

Five Saliences in Marco da Gagliano's Earliest Madrigals

Edmond Strainchamps

In the summer of 1602, Marco da Gagliano's *Primo libro de madrigali a cinque voci* was printed in Venice by Angelo Gardano, Italy's leading publisher of madrigals. It was the first of Gagliano's six books in the genre, published between 1602 and 1617; in fact, it was the earliest publication of any of his music.¹ In 1606, the same firm reprinted the First Book.² Evidently the publisher thought a new printing would be commercially viable. Such a conviction very likely arose from the Florentine composer's having become, in the interim, more widely known and apparently admired through the issuing of his Second and Third madrigal books. As the work of a twenty-year-old composer, the *Primo libro* is remarkable in particular for its range and mastery of musical techniques and for its variety of musical type and expressive character, all of which are accomplished with perfect control. Gagliano followed the tradition of Florentine madrigalists both in his discriminating choice of poetry and in his fondness for homophony or near-homophony, although there is well-made polyphony in the volume as well.

That Gagliano was a progressive is strikingly evident by the ways in which his madrigals adapt the new Florentine ideas about music and aesthetics. Throughout the madrigals of Book One (as in those of his other five books), words, with few exceptions, are set syllabically to declamatory and expressive motives. When they are presented in the homophonic texture he favored, the resultant ensemble recitative makes the text quite easy to hear. This style realizes a basic tenet of the Florentine *camerate's* credo for the joining of poetry and music. As Gagliano himself stated in the preface to his opera *La Dafne*, "the true delight [of song] stems from the intelligibility of the words" (quoted in Solerti 1903:79).³ One example of this can be seen in Gagliano's setting of Giambattista Marino's "Arsi un tempo e l'ardore," at mm. 77-83 (Strainchamps 2002).⁴

More significant than this, however, is that the melodic lines, whether polyphonically interwoven or homophonically aligned, are very much conditioned by Florentine monody. Many of these lines, especially those given to the canto, would work well in a monodic setting with instrumental accompaniment. As Alfred Einstein observed of Gagliano's Book One madrigals, all "have the effect of polyphonic, imitative arrangements of monodies" (1949:734). One example of this, from among many, occurs in the first madrigal of the volume, "O misera Dorinda, ov'hai tu poste le tue speranze?" (Oh wretched Dorinda, where have you placed your hopes?).

Example 1: Marco da Gagliano, "O misera Dorinda," mm. 1–11.

Canto
Alto
Tenore
Quinto
Basso

O mi - se - ra Do - rin -
O mi - se - ra Do -
O mi - - - se - ra Do - rin -
O mi - se - ra Do - rin -

6
- da, o - v'hai tu po - ste Le tue spe - ran - ze?
- rin - da, o - v'hai tu po - ste Le tue spe - ran - ze?
- da, o - v'hai tu po - ste Le tue spe - ran - ze?
o - v'hai tu po - ste Le tue spe - - - ran - - - ze?
da,

Dorinda's monologue, in which she first speaks to herself and then to her reluctant lover, appears in Act II, scene 2 (lines 438–54) of Giovanni Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido*. Example 1 contains the first eleven measures of Gagliano's setting.

The expressive treatment of words, which, more often than not, is the chief determinant of Gagliano's music, is clearly a strong shaping force for these measures. It is the reason that the two syllables at the opening of the canto part are set to a falling diminished fifth, and that the whole first phrase is set within the intervallic span of a seventh (canto, mm. 2–6). At the same time, other voices outline linear dissonances such as the tritones

Example 2: Marco da Gagliano, “Al mio novo martire,” mm. 1–7.

The musical score consists of five staves, each representing a different voice part. The Canto part is the highest, followed by Alto, Tenore, Quinto, and Basso. The music is written in common time (C) and features a chromatic line in the Canto voice. The lyrics are: "Al mio no - vo mar - ti - re".

between the first and last pitches sung by alto and basso in mm. 2–6, the latter of which also elongates the canto’s first interval two octaves lower. These are supplemented by harmonic tritones between the alto’s *f*’ and the tenor’s *b*’ in m. 2 (an interval whose size prefigures the canto’s initial leap), and similarly, between the canto and quinto in m. 10. Through these dissonances, embedded in prevailing consonance, Gagliano portrays the inner torment and confusion that “wretched,” but gentle, Dorinda feels as she is continually spurned by chaste Silvio, whom she deeply loves.

In “Al mio novo martire” (At my new martyrdom)—the opening of which evokes the beginning of “O misera Dorinda”—Gagliano was inspired by the dark word “martire” to give the monody-like canto a chromatic line that moves mostly by half steps within a narrow intervallic span. There is, of course, chromaticism in other voices as well. The linear process at work here and the dissonances that result from it, including, remarkably, dissonant downbeats in five measures (mm. 3–7), produce momentary harmonies suggestive of Gesualdo’s music. The opening of the madrigal may be seen in example 2.

Although this is not the only instance of a somewhat tamed version of Gesualdo’s manner to be found in the First Book, it is the most striking of them. Whatever influence Gesualdo’s madrigals may have had on Gagliano, however, was probably indirect. A more likely influence was the Ferrarese nobleman Alfonso Fontanelli, a close associate of Gesualdo’s who com-

Example 3: Marco da Gagliano, "Tra sospiri e querele," mm. 5–9.

5

Canto
La mia don-na, la mia don-na fal-la - ce

Quinto
La mia don - na fal - la - ce

Alto
-re - le La mia don - na fal - la - ce Ho -

Tenore
8 - le La mia don - na fal - la - ce Ho-ra m'in-di-ce

Basso
-re - le La mia don - na fal - la - ce Ho -

posed in a more accessible style. Fontanelli was often in Florence and was resident there for at least two years, first in 1599 and then in 1601.⁵ Gagliano certainly would have met Fontanelli and encountered his music—and, most likely, the music of others in the Ferrara circle—at the musicians' gatherings that typified Florentine musical life at the turn of the seventeenth century. A letter by Gagliano speaks of the intense music-making occasioned by Fontanelli's brief visit to Florence in 1608: "The Lord Count Alfonso [Fontanelli] stayed in Florence three days, during which there was so much singing that I became sick of it!" (quoted in Vogel 1889:552–53)⁶

In sharp contrast to the slow-moving rhythms, the melodic movement almost entirely by step within a narrow intervallic range, and the near-homophonic texture at the opening of "Al mio novo martire," are the polyphonic measures that set the second verse of the poem "Tra sospiri e querele." In the leaping melodic lines of mm. 5–9, Gagliano wrote a musical illustration for "la mia donna fallace" (my false lady), with "fallace" being the key word in the phrase. The passage is contained in example 3. Measure 5 begins with an imitative duet between canto and quinto on a descending C-triad arpeggio, but before the textual phrase is completed the lines break off. After the canto leaps a ninth upward the phrase begins again, now with a descent on a D-triad arpeggio that spans the interval of an eleventh, coming to rest on an unexpected e^2 . At the same time, the

imitative basso's line covers a tenth and the middle voices, quinto, alto and tenore, span a seventh, an augmented octave, and a seventh, respectively. The melodic contour and the harmony, dropping through the common-note chords C–A–F–D until measure eight, play false at this point to our musical expectations while they make a punning surprise for the singers, who are diverted at the end from their anticipated goal to complete the phrase on A-major harmony.

Gagliano's setting of Ansaldo Cebà's "Scherza madonna e dice" is an anacreontic madrigal that, despite its brevity and its lighter tone, has some unexpected dissonance and chromaticism. The poem and its translation are as follows:

Scherza madonna e dice,
 Hor l'una in me girand'hor l'altra stella,
 Mira com'io son bella.
 Io miro e parte un foco,
 Mi scend'al cor tra 'l gioco;
 E mi struggon duo lumi a dramma a dramma;
 Che s'a gl'occhi son stelle al cor son fiamma.

My lady jests and says,
 turning now one and now the other star upon me,
 "Look how beautiful I am."
 I look and a fire begins,
 falling on my heart in the midst of the joke;
 and two lights destroy me bit by bit:
 for if to my eyes they are stars, to my heart they are flames.

The seeds for the chromaticism that reach their fullest flower in mm. 28–38 are planted as early as the introduction of verse three in m. 6, with its declamatory motive that descends in stepwise motion. This motive is the basis for the setting of the next two verses of the poem, although the motive is altered somewhat during a long section of developing variations (mm. 8–39). With verse six (beginning at m. 23), a climax is reached with a chromatic version of the motive that produces sharp dissonances of seconds and sevenths as it combines with itself again and again in imitative polyphony. Example 4 contains these measures.

The chromatic inflections and the dissonances are inspired by Gagliano's interpretation of the verse "E mi struggon duo lumi a dramma a dramma" (and two lights destroy me bit by bit), especially by the verb *struggere*, which means to melt, consume, or waste as well as to destroy. If the sense here is that of destruction resulting from "a complete meltdown"

Example 4: Marco da Gagliano, "Scherza madonna e dice," mm. 23-39.

Canto

23

Quinto

Alto

Tenore

Basso

-co; E mi strug-gon duo lu - - - mi a dram - ma a dram -

-co; E mi strug - - - gon duo lu - m'a dram-m'a dram - ma,

-co;

-co; E mi strug - gon duo

-co; E

28

ma, E mi strug-gon duo lu - mi a dram - m'a dram - ma,

E mi strug-gon duo lu - mi a dram-m'a dram -

E mi strug-gon duo lu - m'a dram-m'a dram - - - ma,

lu - mi a dram - ma a dram - ma, E mi strug-gon duo

mi strug-gon duo lu - - - mi E

34

a dram-ma a dram - ma;

-ma, E mi strug-gon duo lu - mi a dram - ma a dram - ma;

E mi strug-gon duo lu - mi a dram-m'a dram - ma; Che s'a gli occhi son

lu - mi a dram - m'a dram - ma, a dram - ma a dram-ma;

mi strug-gon duo lu - mi a dram - ma a dram - ma; Che s'a

(to put it into modern parlance), then clearly the treatment of “struggon(o)” is text-illustrative. Perhaps it is also a metaphorical comment on the compositional process itself, in that the evolving motive has reached its final state and is exhausted or “destroyed,” since it cannot be carried further within the style. More relevant to understanding the structure of this passage, however, is that the descending motive, so right for verse six, was prepared over a number of measures (mm. 8–24); in these measures it was fine for carrying text, but it had no text specificity (except for “falling” at the beginning of verse five). The acme achieved at last by the developing motive and the tension of the chromatic dissonance adds psychological depth to the poem. Indeed, one may say that the music has become the drama.

In “Un sguardo, un sguardo no,” Gagliano set a text by Gabriello Chiabrera. The poem belongs to the scherzo genre that Chiabrera created; this particular poem is number twenty-three in his *Scherzi e canzonette morali* (1599). Chiabrera’s poem and its English translation read as follows:

Un sguardo, un sguardo no, troppa pietate
 E per misero amante un sguard’intiero;
 Solo un de’ vostri raggi occhi girate,
 O parte del bel bianco o del bel nero;
 E se troppo vi par, non mi mirate;
 Ma fate sol semblante di mirarmi,
 Che nol potete far senza bear mi.

A glance, a glance no,
 a full glance is too much mercy for a piteous lover.
 Turn only one of the rays of your eyes,
 either part of the fine white or of the fine black;
 and if it seems too much to you, don’t look at me,
 but only pretend to look at me;
 for you can do nothing without delighting me.⁷

The text contains some tongue-in-cheek levity that comes about by the exaggeration of several conventions of madrigalian poetry to the point of making them absurd. This trait marks verses three and four, those in which the lover asks the lady to turn only one ray from her eyes and to send either beams from part of the sclera or part of the pupil. This spoofing request may carry with it some jeering, too, on the part of the speaker.

Gagliano’s setting of the poem devotes much attention to these verses; in fact, they take up more than half of the madrigal (thirty measures of the

Example 5: Marco da Gagliano, "Un sguardo, un sguardo no," mm. 9–38.

9

Canto

Alto

Tenore

Quinto

Basso

-ro; So - lo un de' vo - stri rag - gi oc - chi gi - ra - - - te,

-ro; So - lo un de' vo - stri rag - - - gi oc - chi gi - ra - - -

-ro;

-ro; So - lo un de' vo - stri rag - gi oc -

-ro; So - lo un de' vo - stri rag -

14

O par - te, o par - te del bel

te, O par - te, o par - te del

So - lo un de' vo - stri rag - - - gi oc - chi gi - ra - te, O par -

- chi gi - ra - - - te, So - lo un de' vo - stri

- gi oc - chi gi - ra - - - te, So - l'un de' vo - stri rag - - - gi oc - chi gi -

19

bian - co o del bel ne - ro, So - l'un de' vo - stri rag - gi oc - chi gi -

bel bian - - - co o del bel ne - ro, So - l'un de' vo - stri rag -

- te, o par - te del bel bian - co

rag - gi oc - chi gi - ra - - - te, O

- ra - - - te, O par - te del bel

Example 5 cont.

24

- ra - - - - - te, O par - te del
 - gi oc - chi gi - ra - te, O par - te del bel
 o del bel ne - ro,
 par - te del bel bian - co So-l'un de' vo-stri rag -
 bian - co o del bel ne - ro, So - loun de' vo - stri

29

bel bian - co o del bel ne - ro, O
 bian - co o del bel ne - ro, <o del bel ne - ro,>
 O par - - - te del bel bian-co o del bel
 - gi oc - chi gi - ra - - - - te, O par - te del bel bian -
 rag - - - gi oc - chi gi - ra - - - - te, O par - te del bel

34

par - te del bel bian - co o del bel ne - ro; E
 o del bel ne - ro, o del bel ne - - - - - ro; E
 ne - - - ro, o del bel ne - - - ro; E
 - co o del bel ne - ro, o del bel ne-ro; E se trop-po vi
 bian - co o del bel ne - ro; E

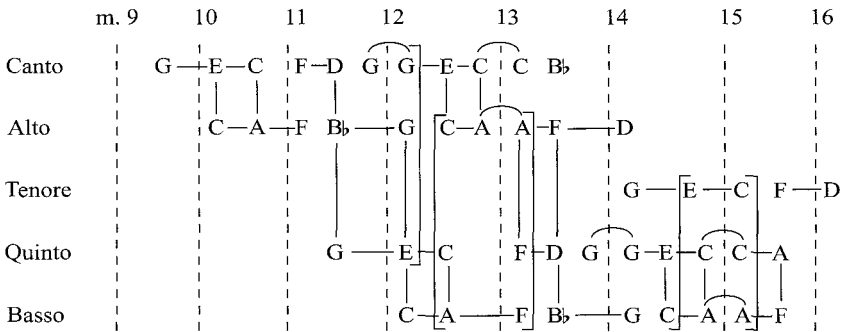
total fifty-seven). Measures 9–38, which may be seen in example 5, have at their center an eighteen-bar *contrapposto* (mm. 14–31), before and after which each verse is presented individually (five and seven measures, respectively). *Contrapposto*—a term borrowed by Alfred Einstein from the world of Renaissance art—refers to the pose of a figure twisted so that the upper body and the lower are on opposing axes (Hale 1981:358). Einstein used the term aptly and extensively to label a section of music in which distinct melodic lines with different texts sound simultaneously (1949).

Contrapposto is not a rare phenomenon; it is used elsewhere in Gagliano's Book One and in the works of other madrigal composers during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Monteverdi, for instance, made a telling use of it in his "Filli cara e amata" from the *Primo libro* of 1587, and in this case, *contrapposto* is more than a musical technique; it serves a psychological purpose as well. Gagliano's First Book indicates his familiarity with Monteverdi, although the passage in "Un sguardo, un sguardo no" cannot be said to derive directly from Monteverdi. Rather, *contrapposto* was "in the air" for progressive madrigal composers of the time.

While Gagliano's *contrapposto* passage for verses three and four is masterful purely as a musical construction, the impulse behind it would seem to be primarily expressive. The peculiar conceits that Chiabrera employed in these verses virtually require opposition in the music. The pointed contrast between "white" and "black" in the second of these is realized in "eye-music" that is brought about by the use of open and filled note-heads to set them. Between the two verses, Gagliano reinforced differences by setting the first to quicker rhythmic values of eighth and quarter notes (mm. 9–16, for instance), while the second has predominantly longer values of half notes (see the canto in mm. 26–31). With the addition of melodic shape to the mixture, it is clear that Gagliano let words, melody, and rhythm emphasize the differences between verses three and four, with each of them maintained in separate and movable strands of imitative polyphony.

Measures 9–38 are also set apart from measures before and after them by their contrasts in texture and harmonic motion. At the opening of the madrigal, with its declamatory setting of words, the texture is homophonic or near-homophonic for the first two verses. But in m. 9, an abrupt change in texture occurs. In the second half of the measure, the canto introduces a five-measure theme for the setting of verse three that is subsequently taken up by the other four voices in a polyphonic imitation with strict canonic repetition, the voices beginning in turn on G–C–G–C–G. The melodic shape of the theme (which closes somewhat differently with the individualized melismas on "girate" that are given to most of the parts), by itself and in the company of other voices, expresses a diatonic collection (with B \flat), primarily by descending cycles of thirds that begin on g" and

Diagram 1: Marco da Gagliano, "Un sguardo, un sguardo no." Harmonic reduction showing the descending cycle of thirds in mm. 9–16.



move mainly at a half-note pace (G–E–C–A–F–D–B \flat) in mm. 9–16. In the reduction of these measures shown in Diagram 1, the dashes indicate falling melodic thirds; the vertical lines and brackets indicate simultaneous thirds that have a place in the descending cycle.

With the first appearance of verse four, the pattern alters. Now a new motive, rising in stepwise motion, first appears in an imitation of itself at a fifth below, producing parallel sixths (see the canto and alto beginning at m. 16). The new motive is also present for the setting of verse four, but now the *dux* and *comes* are separated by second or a fourth, and the voices move in rising thirds (tenore and basso, beginning at mm. 20–21, or alto and canto in m. 26). Thus, the old and new themes with their discrete polyphonic units are simultaneously developed in mm. 14–31, either in entirety or in fragments. In the seven measures that follow the *contrapposto* passage (mm. 32–38)—measures in which verse four stands alone—the musical fragments that set the last words, “o del bel nero,” scattered through the contrapuntal texture, act to bring to a close the long section of imitation. The intensity of the working out that Gagliano gave to verses three and four perfectly suits these two anomalous and artificial verses from Chiabrera’s poem: Gagliano matches complex music to the complex imagery of the poetry. In this sense, mm. 9–38 form a prolonged madrigalism at a deeper level, a madrigalism writ large, as it were.

Salient moments as remarkable as the five passages examined here might be drawn from nearly every madrigal in Gagliano’s *Primo libro*. Indeed, throughout his earliest collection, the complete control of the musical components—melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, sonority—vis-à-vis the poetry, results in truly notable works. While the madrigals in his remaining

five books further display an evolving compositional and expressive proficiency, the first already shows him to be a master. In the end, it can be recognized that Gagliano's madrigals constitute compelling utterances by one of the last great composers of the genre in Italy.

Notes

1. That Gagliano's first publication consisted of madrigals is not surprising, since a beginning composer's initial publication, in Florence and elsewhere, was nearly always a book of madrigals. For more on this see Strainchamps (1984:311–12).

2. After 1605, the firm was named Angelo Gardano et fratelli. See *New Grove Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Gardano" (by Mary S. Lewis and Richard J. Agee).

3. "Il vero diletto [del canto] cresce della intelligenza delle parole." The passage quoted here is from the end of the first paragraph on page 79 (Solerti 1903).

4. See Strainchamps (2002) for a modern edition of all the madrigals in Marco da Gagliano's First Book.

5. See *New Grove Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Fontanelli, Alfonso" (by Anthony Newcomb).

6. "... il Sig. Conte Alfonso [Fontanelli] è stato in Fiorenza tre giorni i quali si sono cantati tutti tal che sono infastidito." Gagliano's letter, written to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga, is extant in Mantua, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Gonzaga, Autografi, busta 6, 487. The letter is printed (albeit with a few errors in the transcription) in Vogel (1889:552–53).

7. I am grateful to Anthony DeDonna who helped smooth my Italian translation of this poem as well as the preceding one.

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