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The tacit knowledge of Claudio Monteverdi as expressed in the opera La Tragedia di Claudio M

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Contexts

The storyline of *La Tragedia di Claudio M* consists of a chain of interrelated facts centred around Claudio Monteverdi's biography. In other words, the basis is the personal cultural archive of our protagonist during his artistic development in the year from *Orfeo* to *Arianna*. Where possible, part of this historical reality is represented by my libretto of *La Tragedia di Claudio M*. What follows underneath is a step-by-step contextualisation of the libretto. Apart from testimonials that provide a biographical narrative, the opera is based on historical and musicological information endorsed by scores, iconography and the literature that was available to Monteverdi when he created *Orfeo* and *Arianna*.

Prologue

Mantua

10 September 1607 Claudia Cattaneo, the wife of Claudio Monteverdi, died after repeatedly falling ill for more than a year. Her death is registered at the parish of San Sepolchro in Cremona¹, where she died at the house of her father-in-law, Baldassarre Monteverdi.

She stayed at his place with her two young sons, but although Baldassarre was a medical doctor and a respected member of the city's college of surgeons, he apparently could not save her life.

Monteverdi had returned to his father's house from Milano in time to witness his wife's passing away. In Milano, he had been meeting his colleague from the Mantuan court, the theologian Cherubino Ferrari. We know he had shown his friend the score of *Orfeo* because Ferrari praised this work in a letter to their patron, Vincenzo Gonzaga, from 22 August 1607.

'Il Monteverdi m'ha fatto veder i versi et sentire la musica della comedia che V.A. fece fare, et certo che il poeta et il musico hanno sí ben rappresentati gli affetti dell'animo che nulla piú.

La poesia quanto all' inventione è bella, quanto alla dispositione migliore, et quanto all'ellocutione ottima, et in somma da un bell'ingegno quall'è il Sig. Striggi non si poteva aspettare altro. La musica altresí stando nel suo decoro serve sí bene alla poesia che non si può sentir meglio [...]'²

Monteverdi has let me see the verses and hear the music of the comedy which Your Highness had done, and it is certain that the poet and the musician have so well represented the affects of the soul that [it] cannot be

¹ "Claudia Monteverdi Catanea Mantovana confes. com. con l'estrema onctione (=unzione) morse adi 10 settembre 1607. Nella parochia di San Sepolchro, et fu levata dalla Cattedrale come forastiere et sepolta in San Nazaro." Elia Santoro, *La famiglia e la Formazione di Claudio Monteverdi*, In *Annali della biblioteca governativa e libreria civica di Cremona*. Volume XVIII, 1967, p. 72. "Claudia Monteverdi Catanea, Mantuan, having confessed with the last rites, died on 10 September 1607 in the parish of San Sepolchro and as a foreigner was taken from the cathedral and buried in San Nazaro.", Paolo Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, Trans. Tim Carter. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.76.

² Paolo Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, (Torino, Edizioni Di Torino, 1985) p.123.

bettered. The poetry as regards its invention is beautiful, is even better as regards its disposition, and is excellent for its elocution, and in sum, one could not expect anything else from so fine an intellect as Signor Striggio's. Moreover, the music, in terms of its appropriateness, serves the poetry so well that one cannot hear it better.³

But the purpose of the Milan visit was primarily the publication⁴ of eleven of his madrigals from the fifth book as contrafacta with religious texts in Latin.

Although other composers are represented in this book, Monteverdi far outnumbers them with his compositions.

Halfway through 1607, Monteverdi's career reached a new high. By that time, his work was very well received, as is proven by the recent reprints in Venice of all previous madrigal books. Also, unpublished work appeared in print. 26 July his *Scherzi musicali* saw the light of day with the very important postscript (*Dichiaratione*) by his brother Giulio Cesare, as a self-confident counterattack to the allegations of Giovanni Maria Artusi.⁵ In this text, the busy life of Claudio is illustrated by several examples, such as 'concertar le due viole bastarde, next to providing music for tourneys, ballets and comedies.' (See the chapter *Dichiaratione*)

But he also kept close contact with his city of birth and even did some work there. Before his departure to Milano, the Cremonese Accademia degli Animosi had paid Claudio honour by appointing him a member of the congregation.

In the past year, most probably also while composing his *Orfeo*, Monteverdi had contributed with his compositions to the events of the accademia.⁶

At this great breakthrough in his career, Monteverdi is confronted with the loss of one of the pillars of his existence, his wife Claudia. She was a very much appreciated court singer and the daughter of the viol player Giacomo Cattaneo. It is possible that Claudio lived in the house of this colleague just after he was appointed in 1590/91 to court musician as a singer and viol player by Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga. It is certain that he had at least close contact with the Cattaneo family, hence his marriage with Claudia, which took place in 1599.

During his first years in Mantua, his reputation as a singer (tenor) and composer outshadowed his viol playing. Only once did he mention mastering the instrument in an extraordinary way. In the dedication of his third book of madrigals, he states that he owed the position as Duke Vincenzo's professional musician to the noble practice of the 'vivuola', which must have been the viola bastarda.

...col nobilissimo esercizio della Vivuola che m'aperse la fortunata porta del suo servizio..'
(with the most noble practice of the viola that opened the fortunate portal to your service)

³ Translation by Tim Carter in Fabbri/Carter, *Monteverdi*, (Cambridge, 1995) p 76.

⁴ *Musica tolta dai madrigali di Claudio Monteverdi e d'altri autori, a cinque et a sei voci*. 1607 Latin texts on sacred subjects by Aquilino Coppini, published by Agostino Tradate and dedicated to Cardinal Federico Borromeo.

⁵ Giovanni Maria Artusi, *L'Artusi overo Delle imperfettioni della moderna musica*. (Venice, Vicenti, 1600). Divided in two parts, *Ragionamento primo e secondo*. A sequel followed in 1603. See chapter 2, The Narrative, p. 34.

⁶ Elia Santoro mentions in his book the possibility that the academy had access to material of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and eventually performed part of it in Cremona on 23 February 1607, so the night before the première of *Orfeo* at the court of Mantua. Santoro, *La Famiglia*, p. 71.

The instrumental skills must have been more than mere viol playing. It is obvious that the word noble in this practice pointed to an instrument of the viola da gamba type, which in this case was played with the bastarda technique.⁷ It is very likely that this instrument was initially for him what the lyre was for Orfeo, as stated in the first line of the libretto. (*mia cetra omnipotente*).

Orfeo

In August 1609, the full score of the opera appeared in print by the publisher Amadino in Venice, with a dedication to Prince Francesco Gonzaga. In his dedication, which is humble and proud at the same time, Monteverdi mentions the transition from a small stage (*'angusta Scena'*) of the first performance for the Accademia degli Invaghiti under the auspices of Francesco, into the *'gran Teatro dell'universo.'* He writes the work could not be linked to any other name than his patron, and thanks to His Highness, it would be lasting as long as mankind. (*'che sia durabile al pari dell'humana generatione.'*)

This was a bit of a visionary statement considering that almost 300 years later, this *Orfeo* would be revived in Paris by the composer Vincent D'Indy. The first performance in modern times (1904)⁸ would be the beginning of a new glorious life for Monteverdi's first opera, obtaining an iconic status.

Prince Francesco Gonzaga interfered heavily during the making of *Orfeo*, as we can conclude from his correspondence with his brother Ferdinando about all sorts of production matters, such as the casting. At the wedding festivities of their aunt Maria de Medici and the French King Henri IV in Florence, the Gonzaga brothers witnessed the first performance of the opera *Euridice* in Palazzo Pitti on 6 October 1600. There obviously was a close link between Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* set on Ottavio Rinnucini's libretto. (see Tomlinson, 1981)

We have, however, no evidence at all that Claudio Monteverdi was among the ca. 200 spectators who attended the Florentine performance of Jacopo Peri's *Euridice*. This might seem probable, and authors like Lucien Rebatet even added some presumed utterances by Monteverdi on the 'boring' performance, as quoted by Laura Rietveld.⁹ But more likely, Monteverdi and Striggio Jr. somehow obtained their information from the score, either in

⁷ James Bates, "Monteverdi, the Viola Bastarda Player." In *The Italian Viola da Gamba; Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Italian Viola da Gamba, Magnano, Italy, 29 April–1 May 2000*, ed. Christophe Coin and Susan Orlando, (Turin, A. Manzoni, 2002) pp. 53–72.

⁸ The new première of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (Act 2,3,4) took place in the Schola Cantorum of Paris, Rue Saint Jacques, on 25 February 1904, with 150 performers in a French translation that was made by Vincent d'Indy. (See also chapter 2, the Narrative, p. 64).

⁹ Laura C.J. Rietveld, *Il trionfo di Orfeo: la fortuna di Orfeo in Italia da Dante a Monteverdi*, PhD diss., Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2007, p.300, n.889.

manuscript or the two printed versions.¹⁰

Throughout several generations, Gonzaga court has had a vivid interest in the myth of Orpheus. In the ducal palaces, the iconography witnesses the fascination for several aspects of the myth, particularly the death of Orpheus.

Act I

According to the parish register, Claudia Monteverdi Catanea (sic) was buried, the Ss. Nazzaro e Celso, the same church where Claudio received his baptism exactly forty years earlier. She had been seriously ill a year earlier, as documented by her letter from 14 November 1606 to the court and suffered health problems regularly. The letter from Claudia to Annibale Chieppio, the ducal counsellor, tells that she had been very sick, '*infermità grave avuta*', their salaries should be paid from the taxes of Viadana '*le provigioni nostre siano pagate sopra il dacio de Viadana*' and that a dress should be given because she was worried about the cold that was coming, '*che molto mi prese, venendo il freddo come fa*'.¹¹

Two weeks after his wife's death, Claudio received a letter from that court written by Secretary Federico Follino.¹² The letter expressed condolences and praise for the deceased but stressed that his return to Mantua was urgently needed. Monteverdi must have arrived on 9 October 1607 or a bit earlier since he spoke to Prince Francesco Gonzaga about the new opera on the evening of that day.

Monteverdi's refusal to return from Cremona to Mantua came only a year later but is for dramaturgical reasons inserted at this spot of the libretto. We know this from the famous letter of 2 December 1608, where he complained with rhetorical conviction about illness caused by the fetid air¹³ of the marshes around Mantua and the poor living circumstances caused by the lack of payment and the extreme workload. A plea for the resignation of his son by Baldassare Monteverdi to both the duke and the duchess had achieved nothing. This explains the vehement tone of Claudio's letter and his confident attitude towards his patron. Complaints about failure to pay and the humiliating low wages date back several years earlier but apply equally well to the glorious years of the operas *Orfeo* and *Arianna*.

The insertion of the *lamento della ninfa* is an anachronism in this scene because the piece was composed and presented later in Venice. The way it is used here (*quel traditor*) hints at Vincenzo, the Duke of Mantua's (suggested) pressing interference in Caterina Martinelli's life. The fact that the duke's beloved singer was chosen to sing the leading role

¹⁰ *Le musiche di Jacopo Peri ... sopra l'Euridice*, Florence, Marescotti, 1600; *L'Euridice composta in musica in stile rappresentativo da Giulio Caccini*, Florence, Marescotti, 1600.

¹¹ Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, p. 124.

¹² *Idem*, a letter dated 24-IX-1607.

¹³ Dennis Stevens, *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, (London, Faber, 1980) pp. 56,57.

in *Arianna* indicates that by 1607, she performed at an exceptionally high level. Moreover, she must have been an intimate apprentice after three years of musical education in the vicinity of the master.

Ragione

The labyrinth was a favourite emblem or symbol in the Gonzaga palaces. In the original garden of Palazzo Te in Mantua, there was a maze of boxwood, which now no longer exists. The palace was built on an island and more or less around a labyrinth surrounded by water. The fictitious return of Monteverdi in Mantua could be situated here. There is an intriguing fresco by Lorenzo Leonbruno combining two favourite Gonzaga emblems, the labyrinth and Mount Olympus. This last symbol was connected to Duke Federico II,¹⁴ who commissioned the construction of Palazzo Te. The respected emblem was granted to him and the Gonzaga family in 1530 by emperor Charles V on the occasion of promoting him from marquis to the first duke of Mantua.

At the top of Mount Olympus stands the altar of Faith. In the Leonbruno fresco, the labyrinth symbolises the transformative journey that must be made to start an individuation process of climbing Mount Olympus, ending at the altar of Faith.

Very prominent is the carved ceiling in the Stanza del Labirinto of the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. Originally constructed for the San Sebastiano palace in that city, it was transferred to its present location in 1601, as ordered by Vincenzo Gonzaga. This spectacular enterprise will have had much attention, even more, because the proud duke used it as a personal symbol of triumph for his part in the last of his battles against the Turks at the Hungarian city of Kanisza. (Canissia) The first of three expeditions in 1595 to Viszgrád was accompanied by a small 'capella', which was led by Monteverdi. The musicians served the masses but also provided musical entertainment at the different stations towards the destination and at the war location. By adding at the border of the sculptured ceiling a text about the war on the Turks, Vincenzo Gonzaga turned the labyrinth into a personal memorial.

'Dum sub arce Canisiae /Contra turcas pugnam/ Vinc Mant IV /et MontFerr II dux.' [While under the fortress of Canessa (Kanizsa, Hungary)/against the Turks / fought Vincenzo, the fourth duke of Mantova and second of Monferrato.]

The image of fights is related to the metaphorical meaning of a labyrinth as a non-linear way to a goal, on which it is often hard to orientate. The core text here is an obsessive repetition of the theme of a frottola¹⁵ from Isabella d'Este's court music. 'Forse che sì, forse che no.'

¹⁴ Federico II (1500 -1540) was the son of Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga II. About the emblem see: Rodolfo Signorini, *Imprese Gonzaghesche*, (Mantova, Sometti, 2013), p 48.

¹⁵ 'Forsi che sí, forsi che no' set to a four-part frottola by Marchetto Cara (1474-ca.1525).

This phrase can be interpreted in many ways. However, because of the centre of this monumental labyrinth, we are supposed to understand the direct link to the labyrinth of Crete, where Arianna helped Theseus escape after he killed her half-brother, the Minotaur.

The only extant reference by Claudio Monteverdi to a labyrinth is in a letter which compares the legal battle about his inheritance of the house in Mantua of his late father-in-law, Giacomo Cattaneo, to the Socratic metaphor of a labyrinth. In Plato's *Euthydemus*¹⁶ concerning the so-called Eristics - outsmarting each other with arguments rather than finding the truth - Socrates states that those disputing with each other are not getting any further as if thrown back in a labyrinth, having to start from square one every time.

This perception most likely motivated Monteverdi to write in 1625 that he was longing for a settlement in the conflict to liberate himself from further intrigues because: 'non credo che altro labirinto gli antichi intendessero che questo del litigare.'¹⁷

More labyrinthine than the lawsuit of 1625 was the conflict, which he was challenged to fight twenty years earlier and the indignation that he expressed in a letter to Doni more than thirty years after the row started. For his *Trattato della musica scenica* (1633-1635), the Florentine historian Giovanni Battista Doni was collecting information about the first composers of opera. Monteverdi's letter was a substantial contribution, also by sketching the argument with 'a theorist' who tried to humiliate him:

'[...], come se fossero statte solfe fatte da un fanciullo che incominciasse ad imparar notta contra notta, [...]' as if they were solfege exercises made by a child that is beginning to learn note against note (counterpoint),

In 1605, in his fifth book of madrigals, Monteverdi gave his first and only public response to the Bolognese theorist and clergyman Giovanni Maria Artusi, who attacked the composer in his treatise published in 1600 about the 'imperfections of the modern composers.'¹⁸ The response was wrapped up in a compact rebuttal of the allegations, a postface in the shape of a short letter to the 'studious (informed) readers'.¹⁹

A few months before he started working on *Arianna*, a new publication was released with the title *Scherzi musicali*. In this edition, his brother Giulio Cesare added a text that clarified the statements that Claudio had made in 1605. This *Dichiaratione della lettera* was probably

The frottola survived in a unique copy in a convolute *Frottole, libro tertio*, Venezia, Petrucci, 1505. ff. XXXIII v-XXXV r, now in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, rar. 878/3. See: Paola Besutti, "'Forse che sì forse che no" in musica: frottole e reminiscenze,' in: *"Forse che sì forse che no" Gabriele d'Annunzio a Mantova*, ed. R. Signorini (Florence, Olschki, 2011), pp. 67-92.

¹⁶ Elisa Ravasio, Ivan Faiferri, "In the Labyrinth of the Dialogue", in *An Anthology of Philosophical Studies*, 12, pp. 139-148. <https://www.atiner.gr/docs/2018PHI-INTRO.pdf>

¹⁷ ...for I don't think those ancient writers understood labyrinth anything other than litigation." Stevens, *The Letters*, p.293.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2, The Narrative, p. 34.

¹⁹ See Chapter 2 *Dichiaratione*, p. 69.

inserted to notify the studious readers that, for the time being, Monteverdi was too busy to fulfil his promise and deliver the treatise about the *seconda pratica* and the perfection of modern music. There must have been some excitement among the Monteverdi brothers about putting in print the final blow to their opponent and allowing Giulio Cesare to include the sarcasm below the dignity of the maestro himself. There is little doubt about Claudio's agreement with the expression of this defence. Therefore, it seems legitimate to use these words in the labyrinthic dialogue between Ragione (Daedalus/Artusi) and Monteverdi as his own.

The controversy can be seen as a confrontation between a theorist and a practitioner, both concerned about the public recognition of their values. But in a wider context this debate is not just between the visions of two men. It is rather a culmination of an ongoing discussion of music theorists from the 16th century, which had a decisive breakthrough after Vincenzo Galilei's publication, *Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna* in 1581.²⁰

Artusi's reasoning and argumentation often portray him as detached from practice, which Giulio Cesare regularly stresses in the *Dichiaratione*.²¹ To remind him of the practical implications of a musician's life, he sketches his brother's many duties, including the viola bastarda—which guaranteed him a position in court music—as by 1607, still a serious occupation.

The remark of Artusi about musicians, who, while exhausting themselves day and night, are deluded by what their instruments make them believe is good music, could very well point to viola bastarda playing. Certainly, in improvisations by these instrumentalists, a lot more freedom was accepted in contrapuntal and harmonic progressions. This is explained as early as 1609 by Adriano Banchieri.²²

Monteverdi was most probably such a practitioner but, at the same time, much more than just a skilled musician. The creating artist in him refused to be put in that category, and he had always carefully avoided being classified as merely a performing musician. This is also illustrated by his letters showing ambition to get a court position as maestro of court music or master of church music, which he did not get in Mantua.

Feeling challenged in the field of reason (Ragione), he promised in his hubris²³ a book that would refute all his opponent's erroneous allegations. In his letter of 1605, he feigned that the book was nearly ready for the press. As a flag he introduced the title *Seconda Pratica* to

²⁰ For more information about the role of Vincenzo Galilei in the development of the *seconda pratica* see Chapter 1, Episteme, p. 24.

²¹ see Chapter 2, *Dichiaratione*, p. 75/76.

²² See Chapter 2, The Narrative, Banchieri (p. 37)

²³ As Tim Carter eloquently described it, Monteverdi had entered a "path through a terminological and philosophical minefield." His promise to clarify the principles of the *seconda prattica* was to solve a "true epistemological crisis" where traditional music theory tried to come to terms with new phenomena in musical practice. Tim Carter, "Artusi, Monteverdi and the Poetics of Modern Music." In *Musical Humanism and Its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca*, ed. Nancy Kovaleff Baker and Barbara Russano Hanning, pp. 171–94. Stuyvesant, (New York: Pendragon Press, 1992), pp.190 and 194.

give the modern way of composing a recognisable identity. This move in the labyrinthic discussion would mark him far beyond the intended effect for centuries to come.²⁴

The promised book would never appear, of course, because the only way to really make his point was by realising all the arguments directly through his music.

Nevertheless, even thirty years later, in the letters to Doni (see above), he would still repeat his intentions to publish a treatise explaining everything about the new style. Ironically, even after his death, in the necrology dedicated to him by Matteo Caberloti, his work on a treatise about the *seconda pratica* is mentioned as unfortunately unfinished. As Caberloti writes in his *Laconismo*:

"...un volume, nelquale notificando i più occulti arcani della sua disciplina era per impedire, che mai più ne secoli venturi restassero nascoste à studenti le vere strade per facilitarli l'acquisto della perfezione dell'arte Musica. Ma l'empia morte affrettata da breve infermità hà cagionato, che come imperfetta resti priva della luce della stampa."

[...] A volume in which notifying the most occult secrets of his discipline was to prevent that ever again in the coming centuries should the true ways to facilitate the acquisition of the perfection of the art of music remain hidden from students. [...] 'due to his unholy death, hastened by a brief illness, the unfinished work would remain deprived of the light of the press.'

Thus sealing the myth of the intellectual Monteverdi rather than the practitioner he was.²⁵

On the other hand, this same author portrays the deceased as the Orpheus of his time, who had no equal in his viol playing. '...col suono della sua viola' must indicate viola da gamba, because by 1644 there was little confusion about the terminology of string instruments.

Moreover, it is improbable that on the cover of *Fiori Poetici* coincidentally, a viola da gamba (obviously the model used for bastarda playing) is the only instrument that comes to the fore and slightly covers the text sheet.

Artusi articulates his objections to the instrumental approach to invention several times in his treatise. He ventilates his contempt for musicians who, as he describes it, 'find through all their practising extravagant things, outside reason and very remote from the experiences of their predecessors, that resulted in secure rules embraced by the ears and confirmed by the intellect'.²⁶

The condemnation of instrumentalists is not based on ignorance about their profession. On the contrary, Artusi demonstrates, certainly in the first *Ragionamento*, a profound knowledge

²⁴ (see Chapter 2, The Narrative, p. 36).

²⁵ Matteo Caberloti, "Laconismo", in: Giovanni Battista Marinoni, (ed.) *Fiori poetici raccolti nel funerale del molto illustre e molto reverendo sig. Claudio Monteverde, maestro di cappella della Ducale di S. Marco.* (Venetia, Miloco, 1644)

²⁶ *L'Artusi, Ragionamento primo*, pp. 8r, 8v.

'Lasciamo, che stia, & resti nella sua ignoranza insieme con quelli che giorno e notte s'affaticano con lo istrumento per ritrovare cose stravaganti, fuori della ragione, e lontani dalla esperienza, già fatta di nostri passati, e ridotta in regole certe dal senso abbracciate, & dal intelletto confermate;'

of the technical aspects of many instruments and their role in ensemble playing. Intonation and accordance in temperament is a very prominent one, though most attention goes to the wind players. The role of the trombones and cornetti is specifically discussed in their ability to imitate the voices and adjust intonations easily and with great care for perfection.²⁷

'che stij bene auertito il Sonatore, di fare che lo Instrumento da lui adoperato, imiti la voce naturale più che puote, s'egli è Cornetto, ò Trombone...'

(the player should be well aware that the instrument he uses imitates the natural voices as well as possible, be it a cornetto, or trombone...)

Virtuosity is particularly praised for those who give grace to their parts with beautiful bow strokes, but also liveliness by the 'passaggi', and the cornetti and other wind instruments by their precision in tonguing. Artusi copied in detail information about the articulations of the cornetto as if he was very familiar with the playing techniques and possibilities of the instrument. His knowledge, however, comes directly from the 1587 edition by Girolamo dalla Casa, without naming the author. In *Ragionamento primo* 4v, 5 Artusi gives detailed information about the three ways of articulating for the cornetto because the tongue is 'the basis of all good and beautiful playing, apart from the lips which of course produce the sound quality.'²⁸

La via naturale all imitatione

Though Artusi respected the skills of the musicians (*pratici*), he held their knowledge and judgement of compositional matters in very low esteem.

In the first part of his treatise, he speaks about the ignorance of mere practitioners because they mix diatonic and chromatic music in total confusion. He concludes that in the end, this will bring them just embarrassment:

*'Non è dubio, che il discorere di cose difficili, & di molta speculatione, non s'appartiene al pratico; ma questo è officio del Theorico, non potendo il semplice pratico penetrare tanto avanti, che arrivi alla cognitione di simili particolari: di qui è, che non potendo col loro intelletto giungere al segno di questa verità: si vedono molte impertinente, & imperfettioni nelle compositioni da loro fatte; il che non apporta se non vergogna infinita.'*²⁹

(There is no doubt that the discourse of difficult things, & of much speculation, does not belong to the practitioner but is the function of the Theorist since the mere practitioner cannot penetrate so far that he arrives at the understanding of such details: whence it is, that not being able with their intellect to reach the meaning of this truth: one sees many improprieties, & imperfections in the compositions made by them; which brings nothing but infinite shame.)

²⁷ L'Artusi, *Ragionamento primo*, 12v.

²⁸ Even the formulations are copy pasted from Girolamo dalla Casa, *Il vero modo di diminuir con tutte le sorti di stromenti. il primo libro*, (Venice, 1589).

²⁹ L'Artusi, *Ragionamento primo*, pp 20v -21r.

The details that should be known, according to Artusi, are mainly in the field of mathematics, tuning and intonation. Also, when he writes about imitating the Grand System of Nature³⁰, it is rather the physics in nature that generates the proportions and perfection, which, in his view, art should approach through imitation. When talking about *musica ficta*, he points to the impossibility of the artist creating something that is equal to nature, even though this artist is put in motion by reasoning and discovers as much as possible about the natural thing. The artefact and nature, however, will never be the same. It turns out that everything music theorists discuss is something that can be measured, but this nature's complexity is beyond measurement.

Only once, though, does Artusi mention the musical work in combination with the text. He did not take poetry into consideration when talking about the imperfections of modern music, and precisely there, his entire attack falls flat. His respect for Cipriano de Rore, who later is mentioned by Giulio Cesare Monteverdi as the first example of a modern composer in the light of the *seconda pratica*, is expressed in relation to merging poetry and music.³¹ Artusi calls De Rore 'the first who started to accommodate the words in a beautiful order' (*che fosse stato il primo, che avesse incominciato ad accomodare bene le parole, & con bell'ordine*).³² Despite his ability to notice this quality, Artusi did not think to include any other remark about text-related issues somewhere in his treatise, even though all the music in the focus of his criticism is primarily an elevation of text.

In his letter to Giovanni Battista Doni, mentioned above, Monteverdi refers to this period in his life where he had been searching for the 'natural way of imitation' while working on the *Lamento d'Arianna*. Contrary to Artusi's presumption, as a practitioner, he did try to study the *Republic* of Plato on the subject of imitation but did not find any help there. With his limited vision (*con la mia debil vista*), as he calls it, he could not grasp what Plato was demonstrating. But with great effort, he finally delivered proof of what he could achieve in 'imitation'.

*'Vado credendo che non sara discaro al mondo, posciache ho provato in pratica che quando fui per scrivere il pianto del Arianna, non trovando libro che mi aprisse la via naturale alla immitatione nè meno che mi illuminasse che dovessi essere immitatore, altri che platone per via di un suo lume rinchiuso cosi che appena potevo scorgere di lontano con la mia debil vista quel poco che mi mostrava; ho provato dicco la gran fatica che mi bisognò fare in far quel poco ch'io feci d'immitatione';*³³

³⁰ idem, p.30 v: ...& in questo senso potiamo dire, che quelli, che propongono cose simili, habbino intentione d'imitare il Sistema massimo naturale, essendo l'Arte imitatrice della natura, se bene non può arrivare al perfetto di essa natura.

(& in this sense, we may say that those who propose similar things have intentions of imitating the Grand System of Nature, the Art being an imitator of nature, even good, it cannot arrive at the perfect of that nature.)

³¹ See Chapter 2, *Dichiaratione*, p. 76

³² *L'Artusi, Ragionamento primo*, pp. 19v, 20r.

³³ Letter No.124, 22-X-1633, to Giovanni Battista Doni, (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p.214). See also Chapter 4, *Libretto* p. 124, note 50.

(I believe that this [book] will not be without its usefulness in the world since I found in practice that when I was composing the lament of Ariadne, not finding any book that explained to me the natural way to imitation, nor one which told me what an imitator should be – except for Plato, who shed so dim a light that I was scarcely able to see with my weak vision what little he showed me - I found, I say, what hard work is necessary to do even what little I did in this matter of imitation.)

Certainly, the poets of his preference provided a major contribution to Monteverdi's musical invention. The third madrigal book, published in 1592, shows a radical change in style, which, to a great deal, can be attributed to the works of Torquato Tasso. As

Gary Tomlinson formulated it, a 'new sensitivity to the musical projection of poetic syntax' can be noticed in these works. Monteverdi understood that not only through 'stock iconic gestures' but also the 'projection of its rhetorical structure', music can enhance the significance of poetry.³⁴ It is a challenging thought to see Tasso's presence at the court of Mantua from March to November 1591 as a unique opportunity for the young composer to learn about the recitation of poems. Even though, as Tomlinson³⁵ puts it, a direct meeting with the 'tormented soul' is unlikely, the fact that Tasso had been working on the second revision (or rather unsuccessful alteration) of his famous *Gerusalemme liberata* and the collection of his *Rime*, suggests that he was mentally relatively healthy. In my opinion, an encounter with the poet's recitation should not be ruled out.

Four years earlier, a theoretical work by Tasso appeared in print, and he discusses the relation between art and nature several times. In the first part of his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, he speaks of imitation in terms of verisimilitude, though according to him, the aspect of marvel can very well be included.

*'La poesia non è in sua natura altro che imitazione (e questo non si può richiamare in dubbio) ; e l'imitazione non può essere discompagnata dal verisimile, peroché tanto significa imitare, quanto far simile ; non può dunque parte alcuna di poesia esser separata dal verisimile ; e in somma il verisimile non è una di quelle condizioni richieste nella poesia a maggior sua bellezza e ornamento, ma è propria e intrinseca dell'essenza sua, e in ogni sua parte sovra ogn'altra cosa necessaria. Ma bench'io stringo il poeta epico ad un obbligo perpetuo di servire il verisimile, non però escludo da lui l'altra parte, cioè il meraviglioso ; anzi giudico ch'un'azione medesima possa essere e meravigliosa e verisimile ; e molti credo che siano i modi di congiungere insieme queste qualità così discordanti ; e rimettendo gli altri a quella parte ove della testura della favola si tratterà, la quale è lor proprio luogo, dell'uno qui ricerca l'occasione che si favelli.'*³⁶

(Poetry is in its nature nothing but imitation (and this cannot be called into question); and imitation cannot be separated from the semblance of truth (*verisimile*), because it means imitating as much as it does mean 'resembling'; therefore, no part of poetry can be separated from the appearance of truth; and in sum, the

³⁴ Gary Tomlinson, *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance*, (Berkeley, University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 53.

³⁵ Tomlinson, *the End of Renaissance*, p.59 "it is unlikely that the troubled poet (wandering between cities, after being released from the mental hospital St. Anna [in Ferrara, my note] would have had direct contact with a novice of Duke Vincenzo's musical staff, his presence itself at the court could hardly have escaped Monteverdi's notice."

³⁶ Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroica*, (Venice, 1587), (mod.ed.:Bari, Laterza, 1964) p.7. <https://archive.org/details/228TassoDiscorsiSi245/page/n11/mode/2up>

verisimilitude is not one of those conditions required in poetry for its greater beauty and ornament, but is **proper and intrinsic to its essence**, and in every part necessary above all else. But although I bind the epic poet to a perpetual obligation to serve the verisimilitude, I do not, however, exclude from him the other part, that is, the marvellous (*il meraviglioso*); on the contrary, **I believe that the same action can be both marvellous and truthlike**; and I believe that there are many ways of joining together these discordant qualities; and I refer the others to that part where the text of the fable will be dealt with, which is their proper place, but I seek here the opportunity to speak of one.)

It is not known if the book of Tasso was among those consulted by Monteverdi, trying to find the natural way of imitation. For sure, it illuminates a way of thinking among artists about their profession and, above all, about the relationship between art and nature.

There is a letter from Rembrandt van Rijn, that describes the efforts he made, in a similar way Monteverdi refers to his own diligence to achieve a goal of naturalness. Rembrandt writes to secretary Constantijn Huygens about two paintings for Prince Frederik Hendrik, in which he reached the utmost natural agility in representing the scene of the resurrection.

‘.want deese twee sijn t, daer die meeste ende die naetuerelste beweechgelickheijt in geopserveert is, dat oock de grooste oorsaek is, dat die selvijge soo lang onder handen sij geweest.’³⁷ (... because these are the two in which the most and most natural agility is observed, which is the main cause they were under my hands for such a long time.)

The painter stressed the great shock of the guards, which is the core of the dramatic impact. Here, the verisimilitude is comparable with that of poetry dramatised by music.

Apart from the musical texture in madrigals and later also monodic settings, it was not just the harmonic and melodic inventions that enhanced the rhetorical conviction. Freedom in delivery played a crucial role and was described as early as 1555 by Nicola Vicentino.³⁸ He indicated that not everything that concerned the performance could be written down.

This included reciting sometimes louder or softly, going faster and slowing down or changing the measure in accordance with the text to show the effects of the passions of the words and harmony. Vicentino points at the experience of the orator and what he is teaching the musician because ‘moving the measure³⁹ has a great effect on the soul. For that reason, the music will be sung by heart to imitate the accents and effects of the parts of the oration.’

In some letters, Monteverdi is also very clear about the importance of rehearsing his work by the singers before they can truly transmit the whole meaning of it.

In his letter of 28 July 1607, he reports to the court that he moved out of Mantua as soon as the duke had left the city and went to his father's house in Cremona. That was why the

³⁷ Letter to Constantijn Huygens, 12 January 1639. See also online:

<https://www.koninklijkeverzamelingen.nl/collectie-online/detail/de67430a-aba5-570c-84da-c808aaa756e0>

³⁸ Nicola Vicentino, *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica*, (Rome, Antonio Barre, 1555)

transcription: <https://tmiweb.science.uu.nl/text/reading-edition/vicant.html>

³⁹ *Idem*, p.94v; (...questo modo di muovere la misura, fà effetto assai nell'animo, & per tal ragione si canterà la Musica alla mente per imitar gli accenti, & effetti delle parti dell'oratione,...)

duke's request to set a sonnet to music only reached him later; moreover, it had taken a week to complete the composition, which underlines the scrutiny of his work.

Now sending the music, he stressed that, before the duke would hear the madrigal, it should be given to vice-chapelmaster Bassano, to rehearse it thoroughly with the singers.

“..quest è la musica da me fatta, ma mi fara gratia che avanti che Sua Altezza Serenissima l'oda, darle prima nelle mani al signor Don Bassano, atio possa provarla, pigliarne la sicurezza del aria, insieme con gli altri signori Cantori...”

(This is the music I have made, but I would be grateful if, before His Serene Highness hears it, you would first give it to Signor Don Bassano, so that he can rehearse it and take the assurance of the aria, together with the other singers...)

As he formulates it in his letter the music would not be understood by the performers:

“...perche e cosa molta difficile al cantore rappresentare un aria che prima non habbi pratticato, et é di molto danno a quella compositione musicale, come nella prima volta che vien cantata non viene intesa interamente.”⁴⁰

(...because it is very difficult for the singer to perform a song that he has not practised before, and it is very damaging to that musical composition if sung like the first time when it was not entirely understood.)

When, in March 1620, the court in Mantua launched plans for taking up the opera *Arianna* again, Monteverdi received a request to send copies. He made great haste finishing them, as we know from his letters of that period. For himself, this was, above all, to guarantee enough rehearsal time, which was a whole month or "a bit more". "No time to lose", as he puts it. He also sent the beginning of the lamento to gain time, "it being the most essential part of the opera."

*‘...essendo un mese o poco piu di prova, non ha ponto da perdere.....; Mando anco il principio del lamento.....essendo la piu essential parte del opera ;’*⁴¹

Just like the attention to compositional details in the madrigal above, the monodic style demanded its rehearsal time. No wonder, with the amount of eventual freedom for the performer, this was a major concern for the composer. If it was in 1620, when there were plans for the reprise of *L'Arianna*, how many more issues to try out would there have been thirteen years earlier, when so much of it was new? In an earlier letter that year⁴², Monteverdi reminds Striggio of the five months of rehearsal time for *L'Arianna* before its premiere.

‘...l'Arianna, che ci volsero cinque mesi di prova con molta istanza, dopo finita et inparata a mente..’

(...Arianna, it took five months of rehearsing with a lot of persistence before it was ready and learned by heart..)

There are several letters by Monteverdi that give a glimpse of his knowledge about vocal techniques and his priorities for an intelligible delivery of poetry. The little report he wrote

⁴⁰ Letter No. 4, 28-VII-1607, to Annibale Iberti, Councillor of the Duke, Annonciade Russo, and Jean-Philippe Navarre, *Monteverdi, Correspondance, préfaces et épîtres dédicatoires*, (Sprimont, Mardaga, 2001), p.28.

⁴¹ Letter No. 51, 21-III-1620 to Alessandro Striggio (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p.110).

⁴² Letter No. 38, 9-I-1620, to Alessandro Striggio, (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p.88).

about a singer⁴³ he auditioned for the duke contains some comments on limited understandability of the text because the singer swallowed the vowel a little (*s'ingorgia la vocale*) or let air 'escape to his nose or between the teeth, which made the word unintelligible' (*'la manda nel naso, et ancora se la lassia sdrussilare [sdruciolare] tra denti che non fa intelligibile quella parola'*).

When asked eight years later to provide music for a setting of *Andromeda*⁴⁴ - despite being positioned in Venice still working for the court in Mantua - he informed who the singer would be so he could take the 'proper nature of the voice' into consideration (*'atio possa pensare sopra alla propria naturale voce'*). He also wanted to know if it were one or two messengers who were going to "speak in song" (*'et se sara uno o duoi che parleranno in canto'*).

1600 - parlar cantando

In 1600 several works in the new monodic style appeared in print, which in their prefaces mention the technique of "parlar/recitar cantando". On its title page, Emilio de Cavalieri called his work a *'Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo [...] per recitar cantando'*.⁴⁵

When Jacopo Peri refers in the preface of *Euridice*⁴⁶ to Rinuccini's *Dafne*, he mentions the proof it gives of what 'song can do in our times', (*'che potesse il canto dell'età nostra'*). Dealing with dramatised poetry it should imitate while singing someone who is talking (*'si doveva imitar' col canto chi parla'*). But in antiquity, according to him, they would never have sung instead of talking (*'e senza dubbia non si mai parlò cantando'*).

Monteverdi also made this distinction between speaking in song and singing in speech when he rejected a commission to write music for *La favola di Peleo e Tetide* in 1616.⁴⁷ Describing the difference between his *Orfeo* and *Arianna* on the one side and this new opera on the other, he wrote that in the first works, the characters tended to speak in song and not, as would now be needed, sing in speech (*'cio e che tendesse al parlar cantando et non come questa al cantar parlando'*). Though for us nowadays, this seems a subtle distinction, apparently, many nuances were possible between the diction-centred way of the first option and the rather vocal delivery of this second.

⁴³ Letter No. 9, 9-VI-1610 (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p.42). Monteverdi is positive about the candidate: "... una bella voce, gagliarda, et longa, et cantando in sena giongera benissimo senza discomodo in tutti li lochi,..."

(He has a beautiful voice, bright and with a good reach. On stage, he will mix very well without difficulty in all locations.)

⁴⁴ Letter no. 29, 21-IV-1618 to Vincenzo Gonzaga (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p.76).

⁴⁵ Emilio del Cavalliere, *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*, (Rome, Nicolò Mutij, 1600). Title page.

⁴⁶ *Le musiche di Jacopo Peri ... sopra l'Euridice*, Florence, Marescotti, 1600.

⁴⁷ Letter No.19, 9-XII-1616. (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p.62.) Monteverdi did not see anything in this libretto as a basis for an opera. The main reason was that there were no dramatic personalities but winds, sheep and rocks to give a voice.

In the same letter, Monteverdi argues that he does not feel this libretto could ever bring him to a natural order that would raise his emotions. (*'Ne sento che lei mi porta con ordine naturale ad un fine che mi mova...'*) This remark can be seen in the same light as Giulio Caccini has thrown on the role of understanding the text in the new monodic style.⁴⁸ Understanding has to be interpreted here, both in hearing all the words as well as knowing what they mean in the context of the narration. As Caccini compares it to the old polyphonic style;

*'... poi che non potevano esse muovere l'intelletto senza l'intelligenza delle parole, mi venne pensiero introdurre una sorte di musica, per cui altri potesse quasi che in armonia favellare, usando in essa (.....) una certa nobile sprezzatura di canto,'...*⁴⁹

(...because it wasn't possible to emote the intellect without the understanding of the words, there came to me the thought of introducing a kind of music by means of which someone could, in a way, tell a story in harmony, [...] while using in it a certain noble sprezzatura of song.)

The term *sprezzatura* was first used by Baldassare Castiglione⁵⁰ to indicate a noble kind of effortlessness and display of freedom in public performance of a skill. The way Caccini uses it suggests a narrow connection to Monteverdi's intended 'natural way of imitation.' In his *Nuove Musiche* of 1602, Caccini is rather explicit in his explanation of the function of *sprezzatura* concerning the rhetorical implications for the text. Half a century after Vicentino (see page 138 above), he discusses the same ideals and even gives a very concrete example for a better understanding. As Vicentino already remarked, there are rhetorical aspects of the performance that could not be notated in the music, and one of them was alterations in the *misura*, which implied both tempo and measure. As Caccini formulates; 'one does not submit to the ordinary measure, but many times cuts the value of notes by half, following the meaning of the text [...] from where consequently that song is born in sprezzatura...'

For some singers of the cast of *Arianna* this very specialised way of recitar cantando must have been second nature. Francesco Rasi (1574 - 1621) studied with Giulio Caccini from 1594 on, and the soprano Settimia Caccini (1591-1660c.) learned everything she mastered from her father. Her engagements in Mantua were the first big steps in her career outside her father's reach.

⁴⁸ *Le Nuove Musiche*, di Giulio Caccini detto Romano, (Florence, Marescotti, 1601), See preface in Angelo Solerti, *Le origini del melodramma, testimonianze dei contemporanei*, (Torino, fratelli Bocca, 1903) p. 57.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, , Venice, Nelle case d'Aldo Romano e d'Andrea d'Asola suo suocero, 1528, (Mod.ed.: Turin, Einaudi, 1965) p.44; 'usar in ogni cosa una certa sprezzatura, che nasconda l'arte e dimostri ciò che si fa e dice venir fatto senza fatica e quasi senza pensarvi' (to use in everything a certain sprezzatura, which hides the art and shows what is done and said to be done without effort and almost without thinking about it).

Francesco Rasi was the star singer at the Mantuan court since 1598, and certainly, after his performance of *Orfeo* in 1607, no tenor equalled his reputation.

Of course, Monteverdi was very knowledgeable about the monodic style and all its possibilities after composing *Orfeo*. Caccini's and Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* of 1600 served as welcome inspiration (see page 129 above). However, he still saw a significant challenge in finding his own way of the *stile rappresentativo* in his next opera. It seems he wanted to integrate all the implications of performative liberties in text expression, made possible by 'parlar cantando' into the essence of his compositions.

The Minotaur

This challenge and the time pressure exhausted Monteverdi in the second half of 1607. No wonder, considering that he began weakened after a summer in which he had settled the final stage of the battle for his reputation with Artusi and not much later lost his wife. The collaboration with librettist Ottavio Rinuccini undoubtedly had a strong influence on Monteverdi's artistic commitment. Also, the fact that all their joint work was destined for the festivities of the forthcoming princely wedding put unprecedented pressure on the final result.

Several of Monteverdi's extant letters testify to his bad conditions during the year of *Arianna*. Probably the most outspoken version about his physical suffering and humiliation that he had endured from the court was sent at the end of that year. He begged his patron to release him from his position in Mantua. The air alone of the city soon would mean his death. (see page 130 above) (*et dubita che solamente l'aria fra poco di tempo sarebbe la mia morte*).

However, on top of that, he never received any proof of appreciation from the court in Mantua, nor the appropriate salary, and soon he was expecting from his ill fortune the final blow.

*Si che, illustrissime signore, s'ho da cavare la conclusione dale premisse, diró che mai ho da ricevere gratie ne favori à Mantua, ma piu tosto sperare (venendo) di haver dala mia mala fortuna l'ultimo crollo.*⁵¹

(If, most illustrious Lordship, I have to draw the conclusion from the premises, I will say that I never received either gratitude nor favours in Mantua but rather should hope (by coming) to have from my ill fortune the final blow.)

Music historians tend to dismiss the many statements about health problems in Monteverdi's correspondence as hypochondria. However, the fact that Monteverdi reminded

⁵¹ Letter No. 6, 2-XII-1608, (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p. 34). Monteverdi had been summarizing all his patron's so-called favours, which turned out to be either financial deceptions or humiliating acts of neglect. Thus, the refusal to return to Mantua at the beginning of the letter is explained.

Alessandro Striggio in a letter twenty years later of his near death as a consequence of too much work in a short time might indicate that he may be taken at his word.⁵²

Anyway, it is clear that in the year of *Arianna*, Monteverdi must have been confronted with the darkest corners of his subconscious mind. The perseverance that was needed to come, despite a lack of time, to the highest artistic achievement and the subsequent lack of respect from his patron caused a catharsis. As a consequence, he showed self-respect with his request for resignation in December 1608, which testifies to an awareness of his position among the greatest composers of his time. The recent promise to clarify his views on the composition of modern music in a book⁵³ must have weighed heavily on him when he started composing *Arianna*.

The image of the Minotaur as a metaphor for our deepest fears and desires lurking in the labyrinth behind the solid walls of our unconscious self⁵⁴ illustrates the artist's struggle. It symbolises the choice to allow instinct to guide. The decision to follow the natural way of imitating the essence, *la via naturale alla imitazione*, can be seen as an overwhelming transformation process.

Act II

At the Mantuan court, Caterina Martinelli was often called '*La Romanina*' (the little Roman girl). In my libretto, Caterina is associated with the allegory of Piacere to symbolise her origins and represent her Roman background. Piacere was one of the characters in Emilio de' Cavaliere's *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*. This first large music theatre work in the new monodic style premiered in February 1600 in Rome. As a ten-year-old singing child prodigy, she might have heard about this exceptional event through her teacher, Arrigo Gabbino. The latter must have been in contact with the singers of the papal chapel, such as the tenor Giuseppe Cenci, whose compositions were sung by the young Caterina.

The Mantuan bass, Paolo Faccone, was also a regular member of the chapel and, from that position, scouted potential singers for the Gonzaga court. There is a very informative extant correspondence between Faccone and the court on the whereabouts of these singers. This informs us in detail about the delicate negotiations to get permission from the young girl's parents in the summer of 1603 to let her go to Mantua. Apart from a heavily discussed examination of her virginity, the blazing heat of that summer delayed the journey.

⁵² Letter No. 92, I-V-1627 to Alessandro Striggio (*Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p. 92). '*Che la brevità del tempo fu cagione ch'io mi riduceSSI quasi alla morte nel scrivere l'Arianna...*' (That the shortness of time was the cause that I was almost reduced to a dead person in writing Ariadne.)

⁵³ Announced in 1605, *Seconda Pratica overo Perfettione della Moderna Musica*, (See the lettera ai studiosi lettori, Chapter 2, *Dichiaratione*, p. 68).

⁵⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1949) p. 57.

Another interesting issue was the idea to first bring Caterina to Florence, so she could study with Giulio Caccini for some time and learn the Tuscan style of singing. This was apparently most to Vincenzo Gonzaga's liking. However, Caccini's condition to have her living in his house made Vincenzo suspicious about losing the soprano to the Medici, and he decided to have her directly come to Mantua. Caccini did not readily accept this decision, and even his former pupil, Francesco Rasi, had to stand up to his old master, which he proudly reported in a letter to the duke.

*'Egli voleva affaticarsi di darmi ad intendere che sarebbe stata sicura, ma gli chiusi la bocca con una parola sola; ma tuttavia però stava nella medesima durezza.'*⁵⁵

(He wanted to strain himself to give me an understanding that she would be safe, but I closed his mouth with one word; nevertheless, he persisted in the same hardness.)

In the letters of Faccone, we read more about the downside of the star tenor's vanity when in Rome. He illegally served other patrons like Pietro Aldobrandini. Only leading to laconic Strainchamps

*'Se il Rasio no ha cervello, suo danno; forse che la necessità gli insegnerà a vivere'*⁵⁶
(If Rasi has no brains, that is his loss; perhaps being in need will teach him how to live)

Later Arrigoni wrote to the court about his diplomatic moves. In his letter from 15 August 1603, we read:

*Ho notificato al padre di questa giovane la mente di sua altezza, ma non totalmente, havendo taciuto quel che s'aspetta al metterla in casa del Monteverdi per la commodità dell'imparare, acciò che costui non entrasse in qualche sospettione vedendo egli muttarsi totalmente gli ordine, ma col tempo andarò disponendo la materia et gli farò cognoscere che per servitio di Caterina non si po' far altrimenti.*⁵⁷

(I have informed the father of this young lady of his Highness's mind, but not completely, as I kept silent about what to expect when she is put in Monteverdi's house for the convenience of learning so that he will not be suspicious if he sees that he has changed his orders so much, but in time I will dispel the matter and I will make him understand that Catherine's service does not allow one to do otherwise.)

Once she arrived in Mantua, Caterina was placed in Monteverdi's house to live in a family setting that should guarantee her safety and virginity. Having lost his own daughter Leonora (born 20 February 1603) earlier that year, Monteverdi most likely welcomed the talented young singer as an enrichment of his household.

Upon arrival, Caterina was an accomplished singer, given the listed repertoire she mastered. Still, she probably had more experience in the florid style of diminutions than the other qualities that were her new master's ideals. His wife Claudia was a court singer, and as an apprentice, Martinelli was surrounded daily by the expertise of her new profession.

⁵⁵ Strainchamps, *The Life and Death*, p. 177, Letter of 9 July 1603 from Rasi to Vincenzo Gonzaga.

⁵⁶ Barbara Furlotti, *Le Collezioni Gonzaga, Il carteggio tra Roma e Mantova, (1587-1612)*, (Milano, Silvana Editoriale, 2003) p. 382. ASMn, AG, b. 976 f. I1, cc. 38-39

⁵⁷ Furlotti, *Le Collezioni Gonzaga*, p.402-403 Archive Mantua, ASMn, AG, b. 976

Preparing *Arianna*

When Monteverdi returned to Mantua on 9 October 1607, Martinelli was one of the few people standing very close to him and his children. Even though Caterina had been living for more than a year in her own house, donated by the duke⁵⁸, the loss of Claudia must have felt like a family member's passing away. It is conceivable that Claudia's illness reported (see libretto, note 2) two months after Caterina left the Monteverdi house had to do with missing her help in the household and tending to the two boys, then 1 and 5 years old.

Now, a new life started with Caterina being at the centre of a huge project, *Arianna*, and the composer under the pressure of approaching nuptials. Martinelli had become, without any doubt, the favourite female singer at the Mantuan court. The prospect of starring in the most spectacular public event at the Gonzaga court ever must have delighted the young singer. Ottavio Rinuccini arrived after Monteverdi in Mantua on 23 October 1607 to start working on the opera. His ambitions were rather in the direction of the original Greek tragedy, hence his quote of *Intelletto* from Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione*:

scena terza Intelletto:

Alme ch'in ciel godete,
qual premio in ciel avete
più nobile e più degno?⁵⁹

(Souls, who in heaven enjoy, /What reward in heaven have ye/ Nobler and more worthy?)

The story of a *tragedia* should be about royal protagonists. In my libretto, the prophecy of Arianna's faith is included in Rinuccini's remark.

The interruption of Vanità, showing the head of the Minotaur, is an allusion to Verdi's *Otello*. He opens with the exclamation: "Esultate, l'orgoglio musulmane sepolto è in mar" (Rejoice, the pride of the muslims is buried in the sea). This is to underline some parallels, such as the role of Theseus, arriving by sea after his heroic action and the similarities between the collaboration of Giuseppe Verdi and the librettist Arrigo Boito and their predecessors, Monteverdi and Rinuccini.⁶⁰

The scene where Teseo sings music of his own invention illustrates the high position of singers in court, such as Francesco Rasi. The tenor was in high esteem from the moment he finished his training with Giulio Caccini. (see above) He obtained his position at the Mantuan court music in 1598 and was indeed also a composer with a reputation for improvising his ornamentations with lightness. Apparently, he was good looking and jovial ('*era uomo di bell'aspetto, gioviale*').⁶¹

⁵⁸ Edmond Strainchamps, 'The Life and Death of Caterina Martinelli: New Light on Monteverdi's *Arianna*', *Early Music History*, 5 (1985) p. 164, note 16. The notarial act was signed on 9 September 1606.

⁵⁹ Emilio del Cavalliere, *Rappresentazione*, no.70, p. XXX.

⁶⁰ The quotation of Verdi also alludes to the link between Monteverdi's revival and Boito's role by innovating Italian opera in a more text-centred direction.

⁶¹ Severo Bonini, *Discorsi e Regole sopra la musica*. See in Solerti, *Le Origini*, p. 138:

With these characteristics in mind, it would not be surprising if Rasi started composing his own music for the verses of Rinuccini. There is evidence that sometimes singers added compositions to the operas they sang.

The letter in which Monteverdi expressed his reluctance to compose music representing winds and sheep (see p. 140 above *La favola di Peleo e Tetide*) also contains a passage about having the singers compose music themselves.

"... cioe signora Andriana (Adriana Basile) et altre le potrebbero cantare altre si comporse le, cosi il signor Rasso [Rasi] la sua parte..."

(i.e. Mrs Adriana and the others could sing and compose hers; likewise, Mr. Rasi his part,)

In that same letter Monteverdi indicates that the best result can only be achieved when written by one hand (*'ci vorrebbe anco una sol mano'*).

However, the ornamentations in the famous aria of *Orfeo*, "Possente spirto", which are printed in the score of 1609, are said to be at least inspired by the performances of Francesco Rasi, if not invented by the singer in this role.

In the letter mentioned above, Monteverdi makes clear that he prefers to have all composing in one hand so he can control the longer line and its emotional climax. For Arianna that was the lamento (*'L'Arianna mi porta ad un giusto lamento'*) and for Orfeo the prayer (*'e l'orfeo ad una giusta preghiera'*). Earlier in the letter, he says not to judge the poetry of the libretto because he always honours the most talented artists. Even more so because: *'questa professione della poesia non e mia.'* (this art of poetry is not my profession).

While Monteverdi worked at the top of his abilities to complete the *Arianna* on time, behind-the-scenes preparations were being made for the performance of music by Marco da Gagliano. Apparently, he was already in Mantua in October 1607.⁶² In the preface of his edition of *La Dafne*, which appeared later in 1608, Gagliano recalls for his readers that he was invited to Mantua to write music for the wedding of Prince Francesco. Indeed, there is correspondence with the prince at the beginning of December, that apart from his work on *Dafne*, he had written a *favoletta per recitar cantando*.

In the preface, he also mentions that the wedding was postponed to May, so all the hurry to finish Arianna in time, which caused such an attack on the health of its composer, was in vain. In January 1608, most of the opera was finished, but suddenly, the upcoming carnival had priorities over it.

"Era uomo di bell'aspetto, gioviale, di voce gradita e suave, faceva apparire con l'allegrezza del volto e maestà il suo canto angelico e divino." (He was a man of good looks, jovial, of pleasant and gentle voice, he made his angelic and divine song appear with cheerfulness of face and majesty.)

⁶² Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, p.126, n. 164

Prefazione

*'Per le reale nozze.... Le quali, essendo differite a maggio dal sig. Duca, per non lasciar passar que' giorni senza qualche festa, volle fra l'altre che si rappresentasse la Dafne del signor Ottavio Rinuccini da lui con tale occasione accresciuta e abbellita, fui impiegato a metterla in musica;'*⁶³

(For the royal wedding.... which was postponed to May by the Duke, so as not to let those days pass without some entertainment, and he wished, among other things, to be performed the *Daphne* from Signor Ottavio Rinuccini, who had enlarged and embellished it for this occasion, and I was engaged in setting it to music...)

The argument that the duke did not want to let pass those days originally intended for the wedding without festivities is what was communicated to the composer. But apart from the upcoming wedding, the fact that Ferdinando Gonzaga recently had been created cardinal (on 24 December 1607) demanded an extra festive subsequent carnival.

Remarks from Duchess Eleonora de Medici about the preliminary version of *Arianna* are dated after the carnival. A meeting with her took place on 26 February, including Rinuccini, Monteverdi, the architect Viani and some other men involved, to discuss the progress of the preparations for *Arianna*. There, according to a report of the next day, she must have asked Rinuccini for more liveliness in the libretto; "*Madama è restata con il sig. Ottavio di arricchirla con qualche azione essendo assai sciutta.*"⁶⁴

La Dafne

There is no proof of any deliberation about the choice for a replacement opera that would be performed during Carnival 1608 in Mantua. It is rather likely it was already on the mind of the Gonzaga's to profit from Rinuccini's presence and have a new version of his *Dafne*. Gagliano was invited as early as October, briefly after the arrival of the librettist, to work on it.

Francesco Rasi also composed an opera, though this would be for the wedding of Ferdinando Gonzaga and Caterina de Medici in 1616. It was intended for a triptique in which *La favola di Peleo e Tetide* would be performed with Monteverdi's music. As we have seen above, that did not happen because the composer rejected the libretto.

But also Rasi's opera *La favola di Cibeles ed Ati* finally did not make it. Probably, there was too little time left to rehearse it, or it was not even finished.⁶⁵ In that sense, it does seem plausible to have Rasi as Vanità in our *Tragedia di Claudio M.*, making a promise of a work that he even had not yet started composing. Certainly, after being banned in 1609 from Tuscany because he was responsible for the death of the administrator of his deceased

⁶³ Prefazione for *Dafne*, Marco da Gagliano, 20 October 1608, in: Solerti, *Le Origini*, p.78, translation by Tim Carter (Fabbri/Carter), *Monteverdi*, 1994, p 80.

⁶⁴ Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, p. 129. ('Madame agreed with Mr Ottavio to enrich it with some action because it is very dry.' Report from General Carlo Rossi to the duke.)

⁶⁵ Susan Parisi, "Francesco Rasi's *La favola di Cibeles ed Ati* and the Cybele legend from Ovid to the early *Seicento*", in *Music observed: studies in memory of William C. Holmes*, ed.C. Reardon and S. Parisi (Warren, MI, Harmonie Park Pr, 2004), p. 361 ff.

father's estate and his attempted murder of his stepmother, he must have been a displaced person. Direct contact with the Medici court or colleagues like Giulio Caccini was no longer possible.

Whether Rasi's opera was performed at all is not certain. He worked on it and made changes to the libretto. According to Susan Parisi, who specialised in the work and life of Rasi, he might have shared Monteverdi's opinion about the leading characters of opera. Parisi's observation that "Rasi moulded the principal characters in his opera as close to human as he could" seems to me entirely plausible.⁶⁶ "Like Monteverdi, and probably influenced by him, Rasi surely felt that a story about human frailty would speak to an audience."⁶⁷

The return of the Minotaur mask alludes to the story of James (the admirable) Crichton's death. Sheer jealousy would have driven Vincenzo Gonzaga to attack the young, brilliant Scotsman, who his father Guglielmo had imposed as his tutor. The nightly attack was done by a 'masked group of ruffians', but they all lost the fight to the incredibly skilled fencer Crichton. Vincenzo would have taken off his mask to confront the man with his real identity. On his knees, Crichton handed over his sword to his patron but was subsequently stabbed to death with it by the prince. This anecdote and the Minotaur mask were included in an earlier version of the libretto of *La Tragedia di Claudio M.*

In Act II.1, Rinuccini's (*Ragione's*) shrewd reminder of the Florentine performance of *La Dafne* can be seen here as an appeal to the Duchess' Medici origins. It is conceivable that she indeed witnessed the legendary performance in 1594 of *La Dafne* in the house of Jacopo Corsi, the leader of the Florentine Camerata dei Bardi. The extremely select group of musicians and poets were the masterminds of the 'revival' of drama, based on the antiques. Corsi and Jacopo Peri provided the music for this first mature attempt in the newborn genre of the *stile rappresentativo*. In the preface and dedication of their edition in 1600 of *L'Euridice*, both Rinuccini and Peri used the same phrase "to provide a proof what singing in our time is capable of." (see above p. 140)⁶⁸

Marco da Gagliano mentions in the preface of his 1608 edition of *La Dafne* the pleasure and amazement the new spectacle aroused in the audience. Rinuccini concluded from this evidence "how apt singing was to express all kinds of affects, and that not only (as many would have believed) it did not bring tedium, but incredible delight."⁶⁹

The preface also gives us a better insight into the singers' special merits at the Gonzaga court. He underlines that what is put on paper in the present edition is not all the music.

⁶⁶ *Idem*, p.387.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*. Parisi refers here to the famous passage in Monteverdi's letter where he states that Arianna moves him because she is a woman and Orpheus because he is a man. Letter No.19, 9-XII-1616. (Russo, *Monteverdi, Correspondance*, p.62.)

⁶⁸ See also Chapter 1, Episteme p. 16.

⁶⁹ "Per s' fatta prova, venuto in cognizione il sig. Rinuccini quanto fusse atto il canto a esprimere ogni sorta d'affetti, e che non solo (come per avventura per molti si sarebbe creduto) non recava tedio, ma diletto incredibile." Marco da Gagliano, prefazione della *Dafne* 1608, Solerti, *Origini*, p. 81.

There are, as he states, "many other requirements, without which there would be little value in any music, even the excellent." But those who think it only depends on the amount of ornamentation are deluded because (and here Gagliano is quoting Caccini's *Nuove Musiche*, 1602) "they are making groups, trills, passages and exclamations, without regard to what end or purpose." Gagliano now gives us valuable information about Caterina Martinelli.

*'Non intendo già privarmi di questi adornamenti, ma voglio che s'adoperino a tempo e luogo come nelle canzoni de' cori, come nell'ottava Chi da' lacci d'amor vive disciolto, la quale si vede ch'è messa in quel luogo a posta per far sentire la grazia e la disposizione del cantore, il che felicemente conseguì la signora Caterina Martinelli, la quale con tanta leggiadria la cantò, ch'empì di diletto e di meraviglia tutto il teatro.'*⁷⁰

"I do not intend to deprive myself of these ornaments, but I do want them to be used in time and place, as in the songs of the choir, as in the aria *Chi da' lacci d'amor vive disciolto* (Who lives dissolved from the bonds of love), which [ornamentation] is seen to have been placed there for the purpose of making the grace and temperament of the singer heard, which was happily achieved by Signora Caterina Martinelli, who sang it with such gracefulness that it filled the whole theatre with delight and wonder."

It is clear that Martinelli, by that time, had mastered the highest art of singing and was equivalent to the experienced tenor Francesco Rasi. Undoubtedly, Claudio Monteverdi played a decisive role in achieving this delicate balance while using ornamentation. In addition to those lessons, Francesco Rasi's influence as a colleague has been of major importance as well. Gagliano sets him as an example by his many qualities and unique (*singularissimo*) way of singing.

*'Richiedesi ancora l'esquisitezza del canto ne' terzetti ultimi: Non curi la mia pianta o fiamma gelo, dove può il buon cantore spiegar tutte quelle maggiori leggiadrie che richiegga il canto, le quali tutte s'udirono dalla voce del sig. Francesco Rasi, che, oltre a tante qualità, è nel canto singularissimo. Ma dove la favola non lo ricerca, lascisi del tutto ogni ornamento;'*⁷¹

The exquisiteness of singing is still required in the last tercets: *Non curi la mia pianta o fiamma gelo*, where the good singer can deploy all the greater gracefulness that singing requires, all of which can be heard in the voice of Signor Francesco Rasi, who, in addition to so many qualities, is singular in singing. But where the story does not demand it, he left out all ornamentation entirely;

By naming the aria's, Gagliano gives us information about the casting. As we saw, Rasi sang the role of Apollo. Tirsi, the messenger, was sung by Antonio Brandi (il Brandino), from whom Gagliano says he could not wish for more. By this exquisite contralto, not only was the diction impeccable, but "he sang marvellously while not only the words were understood but by the gestures and movements felt in the soul into an I don't know what wonder."

*'...la voce è di contralto esquisitissima, la pronunzia e la grazia del cantare meravigliosa, ne solo vi fa intendere le parole, ma co' gesti e co' movimenti par che v'insinua nell'animo un non so che d'avantaggio.'*⁷²

⁷⁰Idem, p. 79.

⁷¹ Solerti, *Le Origini*, p.79.

⁷² Idem, p.87.

More puzzling has been the attribution of Martinelli's role. For a long time, it was taken for granted that she would have sung the role of Amore, eventually doubling with the leading character, Dafne.

Stuart Reiner, in 1974, convincingly argued that the aria connected to Martinelli belonged to the role of Venus and not Amore.⁷³ Apparently, there is an exit of Amore before the aria, and in the score, there is no new character cue for a change of role after Venus' previous recitative. For the Amore, it was more conventional to have a boy impersonating the role, which most probably was also the case in this production of *Dafne*.

The modern printed libretti, however, and recordings also attribute the aria "*Chi da lacci d'Amor*" to Amore, which shows that this convention was established. By the time the libretto for *La Tragedia di Claudio M* was conceived, I had taken the information about Martinelli's role from Paolo Fabbri (1985) and from its English translation of Tim Carter (1994), which offered the dramaturgically much more imaginative solution of Martinelli instead of vanishing as Venus, ending up as a *Dafne* converted into a laurel tree.

After *La Dafne* had been performed, another composer from the Florentine circle flattered Ferdinando in a letter in which he also tried to undermine Monteverdi's reputation. On 8 April Jacopo Peri wrote that he was very much impressed by the performances in Mantua during carnival, which were applauded by the whole town. About Gagliano's contribution, he wrote that his music was composed with infinitely more taste and advances because "this way of singing was recognised as more proper and closer to speech than that of this other worthy man ('*valent'uomo*')." With this last remark, Monteverdi was intended.

Remarkably, Monteverdi regularly had to fight for respect and recognition at the court of Mantua. Even when he had already amply proved that he deserved it, for instance, with his *Orfeo* and certainly in 1608, after the *Arianna*. This last did not even make him a candidate as interim chapel master of the Santa Barbara while Giovanni Giacomo Gastoldi was severely ill. Gastoldi was appointed to that position in 1592 after Giaches de Wert had died. Gastoldi's dedication of his *Balletti a cinque voci* to Vincenzo Gonzaga in 1591 might have helped him to become part of the court music. In the dedicatory text, Gastoldi characterises the use of this music broadly:

*'...per accompagnare la stagione, et le varie occasioni di nozze, et di spettacoli pubblici, et di balli che s'apparecchiono.'*⁷⁴

(to accompany the season, and the various occasions of weddings, and public spectacles, and ballets that are prepared.)

In this case, all the named occasions were united in one event because the carnival celebration was under the sign of the upcoming nuptials. Moreover, the status of *innamorato*

⁷³ Stuart Reiner, 'La vag'Angioletta (and Others)', *Analecta Musicologica*, 14 (1974), pp. 44ff.

⁷⁴ G.G. Gastoldi, *Balletti a cinque voci*, (Venezia, Ricciardo Amadino, 1592): "to accompany the season, and the various occasions of weddings, and public spectacles, and ballets that are prepared."

(the Lover, but also *primo uomo* in the theatre group) is a title appropriate to the dedicatee Vincenzo Gonzaga. As shown below, the duke had an extraordinary affection for the young soprano, whom he had seen growing into the star she had become while in his service.

The commedia troupe named I Comici Fedeli was bound to the Mantuan court by Vincenzo Gonzaga from 1604 on. From the fall of 1607, they were also preparing for the wedding festivities and had been contracted to perform Giovanni Battista Guarini's *Idropica*. The postponement of the wedding also for them resulted in a change of schedule. They resided at the palazzo and most likely contributed to the performances and entertainments during carnival.

Less than two weeks after the carnival and her great success, Caterina Martinelli fell seriously ill. Soon, it turned out that she was the victim of a smallpox infection. Quite some correspondence about her situation and the consequences for the *Arianna* production is preserved, giving us a good impression of what happened when. The first message about her illness was sent to Vincenzo in Turin on 28 February 1608 by his secretary. This was accompanied by a brief report on her condition that said:

'La Sig.ra Catherina sta al suo solito con le varole, ma però con un poco di remissione della febre, rossore e colore, inghiottisse con manco fastidio, et in somma mostra qualche remissione, la quale se persevera si può sperare.'

(Mrs. Catherina is still the same with smallpox, but with a little remission of the fever, redness and colour, she swallows with little discomfort, and in sum, she shows some remission, which, if she perseveres, one can hope for.)

The next day, Vincenzo received a letter from the tenor Francesco Campagnolo, who complained that he feared the whole thing was going to last very long and that "he was buried in idleness to such a degree that for two evenings he had a fever out of sheer boredom."

On the second of March (mistakenly dated 2 February 1608)) Ferdinando Gonzaga sent a letter to update his brother Francesco in Milan:

L'Arianna sta male poiché la Romana non e sicura di campare, anzi è in non picciol pericolo; del resto il Monteverdi se n'è di già spedito in bene, havendo fornite quasi tutte le musiche.

(*L'Arianna* is going badly since it is not certain that *La Romana* will survive; in fact, she is in no little danger. As for the rest, Monteverdi is well underway with it, having finished almost all the music.)⁷⁵

On 5 March, there suddenly was a sign of hope. The secretary Costantini forwarded several letters from the house of Martinelli and added his own comment. In this letter, he announced that she "yet seems to begin to give some hope of sure survival, moving towards feeling some improvement in the disease inside her throat, which caused the most fear."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Strainchamps, *The Life and Death*, p. 167.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, p. 168.

Despite this good news, Caterina Martinelli died a few days later. There is confusion about the exact date of death because, on the one hand, documents say she died on the 7th, which was reported to Rome for the archives on the 8th. Later letters and official announcements from the court keep the 9th as the date she had passed away.

On the 10th of March, Duchess Eleonora had a letter sent to her son Francesco to warn him of the disease.⁷⁷ She pretended that the cause of death might have been excessive drinking during carnival, but in a small personal postscript, she made clear that it was mostly fear that drove her to such a lie.

*'Magnifico nostro carissimo: . . . Farete sapere al Prencipe nostro figliolo ch'e morta qui la settimana passata la Catherina Romana, et questi medici dicono che la cagione della sua morte in parte e stata la mala stagione, nella quale corre un influsso di varole che amazza molti, ma **che molto pidi le ha cagionato la morte l'haver voluto la meschina bere tutto questo Carnevale vini grandi** et particolarmente claretti et malvasie del Monferrato, onde se l'era di maniera infiammato il sangue che non e stato possibile a remediare **alla gran furia del male sopravvenutole**, per quanti rimedi se le sieno fatti. Et che però egli si guardi di gratia non solo dal bere disordinatamente, ma dal bere vini grandi, sapendo noi che tali sono in cotesto paese, et che li adacqui bene, acciò che fra l'altre occasioni non s'aggiongesse questa di recare qualche grave danno alla sua salute...'*

(Our dearest Magnificent: You will let our Prince know that Catherina Romana died here last week, and these doctors say that the cause of her death was partly the bad season, in which there is an influence of smallpox that afflicts many people, but that the death was caused by the fact that the poor girl wanted to drink strong wines, especially claret and Monferrato malvasia, throughout this Carnival, so that it inflamed her blood in such a way that it was not possible to remedy the great fury that had come over her, no matter how many remedies were done. And that he beware, therefore, not only of drinking disorderly but also of drinking large wines, knowing that such are the case in this country and that he waters them well, so that among other occasions, this may not be added to the occasion of causing Some grave harm to his health...)

postscriptum

*'Questa mia lettera non la comunicate con altri che col Principe, poichè quello che scrivo circa alla morte della Caterina non ho a caro che altri lo sapia per bon rispetto. Vi dico bene che **sto con tanta paura di questo benedetto male, non l'avendo hauto il Principe, che mi trema il core**. Sichè pregatelo a guardarsi di tutte le cose che possino di soverc[h]io scaldarlo fin tanto che passi questa mala influenza'.*

(Do not communicate this letter of mine with anyone other than the Prince, because what I write about Catherine's death, I rather have no others to know out of respect. I tell you that I am really so afraid of this miserable disease since the Prince has not had it that my heart trembles. Therefore, beg him to beware of all things that might heat him up until this evil influenza passes.)

Martinelli was buried with some pomp in the Chiesa del Carmine, and Vincenzo Gonzaga ordered to celebrate every ferial day a Mass for the Dead and every month as well an Office for the Dead for that soul, starting on 9 March 1609. In the Carmine church, a marble tomb was constructed, ordered by Vincenzo, with an inscription honouring the singer as well as the dedication of her patron.

⁷⁷ A photo of this letter and the postscript are to be found in Strainchamps, *The Life and Death*, p. 185.

'Inspice, lege, defle!

Catterina Martinella romana, quae vocis modulatione et flexu Sirenum cantus facile orbicumque [sic] caelestium melos praecelebat, insigni ea virtute morum suavitate, forma, lepore, ac venustate Ser. Vinc. Duci Mant. ap[p]rime chara, acerba heu morte sublata hoc tumulto beneficentiss. principis jussu, repentino adhuc casu moerentis aeternum quiescit.

Nomen mundo, deo vivat anima.

Obiit adolescentiae anno xviii

die xx Martij MDCVIII.'

(Look, read and weep!

Caterina Martinelli of Rome, who by the tunefulness and flexibility of her voice easily excelled the songs of the Sirens and the melody of the heavenly spheres, dear above all to Vincenzo, Serene Duke of Mantua, for that famous excellence, the sweetness of her manner, her beauty, her grace and charm, snatched away, alas, by bitter death, rests for eternity in this tomb, commanded by a most generous prince who still grieves at this sudden blow. Let her name live in the world and her soul with God. She died in the eighteenth year of her youth, the ninth of March 1608).

In the summer of 1610, Monteverdi composed a group of six madrigals on a text by Scipione Agnelli, with the title *La Sestina; Lagrime d'amante al sepolcro dell' amata*. (Tears of the lover at the grave of the beloved). It was requested by Vincenzo, who provided the text, to honor the late Caterina. The text refers to the shepherd Glauco, who mourns his beloved nymph, Corinna. The duke obviously borrowed the shepherd's identity for this occasion.

Và ancho preparando una muta di Madrigali a cinque voci, che sarà di tre pianti quello dell'Arianna con il solito canto sempre, il pianto di Leandro e Hero del Marini, Il terzo datoglielo, da Sua Altezza Serenissima di Pastore che sia morta la sua Ninfa. Parole del figlio del Sigr Conte Lepido Agnelli in morte della Signora Romanina...⁷⁸

(He is also preparing a set of Madrigals for five voices, which will consist of three laments, that of Ariadne with the usual song, the lament of Leandro and Hero by Marini, the third given to him by His Serene Highness of Shepherd whose Nymph died. The text is by the son of Mr. Conte Lepido Agnelli on the death of la Romanina...)

La Sestina appeared in print in 1614 in Monteverdi's sixth book of madrigals, together with the madrigal version of the *Lamento d'Arianna*.

Act III

Simultaneously with all the preparations for the Arianna and its rehearsals, another theatre production was being rehearsed. The Commedia dell'arte troupe I Comici Fedeli, the company led by the actor Giovanni Battista Andreini and his wife Virginia Ramponi Andreini, had performed regularly in the palace since 1604. They were asked to prepare Giovanni

⁷⁸ Letter by Bassano Cassola to Vincenzo Gonzaga, 20 July 1610 in Emil Vogel, "Claudio Monteverdi. Leben, Wirken im Lichte der zeitgenössischen Kritik und Verzeichniss seiner im Druck erschienenen Werke", *Vierteljahrschrift für Musikwissenschaft* III, (Berlin, 1887), p.430.

Battista Guarini's *Idropica*,⁷⁹ a comedy of considerable length, for the wedding. The Fedeli were playing mainly the plays written by their leader and had, certainly with his *Florinda*, successes in Florence for the Accademia degli Spensierati and in Milan, where they impressed the governor Enriquez d'Acevedo, the count of Fuentes. The latter was particularly fond of Virginia's acting and singing, and he provided the troupe with regular income, which made the Andreini independent from his father, Francesco.

The Commedia dell'arte ensemble of father Francesco (I Gelosi) was famous, and Maria de Medici imported this style of theatre to the French court through engagements. Giovanni Battista had grown up in that world, and his mother, Isabella, was the most important prima donna of her generation.

When participating in the Gelosi, Virginia must have learned a lot from her mother-in-law, specifically how to play the *innamorata*, traditionally the troupe's leading lady. While her husband, as an upcoming and later most successful playwright, wrote tailor-made roles for her, she apparently had talents that would outshine his famous mother with the many performances of the Fedeli.

Giovanni Battista Guarini's *Idropica* dated in fact from ca.1585. One year later, he surprised the world with his *Pastor fido*, a 'tragicomedia pastorale' that inspired many composers, including Giaches de Wert and Monteverdi, to write madrigals based on its verses. That relation must have become more intense during the period in the 1590s when Guarini resided at the palace in Mantova. On 22 November 1598, an impressive performance (*rappresentazione*) of the play took place at the Palazzo Ducale on the occasion of the 14-year-old Queen Margaret of Austria's visit.

Vincenzo ignored criticisms Guarini had received on the style and the accusations of immorality from the side of the Counter-Reformation. A spokesman was Giason Denores, a professor of moral philosophy at the University of Padua, who started in 1586 a polemic when the *Pastor fido* was only circulating in manuscript, a controversy that reminds us of the Artusi-Monteverdi conflict.

In 1601, Guarini published a *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* as a 'dichiaratione' of his views on the modern genre of tragicomedy. As a reason to write such works, he gave the example of purging the mind from melancholy.

*'Purga la malinconia, affetto tanto nocivo, che bene spesso conduce l'uomo a impazzare e darsi la morte; e purgalo in quella guisa che fa la melodia, secondo che c'insegna Aristotile, quell'affetto che i Greci chiamano ἐνθουσιασμός, e in quella che la Sacra Scrittura ci racconta, che David, coll'armonia del suo suono, cacciava i mali spiriti di Saul, primo re degli Ebrei.'*⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Giovanni Battista Guarini, *L'Idropica*, (Venice, Ciotti, 1613) dedicated to Cesare D'Este. Atto primo, scena sesta, p.14v ff.

⁸⁰ Battista Guarini, *Compendio della poesia tragicomica*, (Venice, Ciotti, 1601) p.15.

<https://books.google.it/books?id=21VOCUeUhVIC&printsec=frontcover&hl#v=onepage&q&f=false>

(Purify melancholy, an affection so noxious that it often drives a man mad and leads him to death, and purge it in the way that melody does, according to what Aristotle teaches us, the affect the Greeks call ἐνθουσιασμός, and in the way that Holy Scripture tells us that David, with the harmony of his sound, drove out the evil spirits of Saul, the first king of the Jews.)

L'Idropica was not a tragicomedy but a regular *commedia* containing many typical *Commedia dell'arte* scenes and characters. Doctors have a special role here and are ridiculed.

For the scene of the rehearsal by the Fedeli at the beginning of Act III, I chose a fragment where the *innamorato* uses the role of Dottore to get access to the house of his beloved. This scene is the only one from *Idropica*, performed during the nuptials on 2 June 1608, of which we have a description. Ambassador Annibale Roncaglia reports to his patron Cesare d'Este in Ferrara that he has seen "the nice story by 'il cavaliere Guirini' (sic), full of mottos and oneliners, but performed by mostly rude actors and the play often so gross, that it made you turn red."

Roncaglia continues: "I will say this for the least: a woman was searching with her hands in the trousers of a young man for a root to cure her illness and other similar things."

'...fu bella la commedia del Cav.re Guirini, assai piena di motti et sentenze, ma recitata da persone per lo più parte sgarbate, et era così grassa che faceva arrossire.

*Dirò questa per la minima: una donna cercava con le mani nelle calcie ad un giovane una radice da far guarire la sua malattia, et altre cose simili.'*⁸¹

La Florinda

While the Fedeli were rehearsing, the preparation for the *Arianna* threatened to be kept on hold for too long. Certainly, Duchess Eleonora was worried about the replacement of Caterina Martinelli, as we read in the letter of 15 March by Secretary Antonio Costantini to the duke.⁸²

'S[ua] A[ltezza] p[er] la Dio gratia sta beniss[im]o di salute, et v[er]o travagliando alla gagliarda in procurare et far procurare con ogni diligenza che si lavori et tiri a fine tutto ciò che si v[er]o facendo p[er] la venuta della Ser[eniss]ima Sposa, ma particolarm[en]te S[ua] A[ltezza] si affatica in far mettere all'ordine la com[m]edia cantata, et era disperatiss[im]a dopo la morte della povera sig[no]ra Catherina p[er]che non si trovava chi potesse addossarsi convenientem[en]te la parte di Arianna.'

(Her Highness, by the grace of God, is very well in her health, and she is working eagerly in ensuring and making sure with all diligence that they work and bring to a conclusion everything which is being done for the arrival of the Most Serene Bride. But in particular, Her Highness toils at getting in order the sung comedy, and she was

transcript: https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Compendio_della_poesia_tragicomica

⁸¹ Lettera di Annibale Roncaglia a Cesare d'Este, 29.5.1608, ASMO, Estense, Ambasciatori, Mantova, b. 8, fasc. 6, c. 4v. See also; Angelo Solerti, *Gli Albori del Melodramma*, (Milano, Remo Sandron, 1904) p.100.

⁸² A transcription of the letter and a translation can be found in Paola Besutti, "The 'Sala degli Specchi' Uncovered: Monteverdi, the Gonzagas and the Palazzo Ducale", *Early Music*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Laments (Aug., 1999), p. 460.

totally desperate after the death of the poor Signora Catherina because no one was found who could effectively take on the part of Arianna.)

The meeting of 26 February (see above footnote 64) before Caterina's death was with the most important figures for the opera production, anticipating the worst-case scenario. Nevertheless, finding a new leading lady must have pressed heavily on the duchess, even though the solution came surprisingly soon.

On the 9th of March, the somewhat detached observations of progress in the preparations for the nuptials by Secretary Chieppio sent to the duke in Turin summarise the confusion:

*'... Qui ogni cosa passa bene, da questa favola della Arianna in poi, nella quale la morte della Sg.ra Caterina ha posto tanto scompiglio che non so quello che ne riuscirà, e certamente questa giovane acquistò tanto nelle azioni che fece nell'ultimo di Carnevale nell'animo di tutti che, se non pianta, è stata commiserata almeno universalmente la sua morte.'*⁸³

(Here, everything passes well, with the exception of the story of Arianna, in which the death of Signora Caterina has caused such havoc that I do not know what will become of it, and certainly, this young lady acquired so much in the actions she did in the last of Carnival in the minds of all that, if not deplored, her death was at least universally pitied.)

In the letter by Costantini mentioned above, we see the sequence of events in searching for Martinelli's replacement. The first selection of singers known to the court as a possible solution was not successful.

*'Mandò a posta a Bergamo per veder di havere quella giovane, che era stata proposta dal sr Monteverde per una eccellente cantatrice, ma non ha voluto venire.'*⁸⁴

(She sent specifically to Bergamo to try to have that young girl who had been proposed by Signor Monteverde as an excellent singer, but she did not want to come.)

Costantini reported that a solution only presented itself when the idea of inviting La Florinda to audition came up. Apart from having the Fedeli around, there were other reasons to consider her a replacement. Virginia Ramponi Andreini had a reputation as a singer and instrumentalist next to her acting. Of course, her skills must have differed from those who studied with masters like Caccini. But she convinced those present instantly to be the best choice for the role in a staged try-out performance on the evening of 14 March.

According to the reporting letters, she learned the role in six days. If so, this would mean she had started one day after Martinelli was buried. There was no reason to stop searching for other singers while Virginia was studying the role, but most probably, Monteverdi was already seriously involved in her training.

And if Duchess Eleonora had indeed a God-given inspiration to ask Florinda, as we read in Costantini's letter, it must have been on the day the corpse of the deceased was buried.

⁸³ Strainchamps, *The Life and Death*, p. 185. Letter Annibale Chieppio to Annibale Iberti.

⁸⁴ See reference of the letter in Besutti, note 82 above.

*'Finalm[en]te Iddio ha ispirato in far prova se la Florinda fusse habile a far questa parte, la quale in sei giorni l'ha beniss[im]o a mente, et la canta con tanta gratia, et con tanta maniera et affetto che ha fatto maravigliar Madama, il s[igno]r Rinuccini et tutti questi sig[no]ri che l'hanno udita. Hier sera S[ua] A[ltezza] fece provar la d[ett]a com[m]edia nella Sala de' Specchi, et restò consolatiss[im]a havendo trovato che quasi è all'ordine da potersi recitare quanto si appartiene alli recitanti.'*⁸⁵

(Finally, God inspired her to try out whether La Florinda was capable of doing this part, which in six days she has learnt very well by heart, and she sings it with such grace and with such manner and affect that she has amazed Madama, Signor Rinuccini and all those gentlemen who heard her. Yesterday evening, Her Highness had the comedy rehearsed in the Sala de' Specchi, and she remained very satisfied, having found that it is almost in a state to be performed in so far as the performers are concerned.)

The first one to report the good news to Vincenzo was Carlo Rossi, who wrote a letter to the duke on the same evening.

*'La Arianna, che per la morte della povera Caterina era morta, è rattivata, perchè avendo volsuto questa sera Madama sentire la Florinda che ne avea imparate parte la più difficile (sic), la dice di maniera che ne è restata stupita, talché sarà mirabile; et alla gobba alla quale Madama aveva spedito apposta et non ha volsuto venire, vadia et stiasi. Alla Commedia grande questa sera si sono fomite di provare tutte le musiche et questa altra settimana marcieranno per le nuvole et non vi mancherà che viole et tromboni che pochi ne abbiamo, et dui organi che si sanno ove sono...'*⁸⁶

(... Ariadne, who by the passing away of poor Catherine was dead, came to life again because Madame wanted to hear Florinda this evening, who had learned the most difficult part (sic). She speaks it in such a manner that she (Madame) was astounded, so that will be admirable, and to the hunchback to whom Madama had sent post, and who did not wish to come, let her go and stay there. As for the big commedia, this evening they rehearsed all the music, and this other week they will prepare papier-maché for the clouds, and the only things missing are viole (violins?) and trombones, of which we have a few and two organs which they know where they are...)

Virginia Andreini was a very experienced actress, and several authors have stated that learning a part in six days would not have been over asking someone who had to memorise text as a daily habit. Besides, the version she sang at the try-out would likely have been without the lamento. Tim Carter argued convincingly that the lamento was included in the opera only later, precisely because La Florinda was the new protagonist.⁸⁷ This being the case, only some 60 lines of text would have to be memorised for the audition. At least, that was most probably the opera's status at the try-out date. If Monteverdi had helped her prepare for the role and introduced her to what was more or less expected from the musical performance, it would not have been a miracle that she knew the role by heart. It must nevertheless have made a spectacular impression, bearing in mind her exceptional acting qualities.

If we stick to the hypothesis that Monteverdi profited during Florinda's preparation for the

⁸⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁸⁶ Fabbri/Carter, *Monteverdi*, p.83. English translation, mainly by Carter.

⁸⁷ Tim Carter "Lamenting Ariadne", *Early Music* vol. 27 no. 3, Laments (Aug. 1999), pp. 395 – 405.

audition from the opportunity to discover the possibilities of the actress, this would explain a lot about the musical creation of her role.⁸⁸

The try-out must have contained performance material that was considered ready for the wedding festivities. Monteverdi's complaints about the workload, which he referred to later that year in his 'resignation letter', did not mention having to do the work twice. So, including a new soloist did not mean reworking what he had written before. Both the text we find in the libretto (apart from the lamento), and the completed music must have been performed in the audition.

The close cooperation between its composer and librettist, Ottavio Rinuccini, speaks for itself and is confirmed later in letters. However, there must also have been a cross-fertilisation with some performers, particularly Virginia Andreini. Until today, there is no proof of this mutual influence other than can be distilled from the notated music in its definite printed version of 1623. Wilbourne's presumption that Monteverdi would have left rhythmic freedom for the performer in the concitato passages (*O nembi, o turbi, o venti*) is at odds with Monteverdi's own report of the effort it took him to find a natural way of representing the essence.⁸⁹ Such a solution would have been the easy way out.

The theatrical world's influence on the creation of *L'Arianna* was even wider because of Giovanni Battista Andreini's presence at the palace. During the rehearsal period, he most likely contributed to his wife's performance as Arianna. This capocomico and playwright was very actively involved in establishing his profession as an art. Several theoretical writings by his hand made it into publications. The awareness of Battista Andreini about the essence of theatre, art and its relation to the real world was expressed some years later in his publication *Prologo in Dialogo fra Momo e la Verità*.⁹⁰ This prologue served as an introduction to a congregation of priests and scholars in Ferrara about presumed vices of comedy. The publication is dated 15 February 1612, but its content had grown in the mind of Andreini during many years of experience.

In the *Prologo*, Battista Andreini gave himself the role of the devil's advocate in the figure of Momo, the god of the critics and creator of quarrels. La Florinda represented the voice of Truth and defended the divine character of comedy by illuminating its noble purpose. When both protagonists introduce themselves, it is clear how the roles are divided into the one trying to denigrate comedy as a display of obscenities and the other who points

⁸⁸ During a conference in June 2017, Paola Besutti shared this idea with me when visiting the Sala degli Specchi in the Palazzo Ducale of Mantua.

⁸⁹ Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth Century Opera and the Sound of Commedia dell' Arte*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016) pp. 67-71. Her hypothesis, based on an article by Irving Godt, that discusses various manuscript versions of the *Lamento d'Arianna*, ultimately would mean that Monteverdi copied his stile concitato from the actress' performance. She does not include the possibility that the manuscripts in London (GB Lb: Add.30491) and Florence (I Fn: B.R.238) could be inaccurate. Notated music is prone to errors, as demonstrated by herself in music example 2.1, where the two famous opening bars are given half of the notes with a wrong pitch due to a *Terzverschreibung*.

⁹⁰ Giovanni Battista Andreini, *Prologo in Dialogo fra Momo e la Verità*, (Ferrara, Vittorio Baldini, 1612).

incessantly at its moral impact, despite or rather as a result of its disguises. (see the libretto at page 118).

The central issue in the discussion is the role of laughter, which, according to Momo, can be seen as the cause of vices. Truth sees it as precisely the opposite, a cure for the diseased, mentally and physically.

Momo: *Non saranno mai azioni virtuose quelle nelle quali entrino il riso, le parole oscene, le fallacie e le menzogne.*

Verità: *Se le comedie avessero per fine queste cianze che vo' dite, gran biasimo sarebbe il loro ed ognuno fuggire le dovrebbe; ma ditemi per vostra fede: avete mai veduto che le medicine che si danno per risanare i corpi infermi, per esser composte 'ingredienti amari, si sogliono sparger d'intorno con zucchero o d'altra cosa dolce, acciò che l'infermo, ingannato da quella poca dolcezza, beve ancora l'amaro, nel quale è posta la sua sanità? Così a punto avviene della comedia, la quale è introdotta per medicare gli animi umani languenti di diversi morbi, ed acciò che sia volentieri udita, per entro vi si mesce il riso, acciò che diletta i giovani e ne nasca la liberazione degli animi infetti; la qual cosa, essendo l'anima ferma conservatrice del corpo, giova moltissime volte per conseguenza a risanare ancora assai infirmità e debolezze dell'istesso corpo.*⁹¹

(Momo: Those actions in which laughter, obscene words, deceits and lies enter will never be virtuous.

Verità: If the comedies had as their end these stories that you want to tell, they would be much to be blamed and everyone would have to flee from them; but tell me for your own good faith: have you ever seen that the medicines that are given to heal sick bodies, because they are made up of bitter ingredients, are usually sprinkled around with sugar or other sweet things, so that the sick person, deceived by that little sweetness, still drinks the bitter, in which his health is placed? The same goes for comedy, which is introduced to medicate human souls languishing from various diseases, and so that it may be willingly heard, laughter is mixed in, so that by delighting it may benefit and the liberation of the infected souls may arise; which, since the soul is a firm preserver of the body, is very often of benefit in consequence of healing many infirmities and weaknesses of the body itself.)

Andreini's efforts to achieve recognition of the artistic value of comedy had some antecedents, for example, at the Ferrarese court. The poet and novelist Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio was in the service of Ercole II d'Este and an influential professor of literature at various universities.

In his *Discorso intorno al comporre delle comedie e delle tragedie*, 1543, Giraldi discusses the value of comedy, which addresses the soul instead of just entertaining the common person. On several points, he mentions its similarities with the tragedia, for instance, that laughter and weeping both depend on a genuine and natural cause and not being forced by the performance,

*Ora, passando dal lieto a lagrimevole, questa medesima consideratione si dee havere ne i pianti & ne i lamenti della Tragedia; perche anco questi debbono essere non sforzati, ma nati della natura della cosa;*⁹²

⁹¹ Andreini, *Dialogo*, second page (no page numbers).

⁹² Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio, *Discorso intorno al comporre delle comedie e delle tragedie*, (Venice, 1543), pp. 282-283. <https://books.google.nl/books?id=rVxcAAAACAAJ&hl=nl&pg=PP11#v=onepage&q&f=true>
See also Florinda Nardi, 'Trattati, prologhi, lezioni. Teoria e pratica del comico tra Cinque e Seicento,' in *Le Forme del Comico*, ed. Simone Magherini, Anna Bozzoli and Gino Tellini, Florence, Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2019, p. 128.

(In moving from joy to tears, the same thing must be taken into account for the weeping and lamentations of tragedy, for these must not be forced but born of the nature of the thing;)

The 'nature of the case' was the tragic element, which in the 16th century was mostly modelled after antique Greek tragedies. From early childhood, Giovanni Battista Andreini must have been familiar with the tragic language and its stories. The repertoire of the Gelosi was his cultural environment from the very beginning of his conscious life.

His own substantial achievement in the genre was *La Florinda*, a tragedy which he published first in 1604 and performed much to the appreciation of the Accademia degli Spensierati in Florence. Unfortunately, the printer in Florence did such a bad job, with a useless fourth and fifth act, that Andreini burned 500 copies when he found out.⁹³

The play was so successful thanks to the performance of Virginia Andreini, and she most probably made use of her talent as a singer to accentuate the more dramatic parts of her role. Whether these would now be marked as *lamenti* is hard to prove without any notated music. However, the performance or 'reading' of the verses must have been close to what we now consider a *lamento*, using all rhetorical devices. As Emily Wilbourne pointed out, several passages of the *Florinda* libretto could have served as a model for the *lamento* the actress would sing in *L'Arianna*.⁹⁴ The fact that laments existed as popular songs also supports the idea of a more melodic *lamento* in *La Florinda* rather than just heightened declamation. A strong argument for the theory that Virginia used her vocal qualities in the tragedies can be found in the favourite position she had with Governor Fuentes in Milan. A letter to Annibale Chieppio on 23 September 1606 informed this secretary of Vincenzo Gonzaga that the Fedeli would stay with Governor Pietro Enriquez D'Azevedo, count of Fuentes because he wanted to hear *la Florinda* sing and play for him. That year, the play she owed her nickname to was reprinted in Milan, and Fuentes' financial support is apparent in the dedication.⁹⁵

Despite the fact that - as Wilbourne states - there is no direct evidence that laments in tragedies such as *La Florinda* were fully sung, this can hardly be a reason for ignoring all the mentioned arguments that point in the direction of an actress with a mature vocal delivery. She had to *sing* the role at her audition, coping with the high standards that Monteverdi used for his singers in court.

It is a challenging idea that a close cooperation between the three artists, Rinuccini, Monteverdi and Virginia Andreini, resulted in the *Lamento d'Arianna*, as we know it now.

⁹³ Emily Wilbourne, "Isabella ringiovinita": Virginia Ramponi Andreini before Arianna," *Ricerche* IX 1-2, 2007, p.57.

⁹⁴ Wilbourne, *Seventeenth Century Opera*, (2016), pp. 59-61. See also Tim Carter, "Lamenting Ariadne?" (*Early Music*, 27/3, (Autumn 1999), p. 401., who chose another passage from *La Florinda* as the probably sung *lamento* in *La Florinda*.

⁹⁵ Emily Wilbourne, *Isabella ringiovinita*, (2007), p. 51, suggests very close ties between the Andreini couple and the count. Even their son was named after the count. His love for the qualities of *La Florinda* meant a real boost in the career of the Fedeli.

Initially, the lead was on the side of the librettist, composing a text that would fit into the entire structure of the opera. The arguments concerning its 'antique Greek' design, which Tim Carter convincingly displayed in his article above, would endorse the insertion of the lamento as a modern and extra feature.⁹⁶ In that sense, Dell'Anguillara's translation of Ovid⁹⁷ not only served as an example for Rinuccini's verses, but his inclusion of a lamento for Arianna in direct speech -deviating from Ovid's original- found a successor in our librettist as well.

The direct speech of the commedia actress, who trained herself in theatrical techniques such as *all'improvviso* delivery and inserting word repetitions, could have contributed to shaping the lament in such an expressive way. This, however, must have been, above all, a question of her delivery and not her mastery of structuring poetry on a high level. *La Florinda* is basically a stream of consciousness, with a large portion of lamenting passages as the main characteristic. There is little hierarchy in the emotional curves. In that sense it is rather a sea of consciousness than a stream, with many waves.

In what sense Virginia would have influenced both composer and librettist to write the lamento specifically for her rhetorical possibilities can be surmised based on examples from *La Florinda*, such as those given here. The many exclamations, repetitive questions, hyperbolic phrasing, etc., ask for an inventive and sensitive declamation to avoid caricature.

It is certain that Rinuccini made more than superficial use of the rhetoric in Giovanni Andrea Dell'Anguillara's translation of Ovid.⁹⁸ In this well-known edition, the part of Arianna had been extended by the translator with a lament in direct speech. According to Giosepe Orologgi, who added comments in the edition of Dell'Anguillara, the translating poet was competing with Ariosto, whose scene of the lamenting Olimpia⁹⁹ is rhetorically very close to Ariadne. Ariosto, however, modelled the lament after Ovid (Ariadne in the *Heroides*) and probably borrowed also from Catullus' *Carmina*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Carter, *Lamenting Ariadne?* p.399-400. Carter contextualised in this article the sources for Rinuccini's lamento.

⁹⁷ The original text can be found in the Latin library online: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid.html>

⁹⁸ Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara, *Le Metamorfosi di Ovidio*, (Venice, Giunti, 1561.1584) libro Ottavo, pp. 268-311. https://books.google.nl/books?id=gd-tnQtD5H0C&pg=PP9&hl=nl&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁹⁹ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, Canto X, 25.

[https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Orlando_furioso_\(sec._la_stampa_1532\)/Canto_10](https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Orlando_furioso_(sec._la_stampa_1532)/Canto_10)

¹⁰⁰ The complete *Carmina* of Gaius Valerius Catullus are published on www.koxkollum.nl.

Catullus,

Carmen LXIV

Ariadna

Namque fluentisono prospectans litore Diae
Thesaea cedentem celeri cum classe tuetur
indomitos in corde gerens Ariadna furores;
necdum etiam sese quae visit visere credit,
ut pote fallaci quae tum primum excita somno
desertam in sola miseram se cernat harena.

Ovidius,

Epistulae Heroidum X

Ariadna

"quo fugis?" exclamo "scelerate revertere Theseu!
flecte ratem! numerum non habet illa suum!"
[.....]
flecte ratem, Theseu, versoque relabere vento;
si prius occidero, tu tamen ossa feres.

Ariosto,

Orlando furioso, canto decimo, 25:

Olimpia

e dove non potea la debil voce,

supliva il pianto e 'l batter palma a palma.

— Dove fuggi, crudel, così veloce?

Non ha il tuo legno la debita salma.*

Fa che lievi me ancor: poco gli nuoce

che porti il corpo, poi che porta l'alma. —

E con le braccia e con le vesti segno

fa tuttavia, perché ritorni il legno.

** ship*

Dell'Anguillara,

Le metamorfosi di Ovidio, libro Ottavo, 138:

Arianna

Deh fossi sol da me tanto diviso

(dicea) che della poppa della nave

Potessi il pianto udir, vedere il viso,

Quanta doglia appresenta e quanto pave;

Che muteresli il tuo crudele avviso.

E di tornar non ti parebbe grave,

Ma poichè l'occhio tuo non è presente,

Guardami almen con l'occhio della mente.

Catullus,

Carmen LXIV

Ariadna

On Dia's lonely beach, by the rush of the waves,
Ariadne sees there, how Theseus' ship disappears,
and in the stormy fury of her tortured heart
She believes not to see, what yet her eye beholds.
For barely awakened from her sleepy delusion,
she finds herself alone, abandoned on the sand.

Ovidius,

Epistulae Heroidum X

Where are you going? I shouted turn back, wicked
Theseus! Turn your ship! You are without one of your number!
[.....]

last lines

Turn your ship, Theseus, sail back against the wind:
if I die first, you can still bear my bones.

Ariosto,

Orlando furioso, canto decimo, 25:

Olimpia
and where the weak voice could not,
she made up for crying and wringing her hands,
— Where are you fleeing, cruel one, so quickly?
Your ship does not have the due corpse.
Pick me up: it does him little harm
who carries the body, because he bears the soul.
— And with my arms and with my clothes I sign
act at least, so that the ship returns.

Dell'Anguillara,

Le metamorfosi di Ovidio, libro Ottavo, 138:

Arianna

Were I alone so divided from myself
(she said) that from the back of the ship
You could hear the weeping, see the face,
How much grief it shows, and how much pain;
That it might change thy cruel opinion.
And to return would not seem grievous to thee, But since thine eye is not present,
At least look at me with the eye of your mind.

Rinuccini, *L'Arianna*, from the lamento:

Arianna	
<i>O Teseo, o Teseo mio</i>	O Theseus, o my Theseus,
<i>Si che mio ti vo dir, che mio pur sei</i>	For mine, I say, since you are that,
<i>Benche t'involi, ah! crudo, a gl'occhi miei</i>	Although you flee, ah cruel, from mine eyes.
<i>Volgiti Teseo mio,</i>	Turn back, my Theseus,
<i>Volgiti Teseo, o Dio,</i>	Turn back, oh God!
<i>Volgiti indietro a rimirar colei,</i>	Turn back to look again at her
<i>Che lasciato ha per te la patri, e 'l Regno</i>	Who left for you her native land and reign,
<i>E in queste arene ancora</i>	And on these sands,
<i>Cibo di fere dispietate, e crude</i>	Food for pitiless and cruel wild animals,
<i>Lascierà l'ossa ignude</i>	Will leave her bare bones.

When following the genealogical path through the history of this particular lament, we notice the topoi clearly articulated. The swift departure of the fleeing traitor (*quo fugis?*), the abandonment in the sand/shore (*arena*) of a deserted island, the sight of the ship, the focus on the eyes (*occhie*), the approaching death, or as a result, the corpse/ bones. We find passages where Ariadne laments about the threat of wild animals (*cibo di fere*) in other strophes outside of this comparison. As Carter justly addressed, the tigers and lions in earlier versions remained in Rinuccini's story, as well as the abandoned island, despite the apparently rather populated environment of Naxos.¹⁰¹

Dell'Anguillara spread the lament over 24 strophes of 8 lines, and all elements that served as ingredients of Rinuccini's version can be traced in this very long monologue. The concise wording of Rinuccini is a remarkable contrast by its direction and clear closures, all in a straightforward way of speaking and restraint in description. The actress's rhetorical habits could have influenced the directness of speech. However, the strong rhythmical structure and the controlled shaping of the longer lines betray close cooperation between an experienced poet and a mature composer. Performance driven by improvisation will not arrive at a result that is so balanced and precise that moving or changing any note or syllable can only damage the entire work of art.

At the première on 28 May 1608, the astonishment and the shock of the new was overwhelming. Several witnesses reported the exceptional scene of the lament, praising both

¹⁰¹ Carter, *Lamenting Ariadne?* p. 400.

the composer and the prima donna. For everybody, it must have been a revelation to be exposed, on the one hand, to something so familiar as a lamento and, on the other, to be absorbed in a new medium with a complete merge of theatre and music that, in its momentary magic eclipsed all theatrical pomp.

The impressive staging of the opera was described by Secretary Federico Follino,¹⁰² the same who had summoned Monteverdi to return to Mantua to gain eternal fame. He mentions the appropriate and pompous clothing of the actors and the impressive scenery of a high rock and waves that perpetually move in a beautiful way. He then shifts the attention to - what he interestingly calls- the power of the music from the ducal chapelmaster Claudio Monteverdi:

'Ma essendole poi aggiunta la forza della musica dal sig. Claudio Monteverde maestro di capella del duca, uomo di quell valore ch'il mondo sa, e che in quell'attione fece pruova di superar se stesso.'

(But the power of music was then added by Signor Claudio Monteverde, maestro di capella of the duke, a man of such quality as the world knows, and who, by doing so, delivered a proof of surpassing himself.)

He mentions further the instruments positioned behind the scene and who delivered varied accompaniment that changed the mood with various sounds. Follino praises the singers, men and women, who were excellent in their roles and more than admirable. But above all, Arianna's lament moved the entire audience to such a state that everyone 'melted' and all the ladies shed a little tear.

'nel lamento che fece Arianna sovra lo scoglio abbandonata da Teseo, il quale che fu rappresentato con tanto affetto e con sì pietosi modi, che non si trovò ascoltante alcuno che non s'intenerisse, né pur fu una dama che non versasse qualche lagrimetta al suo bel pianto.'

(Ariadne's lament on the rock abandoned by Theseus, which was portrayed with so much affect and in such a pitiful manner, that no one was listening without becoming softened; there was not a lady who did not shed a few tears at her beautiful plaint.)

In the literature, there is most of the time attention to the little tears of all the ladies, but the impact of the lamento on the whole audience is stated much more by the choice of words before. Literally everybody (*alcuno*) in the audience was brought into a state of tender sorrow (*ascoltante alcuno che non s'intenerisse*) where the meaning of the word *intenerirsi* (becoming soft) is not really covered by the English translation of being 'moved'.

This description was published later in the year after the 'suntuose feste' of the wedding were over, and a hard copy proof of the magnificent festivities needed to be distributed to preserve its impact.

¹⁰² Federico Follino, *Compendio delle suntuose feste fatte l'anno MDCVIII nella città di Mantova per le reali nozze del serenissimo prencipe D. Francesco Gonzaga con la serenissima infante Margherita di Savoia.*

(Mantua, Aurelio and Lodovico Osanna, 1608), p. 30. Facsimile edited by Claudio Gallico, *Federico Follino, Cronache Mantovane (1587-1608)*, (Florence, Olschki, 2004), p. 138. The quotations on this page are from the same page in Follino's book.

But the letter of an ambassador from Ferrara confirms the impact and even stresses the outshining performance of the leading lady, here referred to as a 'comediante', an actress.

We learn that the opera lasted three and a half hours and started late in the evening, because it finished at three in the night. The ambassador also mentioned that the lamento was accompanied by violins and viols.

This remark caused some confusion among musicologists because the lamento is monody with simple basso continuo accompaniment. The most plausible explanation would be that the interrupting choirs in the lamento (which music, unfortunately, did not survive) had these string accompaniments.

*'Si fece poi la Commedia in musica che sì cominciò prima dell' avemaria et durò sino alle tre ore di notte, et tutti i recitanti ben vestiti fecero la loro parte molto bene, ma meglio di tutti Arianna comediante: et fu la favola d'Arianna et Theseo, che nel suo lamento in musica accompagnato da viole et violini fece piangere molti la sua disgrazia;'*¹⁰³

(Then there was a commedia set to music, which started before midday and lasted until three in the night, and all the well-dressed actors played their part very well, but the best of all was the actress Arianna: and it was the tale of Ariadne and Theseus, whose lament set to music was accompanied by viols and violins that made many weep for her misfortune;)

Francesco Rasi gets a good review for divine singing, but the role of Arianna left everyone behind, and the other soloists (castrati and others) seemed like nothing.

'Vera un Raso, musico, che cantò divinamente; ma passò la parte Arianna, et gl'eunuchi et altri parvero niente.'

In the preface of his 1608 edition of *La Dafne*, Marco da Gagliano underlines Claudio Monteverdi's exceptional position after composing a work that, for the first time, succeeded in reviving the value of music from the antique past in such a way that it visibly moved the whole theatre to tears.

il signor Claudio Monteverdi, musico celebratissimo, capo della musica di S. A., compose l'arie in modo sì esquisito, che si può con verità affermare che si rinnovasse il pregio dell' antica musica, perciò che visibilmente mosse tutto il teatro a lagrime.

All the praise and acclamation right after the performance of *Arianna*, did not include the name of the actress ('comediante'). La Florinda was only named much later when there was reference to her achievement in poetry or correspondence. In Giovanni Battista Marini's *Adone*, published in 1623, La Florinda's Arianna is compared to the emotional impact of the best (female) singer there was, Adriana Basile. The latter was also Monteverdi's favourite.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, p.138.

¹⁰⁴ Alessandro Ademollo, *La Bell'Adriana ed altre virtuose del suo tempo alla corte di Mantova*, (Città di Castello, Lapi, 1888), p.155; In his letter of 28 December 1610 to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga he speaks highly of her qualities in singing, playing and speaking, but even tuning her instrument (harp). Stevens, *The Letters*, p.77.

<i>Tal forse intenerir col dolce canto Suol la bella Adriana i duri affetti, E con la voce e con la vista intanto Gir per due strade a saettare i petti;</i>	Thus, perhaps, can soften with sweet song the beautiful Adriana, the hard affects, And with her voice and with her eyes Turn via two ways to pierce the breasts;
<i>E in tal guisa Florinda udisti, O Manto, Là ne' teatri de' tuoi regi tetti D'Arianna spiegar gli aspri martiri E trar da mille cor mille sospiri.</i>	And in such garment did you hear Florinda, O Manto, There in the theatres of thy royal palaces Of Ariadne explain the bitter martyrs And draw from a thousand hearts a thousand sighs.

(*Adone* VII, 88)

It is remarkable that in the comparison, the word '*intenerir*' is used again to describe the effect of the performance. But also, in this compact description, the attention goes to both the voice and the face, so the singing and acting.

The compass of the audience at *Arianna* is again underlined, though some exaggerations go as far as 5000 spectators, which is difficult to imagine at any location in Mantua's Palazzo Ducale.

La Morte d'Orfeo

Instead of the little tears that were shed at the end of Arianna's lament in 1608, here, as *semi-deo ex machina*,¹⁰⁵ Vanità/Orfeo takes over and revenges the *lieto fine* (happy end) that was imposed on the opera in the edition of 1609. The first performed version of 1607 ended with Striggio's verses of liquidation by Bacchanti (furies), shaped as Bacchanale choirs alternating soli. The music of that ending is lost, just like the rest of *Arianna*, and leaves us curious about its character.

Several scholars agree that the later (printed) version would not have been possible in the narrow space of the *Orfeo* première. The reference to a 'narrow stage' (*angusta scena*) in Monteverdi's dedication to Prince Francesco of the 1609 print, made Nino Pirrotta finally exclude the possibility of elaborate machine work for descending and ascending gods.¹⁰⁶

'Serenissimo signore mio signore et patrone colendissimo, La favola d'Orfeo che già nell'Accademia de gl'Invaghiti sotto gl'auspiti di V. A. fù sopra angusta Scena musicalmente rappresentata, dovendo hora comparire nel gran Teatro dell'universo à far mostra di se à tutti gl'huomini, ...'

(Most Serene Lord, my lord and most esteemed patron, The fable of Orpheus which was already performed in a narrow stage musically in the Accademia de gl'Invaghiti under the auspition of Your Excellency, having now to appear in the great Theater of the universe to show itself to all men, ...)

¹⁰⁵ In contrast to the *Deus ex machina* like Apollo in the revised version of *l'Orfeo* or Baccho in the original libretto of *Arianna*.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by Barbara Russano Hanning, "The Ending of *L'Orfeo*: Father, Son, and Rinuccini" in *Journal of the Seventeenth Century Music*, 9, 2003, no.1, note 9. <<https://sscm-jscm.org/v9/no1/hanning.html#n9>>

In *La Tragedia di Claudio M*, the initial finale of *Orfeo* is crossfaded with the original ending of Arianna, where Bacchus arrives as the saving god, and the original ending of *Orfeo*, the death of Orpheus, lynched by the furies (Baccanti).

Orpheus' lamenting monologue at the beginning of *Orfeo*, Act V, which is only answered by an echo (*Eco*), demonstrates his narcissistic and projected love for an idealised Eurydice. It ends with his rage and rejection of all other women ("*Or l'altre donne son superbe e perfide...*").

This expression of deep frustration in my libretto might have been triggered by Arianna's overwhelming testimony of faith, (too much) love and loyalty in a woman. But simultaneously, Orpheus identifies with this overload of love and condemns himself for it. So, the final motto that concludes the *Lamento d'Arianna*, "*così va chi tropp'ama, e troppo crede*" (Thus goes, who loves and trusts too much), now points in two directions. For Arianna, it was her submission to the love for the one who betrayed her. For Orpheus, it meant that fate deprived him of his muse and faith.

There is a third element mixed into this apotheosis, which is also described in detail by Federico Follino in his report of the sumptuous feasts.¹⁰⁷ One week after the performance of *Arianna*, on 4 June 1608, the other spectacular piece of music theatre written by the golden team of the Mantuan nuptials, Rinuccini/Monteverdi, *Il Ballo dell'Ingrate*, was presented. For the third time during the festivities, Virginia Andreini was given a prima donna role, and again, she sang a—this time short—lamento as one of the spirits (*Ahi, troppo è duro*). When Pluto, with a frightening voice ("*con voce d'orrore e di spavento*"), has ordered the 'sinful' women to descend to their dark cells, one of them (Andreini) stays behind on the stage (*una delle Ingrate ch'era rimasta sù 'l palco*) to sing, while the other dance their sorrowful dance. In the refrain of this aria, these ghosts of ungrateful women are ordered to learn to have mercy on their rejected lovers. (*Apprendete pietà, Donne, e Donzelle*).

Again, Follino reports the emotions of the ladies, almost as copy-pasting his report of the effect of Arianna's lament.

'[...] una delle Ingrate (Andreini) proruppe in così lagrimosi accenti accompagnati da sospiri, e da singulti, che non fue cuor di Donna così fiero in quel Teatro, che non versasse per gli occhi qualche lagrima pietosa.'

([...] one of the ungrateful women burst out in such tearful accents accompanied by sighs and sobs that there was not a woman's heart so proud in that theatre that she did not shed a few piteous tears from her eyes.)¹⁰⁸

Because Orpheus has hijacked the final words of Arianna's lament and uttered his frustration about women, *Ragione*, alias Rinuccini, grasps the moment to whisper the advice he created for the *Ballo delle Ingrate*, in Orpheus's ear. With this move, Orpheus evokes male suppression, which is not entirely his goal, and he tries to escape. *Truth* interferes with a warning to the women, she has taken over from a fury in *Orfeo's* Act V. (*Fuggito è pur*). Monteverdi does the same (*Non fuggirà*) and uses the well-known ending of the Orpheus

¹⁰⁷ Follino, *Le Suntuose Feste*, p.133, facsimile p.243.

¹⁰⁸ *Idem*.

myth to speak a verdict (*Sovra nocente capo ira celeste*) over his own creation. The response is female fury, turning all women in the Bacchanti of the original finale of *Orfeo*, as Alessandro Striggio had conceived it, with the help of Dell'Aguillara's translation of Ovid.¹⁰⁹

<i>Le donne incrudelite, e furibonde, Mandaro il corpo del Poeta in quarti, Sparger le varie membra in varie parti.</i> <i>Gittar nel'Hebro il capo con la Lira, Che tanto esser solean d'accordo insieme. Or, mentre il mesto fiume al mar gli tira, Ogni corda pian pian mormora, e geme. La lingua ancor senz'anima respira, Ed accoppia col suon le voci estreme; Col flebil della lingua e della corda Il pianger delle ripe ancor s'accorda.</i>	The women are incensed and furious, They split the body of the Poet into quarters, They scattered the various limbs in several parts. Threw into the Hebrus the head with the Lyre, That so much they were in accordance together. Now, as the sad river to the sea draws him, Each string slowly murmurs and groans. The tongue, still without a soul, breathes again, And couples with the sound, the extreme voices; With the feebleness of tongue and string The weeping of the banks is still in harmony.
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With Monteverdi's command to silence the voice of Orpheus, he initiated the disappearance of the half-god and his own evocation of the mythological perfection in music.

The phrase is an allusion to the ending of Richard Strauss's *Salomé*: "Man töte dieses Weib." There are two reasons for this ending. The first is Monteverdi's symbolic act of leaving his *Orfeo* behind; now, he has found his new *via naturale all imitatione* (see above). A print of the score by the Venetian publisher Ricciardo Amadino in 1609 (see above) and a reprint in 1615 did not change the fact that no new performance of the opera followed its appearance in 1607. In contrast with *Arianna*, which had an attempted reprise in 1620, but succeeded in being performed again in 1640 in Venice.

The other reason for connecting the death of Orpheus with *Salomé*, is the rebirth of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in the first decade of the 20th century, with Romain Rolland as a *trait-d'union* between both works. The French writer and musicologist was a very important and active force behind the scene that stimulated the Paris premières of these operas, more or less simultaneously.¹¹⁰ What connects them is the re-appreciation of an opera style that had the text as a central and generating element in the shaping of music theatre.

The textless finale of *La Tragedia di Claudio M* is based on the information we have about the insertion of divine appearances at the end of *Arianna*. According to Pirrotta,¹¹¹ who mentions

¹⁰⁹ Giovanni Andrea Dell'Aguillara, *Le Metamorfosi di Ovidio*, (Venice, Giunti, 1561/1584) Libro Undecimo pp. 392-393.

¹¹⁰ For more information, see Johannes Boer, "Ignition-year 1900, Claudio Monteverdi between revival and decadentismo." in: (Fabris, Dinko and Anna Tedesco, eds), *La riscoperta di Monteverdi nel XX secolo. Musica antica, recezione e pratica della messinscena*, proceedings of the Seminar at Fondazione Levi, Venice, 22-24 settembre 2022, special issue of *Musica e storia*, n.s., I, 2024 (in preparation).

¹¹¹ Nino Pirrotta, *Le Due Orfei, da Poliziano a Monteverdi*, (Turin, Einaudi, 1975) pp. 330-331, n. 103.

this intervention of the gods, the actions were added to align the end with classical drama. This would also have been the wish of Duchess Eleonora, who mentioned a more animated representation of the story.

Venus had to rise up from the sea (*Vener uscendo dal mare*), a description that calls Botticelli to mind. Giove was blessing the connection of Bacchus and Ariadne from heaven, the Palazzo Ducale has a good example of a theatrical depiction on a vault. And finally, the only words sung by Bacchus are in the role of the groom, promising Ariadne to shine among the brightest stars.

In this finale, the allegories take the place of the gods and submit their power to the union of Monteverdi and Verità while he offers his head to the womb of Truth like a new matrimonial vow.