a mind filled.
A mind empty of empty places is a mind filled.

Piano

2

mf

mp

mf

8^{va}

mp

XVII

The first letter was the first letter

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = ca. 88

Piano *mp*

very expressive

Narrator

The first letter was the first letter Say that again,

mf

only, linger in the retelling so that the spaces between the words become the words.

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XVII

First system of musical notation, measures 1-4. Treble clef, 7/4 time signature. Features a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (2, 3) and a bass line with triplets (3) and slurs. A 5/4 time signature change is indicated at the end of the system.

Second system of musical notation, measures 5-8. Treble clef, 5/4 time signature. Features a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (2, 3) and a bass line with triplets (3) and slurs. Time signature changes to 3/4, then 4/4, then 2/4, and finally 4/4.

Third system of musical notation, measures 9-12. Treble clef, 4/4 time signature. Features a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (6, 5, 2) and a bass line with slurs. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*. The instruction *poco marcato* is present above the final measure.

Fourth system of musical notation, measures 13-15. Treble clef. Features a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (3, 6) and a bass line with slurs. Dynamics include *p legato*, *mp*, and *p*. Measure numbers 26, 32, and 32 are indicated at the beginning, middle, and end of the system respectively.

XVIII

The texture of the bloom

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

♩ = 92

Narrator

The texture of the bloom is the color of the air around it, its shape the shape of the space it fills.

Piano

pp dolce e molto espressivo

That is why, when the flower dies, it is only the flower that dies. The world is filled with the ghosts of blossoms.

mp

rit. A tempo

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XVIII

The first system of music consists of two staves. The treble staff begins with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a series of notes with slurs and accents. The bass staff starts with a double bass note (marked '2'), followed by a series of notes with slurs and accents. The system is divided into six measures with time signatures of 3/4, 2/4, 3/2, 3/4, 2/4, and 4/4.

The second system of music consists of two staves. The treble staff has an *8va* marking above the first measure and a long slur over the entire staff. The bass staff has a long slur over the entire staff. The system is divided into six measures with time signatures of 4/4, 4/4, 3/2, 3/4, 2/4, and 4/4. A *rit.* instruction is placed above the final measure.

The third system of music consists of two staves. The treble staff begins with an *(8va)* marking above the first measure and a long slur over the entire staff. The bass staff has a long slur over the entire staff. The system is divided into four measures with time signatures of 4/4, 3/2, 4/4, and 4/4. The dynamic *pp* is indicated in the second measure. The system concludes with a double bar line. A *rit.* instruction is placed above the final measure.

XIX

Shut down the bells

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

Piano

$\text{♩} = 84$

5/4 *ff*

4/4 *mf*

8va-7

Narrator

Shut down the bells. | There is too much | clang in the air portending our going.

5/4

2/4

4/4

8va-7

8va-7

Take no note of it. | Silence | after silence

5/4

2/4

4/4

8va-7

8va-7

XXI

You walk in the shade of a lane

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmrovic Stevens

♩ = 56

Narrator

You walk in the shade of a lane. | In the distance, through the trees, there is motion | perhaps, or lack of it. Beyond the farmhouse and the barn the ad for Red Man flakes in the sun.

Piano

4/4

mp
very expressive

A tractor rusts in a field of spent corn. | The day has been a scudding of sky against sky. | There have been small things as well, | a snail across a leaf. Late afternoon

p *mp* *p* *mp*

portamentos into twilight, twilight to dusk. | You have been alone all day. | Only now you are not alone. | Railroad tracks stitch the horizon.

p *mp* *mf*

5/4 4/4

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XXI

Where its needles touch, sky and earth
are a single garment. At your feet the track of a snake
in the dust, one more line you dare
not cross.

Musical score for the first system, featuring piano accompaniment in 4/4 time. The score includes a treble and bass clef, a key signature of two flats, and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The lyrics are: "Where its needles touch, sky and earth are a single garment. At your feet the track of a snake in the dust, one more line you dare not cross." The music features a prominent triplet in the bass line and a melodic line in the treble. The system concludes with a 3/4 time signature.

poco accel.

Musical score for the second system, featuring piano accompaniment in 3/4 time. The score includes a treble and bass clef, a key signature of two flats, and dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*. The music features a melodic line in the treble and a bass line with a 7-measure rest. The system concludes with a double bar line.

XXII

Like a breath of fresh air

Samuel Jay Keyser

Peter Vukmirovic Stevens

Narrator

Like a breath of fresh air, before the beginning,
the sea washed over words. God held the primer in his hand.
Now that he has closed the book, the universe is merely poetry.

Piano

$\text{♩} = 80$

p

20

gva

The World Is Filled With Empty Places - XXII

The first system of music is a piano introduction. It consists of two staves. The right-hand staff begins with a series of chords and a melodic line, marked with a dynamic of *mp*. A crescendo hairpin leads to a dynamic of *p*. The left-hand staff provides harmonic support with chords. The time signature is 3/4. The system concludes with a fermata over a chord in the right hand.

The second system continues the piano introduction. It features a melodic line in the right hand with triplet markings. The left hand continues with harmonic accompaniment. The dynamic is marked *mp*. The time signature is 3/4. The system ends with a fermata on the right-hand staff.

The third system concludes the piano introduction. It begins with a melodic line in the right hand marked *dolce*. The left hand has a bass line. The time signature changes to 4/4, then back to 3/4. The dynamic is marked *p*. The system ends with a fermata on the right-hand staff and a *Red.* (ritardando) marking in the left hand.