

Al di là di un concetto visibile

Teatro & teatralità: musica, poesia, recitazione

a cura di
Mauro Cassarà



saggi, memorie, interventi



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Prefazione di
Anna Sica

Intermedio and Chorus
Re-thinking Theories and Practices
*in Sixteenth-Century Italian Theatre**
Ivano Cavallini

The Italian intermedio was a sort of musical spectacle introduced between the acts of comedies, tragedies and pastorals. From the sixteenth century to the first decades of the seventeenth century, it played an important role in polyphony and pseudo-monody of lute-singers, and, a most important fact, it provided patterns for opera together with the setting and poetry of pastoral theatre.

In order to give a touch of realism in the acts of comedies, the characters were sometimes in charge of playing folk tunes or melodies drawn from Franco-Flemish chansons or Italian madrigals. However, the public asked for mythological or fantastic scenes accompanied by music at the end of each act. The long-staging time, not less than four or five hours, and the rules of the unities of place, action and time recorded by renaissance humanists with their glosses on Aristotle's *Poetics*, meant that stage directors organised dramas in ways that were often boring. By contrast, patrons and common spec-

tators, who were fascinated by the intermedio, forced theorists and playwrights to accept this kind of musical interlude. The unique achievement of the literati was either a prohibition against the insertion of intermedii as 'a drama within the drama', resulting in an autonomous plot developing in four or five parts (but this was an unsuccessful rule), or the introduction of intermedii linked to the subject-matter of the plot.¹

Another complementary model, interchangeable with the intermedio, was the *moresca*, which had already been presented as mime at the end of the fifteenth century in Ferrara, Mantua, Venice and Siena. After the primitive Moorish dance, a choreographic genre whose form of weapon or sword dance recalled the moves of combat between black and white knights in several countries of Europe, the *moresca* entered the Italian theatre under several names such as *ballo d'Etiopia*, *abbattimento* (battle), *giostra* (carousel).² It frequently concerns the satyr's dancing or bacchantes' dancing, a knight who kills the dragon to save a young girl, Cupid or shepherds against wild men, prisoners to be freed by soldiers, peasants fighting with hoes or sticks, and hermits crossing their sticks like swords after the act of seduction by a nymph.³

From a theatrical point of view, the *moresca* did not coincide with the single instrumental pieces recorded by

Antoine Arbeau and Marin Mersenne in their treatises.⁴ Thus, its music was a set of dances collected with the scope to sustain mimes on stage, without no reference to the former Moorish sword dance, whose traces are retraceable in folk music. Descriptions of this scenic trend, according to some experiences in Mantua court theatre, are readable in Leone de' Sommi's four dialogues.⁵ He affirms that the episodes, which are grasped from mythology (e.g. bacchantes), or from comedy (e.g. peasants' clash), can be considered as visible intermedii in the event they express the topic of drama. To this practice is related the finale of Claudio Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, staged in Mantua in 1607 under the patronage of the Academy of the Invaghiti. The first version of this finale, in which the bacchantes probably kill the protagonist dancing a moresca, is recorded in Alessandro Striggio's libretto. Very different is the version found in the score, which reflects the pleasure of the court, in which Monteverdi transforms the scene in a virtuoso duet for the ascent of Apollo *deus ex machina* with his son Orpheus. In the second finale Monteverdi joins a chorus encouraging the demigod to follow Apollo in a happy ending moresca.⁶

Entirely different were the dramatic tools of Siena's contemporary theatre. The Tuscan town produced a special kind of piece, in which the moresca was enclosed

in the plot and, in some cases, it became the core of the spectacle, as shown by the following works: Francesco Fossi's *Comedia in moresca Lucia* (1521), and *Comedia in moresca pietà di Venere* (1521), Giovanni Roncaglia's *Scanniccio* (1527), the Academy of the Intronati's *I prigionieri*, Alessandro Piccolomini's *L'amore costante* (1536), and Mescolino's *L'amore costante* (1542). In the comedy *I prigionieri*, whose text is a free adaptation of Plautus' *Captivi*, four Italian soldiers and four "oltremontani" perform two Moorish dances as a battle to establish the ownership of a female prisoner, and in form of a sword dance to celebrate the happy ending of the play.⁷

The case of Siena is special because the aforementioned writers and others were all burghers and actors not engaged by the nobility. Conversely, in other parts of the country, according to more demand for realism, the music played within the acts appeared as a short parody of popular songs in comedy, and in the form of a simple serenade in pastoral mode to depict the shepherds' and nymphs' idyll in the wood of Mount Parnassus.

Like the Sienese writers, the Croatian poets of Dubrovnik, on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, inserted the moresca within acts so as to increase the importance of the musical pantomime as a pivotal tool of the plot. Instead of the term *moreska*, adopted until

today by folk plays in Dalmatia, Nikola Nalješković and Marin Držić, the creators of the modern Croatian pastoral play, preferred the term *boj bije*, or in plural form *boj biju*, meaning ‘he fights’ and ‘they fight’.⁸ This synonymy is evident in the title page of Držić’s *Tirena*, which states that the moresca was a symbol of Dubrovnik’s culture: *Tirena comedia Marina Darxichia prikasana u Dubrovniku godiscta M.DXLVIII u koioi vlasi boi na nacin od morescke i tanaz na nacin pastirschi* (*Tirena of Marin Držić, a comedy [pastoral] staged in Dubrovnik in 1548, in which the Morlacks [called also Vlachs] fight in the manner of the moresca and dance like shepherds*). Staged at least twice between the years 1549 and 1551, *Tirena* has some similarities with the comedies of the pre-Rozzi Academy of Siena; for example, the peasant struck by Cupid’s arrows, the parody of the pastoral idyll, and the moresca play. Furthermore, the musical pantomime is retraceable within *Tirena*’s plot. In act four, the shepherd Ljubmir is struck by a stone thrown by a satyr; he faints, and a nymph comes to rescue him. Before the end of the play there is another combat between satyrs and shepherds, which is stopped by a nymph’s intervention, whose words help to restore peace in the woods. The same happens in other pastoral dramas by Držić in which Morlacks or satyrs represent uncivilised people (i.e., the otherness), *vs.* kind shep-

herds and nymphs, who symbolise the grandeur of cultivated Dubrovnik, seen as a *locus amoenus*. To this extent, it is necessary to keep in mind that Držić worked as an organist and studied at the University of Siena between 1538 and 1541. During this time, he performed a comedy (perhaps *Aurelia*) at the house of Buoncompagno della Gazzaja, so it is undeniable that he was familiar with the Tuscan centre's theatrical repertoire.

The mid-sixteenth century saw theorists of dramaturgy, in particular, Giangiorgio Trissino, Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio, Leone de' Sommi and Bernardino da Cagli, who were occupied in justifying the introduction of musical episodes, which had been added as divertissements at the end of each act both in tragedies and comedies, either referred to drama, or without any relationship to it.⁹

As the earliest example of European tragedy inspired by classical model without any separation in acts, the *Sofonisba* of Trissino (1524) is provided by a dialogic chorus, and it remains incomparable with other works of the time. Although its Aristotelian rules, *Sofonisba* was translated into French by Mellin de Saint-Gelais, and then staged twice at Blois in 1556 with the intermedi. Indeed, it is not astonishing that the famous *Orbecche* of Giraldi Cinthio, played in Ferrara in 1541, and published with some revisions in 1543, is divided in five acts

and the singing chorus is placed at the end of each act, except for the third one in which a speaking chorus appears. Despite his appreciation for the Grecian patterns, Giraldi Cinthio justifies the convenience of splitting the modern tragedy into parts, inserting the intermedio among them, like in the ancient Latin drama.¹⁰ In the *Letter on Tragedy*, published in his *Didone* of 1543, he refers about the poets in ancient Rome's theatre, who preferred an "empty stage" distinguishing the acts by putting music on stage as a modern intermedio, in order to relax the audience.¹¹

As the most representative playwright at the court of Ferrara before Torquato Tasso, Cinthio claims it would be better to introduce fantastic scenes, "making the musicians [i.e., the singers and a consort of instruments] arise from the middle of the stage by means of machines", rather than music for instruments backstage during the changes of the acts (*Discourse on the Manner of Writing Novels, Comedies and Tragedies*, 1554).¹² Giraldi Cinthio was mindful Greek and Latin plays in making such a distinction, but his proposal of establishing archetypes is a pedantic effort aiming to avoid the unfavourable influence on the chain of events.

On the one hand, Cinthio prefers the visible intermedio as a pleasurable entertainment, on the other hand, in his commentary on comedy of 1572, Bernardino

Pino da Cagli admits that the pantomime is comparable to the classical chorus: that is when the playwright succeeds in fostering a thematic cohesion between moresca and drama.¹³ In a letter of 1582, addressed to Giovanni Maria Bonardo, even the Venetian Luigi Groto suggests the use of a silent representation, or pantomime, sustained by the music of a consort, but avoiding any reference to the term moresca.¹⁴ On the contrary, in his *Calisto* (1561) Groto enclosed a singing chorus at the end of each act. Cited by himself as “canzoni per intermedi”, these poems are madrigals for singers appearing *en travesti* to represent mythical graces, swans, trees (laurel, palm tree, bench, fir), and clouds.¹⁵

However, that may be, music, as well as scenery and games of light, was only a variable element of staging, and for this reason it was not considered to be worthy of being printed. In other words, although Mantua, Ferrara and Venice provided several accounts of the music created for theatre by renowned composers, it was not their habit to print scores of the music played on stage, as the printing costs of part-books were more expensive than the costs of a normal book. Within this circle the unique exception was Florence. As a banking dynasty, the Florentine Medici Family aimed to exhibit through the arts its own financial and political power in all countries of Europe, and this was why it bore the printing

costs in publishing theatrical texts, descriptions of interludes, polyphonic compositions and monodies, too. In this regard, the case of *Commodo* (1539), a comedy by Antonio Landi, was remarkable.

To spread the news of the wedding between Cosimo de' Medici and Eleonora of Toledo, the court of Florence covered the cost of staging, and the cost of printing drama, as well as the printing of intermedi by Pietro Strozzi, a detailed description of the scenery by Gian Francesco Giambullari, and the part-books of the music composed by Francesco Corteccia. These sources have been deeply analysed by Wolfgang Osthoff, Nino Pirrotta and other scholars in the course of the 1970s.¹⁶ The structure of drama is framed by a prologue sung by Aurora and five intermedi, in the following order: first the shepherds, second the sirens, third Silenus, fourth the nymphs, fifth the night, and finally a postlude in form of a moresca of satyrs and bacchantes. The stage reconstruction of spectacle, made by the architect Ferdinando Ghelli in 1980, is based on some documents of that time. In the scale model of Ghelli are visible the town as a suitable place for comedy, and the sun that moves from east to west according Aristotle's unity of time, for the events occurring in a single day.¹⁷

Apart from the other well-known sumptuous entertainments presented after 1539, one should also men-

tion the well-known case of Girolamo Bargagli's *La Pellegrina*, a comedy for the marriage of Ferdinando de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine in 1589. For this event, the Grand Duke engaged the famous authors of future operas, such as the poets Ottavio Rinuccini, Giovanni de' Bardi, and the composers Cristofano Malvezzi, Emilio de' Cavalieri, Jacopo Peri, Giulio Caccini. In 1591 the drama, the scenarios and the intermedi transcribed by Bastiano de Rossi (*Dell'apparato e descrizione degli intermedi*) were printed, as well as the music (*Intermedi e concerti fatti per la commedia*).¹⁸ The main topic of the intermedi is the gift of Harmony and Rhythm given by the gods to men, which is an allegory of Florence's clever policy inspired by the tenth book of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, according to the sketches prepared by the architect Bernardo Buontalenti.¹⁹ As pointed out by many scholars, in this collection some stylistic analogies with the so-called seventeenth-century *dramma per musica* are evident, even though the embellishments of the solo singer parts rely on pseudo-monody, not yet the authentic idiom of the monody of opera.

According to the humanistic theory, as the main problem was the hybrid relationship between the chorus and the intermedio. The incorrect use of the chorus implied a dangerous influence on the meaning of the story. The matter was well discussed by Angelo Ingegneri in

his book *Discourse on Stage Music* (1598).²⁰ Far from being a typical treatise full of philological comments on Aristotle's, Plato's, Horace's and Ovid's theories, the *Discourse on Stage Music* is the first treatise completely devoted to the practice of drama. In fact, as a playwright and director, Ingegneri experienced the chorus in tragedy and pastoral, and in the first chapter of his work he explains in a concrete way the difference among the three kinds of drama. In the second chapter, he illustrates the rules of staging and the place of music, stating that a tragic chorus must be solemn in singing the verses at the end of each act. In short, as an interlocutor interacting with the protagonists, the chorus should avoid fugues or diminutions and sing in a simple syllabic way so that the words can be clearly heard, because their purpose is to arouse the emotion of the audience and in turn provoke catharsis.

If it is necessary to insert a chorus in tragedy, whose ethical topic takes place in a palace or a city, it is not recommended its use in pastoral settings, where the private love between nymphs and shepherds is set in the wood of Arcadia.²¹ So, if the organizers want a chorus in a pastoral scene, it is advisable to modify the plot by introducing games or dances as an expression of gladness, a *sine qua non* in such events. As argued by Ingegneri, in this case both kinds of music are re-

quired, in so doing the chorus should perform in a very simple manner to comment upon the events, and the subsequent intermedio should not provide connections to the plot. Sometimes, the piece concludes with a chorus without any final postlude, in this case the choral group sings a magnificent polyphonic composition accompanied by instruments concealed behind the stage, with the principal aim of avoiding the confusion of roles:

Intermedi give wide berth to tragedies, whereas in pastorals and comedies they are not only acceptable but are a considerable adornment, and however similar or dissimilar that they may be to the play, they always enrich the spectacle and delight the spectators [...]. Where there is a chorus [that is in a tragedy] let it be sung simply. But where the chorus [functions as] an intermedio [...] it is necessary to employ more elaborate singing, and not a bad idea to put instrumentalists playing from behind the scene, taking care however that together they make a unified sound and not appear be two choruses, or the one echo of the other.²²

To solve the problems posed by the renaissance chorus, it would be better to know the mentality of the audience, who always enjoyed some entertainment from singers and players of wind and string instruments. The

essays of Ludovico Castelvetro, Giovan Battista Guarini and the academician nicknamed Arsiccio of the Academy of Intrepidi, i.e., Ottavio Magnanini from Ferrara, help us in this regard.

The leader of the chorus, in the *Poetics of Aristotle* as interpreted by Castelvetro (1579), has the main task of using dialogue in the acts.²³ Guarini, in his *Remarks on the Third Scene in the Fourth Act of the Pastor Fido* (1602), distinguishes the chorus singer of ancient tragedy from the chorus of the modern one which shifts at the end of the act.²⁴ Ottavio Magnanini, a court secretary of the Duke Enzo Bentivoglio, in his almost unknown discourse *On the Origin of the Interlude* (1614), removes any doubt about the correct meaning of the chorus *intercalare* and the chorus *istrione*.²⁵ The first one refers to a group of musicians who sing madrigals or strophic songs as interludes at the end of each act. The second one is a group of *istrioni* (actors) led by a coryphaeus, who is obliged to act as a character in the drama.

Unfortunately, with the exception of Ingegneri, Magnanini and Guarini, in this regard the theoretical frame is very poor. It is almost impossible to find useful information in the commentaries on Aristotle's and Horace's *Poetics*, and moreover, also the project of regulating the pastoral drama with an epigrammatic chorus imitating

the tragic one failed.²⁶ The public was not attracted by the tragic chorus, even though it was charged to comment through music on the events of each act, in a similar way as in the intermedio. As an example, in staging the famous *Aminta* of Tasso in Ferrara in 1579, (at the time the work was celebrated as the milestone among pastorals), some intermedi were added after the choruses.²⁷ Later, in Florence in 1590, a set of madrigals like interludes was joined to this pastoral, after the request of noblewomen together with their ladies-in-waiting.²⁸

Returning to *Aminta*, one can remember also the extraordinary issue of five intermedi conceived by Ugo Rinaldi and composed by Domenico Belli (1616), which were enclosed as a version of the myth of Orpheus: *Orpheus Sorrowful, Divided in Five Intermedi Which Were Useful to Ugo Rinaldi to Stage Aminta, the Pastoral of Tasso*.²⁹ The spectacle, produced at Rinaldi's residence, Palazzo della Gherardesca in Florence, consists of five scenes, whose poetry is partly due to the poet Gabriello Chiabrera. Given that the well-known *Orfeo* of Alessandro Striggio was set to music nine years before in Mantua by Claudio Monteverdi, there is no doubt that modern opera born in 1600 in Florence was considered a kind of spectacle not so different from the pastoral drama or from the mythological intermedio.

The practice of introducing interludes in different theatrical genres, as an unwritten agreement, does not exclude tragedy, as testified by Ludovico Dolce's *Troiane*, inspired by Seneca's *Troades*. The dramatist was supported by the poet Antonio Molino, nicknamed Burchiella, who oversaw the staging, whereas his friend Giovanni Martini had the role of recruiting non-professional actors. Printed three times in 1566, in 1567, and in 1594, the tragedy was staged at Giorgio Gradenigo's palace during the Carnival entertainments of Venice in 1566. The second version is endowed with intermedii by Claudio Merulo, but no sources of them survived (it is possible that Merulo did not publish the score).³⁰ In his introduction the author says he wrote the verses for the intermedii at the request of actors, transgressing the rules of the ancient tragedy. This is the reason why he indicates that these poems detached from the text are not for reading ("verses written only for music not for reading"). However, each intermedio is introduced as a choral epilogue, because the dialogues of gods with the Trojans still refer to action. In this regard, it is astonishing that the stage direction prescribes a *liaison de scène*, i.e. a close connection between the chorus and the following intermedio at the end of the first act, when the silent tragic chorus hears the singing of the Trojans and both are on stage. ("Alcuni troiani favellano col coro" i.e., "Some

Trojans sing with the chorus”: in this case favellano [i.e., they speak] must be translated as they sing.). On the one hand, this compromise provides continuity to the plot, on the other hand, it makes more difficult our analysis. According to the verses of the following acts, it is quite difficult to deduce if the chorus sings or speaks. There are two possible solutions. The first is that before the intermedio one can suppose that the chorus acts as a character in and at the end of the act; the second solution refers to the chorus speaking in the act, and then singing in monotone, after which the intermedio follows.

Also in Venice, some years before Dolce, in 1546 Pietro Aretino introduced in his tragedy *Oratia* a sententious “chorus of virtues”, with the task of replacing the intermedi. As an end-of-act feature, the chorus is on stage and sings only at the conclusion, thus appearing five times, even after the act fifth.³¹ Obviously, the nonconformist poet legitimises the practice as the one derived from comedy, and his purpose precedes Tasso’s reform of pastoral chorus.

More complicated is the case of *Alidoro*, a tragedy by Gabriele Bombace-Bombasi, performed in Reggio Emilia in 1568, whose intermedi represent the ancient myth of the harmony of the body among the four elements: air, water, earth and fire. The intermedi were added to reduce the frightening scenes of the story,

and at the same time to please the Duchess of Ferrara, Barbara. An anonymous secretary described this spectacle in detail. In his diary, the unique source recovered, the secretary says that the intermedi, detached from the main plot to avoid the public's boredom, were requested by the Court.³² In addition to the chorus there were some scenes with instrumental music supporting the machinery that moved the walk-on actors to heaven, earth and fire. While polyphony was rejected to avoid an irritating confusion of words, conversely the audience appreciated the intermedi in the form of *tableaux vivants*, whose topics were easily understood. Even though the court secretary despises the implausibility of the intermedi, he rejects the coryphaeus singing a monotonous tune without accompaniment, and the group singing polyphony without instruments. Aiming to overcome these dangerous limits, he claims that the choirmaster should sing monody sustained by instruments. In fact, the organizers of *Alidoro* instructed a singer who, after the end-of-act chorus, sang monodies accompanied by a hidden consort of strings playing backstage. This girl interpreted her part in a very charming way. Following the meaning of the text like an actress, she imitated crying, despair and other feelings with her face, hands and body movements, to fascinate the audience.

The turning point in the revival of tragedy is marked by the opening of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (1585). The rebirth of Greek archetypes is also indicated by the patronage of the Olympic Academy in building the first marble theatre in Europe, inspired by the Greek amphitheatre. All these features also influenced the *Oedipus the Tyrant* by the dramatist Orsatto Giustiniani (*Edipo tiranno*, after Sophocles' *Oedypus*), and likewise the music of Andrea Gabrieli, the renowned chapel master of the Church of Saint Mark in Venice – until the nineteenth century it was not the Cathedral of San Pietro a Castello which represented the power of the Republic, but Saint Mark's Church.³³ The academicians' purpose was to recreate a simple music based upon the criteria of audibility and intelligibility of the words. Gabrieli provided polyphony in a chordal-syllabic style to please the Academy, articulating sections for five-six voices, with others for one or two parts without counterpoint, with the intention of evoking the chorus of the ancient tragedy. When the chorus-leader engages a dialogue with the actors the text is spoken; otherwise, the chorus sings when it is alone on stage, as it is demonstrated by its positions at the end of acts. However, an adherence to Aristotle's or Horace' theories had no impact on the modern representation of tragedy. The Olympic Academy

commissioned a set of intermedi, unfortunately not preserved, to the composer Marcantonio Pordenon, thus affirming the prevailing logic of musical entertainment.

The co-existence of chorus and intermedi had been the goal of incidental music for theatre, which began to flourish in mid-fourteenth-century Italy without any support from dramatists or theorists. In my opinion, from the age of the Counter-reformation onwards the massive production of hundreds of pastorals, within the frame of the academies and amateur elites, was a determining factor in the introduction of music in theatre. The pastoral drama, tolerated by the Catholic Church and appreciated by the nobility, in opposition to the licentious comedy and the terrifying tragedy, was the preferred medium in which to concentrate all kinds of music in the same way as the intermedio: polyphony, monody, as well as dance and instrumental music. We can affirm now that, if the intermedio was correctly regarded as the ancestor of opera, verses and music also rise to this achievement in pastorals' acts. Despite the attempts of Tasso and Guarini in ruling pastoral and tragicomedy, this kind of play was born as a free form of spectacle out of bounds established by theorists. Without true references to the ancient satire, the woods of the *favola pastorale* became the ideal setting for each

type of scenic effect, in which music had a key role. This is the reason why there was not a rapid decline in pastoral drama after the birth of opera; on the contrary, both pastoral and intermedio had a long life, and for many years they met the audience's favour.

One of the first reactions to this trend is retraceable in Monteverdi's career. On 9th December 1616, Alessandro Striggio, the librettist of the *Orfeo* (1607) and one of the Duke of Mantua Ferdinando Gonzaga's counsellors, sought Monteverdi's opinion on a text to be set to music. The so-called "librettino" of a "maritime tale" *Thetis Wedding (Le nozze di Tetide)*, written by Scipione Agnelli and sent to the composer by Striggio, was one of three entertainments proposed for the upcoming festivities in Mantua for the entry of Caterina de' Medici as the new duchess following her marriage (in Florence) to Duke Ferdinando. In his well-known answer, Monteverdi raised many objections which reveal his negative opinion on this work. He criticised the uniformity of the scenes, the unreal characters taken from mythology, the absence of lyrical passages and more generally of 'affects', each criticism provides important evidence as to his own poetics. In opposition to a recurrent topic in the scenarios of the intermedi, Monteverdi had emphasised the imitation of human qualities that could be obtained through the timbre of instruments and of the "parlar cantando":

I have noticed that the interlocutors are winds, Cupids, little Zephyrs and Sirens: consequently, many sopranos will be needed, and it can also be stated that the winds have to sing – that is, the Zephyrs and the Boreals. How, dear Sir, can I imitate the speech of the winds, if they do not speak? And how can I, by such means, move the passions? Ariadne moved us because she was a woman, and similarly Orpheus because he was a man, not a wind. Music can suggest, without any words, the noise of winds and the bleating of sheep, the neighing of horses and so on and so forth; but it cannot imitate the speech of winds because no such thing exists. Next, the dances which are scattered throughout the play do not have dance measures. And as to the story as a whole – as far as my no little ignorance is concerned – I do not feel that it moves me at all (moreover I find it hard to understand), nor do I feel that it carries me in a natural manner to an end that moves me. *Arianna* led me to a just lament, and *Orfeo* to a righteous prayer, but this play leads me I don't know to what end.³⁴

If it is delightful to outline the importance of this letter, it is also necessary to consider it as an exception in the context of a more general opinion.

In conclusion of this overview, I would like to re-examine the case of a famous lament included by Monteverdi in his eighth book of madrigals, entitled *War*

and Love Madrigals With Some Little Works which Will Be a Short Episodes Between the Songs Without Action (1638).³⁵ Monteverdi published the *Lament of the Nymph* (Lamento della ninfa) in the second part of the eighth book of madrigals, balancing the *Combat of Tancredi and Clorinda* (Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda, 1624) in the first part of the volume. Both of those madrigals are distinguished by the rubric “in genere rappresentativo” (dramatic style). The meaning of the term related to *Combat* is unquestionable. It refers to the participation of a narrator and two characters, and to its performance with movement and gesture. Further, it refers to the mimetic musical setting of the text, the imitation of the passions of the poetry (“ad imitatione delle passioni dell’oratione”), the musical representations of battle sounds and of galloping horse, which are crucial to the total dramatic effect of the work.

The *Lament of the Nymph* is featured for an analogous situation. Its “stile rappresentativo” is related not only to the dramatic shape of an idealised music on stage, i.e., a scene in which a shepherd’s chorus comments on the nymph’s plaint, but also to the specific musical means by which the shape achieves its full expressive representation as an appropriate mimetic gesture. The second part of this piece, the lament proper, is constructed over a descending tetrachord ostinato

pattern, which contributes in creating a new dramatic dimension. It's clearly perceptible structure increases the opportunities for conflict through the female voice, one of the principal means of affective intensification in the recitative. In exploiting the possibilities of contrast between voice and bass line, Monteverdi emphasises the expressive implications of the ostinato, and demonstrates its suitability in association to the lament.³⁶

The verses of the *Lament* are drawn from a strophic canzonetta by Ottavio Rinuccini, the famous librettist of the first operas staged in Florence. As said, the label *rappresentativo* genre is applied to the polyphonic madrigal, meaning a special kind of music reminiscent of opera, or songs on stage, through passages in monody and in chordal style. In this way Monteverdi renews the grammar of the madrigal, and combines the lexicon of opera with the laws of polyphony. In the second part of the *Lament*, the aforementioned use, a descending tetrachord in minor mode of *romanesca*, is not a typical lament-technique, as featured in Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna*, which was imitated by several composers of his time.³⁷

Written for four voices, a soprano, two tenors and a bass, the lament is divided into three stanzas: as a prologue, the first stanza introduces the narrative of the shepherds (two tenors and a bass); the others are the

verses of the nymph (a soprano) constantly followed by a final-verse segment of shepherds who repeat the term “miserella” (‘poor girl’). The score could be regarded as representing two analogous but different points of view. Following a narrative approach, the prologue sung by shepherds is intended as the author’s voice, who introduces the reader into the plot (in this case the listener). Also in the second part, the treatment of voices is comparable to the structure of a novel. The female voice sings a solo monody, and at the end of each line, the text of three male voices appears in form of comment on the words of the young girl. Briefly, like a writer, the homophony of men provides a judgement on the nymph’s feeling; conversely, the nymph, like the protagonist of a novel, shows her personal feeling of sadness. Because of the lack of an authentic polyphony, this piece idealises a typical texture in which different stylistic strata and their functions are combined. Seen from another viewpoint, the *Lament* is linked to the drama, in which the nymph and the shepherds are virtually on stage. The nymph sings but ignores the fact that shepherds are hidden behind the trees, and their separate voices run in the direction of the audience aiming to commiserate the girl as an echo of the woods, even though the final words of the nymph are not repeated.

I SHEPHERDS: TWO TENORS AND ONE BASS

Phoebus had not yet
brought to the earth the day,
when a maiden came forth
from her home.
Wretched one, ah, no more no,
such icy scorn she cannot suffer.

*Non avea Febo ancora
recato al mondo il dì,
ch'una donzella fuora
del proprio albergo uscì.
Miserella, ah più, no, no
tanto gel soffrir non può.*

II NYMPH, A SOPRANO, AND SHEPHERDS

“Love”, she said, and her foot
stopped as she gazed at the sky,
“where is the faith
that the traitor swore?”
Wretched one.

*“Amor”, diceva, il piè,
mirando il ciel, fermò,
“dov'è, dov'è la fè
che'l traditor giurò?”
Miserella.*

III THE SAME VOICES

“Bring about that my love
returns to me, as he was,
or kill me so that I
no longer torture myself.”
Wretched one.

*“Fa che ritorni il mio
amor, com'ei pur fu,
o tu m'ancidi ch'io
Non mi tormenti più.”
Miserella. ³⁸*

Monteverdi also adds a rubric to his lament specifying how the piece has to be performed in two different ways. He still intends a certain amount of flexibility in the performance. For this reason, in the keynote at the

beginning of the three-part madrigal, he distinguishes between the lament itself and the framing choral sections: they are to be sung regularly (“al tempo della mano”), while the lament should be sung more freely (“a tempo dell’affetto dell’animo, e non a quello della mano”). Therefore, this distinction affirms the function of conflict between bass and voice, between regularity and irregularity, as the chief source of affective power. In this way, the performance enhances its dramatic meaning, deduced by former and contemporaneous theatrical experiences:

The correct way to represent this music. The voices singing out of the nymph’s crying are scored, because they sing in measured pulse (regular beats). The same voices commiserating the nymph and singing in a low voice are scored because they follow her crying, which must be played not in measured pulse but following her emotions.³⁹

- * This essay is the enlarged version of a lecture held at the University of Dublin on 17th-April 2014, in the frame of a Seminar in Musicology organized by my dear friend and colleague professor Harry White. The scope of the seminar was to celebrate the centenary of UCD School of Music, which has been founded in 1914. I am grateful to my colleague and dear friend Anna Sica too, who encouraged me to re-consider the ties of the Interme-

dio with the tragic chorus in sixteenth-century Italian theatre.

- ¹ D. Nutter, "Intermedio", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London, MacMillan, 2001, vol. IX, *ad vocem*.
- ² R. Lorenzetti, *La moresca nell'area mediterranea*, Bologna, Forni, 1991.
- ³ Several examples are quoted in N. Pirrotta, *Li due Orfei: da Poliziano a Monteverdi*, Turin, Einaudi, 1975, pp. 53-62, and in P. Toschi, *Le origini del teatro italiano*, Turin, Boringhieri, 1976, pp. 487-9.
- ⁴ P. Nettel, "Die Moresca", in «Archiv für Musikwissenschaft», 14 (1957), pp. 165-74, Pál Péter Domokos, "Der Moriskentanz in Europa und in der ungarischen Tradition", «Studia musicologica Academiae scientiarum hungaricae», 10 (1968), pp. 229-311.
- ⁵ L. de' Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (1556), (ed. by Marotti) Milan, il Polifilo, 1968, [The Fourth Dialogues], pp. 67-9.
- ⁶ P. Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 66-8.
- ⁷ See: Cristina Valenti, *Comici artigiani. Mestiere e forme dello spettacolo a Siena nella prima metà del Cinquecento*, Modena, Panini, 1992; N. Newbiggin, "Politics and Comedy in the Early Years of the Accademia degli Intronati of Siena", in M. de Panizza Lorch *Il teatro italiano del rinascimento*, Milan, Edizioni di Comunità, 1980, pp. 123-34: 125-26. The role of music and the theatrical activities in Siena at the beginning of the sixteenth century are examined by Maria Luisi in "Mille Anphioni novelli et mille Orphei". *Le commedie di Mariano Trinci Maniscalco (in Siena, 1514-1520). Edizione critica, studio introduttivo e appendice musicale*, Rome, Torre d'Orfeo, 2004.

- ⁸ See: V. Katalinić, “Music in the Dalmatian Theatre of the Sixteenth Century”, «Muzikološki zbornik», 24 (1988), pp. 21-8; I. Cavallini, “Il ruolo della musica nel teatro pastorale raguseo del Cinquecento”, «Musica e storia», 8 (2000), pp. 417-54.
- ⁹ B. Weinberg, *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*, four vols., Bari, Laterza, 1974.
- ¹⁰ The theories on the usage of chorus in tragedy are well analysed by Francesco Luisi in “Musica e tragedia nel pensiero teorico del Cinquecento”, «Musica e storia», 7 (1999), pp. 105-40.
- ¹¹ G.B. Giraldi Cinthio, *Lettera sulla tragedia* (1543), in *Didone*, Venice, Cagnacini, 1583; F. Luisi, *Musica e tragedia*, cit., pp. 144-5.
- ¹² «La quale distinzione si fa oggidì appresso noi colle musiche che si fanno alla fine degli atti, allora che la scena rimane vuota. Non nel cospetto degli spettatori, facendo sorgere nel mezzo della scena colla macchina i musici [...], ovvero che si odano dalla parte di dietro della scena, onde non si vede persona, e con questo modo è più facile e più in uso. Ma l'altro è più dilettevole, per non dire meraviglioso.» Quotation readable in E. Povoledo and N. Pirrotta, “Intermezzo”, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Rome, Maschere and Sansoni, 1959, vol. VI, pp. 572-81. Unfortunately, iconography of musicians playing on the two sides of the proscenium in sixteenth-century theatre is very poor. On the problem of placing singers and consort on stage, or behind the stage as Giraldi Cinthio suggests: N. Pirrotta, “Il luogo dell’orchestra”, in *Idem, Poesia e musica e altri saggi*, Florence, La Nuova Italia/Discanto, 1994, pp. 171-8; M. Di Pasquale, “Annotazioni sull’impiego degli strumenti musicali nel teatro padano del Cinquecento”, in *Il diletto della scena e dell’armonia. Teatro e musica nelle Ven-*

- ezie dal Cinquecento al Settecento, Rovigo, Minelliana, 1990, pp. 109-35.
- ¹³ B. Pino da Cagli, “Breve considerazione intorno al componimento de la commedia de’ nostri tempi (1572)”, in *L'erofilomachia, ovvero Il duello d'amore et d'amicizia. Commedia nuova de l'eccellentissimo dottor di leggi M. Sforza d'Oddo*, Venice, Sessa, 1578; see also Weinberg, *Trattati di poetica e retorica*, vol. II, pp. 629-49, and F. Luisi, *Musica e tragedia*, cit., p. 118.
- ¹⁴ L. Groto, *Lettere famigliari*, Venice, Giuliani, 1616, pp. 437-40.
- ¹⁵ I. Cavallini, “Il Groto e la musica”, in G. Brunello, A. Lodo Luigi Groto e il suo tempo (1541-1585). *Atti del convegno di studi*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 1987, vol. I, pp. 183-204.
- ¹⁶ N. Pirrotta, E. Polvoledo, *Li due Orfei: da Poliziano a Monteverdi*, Rome, Edizioni RAI Radiotelevisione italiana, 1969; W. Osthoff, *Theatergesang und darstellende Musik in der italienischen Renaissance*, vol. 2, Tutzing, Hans Schneider, 1969.
- ¹⁷ See: F. Borsi, *Il potere e lo spazio. La scena del principe. Catalogo della mostra*, Milan, Electa, 1980; E. Garbero Zorzi, M. Sperenzi, *Teatro e spettacolo nella Firenze dei Medici. Modelli dei luoghi teatrali*, Florence, Olschki, 2001.
- ¹⁸ D. P. Walker, F. Ghisi, J. Jacquot, (edited by), *Musique des intermèdes de La pellegrina. Les fêtes du mariage de Ferdinand de Médicis et de Christine de Lorraine, Florence 1589*, Paris, CNRS, 1963.
- ¹⁹ J. M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as Theatrum Mundi*, New Haven, CT and London, Yale University Press, 1996.
- ²⁰ A. Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa et del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche*, Ferrara, Baldini, 1598.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

- ²² *Ibid.*, The two sentences are translated by F. W. Sternfeld in *The Birth of the Opera*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 85.
- ²³ L. Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotele volgarizzata et sposta*, Vienna, Stainhofer, 1570, pp. 120-1.
- ²⁴ G. B. Guarini, "Annotazioni della terza scena del quarto atto", in *Il pastor fido*, Venice, Ciotti, 1602, p. 269.
- ²⁵ A. Ongaro, "Origine dello 'ntramezo, in *L'Alceo favola pescatoria [...] con gl'intramezzi del sig. cavalier Batista Guarini. Descritti e dichiarati dall'Arsiccio accademico ricreduto. Aggiuntici appresso alcuni discorsi del medesimo Arsiccio sopra ciascheduno intramezzo*, Ferrara, Baldini, 1614, p. 44.
- ²⁶ On the big amount of pastoral plays from the mid-sixteenth century onwards M. Pieri, *La scena boschereccia nel rinascimento italiano*, Padova, Liviana, 1983.
- ²⁷ «L'egloga del Tasso con intermedi apparenti bellissimi e di vari animali fu bellissimo intrattenimento» (my translation: 'The eclogue of Tasso with visible [on the proscenium] and beautiful intermedi comprised of several animals was a beautiful entertainment'), see A. Cavicchi, "Immagini e forme dello spazio scenico nella pastorale ferrarese", in M. Chiabò, F. Doglio *Sviluppi della drammaturgia pastorale nell'Europa del Cinque-Seicento. Atti del convegno internazionale del Centro studi sul teatro medioevale e rinascimentale*, Rome, Torre d'Orfeo, 1991, pp. 45-7.
- ²⁸ «Le principesse con le dame di palazzo fan loro stesse la Pastorale del Tassino e vogliono madrigali per musiche», (my translation: 'The princesses and the ladies-in-waiting themselves play the pastoral of Tasso and they want madrigals as [incidental] music') see A. Solerti, "Laura Guidiccioni Lucchesini ed Emilio

- de' Cavalieri. I primi tentativi di melodramma”, «Rivista musicale italiana», 9 (1902), pp. 503-58.
- ²⁹ D. Belli, *Orfeo dolente, diviso in cinque intermedi con li quali il signor Ugo Rinaldi ha rappresentato l'Aminta, favola boschereccia del signor Torquato Tasso*, Venice, Amadino, 1616.
- ³⁰ References to this tragedy are in my article “Ludovico Dolce, Antonio Molino, Claudio Merulo e la musica in tragedia”, in M. Capra, *A messer Claudio, musico. Le arti molteplici di Claudio Merulo da Correggio (1533-1604) tra Venezia e Parma*, Venice, Marsilio/Casa della Musica, 2006, pp. 277-98.
- ³¹ P. Aretino, *Orazia*, in M. Ariani *Il teatro italiano II. La tragedia del Cinquecento*, Turin, Einaudi, 1977, vol. II, pp. 185-280.
- ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 984-1008.
- ³³ L. Schrade, *La représentation d'Edipo tiranno au Teatro Olimpico (Vicence 1585)*, Paris, CNRS, 1960; N. Pirrotta, “I cori per l'Edipo tiranno”, in F. Degrada *Andrea Gabrieli e il suo tempo. Atti del convegno internazionale*, Florence, Olschki, 1987, pp. 273-92.
- ³⁴ This letter is readable in P. Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, cit., pp. 148-9.
- ³⁵ C. Monteverdi, *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi con alcuni opuscoli in genere rappresentativo, che saranno per brevi episodi fra i canti senza gesto*, Venice, Vincenti, 1638.
- ³⁶ E. Rosand, “The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament”, «The Musical Quarterly», 65 (1979), pp. 346-59.
- ³⁷ J. Racek, *Stilprobleme der italienischen Monodie. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des einstimmigen Barockliedes*, Prague, Státní Pedagogické Nakladatelství, 1965.
- ³⁸ Translated by Sternfeld, *The Birth of Opera*, cit., p. 174.
- ³⁹ My translation of: «Modo di rappresentare il presente canto. Le parti che cantano fuori del pianto della ninfa si sono separata-

mente poste, perché si cantano al tempo de la mano; le altre tre parti che vanno commiserando in debole voce la ninfa si sono poste in partitura, acciò seguitano il pianto di essa, qual va cantato a tempo dell'affetto dell'animo e non a quello della mano». See Monteverdi, *Madrigali guerrieri*, cit.

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