

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Performed Embodiment, Sacred Eroticism, and Voice in  
Devotions by Early Seventeenth-Century Italian Nuns

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Musicology

by

Lindsay Maureen Johnson

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Performed Embodiment, Sacred Eroticism, and Voice in  
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Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

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Professor Elisabeth Le Guin, Chair

This dissertation comprises a series of close readings of music written and performed in intimate devotional contexts by nun composers Sulpitia Cesis, Alba Tressina, and Lucrezia Vizzana in seventeenth-century convents in Modena, Vicenza, and Bologna, respectively. I argue that in singing music written by their sisters, nuns were able to use their voices to mediate a space between their own corporeal bodies and an ephemeral Divine presence. In so doing, these nuns were able to engage in practices conducive to the experience of ecstasy for both singers and listeners, cultivate an outlet for creativity and entertainment, and strengthen their relationships with one another and with the Divine. This mediation also functioned as an act of self-empowerment, as nuns derived agency through composing, performing, and listening to this music. Nuns' voices therefore occupied a queer and transgressive space that threatened patriarchal control over women's sexualities, allowing for more autonomous nurturing of their own

identities and spiritualities. Through musicking, nuns were able to communicate with each other, with God, and with the outside world through choice of text, musical setting thereof, manipulation of performance space, and subtle relational cues between singers and audience members.

I draw from a range of disciplines: historical musicology, sound studies, queer studies, theater and art history, liturgical history, and Renaissance medicine. My methodologies are similarly multivalent and include “thick” description of the real-time experience of musical performance, sonic space, and the role of the listener; close examination of texts and their relationship to the music; hermeneutical analysis of the musical scores; and analysis of the gestures, bodily movements, and non-verbal cues that occur between singers and audience members during performance.



The dissertation of Lindsay Maureen Johnson is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2013

Dedicated to the women religious  
whose musical contributions still allow us entry  
to their hidden culture.

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music especially. Olivia Bloechel and Nina Eidsheim also contributed to my academic growth, pushing me towards new avenues of thought in modal theory and sound studies. Nina Treadwell has been an encouraging and helpful outside member; I am only sorry that we never seem to be in the same place at the same time!

My fellow graduate students made this journey not only tolerable, but thoroughly enjoyable. When I visited the department as a prospective student, I knew pretty much from my first interaction with the students that this was where I was meant to be. The last seven years are a rush of joyous memories, laughter, and play. From the Futurist Dinner Party to playing video games on Kelsey Cowger's couch, from playing four-square with my fellow first-years during seminar breaks to playing Settlers of Catan, Pandemic, and Carcassone in the evenings, from going to tea in Santa Monica to delivering care packages during Master's and Special Fields exams, from weekly potlucks to afternoons playing chamber music, it truly has been an amazing journey. Samuel Baltimore, Alexandra Apolloni, Jill Rogers, Gray Raulerson, Peter Lawson, Jeremy Mikush, Hyun Kyong Chang, Lindsey Strand-Polyak, Kelsey Cowger, Ross Fenimore, Des Harmon, Joanna Love, Zarah Ersoff, Natalia Bieletto-Bueno, Ryan Rowan, Marianna Ritchey, and Eric Wang, have all touched my life, debated me, pushed me academically, supported me personally, commiserated with me, and helped me to grow.

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*History +*, UCLA, October 2011

“Embodiment and Performance in Private Devotions: Implications of the Female Voice in Early Seventeenth-Century Convent Music”

*European Sacred Music, 1550-1800: New Approaches*, Fribourg, Switzerland, June 2010

“Mystics, Abbesses, and Confraternity Sisters: Spheres of Female Influence and Power in the Early Modern Catholic Church”

*Art of Gender VII*, Pocatello, ID, February 2010

“Pain, Desire, and Unattainable Ecstasy in Alba Tressina’s *Vulnerasti cor meum*”

*Feminist Theory and Music 10*, Greensboro, NC, May 2009

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## **Introduction.**

*The year is 1610. A nun-to-be sits in an interior common room of her convent and listens as two of her sisters perform a duet. The composer sings and accompanies herself with a lute her family donated to the convent as part of her dowry. The novice knows that the composer receives regular music lessons - through a grate in the parlor wall - from one of the Cathedral's hired musicians, an old man not deemed a threat to the sacred chastity of the women. The lessons are paid for by the composer's wealthy family, which has a degree of political clout in the city's civic and social politics, and the convent looks forward to the day when the composer can take over all musical duties at the convent and build a well-regarded music program by teaching her sisters and passing on her obvious musical skills. The novice hopes to be one such pupil. Her family is not particularly wealthy, but because of her clear, strong singing voice she has been allowed to enter the convent as a choir nun at a reduced dowry price.*

*The piece the singers are performing speaks of love for the Virgin Mary and almost brings the novice to tears as she ruminates on the perfection and goodness of the most holy of women. The singers demonstrate great feeling, leaning into the crunching dissonances both vocally and physically as they incline their bodies towards one another. At times their vocal lines run in parallel thirds and then cross over one another, so that the lower voice is on top and the upper voice runs underneath. At these times the two singers lean towards one another as they do during dissonances, and the novice recalls the difficulty of tuning thirds, though she also is moved by the intimacy inherent in the two voices moving so closely together, rolling over one another in waves of beauty. In one of the piece's several short sections, the vocal lines move in staggered imitative thirds, alternating in a canon that echoes and reverberates*

*against the stone walls of the room. The novice imagines hearing this piece in the sanctuary, where the high ceilings and wide-open spaces would have made the canons sound as if a whole choir were singing.*

*The composer's chosen text functions both as a prayer to Mary, the Divine intercessor, and as a description of Mary's role in nourishing all Christians through her life-giving breasts. The novice visualizes the painting in the nuns' choir that depicts Mary, one breast revealed, holding the infant Jesus and offering her milk to the Son of God as well as to his followers. The novice had stopped to pray by that painting many times in the past few months, and now in hearing this duet, the image of Mary comes flooding back into her mind. She allows the fullness of the singers' voices to wash through her body, at the same time sensing her body's humors transform to a more sanguine, fiery dryness as she thinks of Mary's great love for her, an insignificant nun-to-be. As the singers become increasingly emotional, the melody rises higher and higher until it reaches a climax, and the novice can feel an outpouring of warmth and love flow between her and God, intensified by the angelic voices flying through the air to envelop her. As the sounds of the last chord die against the stone walls, the bells ring for Vespers and the blushing novice hurries out of the room to join her classmates in singing their own prayers.*

While this is not the story of any specific seventeenth-century Italian nun, the basic situation, the background information, and the place accorded to music in the lives of these women religious,<sup>1</sup> all illustrate a scenario that I believe was fundamental to certain

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'women religious' encompasses an entire spectrum of women living lives dedicated to their faith, including nuns and members of confraternities, as well as unprofessed women who live as nuns in every other way.

repertoires of music, specifically, convent music written by nuns. It is, as I hope to show, a plausible account of nuns employing music as both a private form of devotion and as a means of expressing creativity and feminine autonomy.

In this dissertation, I explore Early Modern beliefs regarding nuns' voices, bodies, and social roles in conjunction with sacred erotic devotional practices, demonstrating how they interconnect with practices of listening and with ritual, theater, and performance through a series of close readings of music written and performed in intimate devotional contexts by nuns in seventeenth-century convents in Bologna, Modena, and Vicenza.<sup>2</sup> I argue that in singing music written by themselves and by their sisters, nuns were able to use their voices to mediate a space between their own corporeal bodies and an ephemeral Divine presence. In so doing, these nuns were able to engage in practices conducive to the experience of ecstasy for both singers and listeners while simultaneously exercising female autonomy, providing an outlet for creativity and entertainment, and strengthening their relationships with one another and with the Divine. By their own initiatives, nuns were able to communicate with each other, with God, and with the outside world through choice of text, musical setting thereof, manipulation of performance space, and subtle relational cues among singers and audience members.

Speculative recreation like my short scenario above allows me to vividly illustrate specific aspects of nuns' music-making as well as provide possible answers to questions of performance logistics, textual significance, and musical meaning. In fact, I believe

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<sup>2</sup> The convents with which I will be working the most are Santa Cristina della Fondazza in Bologna, San Geminiano in Modena, and Santa Maria in Aracoelli in Vicenza, where nun composers Lucrezia Orsina Vizzana, Sulpitia Cesis, and Alba Tressina lived and worked, respectively.

that it is only through the recreation of performance in words or in tones that we can fully comprehend the crucial issues of meaning and function in this repertory.

Performance-specific questions are vital, and range from the issue of performing forces (Were instruments called for? How many voices? How did nuns treat the bass vocal line? Would it take very few or a great many rehearsals to make it performance-worthy?) to the spaces in which these pieces were performed (Cavernous rooms with a great deal of echo potential? Smaller, more personal spaces such as cells or parlors? Rooms that provided an aural conduit to the outside world? Outdoor spaces?) to the experiences of singers and listeners (To what extent did this music resemble that of the new performance styles of staged musical drama? How did listeners and singers use these performances as a means of heightening personal devotions? How were the bodies of those involved affected *vis-à-vis* sacred eroticism, mysticism, and the bodily humors?) All these factors in turn pave the way for the possibility of forging a personal connection with the Divine and perhaps an ecstatic release as well. The implied significance of text and music generates another, shorter, list of questions, though these are complex and much more difficult to answer: Does the meaning change when we recognize that nuns were both performers and audience? How about in the general milieu of religious ecstasy or in intimate performance settings? Why did the composer choose the text that she did? How did the text-music relationship intensify devotion? While many of these questions can never be fully answered, they have guided my research at every step of this project.

Another of my goals has been to shed light on the musical practices of a population that has been largely ignored. These nuns fought hard to maintain their musical practices, knowing the importance of music to their worldly identities and to

their relationships with God. This music and its deep-seated place in the lives of thousands of women have been in the shadows too long.

Previous scholarship on nun musicians between 1550 and 1700 has been largely geographic, with scholars selecting specific cities and their environs as laboratories for their research, editions, and conclusions. Robert Kendrick's research focuses on convents in Milan and Lombardy; Craig Monson writes about those of Bologna and Emilia-Romagna; Mary Lavern has claimed Venice; Colleen Reardon's work focuses on Siena; and Helen Hills, an architecture historian, focuses her research on convents in Naples. The richness of this work, much of it with primary sources, has allowed me to take a slightly broader geographic focus while narrowing the time period. The composers I have selected for my own research come from three different cities in Northern Italy, and all three published volumes between the years of 1619 and 1623. Sulpitia Cesis (b.1577 – d. after 1619; publication in 1619) lived in Modena; Alba Tressina (b. ca. 1590 – d. after 1638; publication in 1622) in Vicenza; and Lucrezia Vizzana (b. 1590 – d. 1662; publication in 1623) in Bologna.<sup>3</sup> Of my three selected composers, the most biographical information is available on Vizzana, thanks to Monson's decades of painstaking work in the Bolognese archives. I decided to focus on Cesis, Tressina, and Vizzana in part because they wrote in a variety of styles and voicings (for example, works in monody, works for double choir and duets, works for low female voices, works in the vernacular) but also because, at least in the case of Cesis and

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most famous nun composer from the seventeenth century, Chiara Margarita Cozzolani, does not appear here as one of my main subjects for two reasons: 1) much research on her music, life, and influence has already been done and 2) her dates of publication fall in the 1640s and 1650s – several decades after those of Cesis, Tressina, and Vizzana. However, I do use Cozzolani periodically as a point of comparison. See in particular Robert L. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and Kate Bartel, "Portal of the Skies: Music as Devotional Act in Early Modern Europe" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 2006).

Tressina, the conventionality of their works and the obscurity of their publications have rendered them invisible to all but a few. Candace Smith, director and member of Cappella Artemisia, an all-female ensemble dedicated to performing the work of Italian nuns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is working to rectify this relative anonymity by recording and publishing editions of their works, while I see myself as advancing the scholarship on these nun musicians through feminist historiography and microhistory.

Composers write conventional music because it functions as a shorthand version of collectively agreed-upon cultural meanings. It performs certain cultural work that is easily recognizable to a wide variety of listeners living in a common time, society, and geographic area. I attend to the conventional and its significance in much of my analysis, combining its multivalent implications with meanings derived from embodied performance. That this music is conventional demonstrates the extent to which these nun composers were interacting with and contributing to their artistic and political communities – not cut off from their societies, but very much a part of them.

Furthermore, that this music was hotly contested by church authorities *because it was so important* to the nuns, their families, and the cultural life of their regions reveals the necessity for further scholarship, discussion, and analyses on the music of these convent communities.

### **The Convent in Seventeenth-Century Italy**

As prominent sites for the cultivation of musical talent, convents in Early Modern Italy often gave nuns access to musical instruction, providing one of the only reputable environments for female musicking. This musicking would have involved a sizeable slice



of the populace, since many Italian women lived in convents at some point in their lives. In the early to mid-seventeenth century, between twelve and fifteen percent of the female populations of Bologna and Siena lived in convents. Bologna by the 1630s had witnessed a 37 percent increase in the ratio between general populations and women living in convents since the 1570s. In Milan during this same sixty-year period, the number of cloistered nuns shot up from around 2,600 women to 6,000, in spite of severe population losses due to war and plague. Among the patrician families of Italy, the percentages are startlingly higher. For example, an estimated 75 percent of noble and upper-class Milanese women took vows in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Wealthy families often sent their superfluous daughters (generally at around age 7) to live in the convent as *educande*.<sup>5</sup> This move served a dual purpose: to provide the girls with a proper and appropriate education, and to get them accustomed to living in the convent. It was common for families to place their daughters in convents where another relative was already established, such as an older sister, an aunt, or a cousin. In this way, the child would have the support of family within the convent walls, both emotionally and politically. When the time came for the *educande* to decide whether to take the novitiate, the decision had in most cases already been made. Most of these girls,

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics taken from Craig A. Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 6; Robert Kendrick, "The Traditions of Milanese Convent Music and the Sacred Dialogues of Chiara Margarita Cozzolani," in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 212; and Colleen Reardon, "The Good Mother, the Reluctant Daughter, and the Convent: A Case of Musical Persuasion," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin Lamay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 273.

<sup>5</sup> Reardon, "The Good Mother", 280.

through a mixture of education, family pressure, their own sense of religious calling, and a desire to remain in a familiar environment, elected to take vows.<sup>6</sup>

Two classes of nun existed in late-sixteenth and seventeenth-century Italian convents: choir nuns (*professe*) and servant nuns (*converse*). The choir nuns were the nuns tasked with praying, singing, and providing genteel labor in the convent's particular supporting industry (for example, the production of silk, embroidery, candle-making, baking, or teaching *educande*). These nuns came from patrician families and often paid hefty dowries upon entrance to the convent, though these dowries were a fraction of the typical marriage dowry and thus a bargain for families with multiple daughters. The servant nuns came from poorer families who could not afford to pay a dowry. They performed the daily chores of the convent, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, field work, and the personal care of the choir nuns. These nuns did not participate in the daily offices, did not have a voice in convent governance, and slept apart from the choir nuns. The servant nuns likely had their own culture, though little record exists of their daily movements, ideas, or experiences, except when a problem arose between servant nun and choir nun.<sup>7</sup>

Tensions did sometimes arise between the *professe* and *converse*. Craig Monson tells the story of one major argument that erupted in the convent of Santa Maria Nuova in Bologna in 1679 after a kitchen *conversa*, Teretina Pulica (or Pulega or Pulga), embroidered a *paliola* to donate to the convent. Several of the professed nuns took offense at this, as they felt that the *conversa* was attempting to upstage their own

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<sup>6</sup> See Monson, *Disembodied Voices*, 137. See also Reardon, "The Good Mother".

<sup>7</sup> For more about *converse*, see Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art & Arson in the Convents of Italy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 17.

embroidery contributions. Donna Maria Vinciguerra (one of the *professe*) wrote to the archbishop, complaining about “the unbecoming willfulness of a convent servant, demonstrated toward a lady of such distinguished lineage.”<sup>8</sup> This attitude of exclusivity was not just a peculiarity of Bolognese convents. Venetian aristocratic nuns also had similar feelings, complaining of “converse who acted ‘as if they were like us.’”<sup>9</sup>

Despite tensions amongst women of disparate socioeconomic background, exceptions in the form of dowry reductions could be made for a musically talented woman of less wealthy parents to join the ranks of the choir nuns. It was therefore a good investment for poorer families to provide their daughters with musical training with an eye towards a convent “scholarship.” As Kendrick mentions, though, petitions by convents to admit women at reduced dowries were not always granted, as this reduced the convent’s income and made it more reliant on patrician generosity.<sup>10</sup>

Squabbles, cliques, and full-on rivalries were an everyday reality in many convents, especially those with women from feuding families – women who likely held varying degrees of religious and spiritual fervor. Nuns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not the homogenous bunch that the distance of the last few centuries has made them appear. They were not as uniformly obedient as we might first imagine. Nor did they fully live up to the impossible holiness and purity that the church at the time sought to project onto them. Women religious in Early Modern Italy included smart, spunky women who demonstrated resourcefulness, creativity, and courage in making a life for themselves that necessarily played out within stone walls and under the oversight

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly*, 120.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>10</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 72.

of male superiors.<sup>11</sup> They often found ways to get around (or ignore completely) direction from their overseers, and managed to keep lines of communication open with their friends and families even as the Church sought to tighten *clausura*. One of the main ways nuns could communicate with the outside world and sometimes stand up to authority was through musical performance.

Many convents in Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were renowned for the quality of music they produced. The evidence of excellent music issuing from convent churches appears in travel diaries, official Church correspondence, city chronicles, and in the form of published music. Visiting aristocrats made sure to go to some of the most famous convents, such as S. Radegonda in Milan (Chiara Margarita Cozzolani's convent) or S. Geminiano in Modena (Sulpitia Cesis's convent), to add to their 'collection' of listening experiences.<sup>12</sup> G. B. Spaccini, who kept a chronicle of Modenese history over several decades, mentions the music of S. Geminiano multiple times. For example, he describes a festival and procession in 1596 that stopped at the convent in order to hear the music of the nuns, whose ensemble featured "every type of musical instrument"<sup>13</sup> and performed motets by their very own Sulpitia Cesis. Kendrick quotes the accounts of Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici's visit to Milan and S. Radegonda in 1664 which describe the two musical ensembles in residence there, made up of "fifty nuns counting singers and instrumentalists of utter perfection": "The first

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<sup>11</sup> See in particular Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly and Disembodied Voices*.

<sup>12</sup> For more in-depth examination of the practice of wealthy aristocratic men collecting "listenings," see Andrew Dell'Antonio, *Listening as Spiritual Practice in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> "*il corpo della loro musica con ogni sorta d'instromenti musicali.*" See Gio. Batt. Spaccini, *Cronaca Modenese (1588-1636)*, vol. 1, ed. G. Bertoni, T. Sandonnini, and P.E. Vicini (Modena: G. Ferraguti e C.: 1911), 34.

group of Signora Ceva sang a motet for full choir, the second, that of Cignora Clerici (for these are the *maestre*) sang solo so well as to amaze everyone.”<sup>14</sup> As Kendrick states elsewhere, “The renown of the repertory is no secret; most urban panegyric literature of the Seicento remarked on nuns’ performances (while normally omitting or downplaying music in other institutions) and ecclesiastical historians have mentioned it repeatedly.”<sup>15</sup>

Nuns could receive musical training in several ways. As mentioned above, families often provided music lessons for their daughters before they even entered the convent, and sometimes would arrange for lessons to continue upon the girls’ profession of vows. Convents would need permission from their overseeing fathers to allow nuns access to music lessons. When lessons were approved, a suitable teacher had to be found; if the teacher came from outside the convent, he was generally a man who was old and morally beyond reproach. Lessons occurred through a grate separating teacher and pupil and likely included the presence of an additional nun to ensure propriety. In the event that the Church hierarchy forbade the hiring of an outside teacher, a musically gifted nun often took over the duty of teaching her fellow sisters.<sup>16</sup>

Convent musical performances took on various forms. The most-described performances, both in period writings and in recent scholarship, were part of

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<sup>14</sup> Filizio Pizzichi, “RELAZIONE Del Viaggio fatto dal Ser[enissi]mo Prin[ci]pe Cosimo di Toscana in Lombardia,” Archivio di Stato, Florence, Mediceo Principato, filza 6382, fol. 54r. Quoted in Kendrick, “Traditions of Milanese Convent Music,” 215.

<sup>15</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Monson notes that between 1598 and 1609, all petitions for outside music teachers in Bologna were denied, yet nuns continued to perform music during this time. See his “Disembodied Voices: Music in the Nunneries of Bologna in the Midst of the Counter-Reformation,” in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 195.

ceremonial rituals, processions, and feast days.<sup>17</sup> Performances by nuns for the public required that the nuns be hidden from view, creating in the listener the experience of hearing a voice without seeing its provenance, an unusual and fantastic experience at the time. For many listeners, the invisibility of the nuns created a shift in perception: for them, the nuns *became* their voices. As nun scholar Gabriella Zarri states, “The nuns become an invisible presence, they are transformed into a voice,” a concept that Monson terms the “disembodied voice.”<sup>18</sup> To accomplish this invisibility while still allowing laity to listen to their music, nuns sang through grates in the wall, behind screens, and out windows, and they played loud instruments (organ, trombone, *cornetto*) whose sounds could penetrate the walls to the spaces beyond. The placement of the choir room (where the nuns heard mass and sang the offices) was sometimes at the back of the sanctuary, over the entrance, and sometimes above and behind the altar itself.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of where they were positioned, grates were generally placed in the wall so that the nuns’ views were partially or fully obstructed (as were the laity’s views of the nuns themselves), while allowing sounds and voices from either side of the grate to flow freely.

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<sup>17</sup> Colleen Reardon gives a particularly detailed and vivid picture of the musical practices that were intrinsic to profession ceremonies in *Holy Concord Within Sacred Walls: Nuns and Music in Siena, 1575-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Gabriella Zarri, “Monasteri femminili e città (secoli xv – xviii),” in *Storia d’Italia, Annali 9: La Chiesa e il potere politico dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea*, ed. Giorgio Chittolini and Giovanni Miccoli (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1986), 412. See also Monson, “Disembodied Voices,” 191.

<sup>19</sup> See Helen Hills’ work on convent architecture and the significance of the choir’s placement within the church. She describes some churches in Naples where the choir was situated behind and above the altar, causing the priest, after completing the rite, to raise the Host *towards the nuns* – a powerful gesture indeed. Helen Hills, “Cities and Virgins: Female Aristocratic Convents in Early Modern Naples and Palermo,” *Oxford Art Journal* 22:1 (1999): 31-54.

Nuns also performed for one another, though these practices are less documented. Elissa Weaver has written on convent theater and its importance to convent life as a means of recreation, education, and edification.<sup>20</sup> I contend that musical performances inside the convent served similar purposes, and were more frequent and accessible than convent theater. A motet or spiritual madrigal in a familiar, conventional style could happen spontaneously or with little notice, while theatrical productions necessarily involved more logistical planning and rehearsal. Theatrical productions also included music to various purposes. Early *rappresentazioni* were ostensibly sung throughout, “in the style of psalmody.”<sup>21</sup> As the genre evolved, music was used primarily to accompany the action or as choral and instrumental *intermezzi*. Voices and instruments were often both used, though not together.<sup>22</sup>

While some of the music I attend to in this dissertation was intended for feast days and (presumably) larger audiences of devout laity, most of the pieces I have selected could have been used for intra-convent performance. Some pieces require only one or two musicians to perform, such as Lucrezia Vizzana’s *O magnum mysterium*, a highly dramatic piece wherein the singer could accompany herself on lute, or Sulpitia Cesis’s *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria*, a short imitative duet that would have been easy to learn and fun to sing for recreation during the Easter season. Other pieces I discuss required more singers and thus more rehearsal, and might have been used for semi-private performances for friends and family in the *parlatorio* or for use during

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<sup>20</sup> See Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theater in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 73 n. 72. She cites Alessandro D’Ancona’s *Origini* and Paola Ventrone’s *Gli araldi della commedia*, among others.

<sup>22</sup> Weaver, 73-75. Weaver goes on to say that dancing was also a common occurrence in such productions.

offices and mass in the nuns' choir. Most likely, "dress rehearsals" of these larger pieces were performed in the inner spaces of the convent, where the other nuns could listen. Alternatively, once they had this more complex music in their repertory, nuns would have been able to sing it after the designated festival performance as entertainment as they embroidered or relaxed.

Officially, following the Council of Trent, oversight of nuns' musical performance practices fell to their archbishops and local curial officials. The Council decided to allow for regional variance in convent musical practices in the final days of the decades-long meeting, after months of heated controversy regarding acceptable forms of convent music and the regulation of nuns' voices. However, due to the widespread circulation of more conservatively worded drafts of this edict (drafts that sought to ban polyphony entirely from convents), confusion abounded throughout the Italian peninsula. As Monson mentions, "one suspects that few musicians actually read the official Tridentine pronouncements."<sup>23</sup> Gabriele Paleotti, future archbishop of Bologna, had been largely responsible for the most conservative Tridentine drafts. When he became archbishop, he worked to enforce his stricter ideas regarding convent music, resulting in much strife between his office and the musically-inclined nuns in his care like Lucrezia Vizzana and her sisters.

Other archbishops championed convent musicians or were otherwise supportive of nuns' musicking. At the Council of Trent, Giovanna Battista Orsini, archbishop of Santa Severina, and Francesco Piccolomini, bishop of Pienza specifically argued against the prohibition of "musical songs", while others wanted the matters left up to the nuns'

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<sup>23</sup> Craig A. Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," *JAMS* 55:1 (Spring 2002): 1-37, 26.



superiors, or to local councils.<sup>24</sup> In the decades to follow, others in the church hierarchy became fervent supporters of convent music, such as Federigo Borromeo, archbishop of Milan from 1595-1631.<sup>25</sup> Borromeo (nephew of the great conservative reformer, Milanese archbishop, and future saint Carlo Borromeo) was highly concerned with the musical well-being of the nuns under his care. He periodically sent instruments to certain nuns and provided for music lessons.

The Tridentine Council was, in the end, much more concerned with convent enclosure than with nuns' musical practices. Craig Monson, Robert Kendrick, and Elissa Weaver have all noted how permeable convent walls were prior to the Council of Trent. But after deliberations, the Council decided to require all open convents and confraternities to enclose themselves and submit to *clausura* or face excommunication. Furthermore, already-enclosed convents that had lax rules concerning *clausura* faced more rigid enforcement.

Communications between the outside world and the cloistered nuns became more difficult; but they continued nonetheless.<sup>26</sup> Again, part of the problems Church officials faced in enforcing strict enclosure had to do with the fact that convents served not just a religious purpose, but social and political ones as well: to safely house the majority of the daughters of aristocrats. Many of these women may have felt little or no calling to religious life, and most families maintained lines of communication with their cloistered female family members through written correspondence and visits to the

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<sup>24</sup> Craig A. Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," *JAMS* 55:1 (Spring 2002): 1-37, 21.

<sup>25</sup> There are two accepted spellings of Borromeo's first name: Federigo, and Federico. I have followed Robert Kendrick's lead and spelled his name "Federigo."

<sup>26</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*; Monson, *Disembodied Voices*; and Weaver, *Convent Theater*.

*parlatorio*, and on some occasions, through convent retreats, where worldly women (often widows) were allowed to enter and stay in the convents as a retreat from the outside world. Rarer still were pre-approved outings whereby a nun was allowed to leave the convent to attend a concert or performance with her family.<sup>27</sup> And in any case, *converse* and *professe* likely dealt with all manner of outsiders in their daily routines as part of the running of the convent (for food deliveries, rent payments, construction workers, etc.)

Nuns, therefore, were generally quite knowledgeable about the world beyond their walls; their extant musical publications make it clear that this knowledge included outside musical practices, trends, and styles.

### **Introduction to the Composers**

*Sulpitia Cesis* (1577- after 1619)

Born in Modena in 1577 to Count Annibale and Barbara Cesis, Sulpitia Lodovica Cesis took her vows to enter the Augustinian convent of S. Geminiano<sup>28</sup> in 1593. She published a volume of musical compositions entitled *Motetti spirituali* in 1619. Candace Smith suggests that Cesis may have written her *Motetti Spirituali* years before the publication date, as her music is stylistically more similar to that of the late sixteenth century, and as

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<sup>27</sup> Colleen Reardon describes one remarkable pseudo-convent, Il Refugio in Siena, that throughout the seventeenth century allowed its nuns to leave the cloister for days at a time. These women did not take vows and were not associated with any specific rule, though the Sieneese regarded them as nuns. Reardon goes on to explain that at one point (she is unclear when), the privilege to leave became a requirement, and nuns thereafter were obliged to venture out into the world three times per year. See Reardon's "The Good Mother", 282.

<sup>28</sup> *New Grove* says that her convent was S. Agostino. Spaccini and Candace Smith, though, maintain that her convent was S. Geminiano, of the Augustinian order. The confusion may stem from Spaccini's chronicles, which at one point mention the "R. de Madre di San Geminiano, già dette di S[an]ta Caterina, dell'ordine di S[an]to Agostino" (vol. I, 288).

she was 42 years old when her music was published – unusual in a culture where a nun’s first (and typically only) book of compositions was published before her 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

No other publication survives.<sup>29</sup>

S. Geminiano was well known for the quality of its music, and Sulpitia herself was an accomplished lute player, as Spaccini noted in his chronicles of Modena. He mentions that the nuns at S. Geminiano could play

all sorts of musical instruments, having Sister Faustina Borghi, my cousin and the daughter of Signor Geminiano, (presently residing in Rome), a young woman of 22 and a fine virtuoso in counterpoint, who plays cornett and organ and is the pupil of Fabio Ricchetti, and Sister Sulpizia, daughter of the most illustrious Signor Count Cesis, who plays the lute excellently. Whence, returning to our discussion, they performed a motet of hers which was highly praised, particularly by the Cavaliere del Cornetto [Nicolò Rubini].<sup>30</sup>

Cesis dedicated this book of motets to Anna Maria Cesis, a nun at the convent of Santa Lucia in Selci in Rome, and a relative from a branch of the family with higher social standing than Sulpitia’s. Anna Maria’s convent, like Sulpitia’s, was also renowned for the quality of its music, and Sulpitia in her dedication suggests that other nuns (likely Anna Maria’s sisters) might enjoy performing her work. She hoped that “with the splendor and nobility of your name, these few musical labors may be defended against

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<sup>29</sup> Candace Smith and Bruce Dickey, “The *Motetti Spirituali* of Sulpitia Cesis,” in Sulpitia Cesis, *Motetti Spirituali (Modena, 1619), vol. 1: motets for 2-6 voices*, ed. Candace Smith and Bruce Dickey, *Complete Collections by Nun Composers* (Bologna: Artemisia Editions, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> “...il corpo della loro musica con ogni sorta d’instromenti musicali, havendo Su[o]r Faustina Borghi mia cugina e figliuola del Sig. Geminiano, al presente abitante in Roma, giovane d’anni 22 virtuosissima in contraponto, di suonare di cornetto et d’organo, et essendo alieva di Fabio Ricchetti, et anco suona di leuto eccellentemente Suor Sulpizia figliuola dell’Ill.mo Signor Conte [Annibale] Cesis. Onde tornando al proposito nostro fecero concerto del motteto suo, qual fu molto lodato particolarmente dal Cavaliere del Cornetto.” See Spaccini, vol. 1, 34. Translation from Candace Smith and Bruce Dickey.

the meanness of their detractors, and also that they might be occasionally performed in the convents of nuns, in praise of our common Lord.”<sup>31</sup>

The only other information about Cesis reveals her sense of independence and a certain desire to take matters into her own hands. According to Spaccini’s *Chronicles*, in 1597 the canon at S. Geminiano used his power to begin keeping his dogs in the convent. The dogs were so disruptive that Cesis had two of them killed. She was “severely disciplined along with six other sisters, against all reason,” a fact that upset the nuns of S. Geminiano enough to write a complaint to the Pope.<sup>32</sup>

In general, the nuns of S. Geminiano, much renowned for their music in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, took part in numerous parades, festivals, and civic celebrations in Modena. Spaccini’s *Chronicles* mention many instances of events at the church that included music, though the description of the festival cited above is by far the most detailed.<sup>33</sup>

The convent of S. Geminiano shared a city block with two other convents: Corpus Domini and San Paolo. In an 1806 map of S. Geminiano, two doors existed between S. Geminiano and Corpus Domini for communication between the convents. Though I have no proof of such doors existing in the early seventeenth century, the possibilities

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Candace Smith and Bruce Dickey.

<sup>32</sup> “Non solo l’ha desiplinata severissimamente insieme con sei altre suore, contra ogni ragione...” See Spaccini, vol. I, 49.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Dell’Antonio discusses the overwhelming paucity of musical description amongst aristocratic writings on musical events, concluding that the purpose of such writings was to display a collection of “listenings,” thus contributing to a discourse of “listening-based musical connoisseurship” to “[establish] spiritual prestige and [reaffirm] noble masculine self-control.” He argues that this “discourse-about” bolstered prestige, while technical language was too closely aligned with the professional musician to be socially desirable for the aristocracy. See Andrew Dell’Antonio, *Listening as Spiritual Practice*, 2, 7.

this offers for musical performance – such as recreational musicking amongst the two convents, musical instruction across the grate, and the sharing of musical manuscripts – are intriguing.

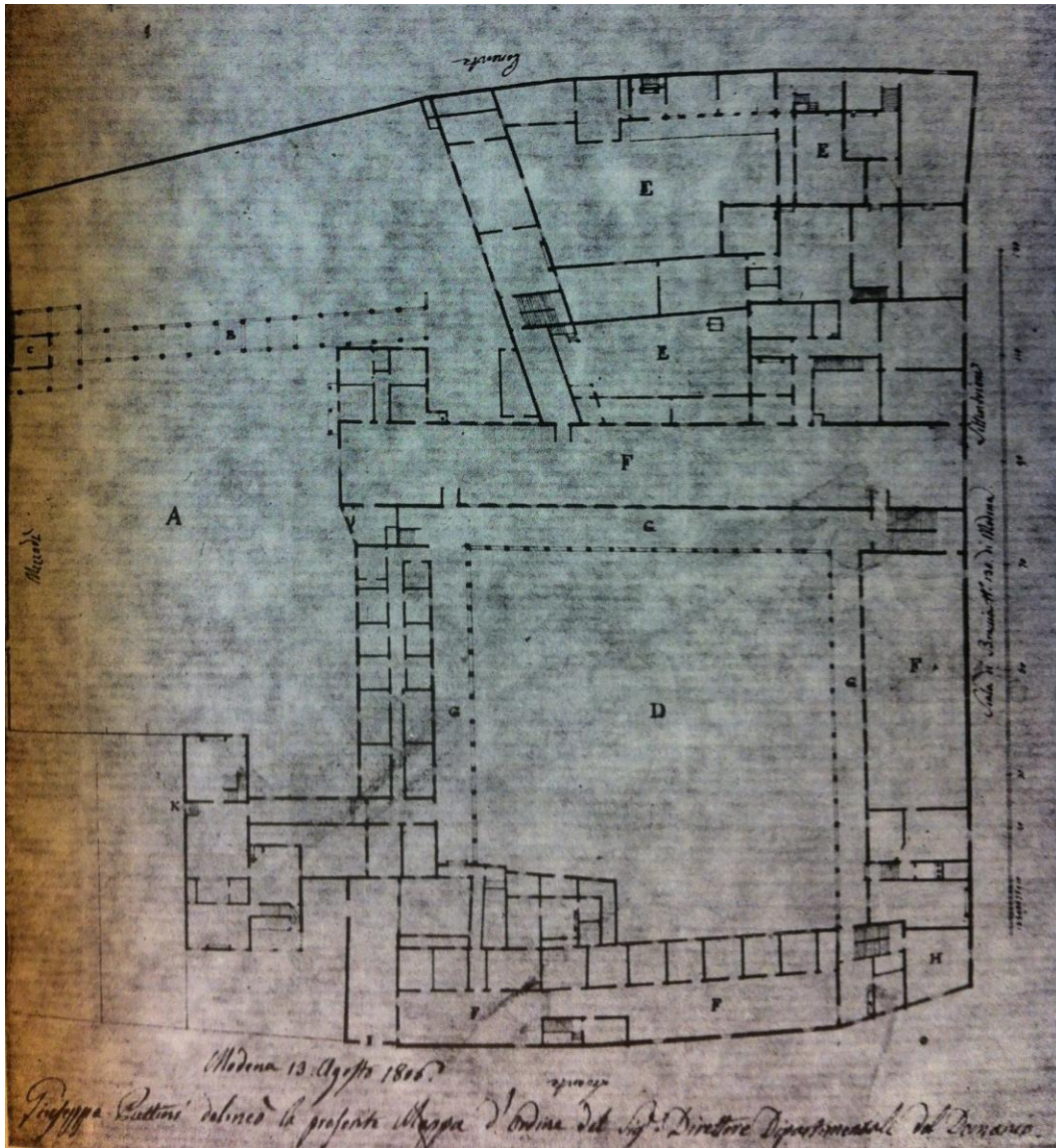
Also notable in the nineteenth-century convent floorplan is the absence of an inner sanctuary.<sup>34</sup> While the church of S. Geminiano is located roughly two blocks north of the convent, I maintain that there was also a sanctuary attached to the convent while Cesis was in residence there.<sup>35</sup> Spaccini's description of the 1596 procession supports this assertion: He says that the parade went to the nuns of San Geminiano and *stopped at their church*, where the decorated altar had been turned so that the nuns could see the proceedings. Also to aid the nuns' sightlines, the main door to the convent was opened, and all the cobwebs had been cleared away from both the door and the grated window.<sup>36</sup> The increased visibility also helped the members of the procession to hear the music performed by the nuns (see above). See Figures 1-3 for images of S. Geminiano as it was in 1806 and how it appears in the present day.

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<sup>34</sup> Churches associated with convents at this time generally had two main spaces: the exterior church, accessible by the laity, and the interior church, just for the nuns. The two usually connected via grated windows. In this discussion, I am using "church" loosely to designate a consecrated space for musical performance, as I have only Spaccini's description of a sanctuary space at the convent of S. Geminiano.

<sup>35</sup> San Geminiano was a popular saint in Modena; from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century, there existed not just Cesis's convent, but also a separate church, an orphanage, a hospital, a hermitage, and a confraternity bearing the name S. Geminiano. By Cesis's lifetime, the hospital and the hermitage had disappeared, but all the other groups were still active and present in the city. See Gusmano Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, vol. 2 (Modena: Aedes Muratoriana, 1974), 65-83 for information about the confraternity, and 85-103 for information about the hermitage, hospital, orphanage, and convent.

<sup>36</sup> Spaccini, vol. 1, 34. See Appendix A for the account in Italian.



**Figure 1: Map of S. Geminiano (one floor only) from 1806.**  
 The doors to Corpus Domini are at K and a small break in left edge of A, the garden. D and E denote courtyards, and G is the arcade around the main courtyard. C denotes the garden chapel. F represents common spaces. I is the east entrance. In this map, north is to the right. Reproduced in Gusmano Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, vol. 2 (Modena: Aedes Muratoriana, 1974), 87.





**Figure 2: Aerial photo of S. Geminiano's buildings today (now a school of jurisprudence). North is at the top. The gardens of the map in Figure 1 are the trees in the bottom left corner. Photo from Google Maps.**



**Figure 3: The arcades in the interior courtyard. Photo by Federica Cremonini.**

*Alba Tressina*<sup>37</sup> (ca. 1590 – after 1638)

Little information is available regarding Alba Tressina. She took vows at the convent of Santa Maria in Aracoeli in the city of Vicenza, and there she must have been an exemplary nun, for during her lifetime she rose in the monastic hierarchy to become abbess of her house from 1636-1638. She was granted music lessons with one of Vicenza's most famous composers of the time, Leon Leoni. Leoni must have seemed an ideal choice as music teacher, for he was both an ordained priest (and therefore of an appropriate respectability to work with a nun) and the *maestro di cappella* of the Duomo in Vicenza, a post he held from 1588 until his death in 1627. Also notable is his membership in the Confraternity of Divine Love, a group dedicated to promoting acts of charity.<sup>38</sup> Leoni was a prolific composer, publishing five books of secular madrigals for five voices between 1588 and 1602, as well as a volume of *madrigali spirituali* (also for five voices) in 1596. After 1602 he dedicated himself entirely to sacred music and dramatically changed his compositional style to align more with “i più rappresentativi «compositori alla moderna»” (“the more representational ‘composers in modern style’”), like Monteverdi, Gesualdo, and Lodovico da Viadana.<sup>39</sup> Leoni published four books of motets from 1606-1622 as well as works for various performing forces, from duets to double choir works concerted with instruments such as cornetto, trombone,

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<sup>37</sup> An alternate spelling of Tressina's name is “Trissina.” I have chosen to use “Tressina,” as it is spelled this way in the original 1622 publication of her music. Similarly, her teacher Leon Leoni's name is often spelled “Leone Leoni,” but again, in the 1622 publication it is spelled without the final “e”.

<sup>38</sup> He was also a member of the Accademia Olimpica and served as *maestro della musica* of the Pia Opera dell Incononata. See Vittorio Bolcato, *Leone Leoni e la musica a Vicenza nei secoli XVI-XVII: Catalogo Tematico* (Venezia: Fondazione Levi, 1995), LVII-LXVI.

<sup>39</sup> See Bolcato, LXVII.



violin, viola, violella, and organ. That some of his volumes were reprinted multiple times, and that his music was included in various contemporary anthologies, attest to his music's popularity. It is important to note that the date of his co-publication with Tressina occurred well after his style change.

Many of Leoni's sacred motets are scored for treble voices, increasing the likelihood that they were performed in convents. His fourth book of motets, *Sacri fiori, libro quattro* (Venice, 1622), is not only dedicated to Tressina, but includes four of Tressina's pieces: *Vulnerasti cor meum*, *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus*, *In nomine Iesu*, and *Anima mea liquefacta est* – the only compositions of hers that survive today. In his dedication, Leoni praises Tressina's musical and compositional abilities, writing of her "melodious voice" and "noble compositions." He continues with a reference to Tressina's talent at musical rendition, noting that she imbues her pieces with spiritual life and makes them "breathe celestial harmony."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, in likening Tressina's musical talents to those of angels, Leoni participates in the widespread discourse of nuns as earthly angels. Evidently Tressina also played an instrument as skillfully as she sang, though Leoni in his dedication does not mention which instrument. Considering that she sang and composed as well, it is probable that she played a bass or chordal instrument in order to accompany herself; most popular in convents in northern Italy during this time were lute, viol, and organ.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Si perche con la voce vostra canora, con i dolcissimi accenti, e con il vostro canto e suono soave, potesse far ch'ella spiri celeste armonia." See Appendix B for the full text and translation. The dedication is reproduced in Bolcato, 140. Taken from Leoni's *Sacri fiori, libro quarto* (Venice: Vincenti, 1622).

<sup>41</sup> Trombone also seems to have been fairly common as a bass instrument, despite public anxiety over the fact that women's faces looked ugly when they played wind and brass instruments. Since nuns were not seen publicly as they played, this anxiety was arguably irrelevant. See Monson, "Disembodied Voices," 200.

One major commonality between teacher and student is a fascination with the sacred erotic, an idea I will explore further on in this Introduction. Leoni published at least 25 madrigals and motets between 1606 and 1622 that featured texts derived from or inspired by the *Song of Songs*, including two settings of *Anima mea liquefacta est* and one setting of *Vulnerasti cor meum*, texts also set by Tressina in two of her four extant works.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Lucrezia Orsina Vizzana* (1590 – 1662)

Born in Bologna, Lucrezia Vizzana took vows at the convent of Santa Cristina della Fondazza, a church situated on the eastern side of Bologna where several of her family members were also professed nuns. Her aunt, Camilla Bombacci, likely served as one of her music teachers, while her sister Isabetta Vizzana came to be an important political figure in the convent during its years of crisis over the sisters' musical performance. Santa Cristina, like S. Geminiano, was also well known for the quality of its music, and this fame, along with internal arguments regarding musical practice, prompted decades of curial visits, injunctions to cease polyphonic singing, and threats of excommunication. The nuns of Santa Cristina struggled with church authorities throughout much of the seventeenth century over their right to perform music; indeed at one point the fighting became physical as nuns lobbed tiles and stones at the curial investigators, a strategy that momentarily solved their problem but that resulted in

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<sup>42</sup> Leoni's settings of *Anima mea liquefacta est* were published in 1612 and 1614, and *Vulnerasti cor meum* was published in 1606. See Bolcato.

more heavy-handed punishment in the long run.<sup>43</sup> These struggles with the Church hierarchy eventually caused Vizzana to go mad.<sup>44</sup>

Vizzana's first and only publication, *Componimenti musicali de motetti concertati a 1 e più voci* (Venice, 1623), included the *O magnum mysterium* I analyze in Chapter 1. Most of the pieces in this collection were written for one or two voices in the *stile moderno*, and Craig Monson has shown that many of them had specific thematic ties to the personal lives of the nuns and issues facing the convent of Santa Cristina della Fondazza as a whole.<sup>45</sup> This first phrase of text ("O magnum mysterium") comes from a respond during Christmas Day Matins, and had been (and continues to be) set to music by numerous composers. However, the rest of the text, which derives from an anonymous source, falls in line with most of Vizzana's other compositions, which tend to employ more esoteric poetry.<sup>46</sup> The passionate treatment of Jesus' wounded body, both via text and musical setting, made it suitable for myriad occasions and devotional practices where meditations of the sacred erotic were desirable.

### **The Sacred Erotic**

The *Song of Songs* is the primary locus of the sacred erotic, and its metaphor of earthly love as a way to demonstrate and understand Divine love has held great meaning for Roman Catholics throughout the centuries, and especially in the seventeenth century. Eleventh-century saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a series of sermons on the *Song of*

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<sup>43</sup>See Craig Monson's *Disembodied Voices* for a detailed account of the decades-long conflict over music at Santa Christina della Fondazza. For the account of the events of 17 November, 1628, go to page 163.

<sup>44</sup> See Monson, *Disembodied Voices*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 71-91.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 76.

*Songs*, mediating on “the gift of holy love” that he characterizes as both “ardent” and “perfect.”<sup>47</sup> In this dissertation, I use the terms “sacred eroticism” and “Divine love” interchangeably to discuss this phenomenon, taking a cue from Susan McClary, whose graduate seminar at UCLA in 2008 on Divine Love in Seventeenth-Century Music sparked my interest in this topic.

Sacred eroticism informs much convent repertory throughout the century; composers most notable for using texts and musical techniques in this vein in the latter half of the century include Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (publications in 1642 and 1650), and Bianca Maria Meda (publication in 1691).

Beyond the fact that the sacred erotic must have been a powerful door through which an individual could gain access to the Divine, the staying power of this set of beliefs can be attributed to multiple factors, including politics, important personages within the Catholic Church who popularized its discourse, and the pervasive influence it had on arts and culture throughout Europe.

The question arises: Why were Church officials at this time so happy to promote overtly sexual metaphors as primary aids to spiritual contemplation and salvation? In answering this question, I locate sacred eroticism in the wider category of mysticism.

In times during which the Catholic Church has felt confident in its power and influence, individuals living on the fringes of Church-authorized spirituality have been denounced as heretics and quickly removed from positions of potential influence.

Michel de Certeau describes how, following the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the individual devotions necessary to mysticism came to be seen as dangerous and were

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<sup>47</sup> See Sermons 1 and 7 in Bernard de Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, vol. 1, trans. Kilian Walsh, Cisterian Fathers Series, no. 4 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cisterian Publications, 2005).

subsequently deemed heretical. Mysticism was at that time marginalized, for it “came to designate what had become separate from the institution.”<sup>48</sup> However, during periods of crisis and instability for the political and social power of the Church, Church officials often hailed mystics as spiritual leaders and held them up as examples of the Church’s Divine mission, partly as an effort to regain the populace’s good graces, and partly to inspire heightened levels of devotion and piety through the proper circuits of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The end of the sixteenth century through the middle of the seventeenth century was one such time of social crisis for much of Europe. José Antonio Maravall has theorized this paradigmatic shift, concluding that the seventeenth century was a time in which the educated elite began to see that their lives were changing for the worse. Simultaneously, they apprehended that human actions could affect social and economic conditions, either positively or negatively.<sup>49</sup> Social, economic, and spiritual crises as well as devastating plagues resulted in the disintegration of people’s reliance on God and the Catholic Church’s wisdom over all things.

The crises that most directly affected the Catholic Church during this time were, of course, Martin Luther’s Reformation and the rise of Protestantism. In the mid-sixteenth century, the Catholic Church realized its fallibility as thousands left for the new promise of personal salvation that Luther preached. In Luther’s church, both men and women could speak directly with God without the necessity of a trained priest to intercede, a move that made the individual directly responsible for their salvation,

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<sup>48</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume 1: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 86.

<sup>49</sup> José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 20.

shifting the lay person from a position of relatively passive religiosity to one of great personal and spiritual power.

Confronted by this revolutionary idea, the Catholic Church grew uneasy, for in this alternate religious paradigm lay the potential that not only the priest, but also the entire hierarchy of the church was superfluous. In response, and as a means to regain both members and spiritual clout, the Catholic Church embarked on a series of reforms that in effect tightened the Church's control bureaucratically and socially while also allowing for the renewed presence of sacred eroticism and (specifically) female mysticism.

A newfound excitement about female mysticism comes into sharp focus in the life of St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), a monumental figure in late-Renaissance Catholic Europe. She was an influential nun, abbess, and holy woman whose voluminous writings circulated widely throughout the Catholic world. A resident of Castilian Spain, a region with close political ties to Northern Italy and Rome, St. Teresa quickly gained fame in Rome and throughout Italy for her holiness. As did all female mystics of the Roman Catholic Church, St. Teresa had to walk a fine line between humility and subservience to the male religious hierarchy and her own assertion of influence, a task that she obviously managed to negotiate with great skill.

St. Teresa's mystic experiences and her detailed accounts of them, along with writings from other mystics and holy individuals, were welcomed by the Church as a means of countering the attractions of Reformational devotion. The highly sexualized descriptions of her unions with God in her writings such as *The Interior Castle* and *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila By Herself* offered a new, powerful means of communion with God for pious Catholics. St. Teresa's use of sexual metaphor to describe Divine

union, her myriad writings, and her celebrated recognition within the Church hierarchy all served to elevate her fame and holiness. St. Teresa was canonized in 1622, the same year that Leon Leoni's fourth book of madrigals (and thus Alba Tressina's four pieces) was published. Nuns all over Europe would have heard of her, and maybe even read her works.<sup>50</sup>

Federigo Borromeo, the archbishop of Milan mentioned above, was a particular proponent of female spirituality overall, and female mysticism in particular. In 1616 Borromeo published a four-volume treatise on female mysticism entitled *De ecstaticis mulieribus, et illulis* ("On women who have ecstasies and illusions") that delineates the differences between male and female spirituality, concluding that women through their very constitutions are more likely to experience ecstasy – either 'true' ecstasy from God or 'false' ecstasy from the Devil – than are men. As Robert Kendrick points out, this treatise marks a change towards a gendered version of mystic experience and away from the centuries-old idea that gender had nothing to do with such supernatural events.<sup>51</sup> Borromeo was so taken with the idea of the female mystic that he is reported to have roamed the countryside to investigate new reports of undiscovered ones.<sup>52</sup>

Borromeo was also unusually attentive to the nuns under his care. He championed the widespread idea (Kendrick calls it a "universal mental category") of the convent or monastery as an "earthly Jerusalem" and the singers therein as "terrestrial

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<sup>50</sup> As "reading" at this point in time nearly always meant reading *aloud*, the nuns would not have needed to be literate to have been familiar with St. Teresa's works.

<sup>51</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 156-7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 156 n.13.

angels.”<sup>53</sup> Helen Hills gives a particularly thorough historical explanation of this concept:

Central to monasticism was the equation of virginity with the ontological state of human nature before the Fall, derived from the Fathers of the Eastern Christian gnostic tradition. Virginity, then, is equated with the angelic life, freed from sexuality and physical death.<sup>54</sup>

Hills goes on to explain that sexuality, equated with physical death<sup>55</sup>, allowed virgins, living in a state of perfection to “attain or even surpass the angelic mode of existence.”<sup>56</sup> Textual support for this idea can be found in many places. St. Ambrose: “in holy virgins we see on earth the life of the angels we lost in paradise.” Matthew 22:30: “They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.” St. Methodius of Olympus: “virginity is an ‘angelic transformation’ of the human body.”<sup>57</sup> The belief that virgins under a monastic rule actually *surpass* angels in goodness stems from the idea that while angels are naturally pure, virgins must struggle against desires of the flesh to remain so.

Borromeo’s strong interest in female mysticism led him to be particularly supportive of nun musicians. Not only did he provide them with instruments and music

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<sup>53</sup> Thus their songs could travel beyond the cloister and through the grating in the church wall to stir the laity to greater piety. See Kendrick, 162. This popular belief gave rise to a “remarkable uniformity of outsiders’ reports on nuns’ polyphony” that describe convent music as ‘ravishing,’ ‘heavenly,’ or ‘angelic.’ Ibid., 162-63. One author, P. Morigia, explicitly designates nuns and their music as being angelic. See his *La nobiltà di Milano* (Milan: Ponzio, 1595), 306-7. The paragraph in question is reproduced in Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 441. See also Monson, *Disembodied Voices*, 89; Reardon, *Holy Concord Within Sacred Walls*, 158, and even the dedication in Leon Leoni’s *Sacri fiori, libro quarto* (Venice: Vincenti, 1622). See Appendix B.

<sup>54</sup> Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 46.

<sup>55</sup> Perhaps this is related to the term “little death” to refer to orgasm.

<sup>56</sup> Hills, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



lessons, he insisted on “basic musical competence” as a prerequisite for sacred profession.<sup>58</sup> His keen interest in convent music is not surprising, given that he believed music to be an especially well-suited medium for Divine union and ecstatic experience. Through music and harmony, both performers and listeners had the opportunity to tune their souls to God and experience Divine ecstasy.

In his fourth volume on female mysticism, Borromeo recounts an episode in the life of “una mistica, di grande santità,” whose sisters pester her to demonstrate for them one of her experiences of “celestial harmony” (“celeste armonia”). She puts them off for a time, and finally relents. She takes up a stringed instrument (likely a lute), and slowly begins to accompany herself as she sings. The song dramatically affects the listeners, who explained afterwards that they had never heard music of this kind before (“non avere mai sentito al mondo una melodia del genere”). Borromeo goes on to say that while singing, the nun, in ecstasy, was removed from her senses, yet she continued to play and sing “perfettamente i modi specifici dell’arte musicale.”<sup>59</sup>

The nun in this story is a true mystic who appears to have used music as a means of experiencing Divine love. Surely the majority of nuns were not accustomed to experiencing mystical encounters. But just as musical practice served as a conduit to the mystical in the story, it similarly increased the odds, as it were, that ordinary nuns would experience ecstasy and Divine union themselves. Furthermore, by virtue of their sex, nuns were more likely to experience ecstasy: “Among women, then, most of them

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<sup>58</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 37: “Il canto e il suono,” in Book IV of Federigo Borromeo, *De ecstaticis mulieribus, et illulis* (1616), in *Da Dio a Satana: L’opera di Federigo Borromeo sul “Misticismo vero e falso delle donne,”* trans. into Italian by Francesco di Ciaccia (Milano: Xenia Edizioni, 1988), 195. For the entire story in Italian, see Appendix C.

who have hot hearts and acute intelligence are inclined towards ecstasy” (“Tra le donne, poi, più di tutte saranno inclini all’estasi quelle dal cuore più caldo e dall’ingegno<sup>60</sup> più accuto”).<sup>61</sup>

Beyond the persons of nuns, the Church’s concern with specific, mystic forms of sacred sexuality manifested in myriad ways. St. Teresa’s works opened the floodgates for a deluge of writings by religious individuals, mystics or not, to seek ecstasy through devotion. The Church capitalized on this tradition, patronizing artwork and music that depicted, described, and demonstrated personal ecstasy (generally female) all across Europe. Male excitement surrounding the idea of the female mystic experiencing ecstasy can be seen in the numerous works of visual art generated during these centuries. By depicting union with God in visual art, anyone, literate or not, could view and contemplate Divine encounters and strive for such experiences in their own lives. By rendering holy women in ecstasy, artists (generally male, though Elisabetta Sirani of Bologna (1638-1665) also painted in this idiom) could graphically demonstrate for the masses the soul’s ultimate goal: complete physical, emotional, and spiritual union with God.

Bernini’s *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* is perhaps the most famous sculpture of seventeenth-century Italy and is often posited as the epitome of the Roman Baroque style. Hidden away in the Cornaro family chapel in the small church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, the sculpture was commissioned by Cardinal Federico Cornaro. It

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<sup>60</sup> “Ingenio” carries strong connotations of masculinity, as it was often used to describe male imagination, creativeness, and invention. That it refers to a woman is meant as a compliment.

<sup>61</sup> See Borromeo’s Chapter 8: “La differenza di sesso,” in Book II, 113. Translation mine.

features St. Teresa, reclining in an ecstatic trance on a cloud, her eyes rolled back in her head, her mouth open, her fingers tensed, and her clothes disheveled, while a young



**Figure 4:** *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (1645-1652), Gianlorenzo Bernini

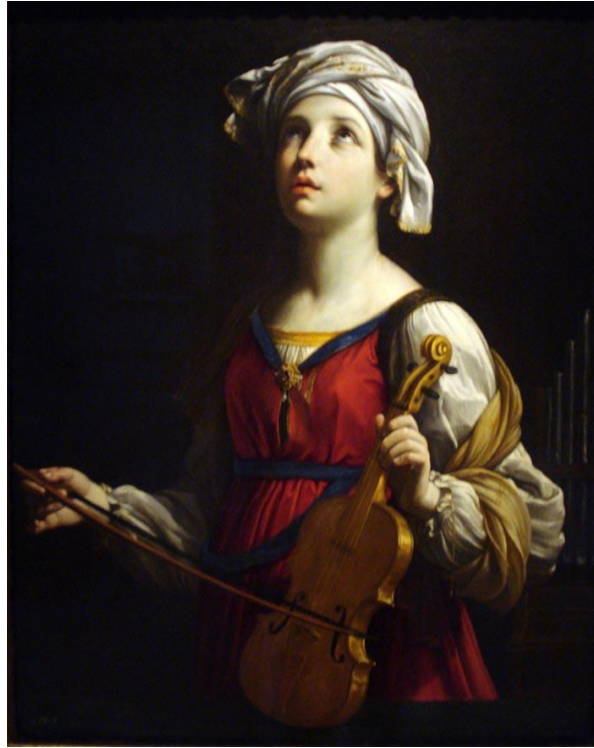
angel smiles over her gently, lovingly, golden arrow poised in hand, ready to penetrate the Saint by plunging the arrow into her breast. The scene is illuminated by a hidden opening in the ceiling, giving the impression of light coming from another world, especially among the dark walls and low lighting of the rest of the church. Behind the sculpture, a golden “sunburst” shoots rays all around St. Teresa, threatening to pierce her body as well. Overall, the scene is aflutter with movement and diagonal lines as the individuals in the scene appear to be ascending heavenward.

Reni’s depiction of St. Cecelia, the patron saint of musicians, is similar to Bernini’s sculpture: it shows her bathed in light against a nearly black backdrop. Her eyes are drawn heavenward and her lips are parted in ecstasy as she plays a small viol. From the time of the Ancient Greeks, a stringed instrument served as an analogy of the soul: as the strings vibrate with musical frequencies when plucked or bowed, so too does the soul vibrate under the loving ministrations of God and Nature. The metaphor was still very much present in the seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> Many other paintings of St. Cecilia depict her playing various instruments, but few artists were able to capture her ecstasy as spectacularly as Reni does. The only discernible object in the background is a pipe organ, an instrument associated with air and breath. Galenic and Aristotelian thought dictated that the *pneuma*, or “breath” had two meanings – that of the inspired air that coursed through the veins, and that of the basic spirit of life, or the “vehicle of the soul’s power.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> For more information, see Penelope Gouk, “The Role of Harmonics in the Scientific Revolution,” in the *Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>63</sup> R.J. Hankinson, “Body and Soul in Galen,” in *Common to Body and Soul: Philosophical Approaches to Explaining Living Behaviour in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. R.A.H. King, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2006), 234 n. 9. *Pneuma* has had multiple meanings



**Figure 5: *Saint Cecilia* (1606), Guido Reni**

Though literature and the visual arts depicted ecstasy and union with God, music was uniquely situated to provide it. *Saint Cecilia* brings us to the idea of the devout female musician as mystical in her own right. Mystics capitalized on the idea that music could act as a conduit to the Divine. Evelyn Underhill traces in part the historical association between music and mysticism, as mystics, in trying to verbally describe the ineffable, turn to metaphors of music as a way to bridge the gap between everyday logic and the Ultimate Reality. For example, seventeenth-century English nun and mystic Gertrude More frequently used musical imagery to illustrate her experiences, writing “O lett me sitt alone, silent to all the world and it to me, that I may learn the song of Love.”<sup>64</sup>

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over the centuries as different societies apply it to their own lives. For example, Hankinson also mentions here that “In Christian hands *pneuma* even comes to represent the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual*

For a female musician to experience ecstasy, both an internal and external affect was needed; the performer must truly believe, and must at the same time be humble. Not only did Church authorities condemn artifice of any kind, such internal deception stymied true rapture. The performance aspect of music for mystic purposes was not lost on Guido Reni, who depicted Saint Cecilia lingering at the tip of her bow during this ecstatic encounter.

In music, the sacred erotic can be identified through multiple aspects of a given composition and its performance: in the use of erotic texts; in performance contexts that suggest non-normative expressions of gender; in the musical manipulation of listener's desire for harmonic resolution; or in the interplay between the vocal or instrumental lines. The *Song of Songs* provides a large percentage of the sacred erotic texts for all composers in this style, men and women, cloistered and worldly alike. Claudio Monteverdi and Alessandro Grandi (Roman Catholics) and Heinrich Schütz (a Protestant) used these verses to great effect, underlining the significance of corporeal ecstasy and union with God in music brimming with eroticism and pain. Grandi's *O quam tu pulchra es*, for example, depicts emotional pain and languishing that produce an out-of-body experience of ecstasy, musically portrayed as a modal meltdown.

Girolamo Frescobaldi uses the same technique in *Maddalena alla Croce*, his *sonetto spirituale* published in Venice in 1630. The text of this piece does describe a union between Christ and Mary Magdalene, saying "For if you wish to die, my soul is united/With you (you know this, my Redeemer, my God)/ Therefore with you I must

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*Consciousness*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 78. From Gertrude More, *The Spiritual Exercises of the Most Virtuous and Religious Dame Gertrude More* (Paris, 1658), 30. More's writings are exceptionally personal, as she did not intend them for publication, and her texts speak of the love of God above all else.

share both death and life.”<sup>65</sup> Susan McClary describes the climax of this piece as a sexual release: “Here is Mary Magdalene at the site of Christianity’s most holy site — the crucifixion — enacting a fantasy of simultaneous orgasm with the dying Christ.”<sup>66</sup> McClary bases her assertion on the numerous and rapid modal shifts (eleven in all). The turning point and the chord that depicts Mary’s rapture is an F#-major triad, “wildly” out of place in the previous harmonic landscape, much as a true mystical encounter with God would be in daily life.<sup>67</sup>

Unusual use of mode was not the only technique for demonstrating sacred erotic experiences. Seventeenth-century composers experimented with timing and desire as well, using dissonance and consonance to create in the listener a longing for resolution. During crunching dissonances, the listener’s yearning deepens and intensifies as phrase endings are withheld, thereby delaying gratification until it either explodes in a burst of ecstasy or dissipates in frustration and fear; St. John of the Cross described the latter outcome in angst-ridden detail in the mid-sixteenth century. This musical withholding of gratification parallels the desire a believer would have for God’s love and the subsequent rush of joy one might experience in attaining a mystical union with the Divine. These compositional techniques culminate in the act of singing, which provides, palpably and in the flesh, these sacred erotic effects in real time.

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<sup>65</sup> “Che se morir pur vuoi, l’anima unita/Ho teco (il sai, mio Redentor, mio Dio)/Però teco aver deggio e morte, e vita.” Translation McClary’s.

<sup>66</sup> Susan McClary, “Mediterranean Trade Routes and Music of the Early Seventeenth Century,” in *Inter-American Music Review*, vol. 17 (2007). Concordis Modulationis Ordo Ismael Fernández de La Cuesta In Honorem [Festschrift in honor of Royal Academician Don Ismael Fernández de La Cuesta], 135-144, 137.

<sup>67</sup> McClary, “Mediterranean Trade Routes,” 140.

This music highlights the often-hazy distinction in Renaissance and Early Modern art between secular love and sacred love. Scholars of Medieval, Renaissance, and seventeenth-century music and art grapple with this liminal space, which tends to make us uncomfortable.<sup>68</sup> This squeamishness when dealing with the elision of the sacred and the sexual likely stems from academia's Anglo-Saxon genealogy and the lingering strength of Puritan and Protestant sexual mores. However, it is also possible that even in seventeenth-century Catholic Europe the depiction and representation of the sacred erotic elicited similarly complex reactions, encouraging the individual to feel simultaneously scandalized, piously meditative, and ravished.

### **Explanation of Analytical Methods**

To address this complex musical landscape, I make use of multiple analytical methods. “Thick” descriptions of musical performance, sonic space, and the role of the listener; close examination of texts and their relationship to the music; hermeneutical analysis; queer musicology; and corporeal analysis based on educated inference of gestural semiotics – all work together to provide fuller understanding, not only of the pieces themselves, but of the social contexts, communicative desires, and performance practices of the nuns who wrote and sang them.

To look at a musical encounter as a “thick” event is to examine it on multiple sensory levels. Clifford Geertz, who pioneered the idea of “thick description,” wrote that

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<sup>68</sup> Martha Easton, a Medieval art historian, analyzes and hypothesizes about the reason behind both our modern squeamishness, especially among art historians, of specifically Medieval art and literature that merges spirituality and sexuality, and the subsequent elimination of such themes in serious scholarship. See Martha Easton, “‘Was It Good For You, Too?’ : Medieval Erotic Art and Its Audiences,” *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 1:1 (September 2008), 1-30. Though Easton focuses on a vastly different time period, many of her points about scholarly reactions today hold true for those studying the seventeenth century as well.



“analysis is...sorting out the structures of signification...and determining their social ground and import.”<sup>69</sup> It is this kind of analysis that allows us a fuller understanding of the musical and performance contexts of this repertory. Beyond listening to combinations of pitches and text, I attend to bodily sensations and movement, visual aspects of performance, olfactory components, spatial awareness, and inward thoughts and personal reactions of musicians and audience members. All of these facets of the event generate the experience, and in the case of convent music, intensify individual devotions.

In applying the idea of the thick event to convent music, I use the written music as a point of departure to recreate other facets of the performance, just as the original performers did. As Martha Feldman puts it, musical scores of the eighteenth century and before are merely “phenomenal traces of a hypothetical event...the footprints of performances past, the dust of old intentions.”<sup>70</sup> In reconstructing the performance context(s), including possible viewpoints from both the musicians and the audience, we can gain fuller understanding of these pieces, fleshing them out to become “living tissue, richly laced with the nerves and capillaries of social space.”<sup>71</sup> It is attention to the multiple sensory components of musical performance that allows for this fleshing out.

Christopher Small in his “Prelude” to *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* describes music as an action – something we do – rather than an object. He defines “musicking” and “to music” as “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical

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<sup>69</sup> See “Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture,” Chapter 1 of Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 9.

<sup>70</sup> Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 49.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”<sup>72</sup> I use Small’s term frequently throughout this dissertation to account for all the ways nuns interacted with music in their daily lives. Similarly, Linda Austern in the introduction to *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality* calls on scholars to “make carnal” our knowledge of music, that is, to not divorce the senses and the information they provide from our theoretical and historical analyses of music.<sup>73</sup> She asserts that performing, listening to, and interacting with music offers a “kaleidoscope” of sensory experience and perception.<sup>74</sup> Though she does not mention Small, her vignettes, detailing the many ways Western culture interacts with music’s sensory experiences, are highly reminiscent of Small’s opening pages. Both Small and Austern emphasize the subjective qualities of music and their effects on emotion and physiology through multi-sensory perception.

I am indebted and committed to the body of musicological work that deals with queer and feminist theory, and I draw particularly from the scholarship of Judith Peraino, Suzanne Cusick, and Elizabeth Wood. Peraino, in her Introduction to *Listening to the Sirens*, parses the links between musical practices and subjectivity, suggesting that “music can lead to questioning the ideological superstructure of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’.”<sup>75</sup> She goes on to explain her use of the term “queer” as a sexually

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<sup>72</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Phyllis Austern, “Introduction,” in *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality*, ed. Linda Austern, (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). Taken from a quotation by Norman O. Brown in *Love’s Body*: “To return the word to the flesh. To make knowledge carnal again,” 2.

<sup>74</sup> Austern, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 5.

inflected form of this questioning. Taking this line of thought further, I submit that the convent represented a uniquely queer space in Early Modern European culture, as it denied women the heteronormative lives of their mothers or married sisters (or, alternatively, rescued them from such a life), instead requiring (or enabling) them to live in homosocial, virginal communities. Musical performance in these communities was an essential component of the creation and preservation of this queer space. The pieces I discuss in this dissertation simultaneously performed and managed homoeroticism inside convent walls, as musical performance helped to mitigate and channel same-sex desire by providing an appropriate and controlled space for its expression.

As Austern states, “Music, with its physical origin and paradoxical intangibility, with its beginning in the mind and end in the imagination or memory between mind and body, must necessarily occupy a complicated place in any scheme linking corporeality and contemplation.”<sup>76</sup> Further questions arise when this “complicated place” lies at the nexus between the physical, earthly world and the spiritual, heavenly realm, as many prominent thinkers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries suggested was the case with convents and their nuns. Taking a leap here, I would venture to guess that these kinds of instances, when, in Suzanne Cusick’s terms, “power circulates freely across porous boundaries; the categories player and played, lover and Beloved, dissolve,”<sup>77</sup> are what would have opened up the barrier between this reality and another for seventeenth-century mystics and others susceptible to ecstasy. This kind of give and take between the piece and the musicians, and among the musicians and their

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<sup>76</sup> Austern, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Suzanne Cusick, “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2d ed., ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2006), 78.

companions, is what Cusick has dubbed a “lesbian relationship with music,” where no one person is driving the piece, nor is anyone condemned to passivity, or to a condition of being controlled.

Elizabeth Wood’s concept of the Sapphonic voice, a “vessel of self-expression and identity, [a] channel for a fluid stream that ‘speaks’ for desire in living human form, a lure that arouses listening desires,” has informed my thinking about the vocality of nun music.<sup>78</sup> I explore the notion of the (specifically female) voice as a vessel for desire in Chapter 1. I also examine vocal register, one of Wood’s concerns, both there and in Chapter 3.

Our latter-day bodily sensations of singing and playing music reveal further information about period performance practices, composer intention, and the degree to which music *meant* to Early Modern convent populations (and to a lesser extent, their outside audiences as well). I have approached this music from the vantage point of a performer – as a singer, violinist, amateur guitarist, and director – and have closely interrogated the bodily process of rehearsing and performing these pieces. There is power in situating your body in just the way that someone did hundreds of years ago, to kinesthetically feel the same things that a composer or performer experienced when performing the exact same piece. By physically working with a given piece of music, new worlds of meaning can open up through bodily movement and kinesthetic memory that are just not possible to discover by studying the score.<sup>79</sup> In attending to the corporeal experience of modern-day performance as a legitimate source of knowledge about past

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<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Wood, “Sapphonics,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2d ed., ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2006), 28.

<sup>79</sup> See Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

practices and experiences, I follow the example of Elisabeth Le Guin's *Boccherini's Body: an Essay in Carnal Musicology*. Le Guin explores Boccherini's chamber music from a largely tactile and experiential perspective, detailing how specific physical movements during performance can inform the living cellist about the long-dead composer, his compositional choices and his reasons for them.

In *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy*, Martha Feldman analyzes non-verbal communication between performers and listeners. She describes the focus of her method as "what is mutually produced by performers and spectators: the flame that shoots back and forth, the grain of the singer's voice, the urging of the fans (or their ignoring or disdain), the circulation of nervous impulses."<sup>80</sup> While the "urging of the fans" only applies to convent musicking in the most subtle of forms, I think that all the other aspects of opera performance Feldman delineates were vital to the performance of convent music.

Separating modern ideas about corporeality in performance from my imaginative recreations of the period has been admittedly complicated. Surely no one can be conclusive on that front, though I have made a concerted effort to immerse myself in Early Modern conceptions of the body, especially with respect to humorism and connotations of the female voice. I also think that many aspects of musical performance and rehearsal have likely remained unchanged in the intervening years. Subtle gestures and bodily movements that occur in communication between singers, such as leaning closer to one another to tune tricky passages, seem less culturally and historically

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<sup>80</sup> Feldman, 43.

specific and more grounded in acoustics and basic operations of the senses; to hear a pitch or a chord better, no one will move farther away from it.

Because of the introspective nature of convent culture steeped in Medieval tradition, the work of Medievalists has been extremely useful to me. I have modeled some of my work on that of Elizabeth Upton, who in *Music and Performance in the Later Middle Ages* examines the works notated in Medieval manuscripts as material culture, situating them in a largely experiential and contextual framework to glean new conclusions about performance practices and musical consumption. Emma Dillon, another Medievalist interested in the ways manuscripts can offer information about performance and the Medieval sonic environment, has influenced me through her use of historical sound studies in *The Sense of Sound: Musical Meaning in France, 1260 - 1330*.

Another model for my work is Suzanne Cusick's *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power*. This dissertation and Cusick's book both use feminist microhistories and case studies to examine music produced and performed within a female homosocial environment. Cusick focuses on the secular sphere and the powerful individuals who moved within it, while I have immersed myself in the realm of the sacred and the little-known individuals who were confined, or who confined themselves to it. Still, we use similar methods as a means of approaching this music, both believing that the "music, and the circumstances that enabled [these women] to leave it behind in print, could tell us things we would not otherwise know about how women experienced music and life."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Suzanne Cusick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), xiv.

I speculate here about convent sounds and meanings of those sounds based on informal discussions with nuns and ex-nuns, secondary sources that describe convent life, historical fiction, and my own experiences in the homosocial environment of a women's college comparable in size to the largest convents (500 residents) and situated within a "living history town" dating from the late eighteenth century.<sup>82</sup> I also extrapolate pertinent information from the soundscapes and resonances of historically restored missions in Southern California, which were built for a purpose similar to that of the Italian convents: they housed communities of monks who chanted the offices and who participated in particular industries to keep the mission financially solvent, and they served as holy 'islands' of peace and Roman Catholicism within the surrounding 'wilderness'. Furthermore, they provide an acoustic environment more closely related to those of sixteenth and seventeenth-century convents than many former convent buildings still standing in Italy, which have now been converted to more modern purposes.<sup>83</sup>

In listening more holistically to Early Modern convent repertory it is vital to emphasize the broader cultural contexts of this music. As such, I have made an effort to extend my musical analyses to reflect larger social, scientific, and religious ideas through interdisciplinary engagement wherever possible. In Chapter 1, I employ philosophy and the growing field of historical sound studies to theorize the nature of

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<sup>82</sup> The college in question is Salem College (founded in 1772), the oldest women's college in the United States, and is located in Old Salem, a neighborhood in Winston-Salem, NC.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Sulpitia Cesis's convent, S. Geminiano in Modena, is now a school of jurisprudence. The exterior is intact, but the interior spaces have been modernized. I visited 3 missions: San Gabriel Arcangel, San Diego de Alcala, San Luis Rey de Francia to listen closely to the acoustics of the sanctuaries, the baptismal niches, the sounds of the walls, the wooden railings, the fountains, the birds, and the bricked pathways. The resonant sanctuaries were shaped like boxes, which is how many convent churches were formed.

listening and voice in a convent setting. Chapter 2 makes use of theater history, the nature of ritual, and gender studies to lend further insight to performed embodiment in the convent. In Chapter 3, I delve into the world of Renaissance medicine to gain fuller understanding of Galenic humorism and its ties to both the sacred erotic and performance. Chapter 4 combines art history, religious studies, and comparison of poetic texts to inflect our understanding of vernacular compositions by nuns.

Finally, my work would not have been possible without the nun scholars whose archival projects laid the groundwork that supports my own arguments and conclusions: Gabriella Zarri, Craig Monson, Robert Kendrick, Colleen Reardon, Helen Hills, Carolyn Walker Bynum, and Candace Smith. Their detailed treatments of the inner workings and outside politics of Medieval and Early Modern convents have allowed and invited me to focus my research in a more interpretive direction.

The sixth chapter of Kendrick's book *Celestial Sirens* is entitled "Nuns' Music in the Milanese World-View." In this chapter, Kendrick situates the music coming out of Milanese convents as part of a larger cultural, religious, and political milieu, identifying the significance of nuns' music for the people of Milan as both a civic treasure and as means of cultural redemption. I propose to follow Kendrick's example, but with reference to the work of Walter Ong, thus avoiding the overly visual and modern connotations of the term "world view." Ong proposes that we think of Early Modern people's interaction with and understanding of their worlds not in visual terms, but in terms of experience: an "event-world".<sup>84</sup> Approaching people's perception of their worlds via action, sound, and other senses in addition to sight is especially appropriate

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<sup>84</sup> Walter Ong, "World as View and World as Event," *American Anthropologist* 71:4 (Aug. 1969), 634-647.



for oral cultures, or cultures whose relationship with the universe is not based on a visualistic science. As Ong says, “There are cultures that encourage their members to think of the universe less than we do as something picturable and more than we do as a harmony, something held together as a sound or group of sounds, a symphony, is held together.”<sup>85</sup> He goes on to mention the ancient Greeks and their concept of the “world as a harmony” that “one responded to, as to a voice, not something merely to be inspected.”<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the ancient Greeks believed that the universe was made up of sounds that harmonize together – the “music of the spheres”, and that the human soul, a microcosm of the forces of the universe, was a lyre that resonated with the cosmos. This idea, renewed by Medieval and Renaissance philosophers and theologians such as Cassiodorus and Clement of Alexandria<sup>87</sup>, was still very much a part of the event-world of nuns at the turn of the seventeenth century, who through a mixture of mystical and musical practices sought to tune their spirits to God and nature.

The event-world concept is similar to Geertz’s “thick” event, though it is more encompassing, dealing instead with the complex network of events that makes up one’s understanding of how the self fits into the cosmos. Ong is particularly interested in the usefulness of sound in this comprehension of interiority and self. He says, “Sound...reveals the interior without the necessity of physical invasion. Thus we tap a wall to discover where it is hollow inside, or we ring a silver-colored coin to discover

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<sup>85</sup> Walter Ong, “World as View and World as Event,” *American Anthropologist* 71:4 (Aug. 1969), 636.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> See Nancy van Deusen, *The Harp and the Soul: Essays in Medieval Music*, Studies in the History & Interpretation of Music, vol. 3 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 202-4.

whether it is perhaps lead inside.”<sup>88</sup> By extending this idea, we can conclude that sound can also reveal our own interiors, both physically and in a more metaphorical way. This revealing of the self has an element of sensation – a physical feeling of one’s interior vibrating. For Ong, touch operates in much the same way that sound does – as a means to gain further knowledge of the self:

And yet, by the very fact that it attests the not-me more than any other sense, touch involves my own subjectivity more than any other sense. When I feel this objective something “out there,” beyond the bounds of my body, I also at the same instant experience my own self. I feel other and self simultaneously.<sup>89</sup>

But what happens when the “touching” takes place inside one’s own body? The nexus of touch and interior sounding is the voice, when one feels one’s interiority through the sensation of vocalization. I address this nexus in Chapter 1. Vocalization exists in the event-world, not an object-world. Thus, it is to the event-world of voice, experience, and musical performance that I attend.

In each of the pieces examined in this dissertation, the text is of the utmost importance, as the vast preponderance of words is directed towards God or a holy intercessor, like Mary or a patron saint, and thus functions as prayer in musical form. During this time, music was considered to be secondary to the text. Music thus served to adorn, emphasize, and interpret the primary vehicle of communication: the text. Careful identification of textual origins, language, and liturgical uses provides the basis for my explorations of broader cultural implications of the themes, topics, and ideas set forth within the texts. For example, the main focus of Chapter 4 is Cesis’s set of compositions in the vernacular – a relatively unusual move for a nun during this time. Cesis wrote at

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<sup>88</sup> Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 117-118. Quoted in Ong, “World as View”, 637.

<sup>89</sup> Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 169-170. Quoted in Ong, “World as View”, 637.

least one of her own vernacular texts – a parody of the text of a Palestrina madrigal – and this allows me to discuss the implications of Early Modern female rhetorical creativity, using this text as an example.

My aural portrait of convent life is general and could apply equally well to a wide range of Early Modern convents. Thus, my case studies function with respect to a specific place and time while also representing to a degree the larger, though rather heterogeneous, culture of women religious. Because most convents from the seventeenth century have left us with only passing information (if any) regarding the lives, struggles, hopes, and ideas of the nuns, to get a broader understanding of any given monastic community, we must draw from an aggregate picture, which out of necessity contains a spectrum of regional, local, order-specific, or convent-specific practices.

In the following chapters, I combine multiple forms of analysis to argue the importance of performance, ritual, the female voice, and the nun's body in bringing these musical techniques to life. In short, I analyze how listening to and performing these pieces worked to strengthen convent community and intensify individual devotional practice in early-seventeenth-century Northern Italy.

## Chapter 1.

### Listening and Voice in Convent Life: Attending to Lucrezia Vizzana's *O magnum mysterium*

#### Listening

The act of listening was, along with prayer, the most important act in which nuns could engage. They listened to God for spiritual fulfillment; to their fathers, teachers, and abbesses for guidance; and to themselves as they sang and as they prayed both silently and aloud. Listening is how nuns learned about the Catholic faith from parents, priests, Biblical readings<sup>1</sup>, and spiritual music. Listening, nuns learned some of the most important and frequent prayers they repeated each day – prayers of the rosary, or the Lord's Prayer. It is how they received communication from the Divine. And finally, for every prayer they intoned, they listened inwardly to their own words while listening outwardly for answers, for direction, or for comfort from God. Through their voices and through listening, nuns crafted their individual forms of spirituality and developed a relationship with the Divine.

Beyond matters of the spiritual, the listening and oral culture of the convent had roots in practicality. It is unlikely that any of the servant nuns (*converse*) knew how to read. Though little evidence exists as to their subculture within the convent, we can comfortably assume that few of them, if any, were literate.<sup>2</sup> Theirs was an oral culture,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Rule of Saint Augustine* states: "From the beginning of the meal to the end listen to the customary reading without noise or protest against the Scriptures, for you have not only to satisfy our physical hunger, but also to hunger for the word of God." See *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, trans. Raymond Canning (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1996), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Factors that affected literacy in Europe in the seventeenth century included gender, social status, and geography, and to a lesser extent, religion. Men of high social and economic ranking who lived in towns or cities and who were Protestant were the most likely, across Europe, to be literate during this time. *Converse* were Catholic women of low socio-economic status who

requiring all transmission of knowledge, ideas, and spirituality to be spoken and heard. I imagine that in areas where the choir nuns (*professe*) rarely ventured (the kitchen, perhaps), *converse* were free to talk amongst themselves, hum tunes while they worked, and joke with one another. The fact that *professe* were sometimes allowed to bring their own servants from home upon entering the convent makes this image of *converse* culture even more probable.<sup>3</sup>

Literacy amongst the *professe* was likely more complicated. Not all noble women at this time were literate, though nuns who started as *educande* were almost certainly able to read and write. It is safe to assume that the more prestigious, more urban convents housed a larger percentage of literate nuns (indeed Monson distinguishes *professe* from *converse* partly by nature of their education, defining the *converse* as “simple, illiterate country girls”).<sup>4</sup> Still the percentage of illiterate individuals across the board in Catholic countries such as Italy and France “remained spectacularly high, far into the nineteenth century,” and so we cannot assume that all *professe* could read fluently, even those from the patrician classes.<sup>5</sup>

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sometimes came from rural areas, making them much less likely than the *professe*, who generally came from more prominent, urban families, to be literate. See Carl F. Kaestle, “History of Literacy and Readers,” in *Perspectives on Literacy*, ed. Eugene R. Kintgen, Barry M. Kroll, and Mike Rose (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1988), 95-126.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Monson mentions the Bolognese convent of San Guglielmo as one such convent where records exist of nuns bringing a personal servant. He also mentions that certain convents in Portugal and Spain held slaves. See his *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Frits Van Holthoon, “Literacy, Modernization, the Intellectual Community, and Civil Society,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy*, ed. David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 434.

However, literacy and *musical* literacy are two different skills, and we have no way of knowing the range of ability *professe* had when it came to reading music. It would have been impractical to provide handwritten copies of the music to every singer, necessarily making the methods by which singing nuns learned new music skew towards aural forms of musical learning – that is, repetitions, drills, and rote memorization – while the manuscripts served as a guide. By the seventeenth century, this type of musical learning had been a mainstay of monastic culture for many centuries, and there is no reason to think that musical instruction practices had changed to any major degree.<sup>6</sup> And for those who were functionally musically literate, none of the manuscripts would have been in score form, making active listening across musical lines paramount.

The performance of music in convents was a multi-sensory experience for singers and listeners alike; indeed, the nuns were afforded a more complete musicking experience than lay listeners, as the sisters could *watch* the performances – an opportunity denied to lay listeners, who had to listen to the music through grating, windows, or screens (if they were allowed to listen at all). Though listening was just one facet of the sensory kaleidoscope of music within the convent walls, I focus in this chapter and elsewhere on listening's role in communal musicking events as well as in nuns' more general spiritual practices and communications with God.

### **The Convent as a Listening Culture**

Living in a cloistered environment, nuns had their own cultures borne out of a collective sonic space. As Veit Erlmann notes,

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<sup>6</sup> Though musical literacy and general literacy are two different things (though likely roughly correlative), crude estimates of European literacy around 1600, after the inception of the printing press, indicate that just over 50% of individuals living in urban areas could read. See Kaestle, 104.

‘Hearing culture’ suggests that it is possible to conceptualize new ways of knowing a culture and of gaining a deepened understanding of how the members of a society know each other. It is not only by accumulating a body of interrelated texts, signifiers, and symbols that we get a sense of the relationships and tensions making up a society. The ways in which people relate to each other through the sense of hearing also provide important insights into a wide range of issues confronting societies around the world.<sup>7</sup>

I believe that the daily soundscape of the convent was not relegated to the backdrop of nuns’ consciousness, as may be true in modern industrial societies, where we seek to block out or otherwise cease to hear the constant sounds of our environment. Rather, the sounds of convent life, divided into hourly routines and highly regulated, would have been ever at the fore of nuns’ active listening, for surely the two primary jobs of the nun are to pray and to listen. I might therefore suggest that this hearing culture might more usefully be called a *listening* culture.

While the idea of learning more about a culture by analyzing its sounds is fascinating in its own right, I would like to explore how this listening culture might have approached musical listening, and, in listening to one another (and themselves) sing, how nuns at the turn of the seventeenth century were able to combine Roman Catholic practices, mysticism, and corporeality (their sense of their own bodies and the bodies of others) into a meaningful spiritual life.

What would a convent hearing culture be like? Unlike our modern urban world, full of the sounds of strangers, the Early Modern convent would be the site of known noises and familiar voices. After years of listening to themselves collectively chant the offices, murmur to one another in the corridors and under the arcades, slurp soup and chew bread at mealtime, rehearse polyphony during recreation time, and the sneezing,

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<sup>7</sup> Veit Erlmann, “But What of the Ethnographic Ear? Anthropology, Sound, and the Senses” in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (New York: Berg, 2004), 3.

coughing, snoring, and other bodily sounds of life, the nuns of any given convent would have fallen into a hearing culture as familiar as their own thoughts. In singing together, the sisters would have been able to pick out certain voices individually as well as hear how they all came together to form a single, aggregate voice. Add to these corporeal sounds the cyclic sounds of daily life, and the soundscape of the Early Modern convent becomes increasingly complex, yet simultaneously predictable. The church bells marking the hour would have played a significant timekeeping role in convent life, and indeed the lives of all who lived within earshot. The bells called the nuns to prayer in daily, weekly, and yearly cycles, enhancing festive occasions and commemorating solemn ones.

Sounds penetrating the convent walls from the outside world would also have been familiar to the nuns, perhaps even helping them to situate themselves spatially within their neighborhoods and tie them to their communities. Sounds and noises issuing from street hawkers, horse-drawn carts on cobblestones, blacksmiths, children at play, and shouted conversations amongst passersby enriched the sonic world of convent gardens and outdoor spaces and penetrated open windows to enter the indoor spaces of the convent buildings.

Nuns also participated in this exchange of sound across convent walls. Steven Connor's notion of vocalic space, where voice not only occupies and actively procures space, but *is* space as well, is a useful concept in articulating the politics surrounding the partitioning of space via sound.<sup>8</sup> Craig Monson has documented the practice of nuns increasing the size of a convent's organ in order for it to be better heard through the

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<sup>8</sup> Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.



walls, thus enabling the nuns to transmit their music to the public despite being confined behind layers of stone.<sup>9</sup> As Monson suggests, “music was...a powerful tool for partial deprivatization of architectural spaces – one deliberately employed by nuns to forge affective and, in the broad sense, political links with networks in the outside, public sphere.”<sup>10</sup>

Though the intentional “broadcasting” of music beyond the walls (often as an act of resistance towards church authorities)<sup>11</sup> helped to establish convents as a major force in the production and dissemination of music in their cities, I am more concerned here with the flow of sound in the opposite direction – to the nuns themselves – and how they received, comprehended, and experienced individually and collectively sounds, noises, and music from both the outside world and from within the convent itself. Indeed, the nuns engaged in active listening throughout the majority of their waking hours, regardless of other activities in which they participated.

In his short book *Listening*, sound phenomenologist Jean-Luc Nancy explores and theorizes the act and sensation of listening, asking questions that readily apply to the life experiences of nuns. He says,

What does *to be* listening, *to be* all ears, as one would say “to be in the world,” mean? What does it mean to exist according to listening, for it and through it, what part of experience and truth is put into play?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Craig A. Monson, “Disembodied Voices,” in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 194.

<sup>10</sup> Monson, *Disembodied Voices*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 5. Originally published as Jean-Luc Nancy, *À l’écoute* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2002).

If we think of Early Modern women religious as existing “according to listening,” what new avenues of inquiry arise? The act of listening intertwines with the voice and the act of sounding; indeed in bodily practice, the two cannot be separated. Singers produce sound while simultaneously listening to that sound *resound* within their own bodies, and even those who listen without singing experience this resounding. Therefore, the second half of this chapter shifts focus from the experience of listening to the significance of the nun’s voice itself, both sounded aloud for others to hear and voiced silently, through a nun’s own thoughts, hopes, and prayers.

The idea of listening as causing one to “be in the world” affords interesting and opposing avenues of inquiry with respect to Early Modern nuns, who on several levels were not in fact living in the world. Physically cut off from the outside by high brick walls, metal grates, and heavy wooden doors with multiple locks, nuns and their voices inhabited an interstitial space between the bustling, busy, earthly world, and the serenity and peace of heaven.

At the same time, though, nuns, in listening, were experiencing something distinctly corporeal and *of* the world. Not only were they “feeling” sounds with their bodies (the Italian word for “to listen” is *sentire*, which also means “to feel”<sup>13</sup>), they were also taking them into their own bodies, where they continued to resound.

The idea of the listening ear as an organ that can reach outwards from the body to grasp hold of sounds is centuries old. Boethius, writing in the *Fundamentals of Music* in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, C.E., asks, “How does it happen that when someone willingly takes in a

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<sup>13</sup> For an exploration of these two meanings from a theoretical perspective, see Jean-Luc Nancy’s Foreword “Ascoltando” to *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, by Paul Szendy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), x.

song with both the ears and the spirit, he is involuntarily turned to it, so that his body feigns some motion similar to that of the song heard?”<sup>14</sup> He suggests that the ears play an active role in attentive listening while also making room for the spirit as co-agent. For Boethius, the spirit and the ears work together in listening to and understanding music. The fact that the spirit involves itself in listening to music is a major point for him: “From all this it appears clear and certain that music is so much a part of our nature that we cannot do without it even if we wish to do so.”<sup>15</sup> Boethius’s idea of attentive listening with the spirit as well as the ears was a highly influential one, as church fathers continued to repeat this idea in various ways for centuries.<sup>16</sup>

Listening and hearing, while two different processes, almost always occur to some degree in tandem. We may attend to one sound consciously while hearing still other sounds. Or we may listen to a sound despite our best efforts to block it. Hearing is essentially passive and penetrative (as Kant was to demonstrate), while listening is an active process, a reaching out.<sup>17</sup> In Italian, one expression for “to listen” is “*tendere l’orecchio*”, which literally means “to stretch or to offer, to extend (as in a handshake) *the ear*”.

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<sup>14</sup> Boethius, “From *Fundamentals of Music*”, in *Strunk’s Source Readings in Music History*, rev. ed., ed. Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 140.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> See for example St. John Chrysostom’s redux of Paul: “Sing ‘With understanding, he says; not so that the mouth utters words while the mind is inattentive and wanders in all directions, but so that the mind may hear the tongue,’” in *Strunk’s Source Readings in Music History*, rev. ed., ed. Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 124.

<sup>17</sup> Kant posited music as necessarily penetrative, stating that it “obtrudes itself and does violence to the freedom of others” as the sound waves enter our ears forcibly, bidden or not, saturating all within earshot like a perfume. In this way Kant demonstrates the ambivalent nature of our perception of sound. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, a division of Macmillan Publishing Co., 1951), 174. In § 53: Comparison of the Respective Aesthetical Worth of the Beautiful Arts.

I have been arguing that Renaissance and Early Modern nuns were actively listening for much of their waking lives. The question I now turn to is: Listening to *what*? Or, perhaps more importantly, listening *for* what?

### **Sonority and Message**

The struggle between sonority and message lies at the heart of centuries of debate and unease regarding the place of music within the religious sphere. St. Augustine in his *Confessions* was the first of the church fathers to explore in such hand-wringing anguish his ambivalence about music as a facet of faith. He reveals, “The delights of the ear had enticed me and held me in their grip, but You have unbound and liberated me. Yet, I confess, I still surrender to some slight pleasure in those sounds to which Your words give life.”<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine here describes music as ensnaring him in pleasure, though he agonizes over the prominence he gives to the sounds (the “sonority”) over the meaning of the words (the “message”). He continues:

But yet, these chants, animated as they are by Your words, must gain entry to me and find in my heart a place of some dignity...Sometimes it seems to me that I grant them more honor than is proper, when I sense that the words stir my soul to greater religious fervor and to a more ardent piety if they are thus sung than if not thus sung.<sup>19</sup>

For Augustine, gratification of the flesh occurs the moment that listening to the chanted psalms causes the listener to focus more on the music than the words.

This fine line between listening to the music as an end in itself and listening to the message of the words conveyed through music causes Augustine much guilt and personal shame. He is not alone in this debate, however, which has raged in some form

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<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine, “From the *Confessions*” in Strunk’s *Source Readings in Music History*, rev. ed., ed. Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 132.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

among nearly every branch of the Christian Church ever since. This struggle between sonority and message took place on shaky ground for nuns as they and their superiors sought to reconcile music and God's word; indeed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries convents waged war with their superiors in many parts of Italy over the right to perform music beyond the chanting of the offices, even in their private worship.

Different dioceses had different ideas regarding the type of music that was suitable for nuns. Everyone seemed to agree that chanting the offices was acceptable. However, beyond chant, archbishops disagreed on whether polyphony or monody was more appropriate, and the kinds of instruments that nuns should be allowed to play, either alone or in concert with singers. While I focus the majority of this dissertation on convent polyphony in the style of the sacred music of Gabrieli, Palestrina, and Monteverdi, I would like first to examine a piece of convent music in a style that pushes the boundaries of the spiritual and the secular.

Gabriele Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, in 1580 had decreed that nuns could perform motets for a single voice and organ, specifying that the texts must be devotional and in Latin.<sup>20</sup> And, as Monson points out, this format came to be the norm in Bologna; indeed, much of Lucrezia Vizzana's published works are for just such an arrangement. However, with the rise of monody, opera, and vocal ensembles such as the *concerto delle donne* at Ferrara in the early seventeenth century, convent music in Bologna took a turn towards the dramatic, "ironically...subvert[ing] the reformers' own ends."<sup>21</sup>

Lucrezia Vizzana's composition *O magnum mysterium* (1623), while set to a devotional

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<sup>20</sup> Monson, "Disembodied Voices," 192.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

text, stylistically evokes not just secular musical practices, but opera, with all of its public, theatrical, and sensual connotations and its attendant performance techniques and cultural signifieds: luxury, sensuality, and disreputable women – all factors that would arguably make such music even more inappropriate for convent performance than polyphony. As Monson says “From 1580 onward, then, Bolognese church fathers thus unwittingly directed the musical nuns in their charge to participate indirectly in what constituted the “new music” of the early seicento.”<sup>22</sup>

The operatic, monodic style of *O magnum mysterium* is most apparent in the ever-shifting harmonic palette that Vizzana uses to impart a strong sacred erotic affect to listeners. The listeners in this case were presumably the laity during mass and – what is more interesting to consider – other nuns in Santa Cristina’s common rooms, “where the nuns did needlework together, and could sing or play without disturbing any sisters in the dormitories across the courtyard.”<sup>23</sup> This personal devotional piece would have resounded in the private, resonant, interior spaces of the convent. (See Fig. 1).

I begin with discussion and analysis of this piece, so stylistically different from all the other music in this dissertation, in order to interrogate and call into question the binaries surrounding our conceptions of convent life such as inside/outside, private/public, and sacred/secular, and to a lesser degree, ritual/theater, and Neo-Platonic/erotic. That *O magnum mysterium* is so up-to-date with the early operatic compositional techniques pioneered by Jacopo Peri and Claudio Monteverdi demonstrates the degree to which convent walls allowed the transfer of innovative new ideas. Furthermore, the necessarily dramatic performance of this piece, both aimed

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<sup>22</sup> Monson, “Disembodied Voices,” 202.

<sup>23</sup> Monson, *Disembodied Voices*, 28; and “Disembodied Voices”, 194.

towards the exterior church and nuns in their common rooms blurs the lines of sacred and secular, and thus ritual and theater as well. Finally, the erotic text, sung and acted out by a nun for other nuns, inflects our understanding of all these other categories.



**Figure 1: View into the courtyard of Santa Cristina as it appeared in 2010. The windows under the arcade on the left look into what used to be the common and laundry rooms. The space is now a women's studies library.**

*O magnum mysterium* functions as a supplication. Just as repetition of words like “please” serve to underline the degree to which we want something (“please, please, *please* can we go to the zoo?”), the repetition pattern in this text demonstrates fervent desire on the part of the singer:

O magnum mysterium, O magnum mysterium, magnum mysterium,  
O profundissima vulnera,  
O passio, O passio acerbissima, O passio acerbissima,  
O dulcedo deitatis, O dulcedo deitatis,  
adiuva me ad aeternam felicitatem consequendam,  
adiuva me ad aeternam felicitatem consequendam,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,

O dulcedo deitatis, O dulcedo deitatis,  
adiuva me ad aeternam felicitatem consequendam,  
adiuva me ad aeternam felicitatem consequendam,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.<sup>24</sup>

O great mystery, O great mystery, great mystery,  
O deepest wounds,  
O passion, O most bitter passion, O most bitter passion,  
O sweetness of the Godhead, O sweetness of the Godhead,  
help me to reach eternal happiness, help me to reach eternal happiness,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.  
O sweetness of the Godhead, O sweetness of the Godhead,  
help me to reach eternal happiness, help me to reach eternal happiness,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

The repetition of phrases is like a mantra: meditative, and designed to take the performer out of herself. In fact, the comforting act of echoing portions of phrases generates a type of double reverberation: as the words and their meanings resound in the listener's mind, the sounds issuing from the singer's voice resound in the listener's body. This double reverberation is all the more appropriate given the meaning of the text, which is meant to aid in personal devotions (spirituality) through contemplation of Christ's mortal wounds (physicality).

This text meditates on a desire for Christ's wounds, His Passion, His physical body as a way to become closer to the Divine in body and spirit. Though not as explicit, it falls into the same type of religious poetry as Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg's (1633-1694) extended meditation on Christ's wounds, called "Die Abendmahls-Andachten," which includes a poem entitled "Uber das Blut JESU/aus seiner rechten Hand" ("On the Blood of JESUS from his Right Hand").<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The first line of this text comes from a Respond in the Christmas Day Matins; however, the subsequent lines do not.

<sup>25</sup> See Kathleen Foley-Beining, *The Body and Eucharistic Devotion in Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg's "Meditations"* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, Inc., 1997).



## Word and Meaning

Western theology is grounded in the power of utterance, the work of spoken language. As sound phenomenologist Don Ihde states, “the creative power of the Hebrew God is *word* which is spoken forth as power: *from word comes the world*. And although God may hide himself from the eyes, he reveals himself in word which is also event in spite of the invisibility of his being.”<sup>26</sup> Though the Hebrew God is not visible and cannot be seen, He can be heard, and in His words is the power of creation. The New Testament takes this idea one step further: the first lines of the Gospel of John state: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God” (emphasis mine). God here is *sound*.<sup>27</sup> He did not write; he spoke. Hildegard of Bingen expands upon this idea, writing,

In a word there is sound, power and breath. For it has sound that it may be heard, power that it may be understood, breath that it may be perfected. In the sound, note the Father, Who with unerring power makes manifest all things. In the power, note the Son, Who is wonderfully begotten of the Father; and in the breath, note the Holy Spirit, Who breathes where He will and all things are accomplished. But where no sound is heard, there neither power, works, nor breath is raised, thence neither there is the Word to be understood; so also the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not to be divided from themselves, but their work is performed unanimously.<sup>28</sup>

This trinity of significance that Hildegard understood to reside within the word and language elucidates the epistemological break that Michel Foucault asserts occurred in the seventeenth century. He maintains that at the dawn of the seventeenth century,

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<sup>26</sup> Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), 15. Emphases his.

<sup>27</sup> The concept of *logos*, wherein the Voice of God in sounding is inherently creative (generating life, bodies, matter, etc...), is the root of the power of all language and utterance.

<sup>28</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, “Hildegard of Bingen, *The Visions of St. Hildegard* (1141),” in *In Her Words: Women’s Writings in the History of Christian Thought*, ed. Amy Oden (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 111.

nearly five hundred years after Hildegard, the system of signs surrounding language was still ternary (sound-power-breath), whereas soon after a major shift occurred, resulting in the language binary of signifier and signified.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in the first few decades of the seventeenth century when Vizzana was composing, nuns likely understood language as ternary, much as Hildegard delineated.

Beyond the binary of the written sign and its meaning, Hildegard is more concerned with the *vocalized* word, and the sound, meaning, and vital spirit that together form the acts of speaking or singing. While even today the idea that a spoken word is made up of sound and meaning seems logical as a binary, the third aspect – what Hildegard labels the breath – is less obvious. The breath, the Holy Spirit of spoken language, is the *pneuma*, the life force, the spark of vitality. It manifests as energy, coursing through the air from one being to another, from singer to listener. This vital spirit imbues otherwise sterile language with agency and impetus. The breath is a kind of music all of its own, and as such, energizes musical delivery of sacred text – the Word of God.

This epistemological break from ternary to binary meaning also changed our understanding of the senses: “things and words were to be separated from one another. The eye was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear.”<sup>30</sup> The distinction between visible and invisible with respect to sound and source would have been particularly underscored within the convent setting. Monson has argued that outside the convent, the music of nuns unseen wafting through grates and

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<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1994), 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, 42-43.

windows likely afforded the laity an un-earthly experience, as they listened to a sound artificially cut off from its source, or a “disembodied voice.”<sup>31</sup> On the other side of the convent wall, nuns listened and waited for disembodied voices of their own -- guidance from God or the saints, perhaps.

Voice theorist Steven Connor uses the term ‘ventriloquism’ to explain instances where a voice seems separate from its visible source, as nuns’ singing would be for the laity. He says that prior to the eighteenth century, “the ventriloquial voice function[ed] as a mediator between the human and the inhuman,” and was a “medium for exploring the relations between selves and their voices.”<sup>32</sup> It is possible that to those outside the convent, the disembodied nature of nuns’ voices helped them negotiate their own relations to the Divine. Listening to the nuns’ music allowed them an aural foretaste of Heaven, though one just out of sight, mitigated by stone walls. In addition, as the nuns generated music from their own bodies, they sent it out beyond the walls – thus effecting a reinscription in the bodies of listeners.<sup>33</sup> Connor describes this link between the source of sound and that which hears it as an “umbilical continuity,”<sup>34</sup> though Early Modern listeners might have attributed such a linkage to *pneuma* flying through the ether.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Monson, *Disembodied Voices*.

<sup>32</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 42-43.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 68.

<sup>34</sup> Steven Connor, “Edison’s Teeth: Touching Hearing,” in *Hearing Cultures*, ed. Veit Erlmann (New York: Berg Publishers, 2004), 153-172.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 3 of this Dissertation: “The Four Humors, Melancholia, and Sacred Eroticism: a humoral reading of Alba Tressina’s *Anima mea liquefacta est*.”

Don Ihde, writing about the problem with Western modernity's primacy of the visual over the aural, declares: "*It is to the invisible that listening may attend.*"<sup>36</sup> On the surface, this is not a particularly revolutionary idea for monastics, or anyone, really, who prays with their heads bowed and their eyes closed. When we think beyond the obvious to other aspects of the invisible that require listening rather than seeing – Ihde's " 'Gods' who remain hidden," or the " 'self' which constantly eludes a simple visual appearance,"<sup>37</sup> or Nancy's notion that "truth 'itself'...be listened to rather than seen"<sup>38</sup> – we begin to understand that the great metaphysical concepts (God, self, truth) are best approached through listening, and in listening, we ourselves can be seemingly transported from our bodies. The word "ecstasy" comes from the Greek *ekstasis*, which means "to be or stand outside of oneself," connoting a removal or displacement from the more grounded "stasis". The notion of Divine love as a musical idiom, whereby one invites the 'penetrations' of music, and actively seeks out sensual engagements with it through both listening and performance, was particularly meaningful for the devout (Roman Catholic, Jew, and Protestant alike) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During this time, out-of-body experience was associated with either ecstasy, (now a mystical term for a pure union of the soul with God), or with demonic possession, an unholy coupling of the soul (and often body as well) and the Devil.

And yet, while music has the power to take us outside of ourselves, the act of listening also roots us more firmly in our bodies, as St. Augustine discovered. Thus, music has the unique ability to draw ourselves (our spirits, our souls, that which is

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<sup>36</sup> Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 14. Italics his.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Nancy, *Listening*, 4.

invisible in us) simultaneously outwards towards God and into the depths of the sensual body. What allowed St. Augustine a modicum of hope and pious decorum was the melding of sound and meaning; for him, the purpose of listening to the psalms set to music lay in the heightened strength music lent to the meaning of the words. Through his language, Augustine describes listening as intensifying the senses in an erotic manner, describing music as a “gratification of the flesh” or a “peril of pleasure.”<sup>39</sup> While Augustine writes primarily about sound that issues from a person or object outside of the listener’s body, there is also a different sort of listening that occurs in performance within a singer’s body. The singer listens to her own body from within her body, creating a loop of resonance and of re-sounding that remains within a single body yet also flies out to other bodies. If the act of listening to an outside voice has the capacity to take us outside of ourselves, I would argue that the experience of listening to our own voices roots us more firmly within our bodies, attending to the sensations and vibrations that resonate from within.

Returning to Vizzana’s *O magnum mysterium*, we see that the meaning of the text and its relationship with the musical setting are closely tied to bodily movement and the reverberations of the singer’s voice. The majority of the textual repetitions rise in pitch, underscoring the singer’s heartfelt supplication and desire. The “O” in the repetition of “O magnum mysterium” begins a minor third higher than the first iteration, and a minor sixth higher than the preceding note.

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<sup>39</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 133.

Cantus

O ma - - gnum my - ste - ri - um,

Basso continuo

S.

O ma - gnum my - ste - ri- um, ma - gnum my - ste - ri- um,

B.

**Example 1: *O magnum mysterium*, measures 1-10**

Similarly, the three instances of “O passio” begin at increasingly higher pitches while shifting from the soft to the hard hexachord. These measures (pickup to 13 – 19) also play with the timing of the breath, which, through placement of rests, generates a breathless quality and quicker note values. In addition, Vizzana frequently makes use of the minor third descending leap to heighten the sensation of languishing in desire, requiring the voice to sigh over and over again in lovesick melancholy. This motive generally occurs at the beginning of a phrase, such as the second iteration of “O magnum mysterium,” or each of the three iterations of “O passio.”

The singer in these instances hears and feels her breathlessness, the increase in the tempo of her words, the tightening of her voice as she increases the pitch of her entrances or leaps up a fourth or a sixth, and the pain of singing the unprepared dissonance on the second iteration of “acerbissima” (“bitter”). In feeling her body generate these sounds, she also feels it respond psychosomatically as the words complement her body’s physical responses.

13

Cantus

O pas - si - o, O pas - si - o a - cer - bis - si -

B.C.

16

C.

ma, <O pas - si - o a - cer - bis - si - ma,>

B.C.

# # # #

**Example 2: *O magnum mysterium*, measures 13-19**

Listening in combination (listening to the self in concert with other voices) opens up yet more pathways of association, as we attend to our bodies while listening to voices all around. This type of double listening, where the singer, surrounded by the voices of others, also hears and feels her own voice, can create a powerful sense of unity, of feeling greater than oneself, of temporarily feeling more part of the group than autonomously individual, but still retaining a sense of one's own voice.<sup>40</sup> The power of this unity bolsters group dynamics and strengthens community bonds. The act of singing in concert with one another, and thus also listening to the harmonious merging of the self with the group, would have been a powerful way to shape and strengthen community within the convent as well as reinforce the group's collective relationship with the Divine, a relationship that must have reinforced relationships between God and the

<sup>40</sup> Being able to still hear your own voice is vital to this dual listening that promotes unification of the self with society. When the other voices are mechanized, or electrified, as through speakers, so much that your own voice, and even the *sense* of your voice through vibration, is lost, the overall feeling is not one of unity with the group, but powerlessness before the group – a momentary loss of self.

individual nuns. Listening and vocalizing were what brought them closer to God, and what afforded them ecstasy, and ultimately, salvation.<sup>41</sup>

In measures 32 – 42 and 56 – 66 (nearly identical to 32-42) of *O magnum mysterium*, the basso continuo line comes to life, suddenly interacting with the vocal line rather than merely supporting it. The two lines play off of one another, taking turns with movement and relative stasis, at times in canon, and at other times in parallel motion. The continuo line here seems to encourage the vocal line towards ecstasy by demonstrating a mutual excitement and sense of togetherness during the “alleluia” and then returning to a more chordal supportive function when the vocal line becomes syllabic for the repetition of the last two lines of text (“O sweetness of the Godhead, help me to reach eternal happiness, alleluia”). (See example 3.) In this example, it is the combination of musical bodies working with one another, listening to one another, and playing off of one another that fulfills the desire set forth in the text.

The dramatic nature of this music virtually requires the performer to enact the emotions set forth in the text and manifested in the musical syntax. This *stile rappresentando* presupposes a sonic enacting of sensual arousal and intensifying desire. This piece could be self-accompanied, with the singer accompanying herself on lute or harpsichord. This would have allowed for a high degree of metrical freedom as the singer timed her phrases according to her own interpretation. She would also have ornamented her line, especially during the repeated section, from measure 43 to the

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<sup>41</sup> In convents large enough to support more than one choir, the act of singing with one’s particular group indeed fostered a sense of community and loyalty *with that group*, often in opposition to the other choir. Robert Kendrick documents multiple instances of these types of internal convent struggles at large convents in Milan. See his *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).



end, and varied her vocal quality as another means of interpretation and dramatic enacting.

32  
Cantus (dam.) Al-le - lu - ia, al-le - lu - ia, al-le - lu - ia, al -  
B.C.

36  
S. le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu -  
B.

39  
S. ia, al - le - lu - ia.  
B.

**Example 3: *O magnum mysterium*, measures 32-42**

The other nuns watching and listening would have seen their sister embodying the character of another woman who was obvious in her desire, and who, through her performance, was sending this sensuality out through the ether to the other nuns, by now made voyeurs to this act of passion. The singer theatricalizes sacred love according to well-known and distributed formulas of performance typically used on stage to portray secular passion, and although in this case these formulas depict Divine love, the singers and audience likely had similar psychosomatic responses to those they might have experienced had the subject matter focused on earthly desire.

These responses invite queer readings of musical practice within the convent. Nuns, before even opening their mouths to sing, already exist in a queer space by virtue of their homosocial environment, their heralded virginity, and their non-procreative group marriage to a (generally) non-corporeal being. When we then place musical performance in the convent setting, especially a performance that so obviously and theatrically presents embodiment of the erotic through song, the tensions between discipline and desire in musical performance that Judith Peraino elucidates become markedly apparent.<sup>42</sup> In the next section, I address this queerness as it manifested in cultural anxiety over the female voice – and the nun’s voice in particular.

## **Voice**

Voice is both literal and figurative in its meaning, and I address both in this chapter. Except where noted, when I use the word “voice” I mean the sonorous voice, encapsulating singing, praying, shouting, speaking, murmuring, crying, and other vocalizations. It is for this type of voice that we can discuss issues of range, timbre, resonance, and virtuosity, as well as what cultural connotations the specifically female voice carried in the Early Modern era.

The sonorous voice further divides into the speaking voice and the singing voice. For Early Modern nuns, these two modes of vocalization were completely different categories of expression with different mores and rules associated with each. The speaking voice was closely regulated. At times when speaking was allowed, the voice was to be low and unobtrusive. When not singing, nuns whispered, murmured, and intoned softly. Surely even loud spoken prayer would have seemed theatrical or over zealous. As

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<sup>42</sup> Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11.

talking amongst themselves was often restricted, the majority of acceptable vocalizations were likely directed towards God, or to an intercessor during Confession. Furthermore, when a nun had the opportunity to talk with someone from outside the convent, she needed to gain permission from her superiors and take two other nuns with her to listen to her conversation to ensure propriety and modesty. The rule of St. Clare has an entire chapter on the regulation of speech within the convent, entitled “Of silence, and of the manner of speaking at the Speak-house, & grate.”<sup>43</sup> Therein, St. Clare delineates which hours the sisters are to keep silence, and when and where talking is allowed. When Pope Urban IV revised the Rule of St. Clare in 1263, he relaxed some of the rules on silence, leaving the particulars up to the abbess.<sup>44</sup> In practice, therefore, the social norms of convents almost certainly varied greatly from convent to convent.

In light of the official restrictions on speaking, the singing voice could fulfill the need for personal, vocal expression, and the need to sound aloud the figurative voice. For nuns, singing might have been one of the only socially accepted times when they could raise their voices, project outwards, vocalize with conviction, and communicate their feelings, desires, and ideas.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Alba Tressina, the subject of Chapter 3, lived in a Clarissan convent. St. Clare, *The Rule of the Holy Virgin S. Clare Together with the Admirable Life, of S. Catharine of Bologna, of the same Order, Both translated into English*. 1621. Vol. 274, English Recusant Literature (1558-1640), ed. D. M. Rogers. Reproduced at the original size. (London: Scholars Press, 1975), 24.

<sup>44</sup> From Edwin V. O’Hara, “Poor Clares,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), 252. Also online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12251b.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> Completely silent orders did not have this luxury. I assume that they found other creative outlets such as visual art, gardening, needlework, letter-writing, or non-verbal forms of communication such as gesture, posture, and the glance. In such orders, the importance of silent prayer and internal voice takes on monumental proportions.

The figurative voice connotes agency, subjectivity, and the desire to be heard. Though the two kinds of voice often merge (in prayer especially), they are two different concepts. That nuns valued this type of agency is implicit in the frequency of punishments meted out to errant nuns that specifically deny the use of both “active and passive voice” (*voce attiuu, e passiuu*). Many of these same punishments also deny them the right to sing polyphony.<sup>46</sup> In 1575, Cesare Arese, Carlo Borromeo’s vicar of nuns, sent punitive orders to S. Maria Maddalena al Cerchio in response to three nuns’ possession of secular music.<sup>47</sup> A portion of the letter is as follows:

Suor Prospera Vittoria Cavenaghi, and Suor Prospera Corona Bascapè, and Suor Paola Giustina Campana are to be deprived of active and passive voice, of [the right to go to] the gate, the pass-through, and the parlor, [the right] to sing polyphony for six years. Every Friday for a year, they are to voice their guilt in the refectory, and say the psalm *Miserere mei Deus* on their knees in the middle of the refectory...They must leave their cells, and stay elsewhere as dictated by the Mother abbess. And also, Suor Paola Giustina is to be deprived of writing letters or other things to anyone.”<sup>48</sup>

A similar punishment that sought to curtail a nun’s musical voice was also meted out by Carlo Borromeo, this time in 1571, to Suor Angelia Serafina, a Clarissan nun at S.

Apollinare:

Suor Angelina Serafina is to be without her veil [i.e. with a bare shaven head] for three months. She is relieved of the organist’s duties, nor may she return to this

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<sup>46</sup> Another common punishment was to deny use of instruments.

<sup>47</sup> Borromeo was archbishop of Bologna from 1564-1584 and was the uncle of Federigo Borromeo. He was such a well-loved leader in the reformation of the Catholic Church that he was canonized just 26 years after his death.

<sup>48</sup> “Suor Prospera Vittoria Cauenaga, e Suor Prospera Corona Basgapera e Suor Paula Iustina Campana stiano priuate di voce attiuu, e passiuu, di porta, torno, e parlatorio, di non cantar canto figurato per il tempo di sei anni, dicano ogni venerdi per vn’anno sua colpa in reffittorio et il salmo, Miserere mei Deus, in genocchi in mezzo il refittorio...Lasciando le loro celle, nelle quali andauano a star altre come se dira alla Madre ministra. – Et di poi detta Suor Paola Iustina stia priuata di scriuer ne far sciuiere lettere ne altro ad alcuna persona.” Translation by Robert Kendrick until the ellipses, then translation mine. See Appendix A, Doc. 8k in *Celestial Sirens*, 439.

position for six years. The large harpsichord is not to be kept in her room, but somewhere else in the house; nor can she play it or any other keyboard, nor sing polyphony for three years. And every Wednesday for six months she is to eat on the floor of the refectory, and ask forgiveness for the disturbance she caused, and for the scandal of having fed the organist inside the monastery. Nor may she go to the parlor for three months.<sup>49</sup>

For these nuns, these punishments were designed to inflict maximum humiliation, silence personal subjectivity and voice through removal from convent governance decisions and the prohibition of writing, stifle musical creativity, restrict recreation and relaxation activities, and minimize opportunities for social interaction, as these women could no longer participate in rehearsals or other forms of social musicking.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, both of these punishments restricted the nuns' access to the parlor (*parlatorio*), an important liminal space that allowed nuns to speak to, visit with, and perform for guests from the outside. The parlor was always constructed as a double room divided by a grate or iron bars, and for the church hierarchy it often became the site of scandal. Numerous edicts survive banning nuns from performing secular songs or Carnival plays *en travesti* for select audiences of family members, local aristocrats,

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<sup>49</sup> “Suor Angelina Serafina stia per tre mesi senza il uelo. Sia priua dell’ufficio di organista, nè si possa rimettere a questo officio per sei anni. L’arpicordo grande non stia in camera sua, ma altroue in conuento, nè lei possa sonar su quello, o altro instromento, nè cantar per tre anni canto figurato. Et per sei mesi ogni Mercordì mangi in refettorio in terra, et domandi perdono del disturbo, che ha hauuto per causa sua, et del scandolo de haver dato da mangiare in conuento all’organista. Nè uada per tre mesi al parlatorio.” Translation by Robert Kendrick. See Appendix A, Doc. 7d in *Celestial Sirens*, 437-8.

<sup>50</sup> Examples of convent punishments, in rough order of severity, included excommunication; imprisonment in one’s cell (in extreme cases for the rest of a nun’s life); denial of Communion or other sacraments; restrictions on behavior, such as movement within the convent, singing, communicating, etc...; forced humility, such as requiring the nun to lie prone on the floor while others walk over or around her, making her eat apart from the others, making her kiss the feet of her sisters and ask their forgiveness for her transgression, etc...; and for minor offences, extra prayers or other convent duties. Often, the severity of the punishment was reflected in the duration of time that it lasted: days or weeks vs. months vs. years. The severity of Suor Serafina’s punishment demonstrates the degree to which her actions threatened the Church’s beliefs regarding proper nun behavior.

friars, and honored guests in the parlor.<sup>51</sup> The regularity of such decrees throughout the Seicento demonstrates their ineffectiveness.<sup>52</sup> The parlor was also the space where an outside music teacher would meet with his pupil(s), though this practice was heavily regulated and often forbidden from the early 1600s on.

Centuries of careful control of nuns' figurative and literal use of their voices, as well as harsh measures taken against perceived violations of that control reveal Church authorities' understanding of the power nuns placed in their voices. Meanwhile, letters written by nuns about their musical practices provide yet another, perhaps more immediate, facet of their figurative voices and how they conceived of themselves in the world. Many nuns who wrote to Federigo Borromeo demonstrated "self-understanding as members of a special state – sacred virgins consecrated to God."<sup>53</sup> Often this self-understanding played out in the description of a musical act. As Angela Confaloniera, a Milanese nun who sang and played lute, organ, and violin, wrote in a 1630 letter to Federigo Borromeo upon receiving a lute from him,

Dearest Father, I cannot stop thanking Your Excellency for the gift you made me, especially since it was in time to use it the first time for such a beautiful mystery [a paraliturgical Christmas celebration]; since the happiness [from the gift] I saw all the nuns had made me resolve to let everyone hear its sound. So secretly I asked a nun who plays violone and another who plays violin, and so Christmas Eve we went to perform the *matinati* for all the nuns, singing *Gloria in excelsis* and other similar verses, such as these: Your sweet spouse, my dear sisters, has been born today of the Virgin Mary. Good Jesus has been born as our Saviour.

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<sup>51</sup> For the importance of these select performances to the economic and cultural capital of Milan, see Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 116.

<sup>52</sup> As Kendrick says, "The reports of *mascherate* and secular *commedie* at female monasteries began with the 1577 complaints at S. Agnese and continued well into the Settecento." See *Celestial Sirens*, 81 n. 73. New restrictions that repeat this injunction appeared in 1647 (96 n. 20; and 106-7).

<sup>53</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 41.

Come, sisters, give Him your hearts...The gift made to the poor *genocha*<sup>54</sup> drew tears of devotion from the eyes of many people when they heard the sound of such beautiful mystery: then they were reminded of the melody of Angels.<sup>55</sup>

Also part of the figurative voice is the internal voice – the voice of thought, the voice of conscience, and the voice of silent prayer. This type of voice, while “sounded” internally and heard only by the individual and God, was no less important to the subjectivities of nuns. The value of such internal thoughts to the formation of identity is evident in the fact that we ascribe these thoughts to our “voices”, even though they are without vibration or sonority. St. John Chrysostom even goes as far as to describe the act of soundless, internal singing: “One may also sing without voice, as the mind resounds inwardly. For we sing, not to men, but to God, who can hear our hearts and enter into the silences of our minds.”<sup>56</sup> The idea is that God does not need to hear voices sounded aloud to “hear” them with you, internally. And in this type of voice, the church hierarchy had no control, jurisdiction, or oversight, though not for lack of trying. All of the measures documented above to control the nun’s external voice were also meant to

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<sup>54</sup> I have not been able to find a translation of this word. Given its similarity to “ginocchio” (“knee”) and “genuflettersi” (“to genuflect; kneel down”), I take it to mean someone who is on her knees a great deal, as in prayer. Furthermore, Confaloniera here is talking about herself. When nuns ventured to write letters or treatises, they tended to portray themselves using overly humble language (see the writings of Hildegard of Bingen or St. Teresa of Ávila); as Confaloniera was writing to her archbishop, an imprecise gloss such as ‘penitent’ seems to fit.

<sup>55</sup> “*Padre carissimo, non posso finir di ringraziar V.S. Ill.ma del dono che mi à fatto e molto più per eser stato a tempo di poterlo adoperar la prima uolta a si bel misterio poi che per l’alegrezza che io vidi che ebero tutte le monache mi risolsi di uoler far sentir à tutte il suo sono. E cosi secretamente feci inuito a una che sona il uilone e un altra il uiolino e cosi la notte del Santo Natale andavimo a far li matinati a tutte le moniche cantando[:] Gloria in eccelsis et altri uerseti simili a questi che io dirò cioe[:] Il dolce sposo uostro sorelle mie Hoggi è nato dalla Vergine Maria. E nato il Bon Giesu per nostro Saluatore. Venite sorelle a donargli il core...il dono che ha fato a la pouera genocha ha tirato li lacrimi de gli ochi per diuotione a molte persone per sentir a sonar a si bel misterio: poi si ricordauano poi [underlining in original] della melodia deli Angeli.*” Translation by Robert Kendrick until the ellipses, then translation mine, with help from Nina Treadwell. Reproduced in *Celestial Sirens*, Appendix A, Doc. 35, 451.

<sup>56</sup> St. John Chrysostom, 124.

suppress, or quell, the nun's internal voice and direct her very thoughts. However, the undocumented internal voice remained a final vestige of personal control, ultimately an irresolvable challenge to the Church's project of completely dominating the nuns under its care.

While the internal voice leaves no trace, subjectivity can emerge from vestiges of musical practices – that is, the musical scores and texts written by nuns that gesture towards performances by those same nuns and their cohorts. It is this type of voice that I seek to address in other areas of this dissertation through a variety of analytical techniques as I try to approach a more holistic picture of nuns' musical practices and how they supported other aspects of their lives. In the following pages, I look first at the sonorous female voice in its broad cultural context and then I examine it in the world of the convent.

The most readily available material that speaks to the significance of the female voice comes from Early Modern men's accounts of women's voices, and period beliefs about the effects women's voices were supposed to have had on men's bodies. Stories that come to us from the Ancient Greeks and Romans as well as the writings of early Christian fathers abound with warnings about the unchecked female voice. These stories about women such as Cassandra, Artemis, the Furies, the Gorgon, and the Sirens highlight what men perceived to be the dangers of women who allow their voices to shriek, howl, intone, and sing.<sup>57</sup> Anne Carson traces the history of early ideas about high-pitched voices, linking Aristotle's assertion that high voices are evidence of an evil disposition with the centuries-old correlation between public use of the female voice and

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<sup>57</sup> For a fuller, more descriptive list, see Anne Carson's chapter "The Gender of Sound" in her monograph *Glass, Irony and God* (New York: New Directions Books, 1995).



madness, witchery, and bestiality.<sup>58</sup> St. Paul in I Corinthians reveals a similar fear of the female voice, declaring that women must remain silent in church, saying that it is “shameful” for them to speak.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, when women seem not to be able to control their own voices, it is assumed that the men around them are responsible for controlling it for them.<sup>60</sup> As Carson says, “putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day.”<sup>61</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this “door” was quite literal, and had vast repercussions for Early Modern women religious, who after the decrees of the Council of Trent had to cloister themselves or face excommunication. Judith Peraino takes these ideas into the realm of music, pointing out the potential queerness of the female singing voice. Peraino argues that the close relationship between music and desire has always been fraught with anxiety, and in turn, queerness. Though she uses the Sirens and the story of Odysseus as her case study, anxiety and desire surround period accounts of nuns’ voices as well. Convent song is therefore similarly queer.<sup>62</sup>

Multiple Early Modern discourses existed regarding the effects women’s voices could have on listeners, depending largely on the moral character of the woman in question, and the location, timbre, and manner of her vocalization. Men tended to view women who performed in public as whores, thereby linking (dangerous, female) sexuality and female vocalization, much as Homer did with the Sirens. Undeniably, the

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<sup>58</sup> Carson, 119, 120.

<sup>59</sup> I Corinthians, 14:34-36.

<sup>60</sup> Carson, 127.

<sup>61</sup> Carson, 121.

<sup>62</sup> See Peraino, Chapter 1: “Songs of the Sirens: *desire*”.

courtesan embodied all of these facets – musical talent, beguiling voice, overt sexuality, and danger (physical, in the form of syphilis, as well as moral). As a result, Early Modern women who wanted to perform music had to do so in private or semi-private spaces, such as a salon or convent, and even then having an audience could be suspect. At the court at Ferrara, Duke Alfonso d’Este attempted to keep an iron grip on the *concerto delle donne* he had ostensibly created to entertain his young wife.<sup>63</sup> He forced the women to submit to medical exams to assure their virginity and kept strict watch over their personal lives to ward off accusations of scandal and as a means to legitimize the group and its performances (though somewhat unsuccessfully). Though some saw the *concerto delle donne* as indecent, the group and their patrons were nonetheless successful in challenging the aversion to the high treble voice, helping to usher in a new trend of what Susan McClary terms the “soprano as fetish”<sup>64</sup> – a newfound preference for high, virtuosic voices in both chamber music and in early opera that, through graceful, ornamented vocal gymnastics, could incite fervent desire in the listener.

Vizzana’s *O magnum mysterium* falls into this category of music, whereby the singer’s voice itself becomes an object of desire through harmonic shifts and operatic vocal technique. That singers performing this piece would have been cloistered surely only increased the desire in lay listeners, who could not see the singer and therefore could allow their imaginations to take over. And performance within the convent itself, shielded from male eyes and ears, would potentially have allowed for more overt

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<sup>63</sup> As Nina Treadwell reveals, the duke himself was obsessed with the *concerto* and its erotic pleasures, and he attended their concerts daily. See Nina Treadwell, “The Performance of Gender in Cavalieri/Guidiccioni’s *Ballo* “O che nuovo miracolo” (1589), in *Women & Music* 1 (1997), 55-70.

<sup>64</sup> Susan McClary, *Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

experiences of homoerotic desire. Bolognese Church officials, faced with elaborate, spectacular convent polyphony on the one hand and the dramatic treble monody they had inadvertently promoted on the other, saw no other option but to completely stamp out nearly every form of musicking available to nuns.

The secular concern for the virtue of female singers coursed through the sacred realm as well. Certain Italian archbishops during this time went to great lengths to keep the public from hearing convent polyphony (again, often unsuccessfully), the most documented instance being Vizzana's convent in Bologna.<sup>65</sup> One possible method for side-stepping this problem – that of maintaining both the virtue of the nuns and the musical traditions within the convent – was to accept *converse* who were also musicians – that is, servant nuns who did not take vows and whose modesty and family reputation were not at stake. Arese, believing that “the organists and singers of polyphony are often the least disciplined and least spiritual,” suggested this solution, asserting that all organists should be drawn from the *converse*, who supposedly had less virtue at stake than the aristocratic *professe*.<sup>66</sup> This suggestion does not seem to have been applied, however, as the *professe* continued to sing polyphony and accompany themselves with instruments throughout Northern Italy, often without explicit approval despite Carlo Borromeo's “categorization of unapproved female (and only female) monastic music-making as sin, even as mortal sin.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See Monson, *Disembodied Voices*.

<sup>66</sup> Kendrick believes this was written by Arese, as it came from a letter signed “vicario delle monache.” See *Celestial Sirens*, 68 n. 33. This letter specifically cracks down on the “vanity which the *velate* sometimes have in playing [keyboard],” though multiple other documents also mention the danger of vanity and ostentation in singing complex polyphony and virtuosic, ornamented lines.

<sup>67</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 69.

Robert Kendrick describes the apparently “contradictory values” placed on nun musicians during this time: “on the one hand the valorized elements of transcendence associated with nuns’ performances in the special ritual space of the *chiese interiori*; on the other the passionate, almost obsessive concern with regulating the details of such performances on the part of prelates.”<sup>68</sup> He concludes that perhaps little contradiction exists after all, since this most valued aspect of culture needed the greatest regulation in order to be done properly. I believe that the issue is more complicated, however. That all of these cultural and social contradictions must fit together logically is a nice idea, but not a realistic one. Church officials felt ambivalent about nuns’ voices, which occupied a queer and transgressive space that threatened patriarchal control over women’s sexualities. Therefore they worked to regulate convent music, despite pushback from not only the nuns, but their families, who held close political and economic ties with these convents.

Though the *concerto delle donne* was originally created under the pretext of women’s entertainment, and though nuns sang for God and themselves as well as for the laity, much of the primary source material that exists today is filtered through the ears of men and inflected by male desire.

But what of the significance of the female voice to *women*? Certainly nuns knew of and felt the importance of their voices or they would not have fought so desperately for the permission to sing polyphony, to hire outside music teachers, and to publish their compositions – in other words, to exercise their voices, both literally and figuratively, within their communities and beyond. For nuns, their voices were

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<sup>68</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 417.

important for multiple reasons. Outwardly, the most important use of their voices was through prayer, with God as the intended audience. A nun's vocation, prayer could be spoken aloud, sung, chanted, or formed silently, and was meant to advocate for not only their own souls, but for the souls of families, donors, church fathers, and others in need in their communities.<sup>69</sup>

On a more earthly level, many convents used their music with an eye towards audiences of aristocrats and in some dioceses, the church hierarchy. A convent well known for the quality of its musical performances could expect increased attention from patrician families who in turn would supply the convent with more nuns, increase the convent's political clout, and provide economic support through dowries and gifts.

Finally, but no less importantly, nuns used their voices in plays and musical performances with themselves as the intended audience. These performances strengthened a sense of community amongst the sisters (the "feminine subculture" Elissa Weaver describes in the introduction to *Convent Theater in Early Modern Italy*<sup>70</sup>) and provided much-needed entertainment. Weaver cites multiple instances in plays written by nuns that self-reflexively describe the production as "spasso spirituale" (spiritual fun) or "onesto spasso" (honest fun).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Several of the most traditional and conservative convents in the United States today have a world view similar to what seems to have been a prevailing attitude about nuns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As sister Marie Michelle of the Passionist Nuns in Ellisville, Missouri said of choosing a strictly cloistered convent over one more service-oriented, "I realized if I ever went to Africa, and I fed and healed the suffering, I could only help people with these two hands. That is a limited number of people. And yet, if I gave up everything to Him, I could touch the whole world." Quoted in Cheryl L. Reed, *Unveiled: The Hidden Lives of Nuns* (New York: Berkley Books, 2004), 59.

<sup>70</sup> Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theater in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>71</sup> See Weaver, 66 n. 46.

Singing alone or for one another also enhanced personal devotions. In another letter from Confaloniera to Federigo Borromeo, she speaks of what music means to her personally:

Then I set myself to playing lute while singing, now one thing and now another. And so singing and playing at fancy, I sigh deeply now and again. O how I like this feeling of [Divine] love...One recent Sunday after supper, many of my companions were walking along, and meeting me, asked me to accompany them. And as I was there, I began to sing, and sang a motet by heart, while they rested from their weariness, and, while I sang, I felt my heart catch on fire, so that it seemed to the others as if I were mad.<sup>72</sup>

Confaloniera recounts two separate instances here of singing inside the convent. The first occurs when she is alone (or, at least, when she is engaged in musicking for herself, and not for others). She describes how singing and playing the lute help her to experience rapture and Divine love (*Amore*). The second situation involves singing spontaneously for other nuns during a period of recreation, demonstrating that music served an everyday, non-ritualistic function in convent life as well as a purely devotional one. In other parts of this letter, Confaloniera continues to flesh out the various roles music plays in her life: she self-identifies with angels (“that which I sometimes seem to hear in my spirit, that splendid cohort of angels, so lovely, so sweet”) and demonstrates how she imitates Mary in her devotions (“I wanted to understand how she was in the

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in *Celestial Sirens*, 427. Kendrick includes the original Italian in Appendix A, Doc. 38a (452): “Poi mi meto a far il liuto cosi con la voce, hora una cosa e hor un altra. E poi cosi cantando e sonando alla mia fogia me escono a tratto *per* tratto sospiri grandissimi. O che mi piace tanto questo sentimento di Amore...E una di queste domeniche dopo cena, molte di compagnia cosi *per* ricreatione andauano in camina *per* dir all mia fogia, e per la strada incontrando in me, me pregavano andar con esse loro. E cosi *per* compiacerle andai ancor io, e come fui la, cominciai a cantare, e cantai un motetto cosi a mente, mentre che loro dauano un pocco di sufragio alla loro fatica, e mentre io cantaua, me sentive ad accender il mio Core, tanto che pareua all’esteriore che fosse una pazurella.”

days before the Lord took on human flesh”).<sup>73</sup> All of these instances hinge on musical practice – singing in particular – as the catalyst for ecstasy and heightened devotion.

As Confaloniera so aptly describes, the female voice within the Early Modern convent setting mediated between the earthly and the heavenly realms, enabling a connection between the debased, earthly body and the spiritual soul. While the body and voice are certainly not one and the same, the voice by its very nature is generated through the body. It is only when the voice leaves the confines of the body that it enters a more ethereal world of spirits, space, and time. As Connor writes, “the voice is. . . fundamentally. . .on the border between the body and what is not body.”<sup>74</sup> Thus the voice, inextricably linked to both body and spirit, merges seamlessly with both sides of the soul’s lived experience – that on earth, tied up with humanity, and that in Heaven, bound forevermore with God.

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<sup>73</sup> Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens*, 428. Appendix A, Doc. 38 b and c (452): “quello che alle uolte mi par di udir in spirito quella bella compagnia di Angeli, tanto belli, tanto dolci”; “pariua che io uolsi intendere e sapere, come si ne staua quelli giorni auante che il Signore piglia carne umana.”

<sup>74</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 113.

## Chapter 2.

### Ritual and Performed Embodiment in Sulpitia Cesis's *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria*

Listening, praying, and singing served as the basis for all ritualized action within communities of nuns, whose very position as earthly angels married to Christ was already bound up in a state of ritual. In this chapter I analyze the performance connotations of *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria* with respect to the rituality of nuns' lives and actions, taking into account the history of the piece's text and the personal, bodily experiences of both the singers and the nuns who listened. The piece begs questions of female empowerment, theatricality, and embodied performance as the nuns not only envoice angels, but through ritual *become* them. While surprisingly short (it takes less than two minutes to perform), *Maria Magdalena* nonetheless gestures towards a very long tradition of monastic theater and metatheater: that of the *quem quaeritis* Easter dialogue – a genre that can be traced back to at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>1</sup>

*Maria Magdalena*, a small-scale duet from Cesis's 1619 book of motets (*Motetti spirituali*), is one of the shortest pieces in the book, which includes music for a number of different performing situations, ranging from small-scale duets to large works for up to twelve voices. The variety of performer combinations indicates that Cesis must have valued flexibility in the daily musical practices at S. Geminiano.<sup>2</sup> It is possible too that

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<sup>1</sup> Cesis's other duet, *Magi videntes stellam*, is also a two-minute piece and also includes a substantial repeated section.

<sup>2</sup> Of the published nun composers in the seventeenth century, only Chiara Margarita Cozzolani's works reflect this variety of performing forces (1-8 voices). Vizzana's output was largely solos and duets, Tressina published in 1-3 voices, Bianca Maria Meda and Maria Xaveria Perucona wrote for 3-4 voices, and Isabella Leonarda wrote for a mixture of 1-4 voices and instruments.



she believed her book of motets would be more marketable if it offered an extensive range of vocal combinations. Of the 23 pieces in her collection, two are duets, two are for four voices, one is for five voices, two are for six voices, fifteen are for eight voices, and one is scored for twelve. The numbers suggest that Cesis usually had many singers and voice parts at her disposal, and also that small-scale works were less essential in the spectrum of S. Geminiano's musical needs. The two duets *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria* and *Magi videntes stellam* are short productions that would have come together easily for performance. These pieces celebrate two of the most important events in the Christian calendar – Easter and Christmas – and their relative ease of singing made them appropriate for the nuns' recreation and entertainment, to be sung amongst themselves during Easter and Nativity.

The text of *Maria Magdalena*, taken from Easter Monday Matins, creates an interesting situation with respect to performance. As the two nuns sing about Mary Magdalene and the “other” Mary, two holy women clearly favored and honored by God, they visually serve to *represent* those women as well, at least to the other nuns who could see the singers.

Maria Magdalena et altera Maria  
ibant di lucolo ad monumentum.  
“Iesum, quem quaeritis,  
non est hic:  
surrexit sicut dixit,  
precedet vos in Galileam,  
ibi eum videbitis.”

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary  
went to the place of the sepulcher.  
“Jesus, whom you seek, is not here:  
He is risen, as he said.  
He goes before you into Galilee:  
there shall ye see him.”

This text is clearly shortened, as evidenced by the fact that at the moment where third person changes to first person, there is no transitional phrase naming the speaker. The audience, however, knowing the story, would have recognized the words as coming from the angel at the sepulcher. In this way, the text, coupled with the shortness of the musical setting, serve as a synecdoche for a larger production – a shorthand of sorts for what centuries earlier could have been a multi-day dramatic event.

Scored for Cantus and Bassus, *Maria Magdalena* begins with an invocation, a plea, or a call to prayer on the first word, “Maria,” with a brief figure that suggests chant. The first two syllables occur on the same pitch, as if the singer were intoning Mary Magdalene’s name. The third note falls a half step, moving away from what would be the intonation pitch, only to return to that pitch on the fourth note. Such a pattern is common in the psalm tones of the *Liber Usualis*,<sup>3</sup> the book of chants to be performed daily during the holy offices. This beginning may also have served a practical function – by assisting the singers in tuning to one another at the beginning. The first half of the piece focuses on the story’s main female characters: Mary Magdalene and the “other” Maria, and sets the scene for the audience: the empty sepulcher.

The second half of the piece quotes the angel who speaks to the two Marys, saying “Iesum, quem quaeritis, non est hic: surrexit sicut dixit, praecedet vos in Galileam, ibi eum videbitis.” (“Jesus, whom you seek, is not here: he is risen, as he said. He will go before you into Galilee. There you shall see him.”) The music and the words to this section repeat exactly, giving the piece an ABB form.

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<sup>3</sup> A similar beginning figure can be found in Psalm 63, sung during Lauds on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday. See page 776 of *The Liber Usualis*, edited by the Benedictines of Solesmes (Tornaci, Belgium: Desclée Company, 1963).

The sections with the most florid melismas and/or the most complex counterpoint occur on the name “Maria Magdalena” and on the first half (the most important half) of the angel’s proclamation: “Iesum, quem quaeritis, non est hic: surrexit sicut dixit.” This joyous news, announced with a sudden change from a purely narrative third person to the more dramatic first person, prompts a quickening of note values, and later, syncopation and cascading melismas to highlight the momentous import of such a statement. The repetition of the B section provides the opportunity for the singers to ornament their lines, thereby heightening the emotional affect of the performance while also underscoring even more emphatically the message of the piece.

The use of bass vocal lines was customary for compositions by nuns during this time. Nuns likely approached the “problem” with what resources they had, perhaps singing them in range if they could, or up an octave if the tessitura was too low. They could also have transposed the entire piece or played the bass lines on instruments. I imagine that different convents had different responses to seeing vocal bass lines, and selected what worked best for them at any given time.

As Candace Smith remarks, Cesis’s *Motetti Spirituali* do not include a basso continuo part book, though the absence of an instrumental bass line does not necessarily mean that the motets were performed without one, especially in light of the fact that Cesis’s convent housed at least one accomplished organist. I would like to point out, though, that *Maria Magdalena* works just as well without a bass accompaniment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, two of Cesis’s pieces call specifically for other instruments, despite restrictions placed on convents as to their use. Two of these instruments would have been unusual for women to play: the cornett and the trombone, while the others, the violone and the arciviolone, in being string instruments, would have been more acceptable as instruments for females. See See Craig Monson, “Disembodied Voices,” in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 200; and in my Introduction, n. 55.

Ma - ri - a Mag - da - le -

Ma - ri - a Mag - da - le -

8

- - - - - na, Ma - ri - a Mag - da - le -

- - - - - na, Ma - ri - a Mag - da - le -

15

- - - - - na et al - te - ra Ma - ri - a i -

- - - - - na et al - te - ra Ma - ri - a i -

22

bant di lu - cu - lo, i - bant di lu - cu - lo ad mo - nu - men -

bant di lu - cu - lo, i - bant di lu - cu - lo ad mo - nu - men -

30

tum. "Ie - sum, quem quae - ri - tis, quem quae - ri - tis, Ie - sum, quem

tum. "Ie - sum, quem quae - ri - tis, quem quae - ri - tis, Ie - sum, quem quae - ri - tis,

36

quae - ri - tis, quem quae - ri - tis, non est hic: sur - re - xit,  
le - sum, quem quae - ri - tis, non est hic: sur - re -

43

sur - re - xit, sur - re - xit si - cut di - xit, sur - re - xit si - cut di -  
- xit, sur - re - xit, si - cut di - xit, sur - re - xit si - cut di -

49

xit, prae - ce - det vos in Ga - li - le - am, i - bi e - - um  
xit, prae - ce - det vos in Ga - li - le - am, i - bi e - - um

55

vi - de - bi - tis, vi - de - - - - - bi - tis.  
vi - de - bi - tis, vi - de - - - - - bi - tis.

62

"Ie - sum, quem quae - ri - tis, quem quae - ri - tis, Ie - sum, quem  
"Ie - sum, quem quae - ri - tis, quem quae - ri - tis, Ie - sum, quem quae - ri - tis,

67

quae - ri - tis, quem quae - ri - tis, non est hic: sur - re - xit,  
Ie - sum, quem quae - ri - tis, non est hic: sur - re -

74  
sur - re - xit, sur - re - xit si - cut di - xit, sur - re - xit si - cut di - xit, prae - ce - det vos in Ga - li - le - am, i - bi e - - um  
- xit, sur - re - xit, si - cut di - xit, sur - re - xit si - cut di -

80  
xit, prae - ce - det vos in Ga - li - le - am, i - bi e - - um  
xit, prae - ce - det vos in Ga - li - le - am, i - bi e - - um

86  
vi - de - bi - tis, vi - de - - -  
vi - de - bi - tis, vi - de - - -

90  
- - - - - bi - tis."  
- - - - - bi - tis."

**Example 1: *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria* in its entirety**

**Mary Magdalene and the “Muddle of Marys”**

The text of this piece is part of the collect to be used early in the morning during Matins on Easter Monday. The majority of this liturgical text can also be found in Matthew 28, selected out of phrases from verses 1 and 5-7. The similarities between *Maria*

*Magdalena* and Matthew 28 are as follows:

*Maria Magdalena*

Maria Magdalena et altera Maria  
ibant di lucolo ad monumentum  
“Iesum, quem quaeritis,  
non est hic:  
surrexit sicut dixit,

Matthew 28

1: ...venit Maria Magdalene et altera Maria  
videre sepulcrum.  
5: “...Iesum, qui crucifixus est, quaeritis.  
6: Non est hic;  
surrexit enim, sicut dixit...

precedet vos in Galileam,  
ibi eum videbitis.”

7: ...praecedit vos in Galilaeam;  
ibi eum videbitis”...

The noteworthy aspect of this particular text lies in the ambiguity of the phrase “altera Maria.” The name Mary and its variations Maria, Marion, and Miriam are popular names in the Bible, and especially in the New Testament; at least five Marys are directly connected in some way with Jesus, and Biblical scholar Katherine Jansen asserts that this “muddle of Marys”<sup>5</sup> actually includes six different women: the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Jacob, Mary of Bethany, Mary Cleophas, and the “other” Mary.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, sorting out the Mary question has occupied Biblical scholars and priests since the beginning of Christianity. Even in the fourth century St. Augustine felt the need to make a clean separation between the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, and Mary Magdalene, who witnessed and proclaimed the resurrection, demonstrating how even those two Marys, the most prominent of the six, were getting confused. Indeed, one early Biblical commentator, believed to be Cyril of Jerusalem, conflated four Biblical Marys into one, claiming that the Virgin had told him, “I am Mary Magdalene because the name of the village wherein I was born was Magdala. My name is Mary of Cleopa. I am Mary of James the son of Joseph the carpenter.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Mary Magdalene**

Leaving aside the conflation of the Virgin Mary with three other Marys as perhaps an extreme example of this widespread confusion, I turn to the Catholic Church’s official

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Katherine Ludwig Jansen, “Maria Magdalena: *Apostolorum Apostola*,” in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 59.

<sup>6</sup> It is possible that in context Mary, the mother of James and Jacob, and the “other” Mary could be one and the same person, but this is debatable.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Jansen, 59.

position on Mary Magdalene, which is itself a composite of three different women. In September of 591, Pope Gregory single-handedly created the image of Mary Magdalene that is recognizable today: the Magdalene as sinner, penitent, and possessed woman. In fashioning Mary Magdalene, Gregory combined Luke's unnamed female sinner from Chapter 7, John's Mary of Bethany from Chapter 11, and Mark's possessed Mary of Magdala from Chapter 16 into one person (an interesting action in light of the pervasive three-in-one ideology of the Christian Church). Several centuries later, fourth-century saint Mary of Egypt, reputed to have wandered the desert covered only by her long flowing hair, became associated with the Magdalene as well.<sup>8</sup> By the eleventh century, the occupations of teacher and prophet as well as the title of *apostolorum apostola*<sup>9</sup> (apostle of the apostles) had been added to Mary Magdalene's multivalent personage, at least until the Council of Trent.<sup>10</sup> In part due to her three-dimensionality and her heightened "apostle" status, the Magdalene provided a strong female role model, and must have been an inspirational figure for generations of nuns; in particular, her personal history of rising from the depths of sin to a place of great spiritual power would have provided an ideal paradigm for the nuns' own lives.

The power that came with the title *apostolorum apostola* was widespread.

Katherine Jansen quotes Robert of Sorbon (d. 1274), who "told his audience that the

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *A Complex Delight: the secularization of the breast, 1350-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 56.

<sup>9</sup> This phrase could mean that Mary Magdalene is a student of the apostles, or it could mean that she is the greatest of the apostles. This potential duality of meaning is appropriate with respect to Christian belief that "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last," a phrase taken from Matthew 20:16.

<sup>10</sup> Jansen, 60 and 78. See also Aina Trotzic, "L'apparition du Christ ressuscité à Marie Madeleine et le drame liturgique: Étude iconographique," *Revue de Musicologie* 86:1 (2000): 83-104.



Magdalene was the *praedicatrix* of the Lord's Resurrection; therefore men should not disdain women's words."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the assertion that Mary Magdalene fulfilled the role of spiritual teacher and preacher when she went to Provence as a missionary after the Ascension demonstrates the uniqueness of her position. She was even reputed to have performed confirmations and baptisms in France, two sacred rites that have historically been the sole right of the ordained priest and that are codified as such in canon law.<sup>12</sup>

Forgiveness, another theme closely linked with Mary Magdalene, would have held great resonance for religious communities of women. One version of Mary Magdalene – the prostitute – highlights the depths to which she had fallen when she met Jesus. The story of Christ casting out seven devils from her possessed soul characterizes the urgency of her situation. And yet, it is clear that no matter how much in jeopardy Mary Magdalene's soul appeared, her penitence and love for Jesus effectively raised her above all the other apostles.

To have a female role model whom God forgave despite her past, and who eventually surpassed all twelve of the male apostles in spiritual authority would have been an extremely powerful image for women religious. At the same time it would have emphasized a "potentially subversive discourse" that ran counter to official rhetoric, which over the centuries had sought to strip women of religious agency.<sup>13</sup> Mary

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<sup>11</sup> Jansen, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>13</sup> Miles, 79.

Magdalene's legendary status provided nuns with a female hero they could emulate, much like St. Catharine of Siena or St. Teresa of Ávila.<sup>14</sup>

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were at the crux of a marked change in how Roman Catholics viewed Mary Magdalene. This historical shift in meaning, delineated in Margaret Miles's book *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750*, infused Mary Magdalene's primary image of the penitent with connotations carrying a heightened degree of (forbidden?) sexuality. Miles traces the trajectory of art depicting Mary Magdalene across the centuries; in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, images of Mary Magdalene emphasize her long hair and her thin, malnourished body (see Fig. 1) while in the seventeenth century, artists began to accentuate her large, shapely, bare breasts, sometimes placing Mary Magdalene in a prone position, and often positioning her clutching her bosom in penitence and emotion.<sup>15</sup> Though I agree with her argument, I take issue with Miles's timeline here; sexualized images of Mary Magdalene appeared as early as the 1530s (see Fig. 2).

It is noteworthy that in the first decades of the seventeenth century, these two competing connotations of Mary Magdalene coexisted. What, then, are the implications with respect to nuns of the move towards a more sexualized portrayal of Mary Magdalene? How would such a change have affected nuns' perceptions of Mary Magdalene? Cesis's *Maria Magdalena* asserts a positive, female-centered take on a

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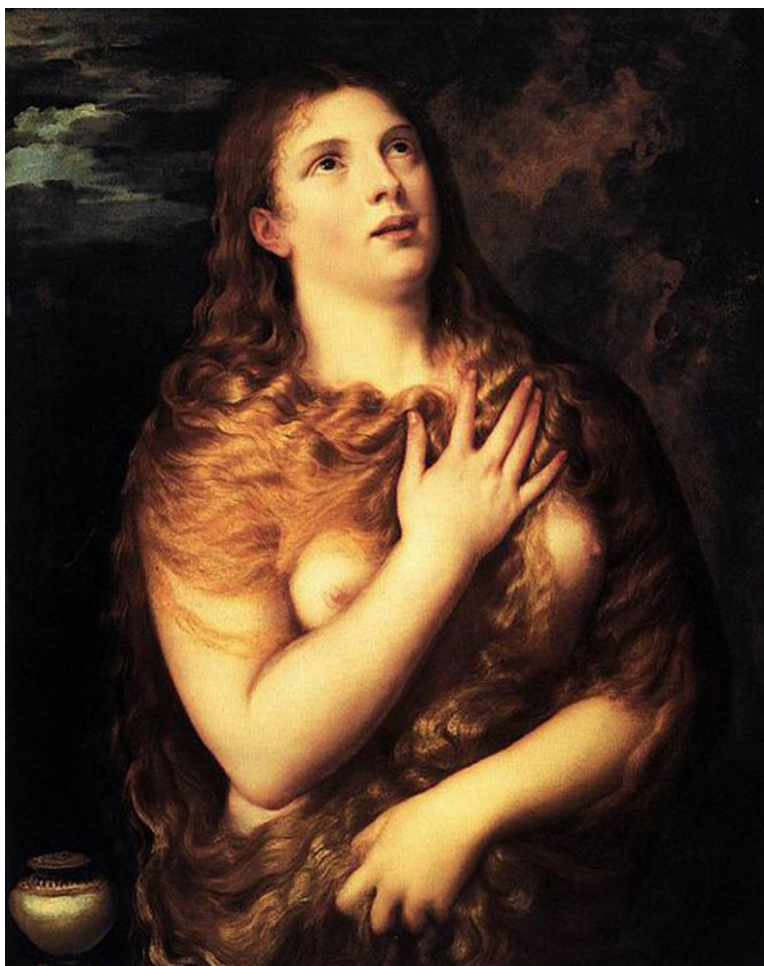
<sup>14</sup> Obviously, the Virgin Mary was also an important female role model, but her perfection and quasi-Divine status made her something that one strives for but never really achieves. Mary Magdalene, St. Catharine, and St. Teresa began as flawed women and through faith were able to rise above their imperfections. For more on the unattainable status of the Virgin Mary, see Kate Bartel, "Portal of the Skies: Music as Devotional Act in Early Modern Europe" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> See Miles, Chapter 3: "Mary Magdalene's Penitent Breast."



**Figure 1: Donatello, *Mary Magdalene*, 1455**

story already empowering to women, using the rich and complex character of Mary Magdalene as the primary vehicle for the story's inception. The theatricality of the piece generates in the listener a desire – perhaps not for Mary Magdalene, but for her subject position.



**Figure 2: Titian, *St. Mary Magdalene*, circa 1532**

*Maria Magdalena et altera Maria* retells one of the most pivotal stories in the New Testament – that of Christ’s resurrection – which also happens to be one of the most empowering stories for women of faith, since Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene and other women in his newly resurrected form. Cesis’s piece celebrates both the resurrection and the women who witnessed it.

Imagery of a holy woman that highlights the combination of sensuality and spirituality would not have been difficult for seventeenth-century nun musicians to comprehend; Kate Bartel has carefully analyzed a piece by nun composer Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (1602-1677/8) that graphically and sensually worships both

Christ's side wound and the Virgin Mary's breasts as a specific devotional act. The form of this piece, "O quam bonus es," also portrays a dialogue, though a dialogue that alternates between the two singers on the subject of Mary's breast milk and Christ's blood. The singers, trading off waves of cascading undulating notes, incite themselves to greater and greater emotional heights as the piece progresses in celebration of both the physical body and the spiritual redemption offered by the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the devotional act of singing a prayer to Mary Magdalene, a holy figure in whom spirituality and sexuality are intricately entwined, remains intensely physical as well, both through bodily performance as well as through the homoerotic images such intense devotion to Mary Magdalene might induce. The physical and mental intimacy required to sing a duet heightens these already-present emotions. For such a performance, the singers must stand near one another (at least during rehearsals, if not for the actual performance) to properly tune their sung pitches, to anticipate and respond to subtle performance cues from one another, to breathe together, and to move as one – with one mind – for the duration of the piece. For the two minutes it takes to perform Cesis's duet, the singers must get into one another's minds and bodies and be completely in tune with one another's movements and thoughts. "Power circulates freely across porous boundaries; the categories player and played, lover and Beloved, dissolve."<sup>17</sup> Looking at this piece in light of Suzanne Cusick's words, such a duet, already rife with homoerotic undertones, becomes a three-way sexual act between the music and

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<sup>16</sup> See Bartel.

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2d ed., ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2006), 78.

the two singers. This ravishing opportunity is heightened through the sense of self-empowerment and female culture provided by the surrounding convent community and through the knowledge that another woman/nun wrote the piece.

The story of the women at the empty tomb simultaneously reinforces and subverts women's "place" *vis-à-vis* men. In this way, the listener could choose which version to "hear." The women go to the tomb to perform their traditional female duties of preparing the body for burial. Then, when they find the tomb empty, they encounter the archangel Gabriel, who gives them instructions. Then they set out on a journey on foot to search for the risen Christ (a man). When they tell the apostles the good news of Christ's resurrection, the men do not believe the women. On the other hand, Christ appears first to the women, giving them the power of information and knowledge. It is perhaps not surprising that some early Christian scholars wanted to conflate the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene; if Jesus had appeared first to his *mother*, the Blessed Virgin Mary who was reputed to have metaphysical powers similar if not equal to those of her son<sup>18</sup>, then perhaps the fact that Jesus' first actions after his resurrection were directed towards a woman would not have seemed so problematic or subversive to later Church authorities.

### **Embodiment and Performance: The *Quem Quaeritis* Dialogue**

The narrative of *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria* is an Easter story – the same story, in fact, that numerous scholars have concluded sparked the inception of liturgical drama in the tenth century, and perhaps that marked the beginning of European drama

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<sup>18</sup> Miles, 40-41.

overall.<sup>19</sup> This story, in the form of a dialogue between the women who go to the empty sepulcher and the angel who greets them there, was known for centuries as the *Quem quaeritis*, which literally means “whom do you seek?” This is the question the angel poses to the mourning women. In the Gospel of John, this scene actually is a dialogue – the angels (there are two in this Gospel) asks Mary Magdalene “Woman, why weepest thou?” and Mary Magdalene replies “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” Mary Magdalene then turns away from the angels and encounters Jesus, whom she mistakes for a gardener. He asks her: “Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?” In the Book of John, then, it is Jesus who says “Quem quaeris,” and not the angels.

The *Quem quaeritis* dialogue was sung in the early tenth century as a brief antiphonal trope before the Introit of the Easter Mass. This specialized treatment of the central story in the Christian tradition became a popular means of recreating the event for both lay and monastic communities, many of which by the tenth century no longer spoke Latin.<sup>20</sup> This trope eventually separated from the mass itself to become an autonomous, dramatized event at the end of Easter Matins, and dialogues were still written into church manuscripts as late as the sixteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Though reenactments of other devotional stories were soon added to the repertory, Easter and

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<sup>19</sup> Among them is W. L. Smoldon, “The Music of the Medieval Church Drama,” *The Musical Quarterly* 48:4 (October 1962): 476-497.

<sup>20</sup> Local languages had already replaced Latin among lay communities by this point. However, as Blandine-Dominique Berger (among others) points out, many of the less-educated monastic communities also struggled with Latin texts as well. See Blandine-Dominique Berger, *Le drame liturgique de Pâques du X<sup>e</sup> au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: liturgie et théâtre*, vol. 37 *Théologie historique* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1976), 92.

<sup>21</sup> Smoldon, 489.

Christmas remained the two primary festivals in the liturgical calendar for these dramatizations.<sup>22</sup>

Elissa Weaver, in her research on convent theater, has documented that original liturgical plays were performed in convents at about the same time as the first documented instance of the *Quem quaeritis*. For example, there survive several such manuscripts written by canoness Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim (c. 935 – c. 973) in the mid-tenth century.<sup>23</sup> As Weaver states, convent theater is an ancient practice. There is no denying the immense influence the *Quem quaeritis* exerted over communities, lay and monastic alike, from the tenth century to the sixteenth century, and, as I argue, even into the seventeenth century.

While the *Quem quaeritis* in the form of a liturgical drama had disappeared from church manuscripts by the seventeenth century, references to it and other dramatized scenes continued to hold significance for certain communities of nuns. Music, a major facet of the very first instances of the *Quem quaeritis*, appears to have served as a conduit for the continuation of this tradition, as nun composers used their skills to effect dramatizations of important scenes through musical performance.

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<sup>22</sup> The seminal work on Medieval drama and its origins is Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933). In the mid-twentieth century, a flurry of scholarly activity surrounding the origins of the *Quem quaeritis* dialogue, as well as its music and its purpose ensued, all including critiques and amendments to Young's work. See Berger; Smoldon; O.B. Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965); and C. Clifford Flanigan, "The Liturgical Context of the *Quem Queritis* Trope," in *Studies in Medieval Drama in Honor of William L. Smoldon on His 82<sup>nd</sup> Birthday*, ed. Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1974), 45-62 for further discussion on the topic.

<sup>23</sup> Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theater in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 49.



Cesis's convent in particular appears to have been fond of dramatic musical pieces: among her collected works, all published in 1619, four feature texts that begin with a brief contextual description followed by a direct quotation: *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria* and *Magi videntes stellam*, both duets; *Angelus ad pastores*, for four voices; and *Ecce ego Ioannes*, for six voices. Interestingly, *Ecce ego Ioannes* contains two separate envoicings: the singers first speak as John, and then as the angels. One other piece, *Ascendo ad Patrem meum*, features a text that is told in first person from the viewpoint of Jesus Christ as he reveals himself to Mary Magdalene before the empty sepulcher, an embodied performance situation that has interesting gender resonances. Of these five 'dramatic' motets, three focus on Easter themes, like the *Quem quaeritis*, and two tell Christmas stories.

The texts of these other pieces are as follows<sup>24</sup>:

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**Magi videntes stellam** (Matthew 2:10-11)

Magi videntes stellam dixerunt ad invicem:

“hoc signum magni regis est!

Eamus et inquiramus eum

et offeramus ei munera,

aurum, thus et mirrham. Alleluia.”

The wise men, seeing the star, said among themselves:

“This is a sign of a great king!

Let us seek him out

and offer to him gifts,

gold, frankincense and myrrh. Alleluia.”

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**Angelus ad Pastores** (Luke, 2:10-11 and Isaiah, 9:6)

Angelus ad pastores ait:

“annuntio vobis gaudium magnum,

quia natus est vobis hodie salvator mundi

et vocabitur Deus, fortis, admirabilis, princeps pacis,

pater futuri saeculi, cuius regni non erit finis.”

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<sup>24</sup> Translations by Alessandra Fiori and Candace Smith.

The angel said to the shepherds:  
“I bring you good news of great joy,  
for to you is born this day  
the Savior of the world  
and he will be called God, mighty and wonderful, prince of peace,  
everlasting father whose reign will have no end.”

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**Ecce ego Ioannes** (Revelation, 5:11-12)

Ecce ego Ioannes vidi et eudivi vocem angelorum multorum in circuitu throni,  
et animalium et seniorum, et erat numerus eorum milia milium dicentium:  
“Dignus est agnus, qui occisus est accipere virtutem  
et divinitatem et sapientiam et gloriam et honorem et benedictionem.”

Behold that I, John, looked and heard the voice of many angels around the throne,  
and the living creatures and the elders, and they numbered myriads and thousands of  
thousands, saying:  
“Worthy is the lamb, who was slain to receive [virtue  
and divinity] and wisdom and glory and honor and blessing.”

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**Ascendo ad Patrem meum** (John, 20:17 and 15:26)

Ascendo ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum,  
Deum meum et Deum vestrum. Alleluia.  
Et cum assumptus fuero a vobis,  
mittam vobis spiritum veritatis et gaudebit cor vestrum.

[Jesus saith to her:]

I ascend to my Father and to your Father,  
to my God and your God. Alleluia.  
And when I am taken from you,  
I will send unto you the spirit of truth and your hearts will rejoice.

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Cesis’s Modenese convent does not appear to have been unusual in this regard; in Milan, Cozzolani was also writing dramatic compositions, including “dialoghi” that often take place between a pious soul and a holy entity. In the performance of these dialogues, singers embody figures such as Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, angels, and shepherds. See the table below for the scoring of Cozzolani’s dialogues.

Title	Date	Scoring	Characters
<i>Ave mater dilectissima</i>	1642	CA	Mary (C), Risen Christ (A)
<i>O mi Domine</i>	1642	AT	Soul (A), Angel (T)
<i>Psallite, superi</i>	1642	CCAA	No set characters, but groups who ask questions and groups who answer
<i>Quid, miseri, quid faciamus</i>	1642	CATB	Mary (C), the faithful (ATB)
<i>Gloria in altissimis Deo</i>	1650	CCAT	Angels (CC), Shepherds (AT)
<i>Maria Magdalene stabat</i>	1650	CAAT	Mary (C), Angels (AA), Narrator (T)
<i>O caeli cives</i>	1650	CCCTT	Angels (CCC), the faithful (TT)

**Table 1: Cozzolani's *dialoghi*: scoring and characters**

Besides these dialogues, Cozzolani wrote several other pieces with para-dramatic texts. Thus, out of her collected motets, nine lend themselves to heightened dramatic performance, though Cozzolani was more eclectic in her themes than was Cesis. While Cozzolani wrote dialogues for Christmas and Easter (two for each), she also wrote dialogues for the Assumption, for the feast day of an unspecified Saint, and as prayers fit for any occasion that depict individuals speaking with an angel and with the Virgin Mary. Setting a prayer in this musical dialogue form likely was a natural progression, as prayer is also a form of dialogue.

Interestingly, one of the two dialogues Cozzolani wrote for Easter features the story of Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher. Her text comes partially from the more

theatrical Gospel of John and fascinatingly, Mary Magdalene intersperses phrases from the *Song of Songs* with phrases from the Gospel. In nearly all of the dialoghi, the various characters come together at the end to sing an alleluia or a communal prayer.

When viewed in light of the fluid borders between ritual and theater, the performance opportunities offered by musical settings of dramatized texts offer up intriguing possibilities with respect to embodied performance and personal participation in devotional experiences.

### **Liturgy and Theater**

After centuries of liturgical practices, it must have been a seamless move to begin theatrical productions based on devotional material, especially within cloistered communities. Convent rituals, processions, and feast day celebrations that included dramatizations, costumes, and re-enactments made the advent of religious plays merely a new step along a pre-existing continuum. The line between ritual and drama blurred even more when these re-enactments included the singing of *laude*, hymns, and praises.<sup>25</sup>

In comparing the liturgy with theatrical performance, Blandine-Dominique Berger concludes that there are “profound similarities” between the theater and liturgy, stating that liturgy itself is a type of performance.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, liturgy is heavily scripted and choreographed, with specific roles meted out to everyone involved, from the priests and deacons to the congregations. Berger mentions that both the liturgy and theater

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<sup>25</sup> See Weaver, 50-51.

<sup>26</sup> She says: “Nous pourrions voir qu’au Moyen Age, comme maintenant, les notions de base qui déterminent l’art de la scène et l’art du culte demeurent profondément semblables.” Berger, 34.

belong to a category of human activities that are special, not mundane, and yet are solemn, part of a higher reality of art that is removed from daily life. For both activities, “tout est image, danse, et chant.”<sup>27</sup>

Anthropologist Victor Turner has written about the liminal space between ritual (an aspect of his “social drama”) and theater (“aesthetic drama”). He suggests that we can “learn something about ourselves from taking the role of others,” even when the “role of others” in question is a reenactment of a foreign ritual process.<sup>28</sup> Turner goes on to say that the “Mass, the Eucharist, itself was, of course, a drama with a scriptural script long before it gave rise to ‘Passion Plays.’”<sup>29</sup>

Nuns, living separately, both physically and socially, from the outside world, would have experienced ritual as a permanent aspect of their daily lives. Their days were structured by ritual; for all monastic communities, daily Offices, feast days, and liturgical seasons marked the passage of time and were more immediate than such events amongst the laity. For women religious, too, the state of being *married* to Christ dictates the presence of a constant rituality in their lives. I would like to assert that even performances not included in the mass itself, i.e. those that took place on a small, more informal scale inside the intimate spaces of the convent, would have been affected by the blurring of ritual and theater. Thus, virtually any spiritual act within the convent setting opens the door for a metaphysical union of ritual and theater.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> R. Guardini, *L'esprit de la liturgie* (Paris, 1930), 218-19. Quoted in Berger, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 91.

<sup>29</sup> Turner, 103.

<sup>30</sup> The high incidence of reported female mystics during the seventeenth century attests to this fact, though with varying ratios of ritual and theater. For some who were faking their mystic

For example, in the context of ritual, not only do the nun performers tell the story of the women at the tomb and quote the angel, for the duration of the duet they *are* those women and the angel too. It is no wonder, then, that many seventeenth-century intellectuals, authors, and composers viewed nuns as “terrestrial angels” who lived in a New Jerusalem-like, Heaven-on-Earth setting.<sup>31</sup> The nuns are envocing the angel, but they are also embodying it and sharing in its point of view. The co-existence of these multiple levels of reality would have been instilled in women religious at an early age in the Renaissance and Early Modern eras.<sup>32</sup>

The *Quem quaeritis* tradition resurfaces in *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria*, and while there is no dialogue per se in the piece, the quotation – one half of a dialogue – gestures to the centuries-old theatrical origins of the celebrated conversation between the Marys and the angel who greets them at the tomb. The first sentence the angel speaks in the piece, “Iesum, quem quaeritis non est hic,” signals the link between this duet and the historic dialogue. The fact that this piece delivers a one-sided conversation necessarily means that the other half of the conversation – the words spoken by the Marys in response to the angel – is missing. From this situation, two questions arise: 1)

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status, like Benedetta Carlini, theater was paramount, though believers interpreted it as ritual. For more information on Carlini, see Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> See the Introduction of this Dissertation.

<sup>32</sup> Many women entered convents as young girls – *educande* – to be educated by the sisters. This practice also eased the transition to novitiate, as young women who had known no other life were often more willing to profess than those for whom convent life was alien. See Craig Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 136-7; and Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Enclosed Lives and Broken Vows in the Renaissance Convent* (London: Viking, 2002), 35; among others.

Would nuns in the audience have recognized this quotation as a dialogue fragment? 2) If so, would they have been able to supply the missing words themselves?

I believe the answer to both questions is yes. According to Weaver, in the seventeenth century religious plays, while they may no longer have been para-liturgical, still formed an important aspect of the lives of many nuns. These plays were beneficial on two levels – as spiritual edification and as recreational amusement.<sup>33</sup> The story of the resurrection in the form of the *Quem quaeritis* dialogue held a place of prominence among liturgical dramas for centuries, and likely inspired a plurality of spiritual plays in the five or six hundred years these dramas were popular. Nuns, many of whom likely had seen or even performed in such Easter plays, would have been able to readily attach a dialogue to the situation. For a nun who had performed in such a play herself, hearing one half of the dialogue might have been like being cued in to her own speaking role.

The action of internally “playing along” with the angel’s cues is significant in light of ritual and embodiment. As both singers speak the words of the angel – and in terms of ritual, this is *really* happening – the singers/angel speak to the *audience*. Therefore, the audience is implied in the re-living of this scene as each listener becomes one of the Marys (or “other women,” as the Gospel of Luke states), answering the questions of the angel internally and individually. Though the nuns knew the outcome in advance, the event itself would have been playing out in real time. Audience members would have been personally embodying these women, thinking like them, and identifying with them.

Had this piece been performed as entertainment within the convent, it likely would have taken place in a common room, with listening nuns situated in close proximity to the singing nuns. This physical and acoustical closeness would have helped

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<sup>33</sup> See Weaver, 7.

to further strengthen the immediacy of the music, text, and performative gestures in relation to the audience. The spatial positioning of audience and singers would have lent additional veracity to the idea that the listeners were taking part in the action at the tomb, and were therefore embodying the holy women listening to the angel's directive.

C. Clifford Flanigan defines the nature of ritual as “a form of action that seeks to bring about the reality it proclaims,”<sup>34</sup> and this is where ritual and theater diverge. While theater seeks to depict actions in a microcosm of life, ritual allows those actions to happen again and again. Christian ritual does not merely re-enact the actions, situations, and miracles of Christ's life; for true believers, it causes these events to play out in real time, allowing the congregation to witness them firsthand. Thus, one purpose of the *Quem quaeritis* trope is to imply that the celebration of Christ's Resurrection is no longer happening on Earth, as it did two thousand years ago, but in the heavens, *in the present, right in front the congregation*.<sup>35</sup> This “cultic notion of imitation [thus] makes the past event a present reality.”<sup>36</sup> The result for believers is not simply a dramatization, but an actuality.

Turner also addresses this feedback loop of drama and ritual, positing it as intrinsic to the living of one's life. He locates stage drama as metacommentary on social dramas whose “message and...rhetoric feed back into *latent* processual structure of the social drama and partly account for its ready ritualization.”<sup>37</sup> He goes on to say, “Life itself now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now *perform* their

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<sup>34</sup> Flanigan, 49.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Turner, 107-8.



lives...Neither mutual mirroring, life by art, art by life, is exact, for each is not a planar mirror but a matricial mirror; at each exchange something new is added, something old is lost or discarded.”<sup>38</sup> The deepest human experiences therefore come from this oscillation between and mutual inflection of ritual (“social drama”) and theater (“stage drama”).

These processes have formed the core of traditional Roman Catholic liturgical practices for more than one thousand years, and still do today to an extent. The Sacred Rite of transubstantiation, in which the priest turns the wafer and the wine into the body and the blood of Christ (traditionally accompanied with the ringing of small hand bells to further highlight the miraculous nature of such an event), remains the highlight of Mass. Thus for a convent in the seventeenth century, this idea of historic re-enactment taking place in real time would have still been a part of the community’s cultural consciousness. The synergy among liturgy, ritual, performance, and theater would necessarily have extended to other forms of dramatized, embodied performance. Though *Maria Magdalena* is only two minutes long, it carried extensive implications for Early Modern nuns striving to understand and know God.

This self-identification with the most honored and holy women of Christ’s time was likely a source of self-empowerment for the nuns, who strove for holiness throughout their lives. To re-live these momentous scenes *as* the women who witnessed them must have been enormously satisfying for faithful nuns, as for the few minutes it takes to perform this piece they themselves could assume a perfection unattainable in everyday life.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 108.

### Chapter 3.

#### **The Four Humors, Melancholia, and Sacred Eroticism: A Humoral Reading of Alba Tressina's *Anima mea liquefacta est***

*Alba Tressina sits, lute in her lap, in the nuns' choir room behind her convent's exterior church, a sheet of music written in her own hand laid out in front of her on a small table. It is a hot weekday in early August, and the windows are flung open to the wide, tree-filled park that wraps around the back of the convent and abuts the river. If she were to look out the windows and beyond the walls of her convent, she would see several upper-class families taking advantage of the last summer warmth, picnicking leisurely on the grass by the river, within earshot of the nuns' rehearsal.*

*Tressina, however, is deep in conversation with the three sisters with whom she is rehearsing. Two stand near one another, looking over the shoulder of a third who sits at a small, portable organ nearby. A young conversa stands quietly next to the organ, ready to begin pumping its small bellows. Tressina is explaining to her ensemble that they will perform this, her latest piece, for the rest of the sisters and possibly their father confessor on the feast day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She confides that she chose the text she did – “Anima mea liquefacta est” – because she wanted to demonstrate in music her close relationship with the Holy Mother, out of whose very body sprung the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*The nuns were to meditate on the Virgin Mary's holy body. During her pregnancy her bodily humors – blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile – had become Jesus' humors. And after Christ's birth, her milk had fed and nourished the infant. In a similar manner, the Virgin Mary might spiritually nourish the nuns devoted to her. Finally, her Assumption – her bodily removal from the Earth to Heaven –*

*demonstrated the sanctity of her body, as well as the physical merging of her body and soul with God. Tressina explained to her sisters that by meditating on these holy attributes of the Blessed Virgin, and by aspiring towards the perfection of the Holy Mother through prayer, music, and mystical practices, a nun might attain to a higher level of closeness with God, perhaps even reaching ecstasy, or a physical union with the Divine.*

*Tressina asks the singers to pour their love for the Virgin Mary into their singing, and to remember that although they would be performing for their own sisters, they would also be performing for the Holy Mother and for God himself. Thus, they must sing and play with a pure heart and absolute humility and love.*

Tressina's composition, *Anima mea liquefacta est* (1622), interacts with numerous Early Modern discourses: sacred liquids and their relationship to the body; sacred eroticism in the arts; and the link between the body, liquids, and musical performance. The body's carnality and its internal liquids, or humors, when used in meditative devotions, became a celebrated aspect of spirituality within the Roman Catholic Church in much of seventeenth-century Europe. Even as early as the mid-sixteenth century, liquid imagery had become indispensable as a metaphor for bodily union with God.

*Anima mea liquefacta est* is at the nexus of spirituality and Early Modern 'liquid eros' with respect to both text and music. The text Tressina selected for this piece comes from chapter five, verses six and eight of the *Song of Songs*:

Anima mea liquefacta est	SS 5:6
ut dilectus meus locutus est.	SS 5.6 paraphrase
vocavi illum et non respondit mihi	SS 5.6
quesivi illum et non inveni	SS 5:6

nuntiate dilecto meo  
quia amore languo.

SS 5:8 paraphrase  
SS 5:8

Loosely translated, it reads:

My soul melted when my love spoke.  
I called him and he did not answer.  
I searched for him and did not find him.  
Tell my Beloved that I languish of love.

To say that one's soul is melting is to suggest that the now-liquid soul can easily merge with other sacred liquids, such as the blood of Christ or Mary's breast milk, two of the more important liquids in Christian tradition. Richard Rambuss writes extensively (and graphically) about the role of bodily fluids in sixteenth and seventeenth-century personal devotions, revealing how combining bodily liquids in the name of faith and devotion opens the door for countless fusions of the erotic and the spiritual.

Furthermore, the mixing of liquids is permanent – once tears and blood are melded together, the two cannot be parted.<sup>1</sup> I argue that this symbolism of bodily fluids and eroticism within Early Modern religious traditions was particularly powerful for women, whose bodies had the capacity to produce three of the most prominent liquids in Christian imagery: blood, milk, and tears.

The family of metaphors that combines liquid imagery and descriptions of Divine ecstasy has been around for thousands of years; indeed the text of the *Song of Songs* was likely written between 960 and 400 B.C.E.<sup>2</sup> By the Early Modern period, using

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). See especially the Introduction, "Sacred Eroticisms."

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems: Poetry and Symbolism* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 43-44. Stylistic differences in the writing of certain verses suggest that the book is a collection of songs written over the course of several hundred years. Mariaselvam argues that the book was compiled around 400 B.C.E., though certain verses were written much earlier.

water to describe intimacy and union with God was still a particularly meaningful way to illustrate the ineffable.<sup>3</sup> St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) uses water as an underlying theme in her autobiography to delineate the four stages of prayer a devout believer must obtain before experiencing rapture. She likens personal prayer to the cultivation of a garden for God's pleasure. The four stages are: 1) The water is drawn from a well (*difficult*); 2) The well-water is drawn with a water-wheel and buckets, worked by a windlass (*less laborious, and brings up more water*); 3) The water comes from a stream or a spring (*easy, and better saturates the ground*); and 4) Heavy rains water the garden (*easiest – sent by God himself; no labor necessary*).<sup>4</sup> This last metaphor references Divine union, when the soul is inundated with God's love. These unions can be unexpected, yet intense. As St. Teresa says, "In one of these visits, however brief it may be, the Gardener, being as he is the Creator of the water, pours it out without stint; and what the poor soul has not been able to collect in perhaps twenty years of exhausting intellectual effort, the heavenly Gardener gives it in a moment."<sup>5</sup>

The idea of languishing of love for the Divine also appears several times in St. Teresa's text. In her sixteenth chapter describing the "third water" (the third stage of prayer), St. Teresa expresses her emotional state as "bewildered and intoxicated with love."<sup>6</sup> This intoxication later causes the soul to melt in ecstasy, as she makes clear in one of her chapters on rapture (the "fourth water"). She states, "But it is plain from the

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<sup>3</sup> Music was perhaps the best way of conveying the sacred erotic, as it was uniquely situated to not only depict Divine union, but also to facilitate it.

<sup>4</sup> See St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila By Herself*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 78.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

superabundance of grace that the sun must have shone very brightly here, to leave the soul thus melted away.”<sup>7</sup> Tressina makes use of a similar idea of rapture through her flowing settings of selected verses from the *Song of Songs*. The melting soul that languishes of love is evidently an image that both Teresa and Tressina found useful in evoking Divine ecstasy.

Part of the reason liquid metaphors were so effective a tool for pious individuals desiring a closer, visceral connection with God has to do with how people of all classes and religions viewed their bodies. St. Teresa’s reliance on water as a central image was no coincidence. Her writings were intended to aid the devout in bettering themselves (that is, aligning the interior aspects of themselves with Christian spiritual and mystical beliefs) in order to become closer to God. What better metaphor to use then, than liquids, which, according to Galenic humorism and Early Modern medicinal teachings, not only filled the interior spaces of the body, but also directly affected sickness, health, personality characteristics, and emotions?

### **Galenic Humorism and Its Effects on Performance**

Humorism, the theory codified by the Greek physician and philosopher Galen in the second century C.E., holds that the body is made up of four humors: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. These regulate the body’s health, characteristics, and physiological make-up. The humors, when balanced according to each individual’s

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<sup>7</sup> St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Saint Teresa*, 126. Chapter 18 is central to both St. Teresa’s argument and to mine. There are numerous statements within these few pages that link water and the rapture. Indeed, this chapter, in describing sacred-erotic experience, sheds light on sixteenth-century ideas regarding ecstasy and sexuality in addition to liquids. One quotation in particular from this chapter connects all of these themes: “O my Creator, do not pour so precious a liquid into so broken a vessel. For You have seen already how often I spill it” (ibid., 123).

bodily constitution, assure a healthy body wherein all processes run smoothly. At times of humoral imbalance, the body shows symptoms of sickness. In this way, the body resembles a great vat of liquids and spongy organs which “slosh about”<sup>8</sup> in pools of mixed humors, absorbing what they need, assimilating and transforming these liquids into useable substances, and expelling any surplus. Problems, both psychological and physical, begin to occur when the humors become unbalanced and the humoral mix within the body becomes stagnant, clogged, and putrid.

The four humors can be loosely associated with the four elements (air, fire, earth, and water, respectively), and also the four seasons, the four stages of life, and four key personality characteristics: Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic, and Phlegmatic. Each humor has two qualities associated with it, and each quality in turn pertains to two different humors. Blood and phlegm are both moist humors, while yellow and black bile are dry. Blood and yellow bile are warm, while phlegm and black bile are cold. (See Fig. 1.)

The properties of the humor most prominent in the body affect a person’s personality. For example, a sanguine person is extraverted, social, and prone to “amatory passions,”<sup>9</sup> while a choleric person is energetic, passionate, and charismatic. Melancholics are creative, kind, and considerate, though also prone to bouts of grief. Phlegmatics are dependable, kind, and affectionate, though also prone to fear or astonishment.<sup>10</sup> (See Fig. 2.) Each person’s humoral makeup is different; thus, what is

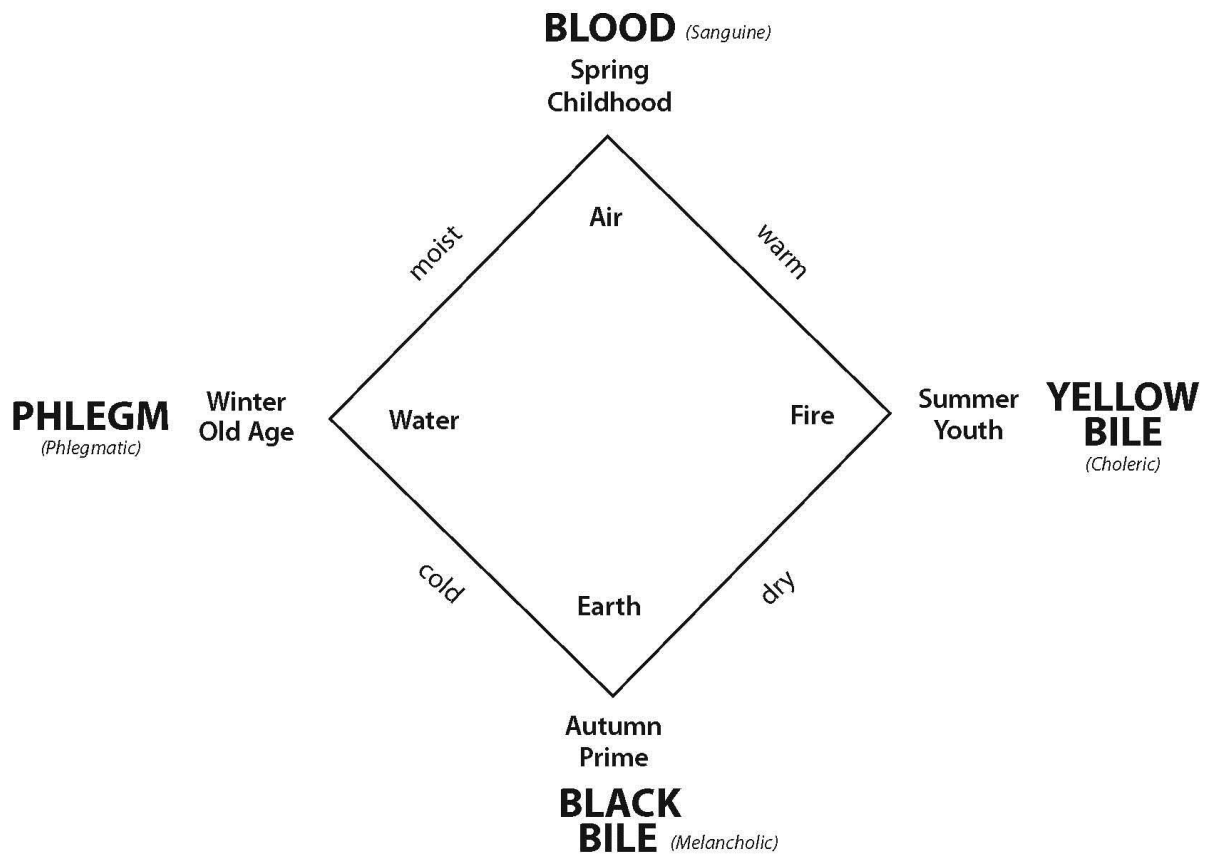
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<sup>8</sup> Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 39.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See also Mark Grant, *Galen on Food and Diet* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

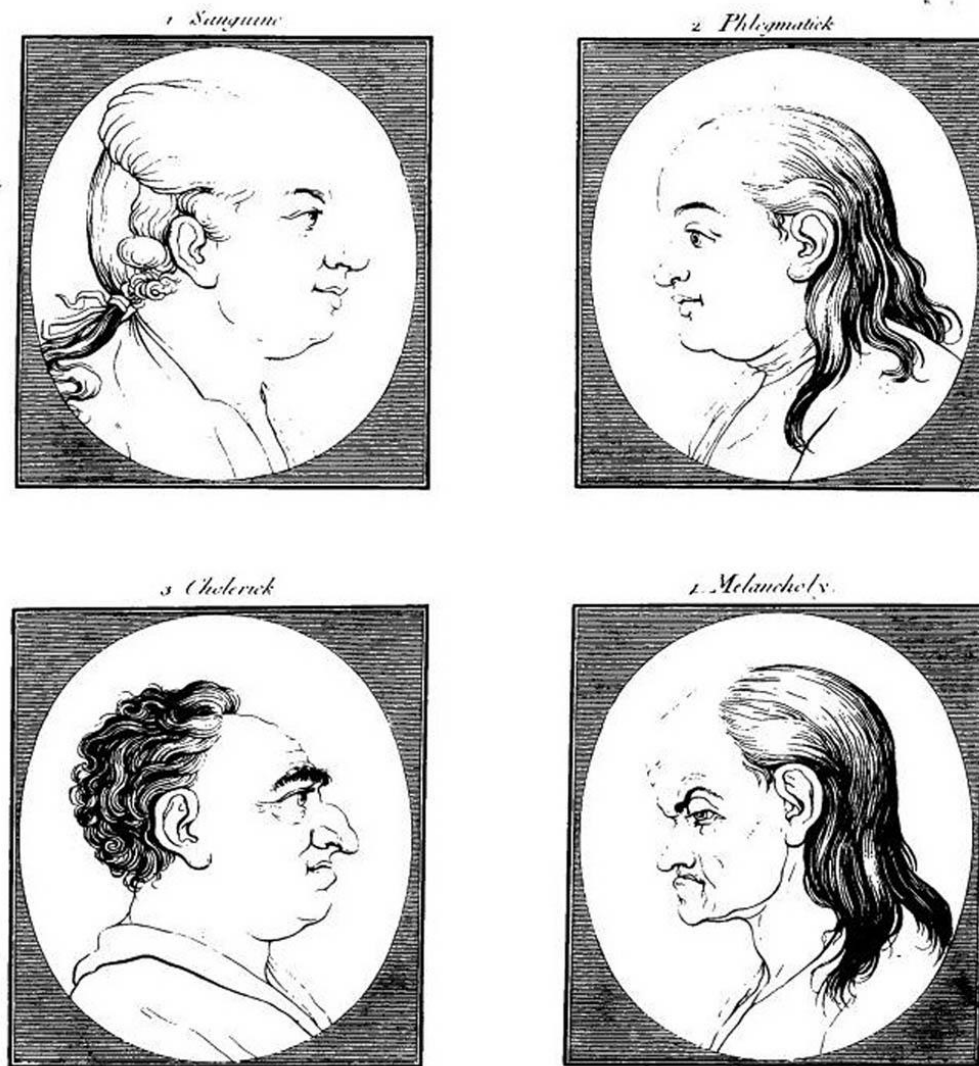
# The Four Humors



**Figure 1. Chart of the four humors, their characteristics, and correlating factors**

balanced in one person may for another be unbalanced. Some people are naturally Choleric, but when a Sanguine person starts to become Choleric, it is a sign of imbalance. Such a person would begin to take on the character and physical traits associated with an excess of Yellow Bile. Physical stature and weight also could be explained by the humors: for example, a fat person was viewed as having an excess of cold moisture, and thus too much phlegm.





**Figure 2. The Four Temperaments. From Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Essays on physiognomy, designed to promote the knowledge and the love of mankind* (London: Printed for John Murray, 1789). Originally published in German. Image occurs between pages 254 and 255. Public Commons.**

The renewed interest in ancient Greek and Latin philosophers, intellectuals, and authors in the Renaissance helped to re-popularize Galenic medicine. Renaissance physicians took Galen's works as a starting point and either sought to refute his ideas or champion and expand upon them. As a result, even though anatomists such as the sixteenth-century Andreas Vesalius began to disprove many of Galen's assertions (due

largely to the fact that by this time the dissection of human cadavers was becoming legal), in the seventeenth century diagnostic medicine still relied heavily on Galen's work.<sup>11</sup> Reprints of his works appeared throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries across Europe in Latin, German, Greek, and English, and bloodletting, a remedy that would drain the supposedly putrid, stagnant fluids from the body (one of the cures Galen most emphasized in his works), was still a popular form of treatment even in the nineteenth century. Thus, the image of the body as a stewpot full of sloshing liquids and spongy organs that dictate emotion, physical health, and human actions was common knowledge among all levels of seventeenth-century European society, much as the knowledge that "germs make us sick" is today.

Galen's influence continues to extend into present-day psychiatric medicine, especially in the areas of personality development and the psychobiology of personality. Psychiatrists and researchers still return to Galen's ideas about humors and their effects on specific personality characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

Humorism's influence on how people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries viewed their bodies cannot be overestimated, especially since the humors affected both physical and mental health. An imbalance of humors could either cause physical or

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<sup>11</sup> Robert M. Stelmack and Anastasios Stalikas, "Galen and the Humour Theory of Temperament," *Personality and Individual Differences* 12:3 (1991): 255–263. See also the introduction to Galen and A.J. Brock, *Galen On the natural faculties : with an English translation*, The Loeb Classical Library (London and New York: W. Heinemann and G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928); and Andrea Carlino, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> One modern source, particularly interesting in its format and indicative of the continued influence Galen has on contemporary thought, is a book review that imagines a dialogue between the book's author and Galen himself: "A Dialogue With Galen on Zuckerman's *The Psychobiology of Personality*," by Robert M. Stelmack and Cynthia Doucet, *Psychological Inquiry* 4:2 (1993): 142-146.

psychological issues or be caused by them.<sup>13</sup> Excessive emotion could be the cause of humoral imbalance, every bit as much as a physical malady – an immediate danger for actors, lovers, musicians, or anyone in a position to experience sudden changes in either embodied or projected emotion.

Since the humors controlled the passions and thus a person's actions, they affected all aspects of social and public life as well, especially in situations where a person sought to sway or alter another's personal emotions or intellect. For example, public orations, political speeches, or theatrical or musical performances all had the worrisome capacity to alter one's physical or psychological make-up. Especially dangerous was a performance that elicited a rapid emotional shift, for as Galen states in his *Art of Physick*, "Nature abhors all suddain changes."<sup>14</sup> Performers "discover[ed] the passions of the mind with their bodies," causing their own internal liquids to shift, possibly throwing them off balance in order to more effectively and believably act their roles.<sup>15</sup> The rapid emotional changes necessitated by a good performance, therefore, were actually "sudden, violent metamorphoses" within the physical body, as performers

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Burton, "Definition of Melancholy, Name, Difference," Part 1, Section 1, Member 3, Subsection 1 in *The Anatomy of Melancholy, What it is: With all the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, and Several Cures of it. In Three Maine Partitions with their several Sections, Members, and Subsections. Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically, Opened and Cut Up* (Oxford: Printed by Iohn Lichfield and Iames Short for Henry Cripps, 1621), 45.

<sup>14</sup> Galen and Nicholas Culpeper, *Galen's art of physick...: translated into English, and largely commented on : together with convenient medicines for all particular distempers of the parts, a description of the complexions, their conditions, and what diet and exercise is fittest for them* (London: Printed by Peter Cole, at the sign of the Printing-Press in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, 1652), 91.

<sup>15</sup> Roach, 32.

generated and embodied genuine emotions originating in a fictitious world.<sup>16</sup> The truly great performer could effect physiological changes at will through three key steps, outlined in John Bulwer's 1649 work *Pathomyotomia*: First, the person imagines the object or person. This internal image in turn moves the person's Appetite, which then causes the "mobile spirits" to "flie forth with stupendious obedience to their destined Organs."<sup>17</sup>

Even more perilous, however, was the belief that musicians and actors could through their performances effect physiological changes on audience members. As Joseph Roach says, the actor, his "passions irradiating the bodies of the spectators through their eyes and ears could literally transfer the contents of his heart to theirs, altering their moral nature. The exercise of this power entailed certain dangers."<sup>18</sup> Roach writes of actors in particular, but this same idea extended to musicians as well. Obviously, the ability of an actor or musician to effect physiological changes in audience members could have devastating implications, at the very least causing discomfort in the spectator, but also depression, or uncontrollable rage; it could incite violence, or make spectators physically ill.

Alternatively, a great performer's power over audiences was thrilling for audiences of theater or music, who during a performance could give themselves up entirely to the performers and in turn get to experience elation, joy, excitement, and

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<sup>16</sup> Roach, 42.

<sup>17</sup> John Bulwer, *Pathomyotomia or a Dissection of the Significant Muscles of the Affections of the Minde. Being an Essay to a New Method of observing the most Important movings of the Muscles of the head, as they are the nearest and Immediate Organs of the Voluntarie or Impetuous Motions of the Mind. With the Proposall, of a new Nomenclature of the Muscles* (London: Printed by W. W. for Humphrey Mosely, 1649), 21-23. Quoted in Roach, 44.

<sup>18</sup> Roach, 27.

suspense, but also helplessness, anger, and grief. In fact, an actor or performance was judged as ‘good’ relative to the extent to which audience members got swept up in the moment and experienced the actor’s passions in their own bodies. In other words, the best performers could transfer their own emotions, made possible by the changing ratios of bodily liquids, to the audience members, altering *their* physical bodies in turn.

A particularly excellent performance could put listeners in a type of trance or stupor, or could generate ecstatic experiences. Through his performances the renowned sixteenth-century lutenist Francesco da Milano “ravished” his audiences, and was able to manipulate the listeners’ bodies by dulling their senses “save that of hearing” for the duration of his performance. After inciting a kind of “ecstatic transport of some Divine frenzy,” da Milano would gently restore the audience’s bodies to a normal, though invariably altered, state. French tourist Jacques Descartes de Ventemille gives a detailed account of his experience in his travel diary:

He had barely disturbed the air with three strummed chords when he interrupted the conversation that had started among the guests. Having constrained them to face him, he continued with such ravishing skill that little by little, making the strings languish under his fingers in his sublime way, he transported all those who were listening into so pleasurable a melancholy that – one leaning his head on his hand supported by his elbow, and another sprawling with his limbs in careless deportment, with gaping mouth and more than half-closed eyes, glued (one would judge) to the strings of the lute, and his chin fallen on his breast, concealing his countenance with the saddest taciturnity ever seen – they remained deprived of all senses save that of hearing, as if the spirit, having abandoned all the seats of the senses, had retired to the ears in order to enjoy the more at its ease so ravishing a harmony; and I believe that we would be there still, had he not himself – I know not how – changing his style of playing with a gentle force, returned the spirit and the senses to the place from which he had stolen them, not without leaving as much astonishment in each of us as if we had been elevated by an ecstatic transport of some Divine frenzy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques Descartes de Ventemille, quoted in Pontus de Tyard, *Solitaire second ou prose de la musique* [1555], trans. Joel Newman, in “Francesco Canova da Milano” (Master’s thesis, New York University, 1942), 11. Quoted also in *Music in the Western World: A History in*

For de Ventemille, one of the most noteworthy aspects of his experience is da Milano's ability to exert control over and effect change on his audience's physiology. Da Milano effortlessly alters the listeners' humoral ratios, inciting a "pleasurable...melancholy" that physically changes the bodies of the audience members, both externally (one is "sprawling with his limbs in careless deportment") and internally (he is also "concealing his countenance with the saddest taciturnity ever seen"). The audience is completely and utterly at the mercy of the performer. Indeed, the author notes that they would all still be there today, enraptured and in a trance, if da Milano had not eased them back into themselves.

As Roach mentions, a common belief throughout the Renaissance and into the seventeenth century was that these emotional changes occurred in the physical air between the performers and the spectators. De Ventemille reminds us of this idea at the beginning of his account when he describes da Milano as "disturb[ing] the air." Medical theorists such as Robert Burton used Galen's theory of attraction, the longstanding idea of the *pneuma*,<sup>20</sup> to explain that spirits, becoming agitated by a person's passions and emotions, create a "wave of physical force" that rolls through the ether and affects the spirits of others.<sup>21</sup> Burton speaks of this "phantasie" of imagination which can "so imperiously command our bodies," and which "is of such force...that it can work vpon

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*Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Schirmer Wadsworth Group/Thompson Learning: Belmont, CA, 1984), 159-160.

<sup>20</sup> Galen describes the *Pneuma* as both breath (inspired air) and as a sort of vital spirit. *Galen's art of physick* says that the spirit "Taken in a Physical sense, is an airy substance, very subtil and quick, dispersed throughout the Body, from the Brain, Heart, and Liver, by the Nerves, Arteries, and Veins, by which the powers of the Body are stirred up to perform their Office and Operation," 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> Roach, 45.

others, as well as our selues.”<sup>22</sup> In a section entitled “Musicke a remedy”, he goes on to say, “the spirits about the Heart, take in that trembling and dancing aire into the Body, & are moued together, & stirred vp with it.”<sup>23</sup> Galen himself wrote that air “helps to engender both Vital and Animal Spirit,” “cools the Heart by Inspiration,” and “is the Author of Life, Diseases, and Death to mortal men and women.”<sup>24</sup>

Because stirring the passions required throwing off the equilibrium of humors, such an action necessitated a strong degree of self-control on the part of the performer so as not to succumb to physical disease or psychological malady, which only time or a trained physic could heal. Musicians and actors kept on hand a full range of emotions, including ecstasy, rage, passionate love, and devastating sorrow, and were able to access them quickly and easily. The true art in seventeenth-century performance stemmed from the level of restraint and self-control that a performer could wield. As Roach says, “to attain restraint, control over these copious and powerful energies, represents both artistic challenge and preventative medicine.”<sup>25</sup>

Musical performance, therefore, could pose certain humoral dangers, but when used properly, could also heal humoral imbalances. Burton cites music’s healing powers over melancholy, saying that music can “reviue the languishing Soule” and that it “ravisheth” it.<sup>26</sup> Fascinatingly, he asserts that music “will driue away the Divell himselfe”

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<sup>22</sup> Burton, “Of the Force of Imagination,” Part 1, Section 2, Member 3, Subsection 2, 127.

<sup>23</sup> Burton, “Musicke a remedy,” Part 2, Section 2, Member 6, Subsection 3, 373.

<sup>24</sup> Galen and Culpeper, 91.

<sup>25</sup> Roach, 52.

<sup>26</sup> Burton, “Musicke a remedy,” Part 2, Section 2, Member 6, Subsection 3, 372, 373.

and can make a “Religious man more Divine.”<sup>27</sup> Yet he still allows for the possible dangers of musical performance, saying that “diseases were either made by Musicke, or mittigated.”<sup>28</sup>

The performing arts, therefore, had the power to change the bodies and minds of all involved through manipulation of humors. In devotional contexts, the varying ratios of liquids could bring about heightened relationships with God, or alternatively, move a person to sin. It is scarcely surprising that the visual and literary arts took up the theme of bodily liquids as a metaphor for attaining Divine love.

### **Liquid Eros in Painting: The Case of the Breast**

St. Teresa was only one of many devout artists and authors using liquid metaphors to describe union and/or personal intimacy with God. The sacred liquids in question, besides water, include those that flow from the body: blood, tears, and breast milk.<sup>29</sup> Blood, notably the blood of Jesus, is the most celebrated of these three liquids, and therefore the most obvious link between the body and the Divine for us today. Tears and breast milk, on the other hand, both carry strong associations with women, and their sacred connotations are perhaps less obvious. Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, and various other women weep heavily below the crucifix after Jesus’ death, as well as in the days during which Jesus’ body lies in the tomb. Indeed, the various Marys are depicted mourning by the cross in countless works of art, poetry and music, including the oft-set

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<sup>27</sup> Burton, “Musicke a remedy,” Part 2, Section 2, Member 6, Subsection 3, 373-374.

<sup>28</sup> Burton, “Musicke a remedy,” Part 2, Section 2, Member 6, Subsection 3, 375.

<sup>29</sup> In the case of some authors and artists, semen and urine also find their way into the realm of the sacred erotic. See my discussion below on Crashaw and Donne. This theme is not just a seventeenth-century phenomenon; in the scope of modern 20<sup>th</sup> century art, see Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ*.



text “Stabat Mater dolorosa, juxta crucem *lacrimosa*, dum pendebat Filius” (emphasis mine).

Tears, however, are not specific to the female body, as is breast milk. The holy status of the Virgin Mary’s breast milk was a mainstay of Christian imagery throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The physical and spiritual nourishment that Jesus ingested with Mary’s breast milk allowed believers to view Mary and her life-giving breasts as a source of nourishment for them as well. That nuns thought highly of the spiritual symbolism of Mary’s breast milk can be seen in the last chapter of Federigo Borromeo’s *De ecstaticis mulieribus, et illulis*, which tells of one nun who revealed to Borromeo that she was lactating. Borromeo writes that she thought it was a miracle, but that he did not (“...ma penso che non fosse per niente un miracolo...si smetta, dunque, di parlare di miracoli...”).<sup>30</sup> He goes on to cite Aristotle’s work on physiology to assert that sometimes lactation could occur even in men, though the whole topic displeased Borromeo (“Quest’argomento...mi dà un senso di dispiacere”).<sup>31</sup> He concludes that the

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<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 40: “La fuoriuscita di latte nelle donne vergini,” in Book IV of Federigo Borromeo, *De ecstaticis mulieribus, et illulis* (1616), in *Da Dio a Satana: L’opera di Federico Borromeo sul “Misticismo vero e falso delle donne,”* trans. into Italian by Francesco di Ciaccia (Milano: Xenia Edizioni, 1988), 198.

<sup>31</sup> I must also point out the existence of a different line of thought in the seventeenth century of Jesus as a mother figure, indeed a mother capable of producing nourishing milk. One example of this arises in the poetry of George Herbert (1593-1633). See his “Lucus 34 (To John, leaning on the Lord’s breast)” (originally in Latin), wherein he writes:

You won’t really hoard the whole  
Breast for yourself! Do you thief  
Away from everyone that common well?  
He also shed his blood for me,  
And thus, having rightful  
Access to the breast, I claim the milk  
Mingled with the blood. . .  
(lines 1-7)

Quoted in Rambuss, 37.

nun in question suffered from an imbalance of humors (“...se soffrono di disturbi fisici per malattie di umori”).<sup>32</sup>

Margaret Miles uses Medieval and Renaissance paintings, sculptures, and writings to demonstrate what she calls the “secularization of the breast” that took place in Europe from 1350 to 1750.<sup>33</sup> She describes the close link between visual representations of holy women, such as the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, and the role of women in European society, noting that in times where the breast was highly regarded as a source of nourishment and loving care, women were accorded a highly regarded social position. However, as the breast came to be seen in a medical light and also as an erotic object, women became increasingly subject to medicalization and sexual objectification.

Prior to the seventeenth century, painters and sculptors often depicted the Virgin Mary offering a breast to the baby Jesus, though it generally was not realistically portrayed; often it came out of her shoulder, or was not proportional to the rest of her body. (See Fig. 3.)

As developments in science and artistic style moved towards more realistic representation of bodies, devotional depictions of holy women became increasingly erotic while still maintaining their religious and scriptural significance. As Miles states, “Paintings of the Virgin and other saints and scriptural female figures with exposed breasts require that we reevaluate the common modern assumption that “erotic” and

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 40: “La fuoriuscita di latte nelle donne vergini,” in Book IV of Federigo Borromeo, 198.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *A Complex Delight: the secularization of the breast, 1350-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 4.



**Figure 3. *The Divine Mother (Galaktotrophousa)* c. 1600, Anonymous. Collection of Dr. Amberg-Herzog, Kölliken, Switzerland. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.**

“religious” images are opposite and opposing.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed in the seventeenth century the erotic and the devotional coexisted within the same works of art, just as they did in musical compositions. (See Fig. 4.)

Mary’s body thus offered a parallel to Jesus’ in that her life-giving breasts, like Jesus’ side wounds, had the power to feed and nourish a believer. Marian imagery such as this likely struck a resonant chord with nuns at the time. Indeed, the nuns must have felt a strong connection with both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene in their grief over Jesus’ death and the subsequent disappearance of his corporeal shell. Mary Magdalene in particular was seen as “a model for nuns” in how they themselves might or

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<sup>34</sup> Miles, 14.

should feel deprived of Christ's presence,<sup>35</sup> while the Virgin Mary must have served as a sympathetic intercessor from whom they could take Divine nourishment.



**Figure 4. *Lucretia* (1622), Leandro Bassano (1557-1622), Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice (photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice/Art Resource, NY).**

### **Liquid Eros in Baroque Texts: Blood, Milk, and Tears**

While liquid erotic visual imagery tends to require interpretation, seventeenth-century erotic religious poetry is much more straightforward in its association between bodily fluids and spiritual fervor. A number of religious poems and musical texts make explicit references to blood, milk, sweat, and tears. The anonymous text of Chiara Margarita Cozzolani's concerted duet *O quam bonus es* (1650) overtly rejoices in the nourishment that springs from the blood of Christ's side wound and from Mary's breasts. Indeed, the protagonist has a difficult time deciding which liquid to experience first, eventually alternating between the two:

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<sup>35</sup> Robert L. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 168.

O me felicem, O me beatum.  
Hinc pascor a vulnere,  
hinc lactor ab ubere,  
quo me vertam nescio.  
In vulnere vita, in ubere salus,  
in vulnere quies, in ubere pax,  
in vulnere nectar, in ubere favum,  
in vulnere júbilus, in ubere gaudium,  
in vulnere Jesus, in ubere, Virgo.

O happy, blessed me.  
Now I graze from His wound,  
now I nurse at her breast,  
I do not know where to turn next.  
In His wound is life; in her breast, salvation;  
in His wound, quiet; in her breast, peace;  
in His wound, nectar; in her breast, honey;  
in His wound, rejoicing; in her breast, joy;  
in the wound of Jesus; in your breast, O Virgin.

Later on in this text, the desire of the protagonist becomes even more fervent:

Sanguis amabilis, nectare dulcior, manna jucundior.  
Lac exoptabile, melle suavior, favo nobilus.  
Te amo, te diligo, te cupio, te volo, te sitio, te quæro, te bibo, te gusto.

O lovable blood, sweeter than nectar, happier than manna.  
Desirable milk, sweeter than honey, more refined than the honeycomb.  
I love you, I seek you, I desire you, I want you, I thirst for you, I seek you, I drink you, I enjoy you.<sup>36</sup>

This connection between sacred liquids, physical bodies, and spiritual nourishment was also present, and still is today, in the Eucharist. In taking communion, devout nuns, priests, and laity, as well as Biblical figures, absorb(ed) the blood and flesh of Christ into their own bodies – a sacred union of both physical and spiritual nourishment.<sup>37</sup> Eucharistic symbolism is exceeded by the much more graphic imagery of

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<sup>36</sup> Translation by Robert L. Kendrick. In Chiara Margarita Cozzolani, *Motets*, ed. Robert L. Kendrick (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, Inc., 1998), xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>37</sup> St. Catherine of Siena is reputed to have lived for years on only the Eucharist, provided to her through daily Communion.

Divine/physical nourishment that we see in Richard Crashaw and other poets. For these authors and others, Christ's side wound was a major source of inspiration as a place to enter his body and draw food, blood, and nourishment as well as redemption.<sup>38</sup>

### **Liquid Eros in Music**

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while artists and poets were weaving a web of connections among bodily liquids, pleasure, and the sacred, musicians and composers were also busy developing a set of musical practices that not only referred to sacred eroticism, but demonstrated it outright, opening the door for the more spiritual and devout performers among them to become closer to God via performance, and for listeners to do the same through "inner participation" as well (see Chapter 2).

There were two main avenues of approach for composing music in the liquid-erotic vein: choice of text, and choice of harmonic and melodic relationships to that text. For those nuns who did not have regular mystical encounters (surely the majority), the attraction towards bodily and emotional union with God remained strong, and these women continued to strive for closer intimacy with the Divine. For this reason, religious texts such as the erotically charged *Song of Songs* became immensely popular throughout Catholic Europe, including among nuns. For example, Tressina used texts from the *Song of Songs* in two of her four surviving compositions: *Anima mea liquefacta est* and *Vulnerasti cor meum*. Cozzolani, perhaps the most famous nun

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<sup>38</sup> A large body of mystic poetry and literature focuses on the erotically spiritual acts of kissing and sucking Christ's wounds and the subsequent union that could take place through the mixing of bodily fluids. Rambuss has analyzed these works in the context of homoeroticism in *Closet Devotions*; a similar case could be made for female authors and composers using Marian imagery.

composer of her time, wrote numerous pieces using texts that celebrate the corporeal bodies of both Mary and Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

Tressina's *Anima mea liquefacta est* is both textually and musically awash with liquid imagery. *Anima mea* is scored for a trio of low female voices (Altus primus, Altus secundus, and Tenor) and organ bass line (Basso per L'Organo), an unusual combination among contemporary motets, but in line with her other pieces. The combination of low voice and organ is an interesting one; the direction to use an organ suggests that these pieces were meant for use within the chapel itself, or in a parlor or other private room if the convent had a portative organ. The use of low voices suggests a smaller, more intimate performance, regardless of the performance space. As Richard Wistreich notes, "What little we know about singing by adult women in the early sixteenth century suggests that in private chambers...it was the lower part of the voice which was preferred, conforming to a general aesthetic which favoured softer, deeper voices to 'shrill' or 'raucous' ones, in polite conversation as well as in singing."<sup>40</sup> For smaller spaces, the ideal vocal quality for both men and women was a soft voice singing in a lower vocal range. For women especially, singing within these parameters demonstrated modesty and respectability – important attributes for a nun. These ideas contrast sharply with the virtuosic treble aesthetic that Susan McClary terms "soprano as fetish" (see my Introduction), and demonstrate the degree of ambivalence that existed with respect to the female vocal range.

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<sup>39</sup> See Chiara Margarita Cozzolani, *Motets*; and Kate Bartel, "Portal of the Skies: Music as Devotional Act in Early Modern Europe" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Richard Wistreich, "Reconstructing pre-Romantic singing technique," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 183.

Elizabeth Wood's notion of the Sapphonic voice as a female voice that defies categorization is a useful concept when thinking about much of this repertory, whose frequent low voicing calls for a re-conceptualization of female vocal range and timbre. Although Wood's Sapphonic voice comprises a powerful and extended range that merges seamlessly "butch and femme...male and female" and the tessitura of this repertory is generally fairly narrow, I believe that the prevalence of lower registers in this music, together with the transgressive space occupied by the nun's voice (see Chapter 1), the attraction nuns' voices held for the public, and the sacred erotic affect of both music and text, justify calling the (lower) nun's voice Sapphonic.

Though the low tessitura of this piece would have been appropriate for informal musical settings within the convent walls, the stipulation of organ for the continuo line could imply a slightly larger, more formal setting, such as the sanctuary. And since all four of Tressina's extant pieces are written for lower female voices – a tessitura that ranges approximately an octave and a half, between f# and b' for altos, and an octave range between e and e' for tenor<sup>41</sup> – and include a *Basso per L'Organo*, it is probable that there were several nuns in residence at Santa Maria in Aracoeli who could sing in a lower range. For performance during a church service, all of these women likely had powerful enough voices to project over the organ and through the grating between the *coro delle monache* and the interior space of the church. Having numerous talented singers with low vocal ranges was probably not that rare among convents; indeed, there is evidence of nuns who were accomplished tenors and basses.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix D for a complete chart of ranges and an explanation of my pitch notation.

<sup>42</sup> Wistreich, 259 n. 19: "At the convent of S. Vito, Ferrara in 1621 there were, among other distinguished composers, singers and instrumentalists, 'Cassandra Pigna tenori buoni, Alfonsa



For the most part, Tressina demonstrates in this piece a mastery of late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century musical convention, a product of her musical education from Leon Leoni. It was in Leoni's fourth book of motets that Tressina's four extant works were published. By 1622, Leoni was an old man with decades of musical and compositional experience, and it is therefore not surprising that Tressina's style draws from a range of compositional techniques from both the latter half of the sixteenth century, such as staggered entrances, imitative motives, and a fairly stable harmonic palette, and newer conventions, such as periodic meter changes and a strophic layout. The fact that Tressina's music is entirely conventional gives us contextual information that describes her cultural milieu and demonstrates how closely tied her compositions were to the general knowledge and practices that formed her society.

The textual mimesis that Tressina employs in this piece is straightforward and uncomplicated; her melodic lines imitate the movement (and perhaps the sound, as well) of flowing water. During the first 32 measures, phrases melt into one another, cascading down the staff like a waterfall, spilling from voice to voice over a descending octave. These watery characteristics are paired with the first line ("Anima mea liquefacta est") and intensify on the word *liquefacta*, which for more than half of its nine iterations is set to pairs of descending fusae.

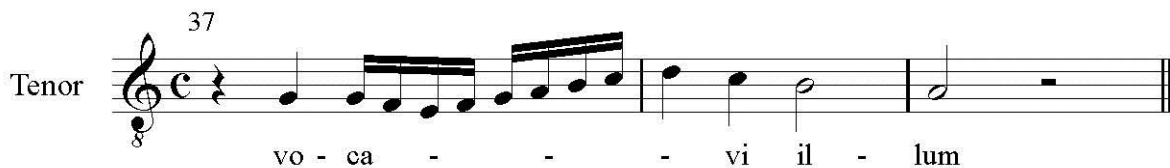
The image shows a musical score for a Tenor voice part. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody begins on a G4 note and descends stepwise through F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, and F3. The lyrics are: "li - que - fac - ta est, li - que - fac - ta est". The word "liquefacta" is set to a pair of descending fusae (half notes) in each of its two occurrences. The score ends with a double bar line.

**Example 1: “liquefacta”**

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Trotti di basso singolare, e di stupore’. Marcantonio Guarini, *Compendio storico dell’origine, accrescimento, e prerogative delle chiese, e luoghi pii della città, e dioscesi di Ferrara* (Ferrara, 1621), p. 376.” Elizabeth Upton also examines vocal range in *Music and Performance in the Later Middle Ages*, concluding that the entire concept of vocal range is a cultural construct.

One other motive, also repeated in each voice part, further emphasizes this piece's connection to liquid imagery. The word "vocavi," which means "I call out," bubbles up from the depths of the singer's voice like a spring, similar to St. Teresa's third stage of prayer.



**Example 2: "vocavi"**

This use of music as a mimetic extension of the text was common during this time and is highly effective. The texts of motets were central to a given piece and served multiple purposes, including instruction and as a means towards heightened spirituality, as authors as early as St. Augustine argued. Therefore, music that successfully emphasized and built upon the words was an important part of devotional experience, especially in religious communities whose members knew these texts by heart.

In Tressina's setting of *Anima mea liquefacta est*, each line of poetry presents an affect whose emotional content corresponds with the characteristics of one or two of the four humors. I say one or two because in humoral theory, the varying combinations of humors produce markedly different qualities than just the single "pure" humoral form.<sup>43</sup> Many of the humors I have affixed to the various lines of this piece are basic and uninflected, though a few are aggregates. All result in various species of melancholia.

I have decided to view this piece through the lens of melancholy primarily because the text describes a love-sickness that Renaissance doctors would have labeled

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<sup>43</sup> A metaphor for these combinations that many modern-day readers might appreciate is the zodiac; the motions of the planets in combinations with one's primary sun sign (Taurus, Virgo, Libra, etc...) give rise to myriad combinations that affect one's personality characteristics.

as melancholy. This is the same type of melancholy that de Ventemille ascribes to da Milano's performance – a “pleasurable melancholy.” Melancholy is particularly interesting among the four humors, as any of the other humors can inflect and influence one's melancholic state. These combinations produce complex aggregates of humoral effects. As Robert Burton, author of the wildly popular *Anatomy of Melancholy*<sup>44</sup> says,

this naturall Melancholy is either Simple, or Mix't...according to mixture of those naturall humors amongst themselues, or foure vnnaturall adust humors, as they are diversly tempered and mingled...From Melancholy adust ariseth one kinde; from Choler another, which is most brutish: another from Fleame, which is dull; & the last from Blood, which is best.<sup>45</sup>

Melancholy mixed with blood (the “best” kind, according to Burton) results in sanguine melancholy, or love-sickness, which is caused by passionate yearning and amorous desires. Sanguine melancholy is particularly important in *Anima mea liquefacta est* because the nature of Tressina's selected text is overtly melancholic in this vein – most notably the last line: “Tell my Beloved that I languish of love.”

The piece begins with overlapping, descending melodic lines that mimic flowing water. The first entrance, in the altus primus line, begins on a g', ending in the next measure a fourth lower, on d'. The second entrance, by the altus secundus, is identical to the first except in the duration of the first g' and begins just as the first motive is ending. In measure four, the first alto begins its descent from d' down to g, imitated slightly differently by the second alto. The tenor voice, picking up on this descent, begins its motive – an imitation of the primary motive – a fourth lower, on d'. The tenor ends its

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<sup>44</sup> First published in 1621, Burton's multi-volume work was reprinted at least nine times in its first 55 years and is still in print today.

<sup>45</sup> See Burton, “Of the Matter of Melancholy,” Part I, Section I, Member 3, Subsection 4, 50-51.

iteration of “liquefacta est” with falling fusa pairs that come to rest on g. (See Example 3.)

**Example 3: *Anima mea liquefacta est*, measures 1-11**

Coupled with the sensation of descent is one of liquid. The lines flow into one another, overlapping, with no beginning and no end. After the first iteration, each subsequent entrance seems to grow out of the previous line. The overtly liquid nature of these initial eleven measures depicts the first line of text – *Anima mea liquefacta est* – and corresponds humorally with phlegm, the cold, moist humor (linked to water in Figs. 1 and 2).

Measures 12 through 17 (set to “ut dilectus meus locutus est” – “when my love spoke to me”) depict black bile, the humor of melancholy and of earth. The harmonies shift subtly into a new modal framework as the text introduces a new person: “my love.”

The voices suddenly enter a period of momentary stasis made possible by a stable homophonic texture that contrasts with the instability of the previous watery motives. The fluid lines flow gently up to the wall of homophony, which rises from the texture in a new modal space and in a new meter (3/2). (See Example 4.)

The two iterations of “locutus est” return to the opening mode, and to duple time, though in performance the two-measure change to triple meter has little to no actual effect beyond a hemiola. During these measures, while the part-writing is conventional, the brief shift to the soft hexachord during the first iteration of “locutus” is nonetheless melancholic in affect.

12

Altus primus  
ut di - lec - tus me - us lo - cu - tus est, lo - cu - tus est

Altus secundus  
ut di - lec - tus me - us lo - cu - tus est, lo - cu - tus est

Tenor  
ut di - lec - tus me - us lo - cu - tus est, lo - cu - tus est

Basso per l'organo

**Example 4: *Anima mea liquefacta est*, measures 12-17**

To perform this affectual change from phlegmatic to melancholic, the performers must pull themselves out of the depths to which they had cascaded individually and come together in unison. Thus, not only must they shift affects through humoral change within their bodies, they must do it together as one person, breathing at the same time and entering on the same tempo, even though the tenor solo in the three measures previous might have included a small rubato to signify the end of the first, phlegmatic section.

Since the changes in performed affect had the potential to physically alter the humoral balance of singers, instrumentalists, and other performers, who in turn might effect similar changes on audience members, such an event occurring simultaneously among three performers (or four, if the bass line was not played by one of the singers) must have been quite compelling.

The homophony does not last long, however. After six measures the singers drop out completely – the first and only time this happens in this piece. A continuo solo beginning in measure 18 and cadencing on the downbeat of measure 22 showcases a contrasting affect, and consequently a contrasting humor. The solo, featuring a repeated anapest rhythm over a steady ascent from *g*” to *f* counteracts the initial languid, liquid descents and the melancholy stasis in the vocal lines. Yellow bile, opposite phlegm in Figure 1, represents fire, summer, and youth in contrast to the watery phlegm associated with winter and old age. The new rhythm, full of energy and optimism in its driving movement upward (as opposed to the downward movement of the earlier motives) points to the warm fiery dryness of yellow bile.



the line's tessitura<sup>46</sup> and in the fact that there are no words – indeed no human voices. In Roman Catholicism, God speaks to the people through intercessors and interpreters: saints, priests, the pope, and other holy individuals. Nuns therefore would have readily welcomed the idea that God might speak *through* someone else in a medium requiring a degree of interpretation, such as a continuo solo. Thus, in convent repertoire, the voice of God could be generated by an instrumental solo and also through the bodies of the nuns themselves (as in some of the duets I discuss in Chapter 2), allowing for multiple types of musical interpretations of doctrine to exist simultaneously.

The 'voice of God' appears three more times in this piece when the voices and the continuo line are in complete homophony: measures 12 – 17 and 30 – 32 (both "ut dilectus meus locutus est"); and the joyful 3/2 section near the end, measures 57 – 69 ("nuntiate dilecto meo"). Only when the text mentions the Beloved do the voices and the continuo line merge rhythmically, thus depicting the singers' union with the Divine.

After the bass solo, which reenergizes the piece by bringing a new, warm, fiery affect, the voices enter once again with material similar to the beginning. In a symmetrical framing gesture, the singers repeat the first line ("Anima mea liquefacta est") and return to their flowing, descending motives. This second iteration is more emphatic: this time, each new voice now interrupts the one before at the height of the phrase, entering during the falling fusa pairs. Additionally, all three voices sing the liquid motive on the word "liquefacta" for even more emphasis.

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<sup>46</sup> In operas and oratorios from the Baroque era, a significant number of wise, father-like characters or characters in positions of authority sing in the bass range. Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) scored the role of Jesus for bass in his *St. John Passion*, and in J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Jesus is a bass as well. In Schütz's *St. Matthew Passion* Jesus is a Baritone. In his oratorios, Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674) was particularly fond of scoring God as a bass; see *Jonas*, *Ezechias*, and *Abraham and Isaac*. Carissimi also set other authority figures as basses, such as Balthazar, Christ, Abraham, and King Solomon.

Measures 33 – 36 (“dilectus meus”) create an appropriate transition between the first half of the piece, which aurally depicts the speaker’s passion and ecstasy, and the second half, which focuses on searching for the lost lover. While liquid is a main theme throughout, the watery imagery changes at this point from a gently flowing descent to waves of sound washing over singers and audience alike. Regardless of where in the convent this might have been sung, it is likely that the space was highly resonant, replete with stone walls, arched ceilings, and minimal furnishings. In such a space, these dynamic few measures would briefly immerse the audience, “drowning” them in sound, as the speaker’s soul melted, or perhaps drowned in love. (See Example 6.)

The phrase cadences on a semibreve in measure 36 – a natural point of rest that allows both the singers and the audience a moment to breathe after the immersion. In the following measure, rapid semifusa runs begin to bubble up from the depths of the voice in each part, as the watery imagery once again changes slightly from immersing ocean waves to a freshwater spring. (See Examples 2 and 7.)

33

Altus primus  
di-lec-tus me - us, di - lec-tus me - us lo - cu - tus est

Altus secundus  
est, di-lec-tus me - us lo - cu - tus est

Tenor  
est, di - lec-tus me - us lo - cu - tus est

Basso per l'organo

56 #

**Example 6: *Anima mea liquefacta est*, measures 33-36**



For all three singers, this motive begins near the bottom of the tessitura, dips to the lowest pitches scored for these lines (g for the two alto lines, and e for the tenor), only to rise swiftly up the scale a minor seventh, and then an octave. This demonstration of fluid motion offers a chance for virtuosity within the confines of an octave, fittingly over the word “vocavi” (“I called out”).

Altus prius 44  
vo - ca - - - vi il - lum

Altus secundus 43  
vo - ca - - - - vi, vo - ca - vi

**Example 7: Two further iterations of “vocavi”**

As the singers take turns “calling out,” as it were, the other voices reply with “et non respondit mihi” (“and he did not answer”). At first, after the initial “vocavi,” the various iterations of the response are spread out over five measures. As the other voices “call out,” the response section shortens to two measures, their entrances cutting off those already sounding. By measure 49, all three voices are singing “et non respondit mihi” at the same time, though not homophonically.

The theme of seeking and (often) not finding runs through a great deal of Catholic mythology, including the *Quem quaeritis* discussed in the last chapter. Just as the protagonist searches for the Beloved in the *Song of Songs*, the women, after finding the sepulcher empty, search for Christ. Similarly, Christians (and members of other

monotheistic religions) participate in the discourse of “seeking God”, or finding themselves “lost in the wilderness.”

While the musical setting for “vocavi” is both phlegmatic (due to the bubbling, spring-like nature of the setting) and sanguine (the music rises and the text expresses hope) in affect, the text of “et non respondit mihi” is melancholic and full of yearning. Each time this line appears, the motive rushes forward with *fusae* towards a goal – a fifth below the starting pitch – but must pause on the penultimate pitch for a minim before coming to rest on the final pitch. This sudden notated *ritardando*, in emphasizing the second scale degree, creates a sense of longing that mimics the longing in the text. The second time this occurs, the second alto line includes a suspension that further augments the sensation of desire.

These measures, 37-51, layer two different humors on top of one another: phlegm and black bile. In humorism, the mixture of phlegm and black bile produce phlegmatic melancholy, a form of melancholia that Burton fascinatingly attributes to “Maides, Nunnes, and Widowes”<sup>47</sup> – in other words, women not having sex. Phlegmatic melancholics, as Burton describes, are prone to weeping, fascination with water, and vivid dreams of drowning.

The meter change in 57 marks a longer tenor solo, repeated in measures 63 – 68 by the upper voices. Once again, the 3/2 meter appears for the words “nuntiate dilecto meo” (“tell my love”). Calling out for the Beloved had no effect, and so the protagonist has switched to the imperative, and is imploring someone to pass the message to the

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<sup>47</sup> See Burton’s Part 1, Section 3, Member 2, Subsection 4, whose title is “Symptomes of Maides, Nunnes, and Widowes melancholy” (page 202 of the 1632 edition). Burton hypothesizes that the association between phlegmatic melancholy and these groups of women was likely due to the women’s reproductive systems, as such women were childless, menopausal, and/or celibate. This section was added after the first edition. This section is an addition to the original 1621 publication; it appears in the 1632 edition.

Beloved. This particular line is paraphrased, not directly quoted, from the *Song of Songs*. Chapter 5, verse 8 says, “Adiuvo vos, *filiae Ierusalem*: si inveneritis dilectum meum, quid nuntietis ei? ‘Quia amore langueo’” (emphasis mine). The speaker in the Bible is addressing the daughters of Jerusalem. Thus, the nuns themselves would have been implicated in both sides of this scenario: as the individual who searches for her Beloved, and as the daughters of Jerusalem, who may be able to reach Him.<sup>48</sup> Seeking *and* finding occur simultaneously in this message of love and suggest union with the Divine, this time intensified by the Trinitarian reference in the triple meter. These factors demonstrate both visually and aurally how intimately connected the speaker and the Beloved are, and how they function with one mind within a Trinitarian framework.

57

Altus prius

Altus secundus

Tenor

Basso per l'organo

63

A.I

A.II

T.

B.

6 6 6 #

**Example 8: *Anima mea liquefacta est*, measures 57-68**

<sup>48</sup> See my Introduction, where I explain the idea of the convent as an ‘earthly Jerusalem’ and the nuns as angels.

The piece ends in sanguine melancholy – the melancholy of love. Indeed the text here states, “I languish of love.” Short melismas occur on the word “amore” in the penultimate bars, and the harmonies hearken back to the fluid lines of the beginning. Whereas the music set to the first line consistently descends, here it falls initially, but rises at the end. As a result, each line finishes the phrase higher than it began. The vocal lines are not as spread out as before. Rather, the points of imitation occur much closer together, at one point resulting in parallel thirds on the word “amore.”<sup>49</sup>

71

Altus primus  
(mo - re) lan - gue - o, a - mo - re lan - gue - o

Altus secundus  
qui - a a - mo - re lan - gue - o, a - mor - re lan - gue - o

Tenor  
qui - a a - mor - re lan - gue - o

Basso per l'organo

**Example 9: *Anima mea liquefacta est*, measures 71-end**

The liquid harmonies, flowing and often paired off in intimate parallel thirds, intensify the erotic nature of the text. Perhaps the single most important factor, however, in demonstrating the ecstatic potential of this piece is performance.

In closing, instead of listing and analyzing numerous performance possibilities, or reiterating the effects of performance on musicians and audience members alike, as I described earlier, I am going to develop the scenario that began this chapter, and in so

<sup>49</sup> Parallel thirds, one of several techniques common in the seventeenth century, were used to depict intimacy, and in some cases to incite arousal. One example of this technique in context can be found in Cozzolani’s *O quam bonus es* (1650), the text of which is given earlier in this chapter. Parallel thirds occur in particular when the two voices rapidly and breathlessly sing “O me felicem, O me beatum,” a motive that returns periodically throughout the piece. Parallel thirds are also used to depict intimacy in Alessandro Grandi’s *Anima mea liquefacta est* (1614).

doing, demonstrate possible conditions and outcomes that might have been associated with the performance of this piece. Given the conditions and contexts described in this chapter, I believe that this is a plausible account of nuns employing music as both a private form of devotion and as a means of expressing creativity and feminine autonomy. Such speculative re-creation allows me to vividly illustrate specific aspects of nuns' music making as well as provide answers to questions of performance logistics, textual significance, and musical meaning.

*Back in the choir room, the sisters commence their rehearsal. The organ and lute intone their first notes, and donna Maria Teresa, the highest alto, begins to sing, swelling gently into each sustained note. Shortly thereafter, donna Emilia, the second alto, enters, increasing the intensity of her entrance as Teresa's statement fades away, suspending the musical line until Teresa once again takes the reins, sliding gently into the D that Emilia is sustaining. The two rest briefly on the unison pitch before breathing together and moving on.*

*In the sixth measure, Tressina's strong yet nuanced tenor voice enters the tapestry, fleshing out the triad and making Teresa and Emilia shiver slightly at the beautiful harmonies coursing through their bodies. For a moment, Teresa is unsure which of the chord's pitches she is singing, so seamlessly are they blending their voices into one sound. All three singers begin to sense a distinct yearning from deep within themselves, and Emilia feels tears begin to grow at the corners of her eyes. The singers' bodies begin to relax and open up; the humors inside of them are responding to the liquid lines they are singing.*

*The short vocal motives and statements that dovetail and intertwine with one another leave the singers feeling breathless, as if they were gasping for air, overtaken by the love and beauty pouring out of their bodies. They bring their lines to a close and rest as the organ begins its brief solo. The organist feels her pulse quicken as she pushes her line forwards and upwards, sequencing nearly an octave before falling back down to a low G. As Tressina begins to sing the second iteration of “Anima mea” over the organ’s G, donna Maria Teresa prepares for her entrance. She eases into “Anima mea,” two octaves above the bass line, pressing Tressina’s line between the two. As she swells into her suspension on the first syllable of “anima”, she realizes that her line has become inseparable from Tressina’s as she renews the cycle of “Anima mea liquefacta est.” Donna Emilia’s line will follow a similar model, creating an unbroken string of suspensions and cascading couplets as her iteration of the first line of text creates patterns of suspension and resolution with Maria Teresa’s line.*

*The low tessitura of the vocal parts creates further intimacy amongst the singers, for their voices are softer and slightly grainier at the lowest pitches. The nuns lean towards one another to tune, and to match one another’s tone, especially at the crucial junctures where voices trade off on a unison pitch. For brief moments, it feels as though their voices are all one voice, their bodies are all one body.*

*As they reach the second half of the piece, the singers throw themselves into their syncopated, descending motives over “dilectus meus” and their rapid phrases that rise from the depths of their ranges over “vocavi.” They use catch-breaths in the short rests, and breathe deeply during the longer ones. They take turns imitating one another’s entrances, style, and breathless quality. The waves of sound wash over all four musicians as their yearning and excitement deepen.*

*By the last line, Teresa's desire for God is so strong she feels the interior of her throat tense in pain, holding back tears as her f-natural rises to an f-sharp on "languero" in the final cadence, her suddenly pinched voice wavering as she tries to keep from going sharp. All the musicians feel this change back to the hard hexachord and the modal space of the opening, and though not unexpected, the harmonies seem to open the heavens. As the sound dies away, the singers and organist are silent and still, swooning individually in God's love as they recover from the physical intensity of performing Tressina's newest piece. They can feel their humors begin to stabilize, their heart rates to slow.*

*Tressina, glancing at the smiling face of the servant girl tending the bellows, suggests that the next time they rehearse this piece donna Noella, the sister in charge of the young girls boarding in the convent, might want to bring the educande in preparation for the upcoming feast of the Assumption. Perhaps by listening to the music and watching the nuns perform, the girls would more fully understand the love of the Blessed Mother, and feel God's love within their own bodies. For isn't that one of music's ultimate purposes? To directly connect humans with the Divine?*

## Chapter 4.

### Sacred Bodies of Saints and Singers: The Vernacular Compositions of Sulpitia Cesis

Of the 23 compositions published by Sulpitia Cesis in 1619, 15 (nearly two thirds of her overall published output) are scored for double choir: CATB/CATB. One further piece, *Parvulus filius*, is scored for 12 voices (CCAATB/CCAATB). The required number of performers and amount of time needed to rehearse such large-scale compositions suggest a performing context grander than simply private entertainment within the cloistered areas of the convent. It seems likely that the nuns of S. Geminiano performed these double choir pieces for a large audience within the context of the mass and perhaps as part of feast-day celebrations.

It is therefore interesting to note that three of these 16 large-scale pieces are set to an Italian text, and not a Latin one: *Io son ferito sì*, *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice*, and *Peccò Signor*. A fourth, smaller, Italian-language piece also appears in Cesis's publication – a 5-part *madrigale spirituale* (scored CAQTB) called *Il mio più vago Sole*. Though the nuns almost certainly spoke Italian amongst themselves (few of them knew Latin beyond that needed to perform the Divine office), compositions by nuns in Italian are fairly rare. So the questions arise: for what purpose did Cesis write these pieces? And why use the vernacular instead of liturgical Latin? The logical reason for presenting a musical piece in the vernacular is so that everyone, from the choir nuns to the servant nuns to nuns' families and friends to the congregated devout, would be able to understand the words – a primary consideration for feast-day celebrations that drew large crowds. *Io son ferito sì* was written for the feast day of Saint Francis, and *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice* is dedicated to Saint Catherine of Alexandria; both were major saints, so it is likely that the nuns would have been performing these pieces for large



crowds of devoted laity. In such a situation, the more people who could understand these new texts, the better.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in his Rule, Saint Augustine gives primacy of place to the meanings of sung texts: “When you pray to God in psalms and songs, the words spoken by your lips should also be alive in your hearts.”<sup>2</sup> The use of the vernacular would have allowed even more people to internalize the message of the words, especially during a city-wide festival.

Another consideration is the author of the texts. Two of the four Italian pieces - *Io son ferito sì* and *Peccò Signor* – bear the inscription “*dalla medesima*” (“by herself” or “by the same one”) in one of the partbooks, indicating that Cesis herself wrote the texts.<sup>3</sup> If Cesis was not schooled enough in Latin to compose her own poetry, it falls to reason that she would write instead in her native language. *Io son ferito sì* is in Italian out of necessity; it is a parody of a secular madrigal made famous by Palestrina, and Cesis cleverly inverts the meaning of the original text. The fact that she ventures to compose texts at all demonstrates the kind of boldness that she exhibited in her daily life. (Several examples of this are provided in Cesis’s biographical sketch in the Introduction.)

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<sup>1</sup> G.B. Spaccini’s chronicles recount a major festival in Modena in 1596 where a great procession was held that wended throughout the city, stopping at San Geminiano, among other places. See my Introduction for a fuller treatment of this passage. For the full quotation, see Appendix A. G. B. Spaccini, *Cronaca Modenese* (1588-1636), vol.1, ed. G. Bertoni, T. Sandonnini, and P.E. Vicini (Modena: G. Ferraguti e C.: 1911), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Rule of Saint Augustine, Part II: “Community Prayer”, Item 3. See *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, trans. Raymond Canning (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1996), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Although it is possible that she composed the texts for the remaining two Italian compositions, I feel it is unlikely, given that she took credit for two of the texts. Perhaps another nun in Cesis’s convent wrote the texts for her. Nun composer Isabella Leonarda also wrote some of the texts she set, though this occurred sixty years after Cesis’s publication.

As rhetorical skill and creativity were assumed to be exclusive to masculine *virtù*<sup>4</sup>, few women composed and published poetry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and those who did were typically either courtesans or *commedia dell'arte* actresses. Indeed, contemporaries of *commedia* actress, poet, and intellectual Isabella Andreini described her in masculine terms, one concluding that she was in fact a man.<sup>5</sup> Andreini composed poetry, performed on stage, and published her literary works under a dual guise: on the one hand moral steadfastness, virtue, and chastity (she was married and was known not for *en travesti* performances, but for playing a young female lover),<sup>6</sup> and on the other hand, masculine intellect.<sup>7</sup> Cesis, not in a position to publicly portray masculine qualities, nonetheless would have been able to use her moral status as a nun to help her maintain respectability as a woman venturing to compose poetry for publication.

Noteworthy in Cesis's own poetry and in the other Italian texts she set is an emphasis on corporeality: through meditations on the physicality and torture of saints, through penitential practices among the devout, and through metaphorical devotional

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<sup>4</sup> See Anne Elizabeth MacNeill, "Music and the Life and Work of Isabella Andreini: Humanistic Attitudes Toward Music, Poetry, and Theater During the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1994), 189.

<sup>5</sup> Ericius Puteanus wrote in a 1609 letter to Andreini, "Truly in my opinion you supply a defect of Nature, Andreina, who are not only capable of male glory but in fact an equal partner in it. Nay more, abandoning your own sex, you transform yourself by the labor of virtue into a man. Now if the word virtue [*virtus*] derives from the word man [*vir*], then you are more fruitful than a man, you who, though a woman, bring forth the fruit of virtue. But if the word man [*vir*] derives from the word virtue [*virtus*], then the reward of the better name, I mean the name of man, is due to you who perform the offices belonging to the better name. Therefore you are a man." See MacNeill, 190. Originally in Latin, translated by MacNeill.

<sup>6</sup> See Nina Treadwell, "Re-Staging the Siren: Musical Women in the Performance of Sixteenth-Century Italian Theater" (PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2000), 106.

<sup>7</sup> MacNeill, 395 and 7.

images. In this chapter I examine Cesis's four Italian-language pieces with respect to the bodies they portray, beginning with the bodies of saints in *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice* and *Io son ferito, sì*, and concluding with the bodies of the devout, represented in performance by the bodies of the singing nuns themselves in *Peccò Signor* and *Il mio più vago Sole*.

### **Saintly Bodies**

The bodies of saints occupy a dual space that is both public and private. The physicality of saints' bodies, more so than the bodies of any others save Jesus and Mary themselves, play out on a grand stage and loom large in the lives of the devoted, who not only meditate on these holy bodies, but sometimes seek to conform their own bodies to those of the saints (and by extension, Jesus) through ascetic practices such as flagellation or fasting.

Upon achieving sainthood, the bodies of saints enter the public domain. Painters and sculptors depict them according to their own interpretations, hagiographers tell the stories of their lives using their own preferences and viewpoints, poets compose verses about their deeds and their bodies that make their physicality come alive, and their relics become an important cultural, spiritual, and economic industry. The bodily torture and violent deaths of saints are the most celebrated aspects of their lives and afford artists and authors a vast trove of blood, pain, anguish and suffering upon which to elaborate. Furthermore, from about 1450 on, the physicality and humanity of saints opened the door for varying degrees of eroticization; much as Christ's wounded, suffering body is eroticized in Renaissance and Early Modern art, music, and poetry, so too are the bodies of the saints.

At the same time, the saints are symbolic of private devotional practices; each devout Catholic has his or her own patron saints according to birthday, social situation, occupation, geographical location, and any number of other factors. Much like private devotional practices centered on Jesus or the Virgin Mary, saintly devotions can include elements of sacred eroticism and a desire to unite with the holy bodies of these men and women.

Much like the embodiment of angels I discuss in Chapter 2, the embodiment of saints in sacred performances can give rise to the merging of ritual and theater, even allowing the performer to personally experience an ecstatic state. The personal contemplation of saints in visual art can also heighten one's connection with the Divine, especially if the image overtly celebrates the physicality (or eroticism) of the saint. A famous example would be Michelangelo's portrayal of St. Catherine of Alexandria on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The strength and raw power of this image continues to stir controversy nearly 500 years after its unveiling.

Saint Catherine was the patron saint of as many as 30 different groups of people, including philosophers, students, unmarried girls, and nurses. Her intellect, eloquence, rhetorical skill, and unwavering faith made her an ideal candidate for worship, especially among groups of educated women religious. She was also a master evangelist, converting the 60 sages, as well as an empress and an imperial commander, all sent by the Roman Emperor Maxentius to debate her; all of them were gruesomely executed by Maxentius after their conversions.

Michelangelo, working closely with Pope Paul III, originally painted St. Catherine nude, with hanging, bare breasts and bulging muscles, bending over the broken wheel on which she was tortured. The decision to paint her nude was easily justified, as

numerous literary and visual accounts of her life depict her as being completely disrobed during her tortures.<sup>8</sup> Still, Michelangelo's treatment of her as muscular, powerful, and unabashed (as Michelangelo's nudes tended to be), caused much dispute among church leaders; so much so that after the death of Pope Paul III, and following the Council of Trent, Pope Pius IV hired Danielle da Volterra to cover two dozen nude images, including that of St. Catherine, by re-painting them with clothing or drapery.<sup>9</sup> This re-painting is what visitors to the Sistine Chapel see today.<sup>10</sup>

As art historian Cynthia Stollhans says, Michelangelo's treatment of St. Catherine was "provocative": the position of her body, bent forward, "breasts dangling...strengthens the symbolism of her martyrdom, and it is her martyrdom that earned Catherine her place among the other saints and biblical figures that we see in the heavenly realm with Christ. They are models of Christian living for those who view the fresco."<sup>11</sup> This visual provocation contains a double-entendre (in Stollhans's words, a "visual pun")<sup>12</sup> that further enhances the sacred erotic aspect of St. Catherine's image: In the original painting, the naked St. Catherine, patron saint of nubile, young women,

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<sup>8</sup> Stories exist of her nakedness in other situations as well. In a late 14<sup>th</sup>- or early 15<sup>th</sup>-century English version of St. Catherine's story, she is undressed by no less than the Virgin Mary, who prepares her for baptism by a holy hermit: "I [Virgin Mary] my-self shal of her clothis strepe and make her al naked, redy to bis thyng." Quoted in Cynthia Stollhans, "Michelangelo's Nude Saint Catherine of Alexandria," *Woman's Art Journal* 19:1 (Spring-Summer, 1998): 26-30. From the Arundel Ms. nos. 20, 168, and 396, in the British Museum, published in John Capgrave, *The Life of St. Katherine of Alexandria* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1893), 237.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig von Pastor in his 1923 book *History of the Popes* mentions that in 1543, Pope Paul III "appointed a special superintendent of the preservation of the paintings in the Sistine, the Sala Regia and the Cappella Paolina." Quoted in Stollhans, 29.

<sup>10</sup> The only reason we know exactly what Michelangelo painted is through the various copies friends of Pope Paul III had made to demonstrate their support, alliance, and friendship.

<sup>11</sup> Stollhans, 29.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



**Figure 1: St. Catherine and her Wheel in the *Last Judgement* (1536-1541) by Michelangelo. St. Catherine is clothed here; this is how she appears today.**



**Figure 2: St. Catherine in her original form, copied by Marcello Venusti, 1549. Capodimonte Museum, Naples.**



bends forward in front of St. Blaise (bending over her with his combs of martyrdom), patron saint of marriageable men.

Another image of St. Catherine from 1588, *St. Catherine's Torture on the Wheel* by Jacopo Tintoretto, also emphasizes the saint's body. The great spokes of broken wheels surrounding her add a visceral element of danger and heighten her vulnerability, while her meagerly covered body adds an erotic element. The angle of her body is such that we, as viewers, look up at her, and spy a nipple peeking out from under her arms, which are held out in prayer. By "hiding" her nakedness, Tintoretto effectively increases desire in the viewer.



**Figure 3: Detail of *St. Catherine's Torture on the Wheel* (1588) by Jacopo Tintoretto**

While Tintoretto's version of St. Catherine is much less muscular than Michelangelo's body-builder depiction, she still has obvious muscle definition, most notably in her upper body. Her mental and emotional strength are eroticized and translated here to physical strength.

### **Saint Catherine Manifested in Music**

Cesis musically depicts these characteristics so salient in Michelangelo's and Tintoretto's works in her own *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice*. The text of this piece celebrates Saint Catherine with devotional poetry characteristic of the early seventeenth century:

Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice  
che di tenace fed'armat'il petto  
sprezzand'ogni diletto  
e'l fral viver amico  
vint'ha'l mondo la carn'e'l suo nemico.  
Godi dunque felice, anima bella, in mezz'al divin choro  
del celeste tesoro il ben di cui bramar maggior non lice.

This is the beautiful and saintly conqueror  
who, having armed her breast with tenacious faith  
Despising any delight  
and friend of fragile life,  
Vanquished the world, the flesh and her enemy.  
Therefore rejoice happily, o lovely soul, in the midst of the Divine chorus  
Of celestial treasure, the goodness, more than which one should not desire.

This poetry shows St. Catherine to be a strong, courageous woman who knows what she wants and is unafraid to go after it. Words and phrases such as “vincitrice,” “armat'il petto,” and “vint'ha'l mondo” unabashedly place her actions within a context of holy war, thus augmenting her position of power, much as Michelangelo did as he painted her naked, muscular body in the Sistine Chapel. In selecting these words, Cesis strengthens Catherine's position not simply as an influential saint, but as a mighty *woman*.



Cesis's text makes no mention of St. Catherine's gifts of convincing argument and rhetoric. Instead, it actively *demonstrates* this rhetoric. Cesis, in setting these words to music, makes a convincing argument for not only St. Catherine's importance, but also for self-identification with Catherine. This self-fashioning, wherein Cesis aligns her own rhetorical talents with those of a holy saint, strengthens Cesis's own image as a gifted composer and musician.<sup>13</sup>

With this piece, Cesis celebrates St. Catherine's beauty and physical strength, drawing from a general understanding of the saint based on her hagiography. Through her choice of poem Cesis invites us to make a parallel between herself and St. Catherine: both women are smart and creative, able to guide emotion and transform the spirit through God-given ingenuity and inspiration.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Cesis was gifted with words as well as with music; her deft inversion of the text of *Io son ferito, ah! lasso* (which I discuss below) demonstrates her inventiveness with language. It is possible that Cesis was the author of the text of *Quest'è la belle santa vincitrice* as well, which, if true, would further cement a parallel between Cesis's and St. Catherine's eloquence.

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<sup>13</sup> Cesis was not the first nun to use St. Catherine for her own purposes. In 12<sup>th</sup>-century Norman England, the nun Clemence of Barking reconceptualized St. Catherine's life in Old French for a contemporary Medieval readership. See Tara Foster, "Clemence of Barking: reshaping the legend of Saint Catherine of Alexandria," *Women's Writing* 12:1 (2005): 13-27. As Foster says, Clemence "creates a link between herself, a cloistered virgin who deftly manipulates words, and Catherine, the consecrated virgin with immense rhetorical prowess," thus drawing a "parallel between herself and her heroine that lends authority to her own use of words and situates her as the legitimate inheritor" of Catherine's verbal dexterity. See Foster, 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Tara Foster mentions that Clemence of Barking's "discursive virtuosity reminds us that if Catherine's use of words is authorised by God, so is Clemence's." Similarly, Cesis's musical (and perhaps textual) talents stem from God. See Foster, 20.

Cesis employs Catherine’s story and significance as a means to “continue the legacy of female speech” that Catherine began.<sup>15</sup> Both the text and the music are authoritative in tone. The opening music is harmonically stable and centered on C, while the text begins in an introductory manner: “This is the beautiful and saintly conqueror.”

The musical score consists of five staves. The first four staves are for Cantus I, Altus I, Tenor I, and Bassus I. The fifth staff is for C.I. (Cantus II). The lyrics are: "Que - st'è la bel - l'e san - - - - - ta vin - - - - - ci - - - - - tri - - - - - ce". The music is in a simple, authoritative style with a clear harmonic center on C.

**Example 1: *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice*, measures 1-11**

This commanding tone, in both the text and the music, may be as close as a nun could get to the masculine ‘voice’ that MacNeill describes. While Isabella Andreini had the fame and cultural clout to write poetry in the masculine first person and thereby securely wield rhetorical power, Cesis had to find other means of demonstrating rhetorical prowess, such as in tone, textual composition, timing, and text setting.

<sup>15</sup> Foster, 13.

The first half of the text describes St. Catherine in the third person. The second half shifts to directly addressing the saint herself in the second person form of *godere* (“to rejoice”) – *godi*. The use of the familiar allows the nuns to approach St. Catherine, if not as an equal, then as one whose position is attainable to them. By addressing St. Catherine as *tu*, nuns could draw strength and power from her while also positing St. Catherine as their equal. One gets the feeling that the nuns want to live vicariously through St. Catherine, asking her to enjoy heaven for them until they themselves can get there.

The initial metatheater encapsulated in Cesis’s appropriation of St. Catherine’s rhetorical power gives way to one further instance of metatheater, which occurs during the line of text that mentions the “Divine chorus,” or “divin choro” in measure 71. On the word “choro,” the cantus of Choir I rises stepwise over the interval of an octave up to a high A, the highest note in the piece. This is the first and most dramatic instance of this high A,<sup>16</sup> which the cantus emphasizes via alternations between the A and a G or G#. The third A marks the end of this phrase.



who have dedicated their lives to God, here sings about a choir of similarly holy beings, in a piece glorifying a holy woman with strong rhetorical prowess. Just as Cesis uses her compositional skills to self-identify with St. Catherine, she sets up her choir to make a similar self-identification with the “divin choro.”

Beyond positing her own choir as a “divin choro,” Cesis depicts St. Catherine’s physical and mental strength. In *Quest’è la bell’e santa vincitrice*, every singer sings the entire text, and the two choirs sing the material antiphonally, resulting in a performance where nearly every statement is repeated, sometimes numerous times. It is not only the text that undergoes multiple repetitions; many of the echoes between the choirs feature musical repetitions as well. These repetitive techniques add stability to a performance, as singers easily trade off lines and audience members can comfortably anticipate what might come next in a given section. Interestingly, Cesis cleverly varies the manner of repetition, forcing the listener to remain alert.

The various types of echo that come together in this piece – antiphonal, textual, and acoustical – allude to St. Catherine’s strength by offering sonic stability and support. Just as multiple pillars may hold up the ceiling of the church, multiple iterations of the music and text support the import of the words and link the rhetorical power of composer and saint.

Sometimes the repetitions are uncomplicated and antiphonal, and sometimes not. At the beginning of the piece, things are fairly straightforward. Each choir sings the first two lines in alternation, resulting in two full iterations. During the following line, however, a series of echoes appears during the text “sprezzand’ogni diletto” (“despising any delight”):

Cantus I  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni - di - let - to, o - gni di - let -

Altus I  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - to, o - gni di - let -

Tenor I  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - to, o - gni di - let -

Bassus I  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - to, o - gni di - let -

Cantus II  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - to,

Altus II  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - to,

Tenor II  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - to,

Bassus II  
sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - to,

C.I  
to, o - gni di - let - to, sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

A.I  
to, o - gni di - let - to sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

T.I  
to, o - gni di - let - to, sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

B.I  
to, o - gni di - let - to, sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

C.II  
dil - let - to, sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

A.II  
dil - let - to, sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

T.II  
dil - let - to, sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

B.II  
dil - let - to, sprez - zan - d'o - gni di - let - - to

**Example 3: Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice, measures 28-39**

As in a true echo, the iterations get progressively shorter, before elongating once again for the statement of the entire phrase by the entire chorus. While the text and rhythm echo exactly, slight harmonic alterations add interest.

The next line, “e’l fral viver amico,” (“and friend of fragile life”) repeats in full three times after Choir II initiates it, once again in a straightforward antiphonal style.

“Godi dunque felice” (“therefore rejoice happily”) also enjoys four iterations, though when both choirs repeat this phrase, the timing is unexpected and a disconnect emerges between musical and poetic stress. This disconnect may serve to underscore the shift in textual address to the Saint herself. Rhythmically, the accents on “*Go-di/dunque fe/lice-*” hint at a triple rhythm, though the musical line remains in duple, resulting in a cross-rhythm. Cesis plays further with this sensation of metrical ungrounding by having Choir I’s response in measure 60, the strong syllable “go-” begin on a weak beat. A little further on, she places the strong initial syllable of “anima bella” on weak beats as well.

Whereas most of the echoes between Choir I and Choir II occur after a complete statement of the phrase, here in measure 60 Choir II jumps the gun and starts its phrase just two semiminims after Choir I begins, resulting in an odd, though brief, compacting of the text over a homorhythmic musical statement. This rapid-fire layering intensifies the message through back-to-back repetition of “godì” and “dunque”, with all eight lines coming together on the word “felice.”

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Cantus I  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go - di dun -

Altus I  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go - di dun -

Tenor I  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go - di dun -

Bassus I  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go - di dun -

Cantus II  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go -

Altus II  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go -

Tenor II  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go -

Bassus II  
Go - di dun - que fe - li - ce, go -

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C.I  
que, dun - que fe - li - - ce a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - la

A.I  
que, dun - que fe - li - - ce a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - la

T.I  
que, dun - que fe - li - - ce a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - la

B.I  
que, dun - que fe - li - - ce, a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - la

C.II  
di dun - que fe - li - - ce, a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - la

A.II  
di dun - que fe - li - - ce, a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - - la

T.II  
di dun - que fe - li - - ce, a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - la

B.II  
di dun - que fe - li - - ce, a - ni - ma bel - la, a - ni - ma bel - la

**Example 4: *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice*, measures 56-66**

In measure 63, the choirs, still in 8-part homophony, sing the same text – “anima bella” – twice in rapid succession. The heightened intensity given to this line (“therefore enjoy happily, beautiful soul”) in effect make the singers seem as though they are falling over themselves in eagerness to speak directly to the Saint. After this line, the choirs calm down again, and for the most part return to singing their phrases antiphonally, one after the other, until the end of the piece. This reassertion of uniformity and control parallels the final line of text (“the goodness, more than which one should not desire”), which suggests that while rejoicing about celestial treasure is fine, one should not overdo it.

Another feature of this piece that musically supports a theme of strength is the prevalence of straight semiminims and minims set in 4 and 8-part homorhythm. The paucity of weaving and interlocking polyphonic lines and the preponderance of row after row of stemmed notes give the visual appearance of an army marching in rank, as each choir always begins and ends each statement together, and most statements are largely homorhythmic within each choir. The singers themselves would not have seen this phenomenon, as they would have been singing from partbooks; but everyone, both singers and listeners, would have heard and felt the strong metronomic pulsations present in the majority of this piece. Phrases that, due to their repeated homorhythmic treatment either within one choir or across both choirs, would have been extremely intelligible to the audience include “sprezzand’ogni diletto” (“despising any delight”), “e’l fral viver amico” (“and friend of life”), “godi dunque felice, anima bella” (“therefore go happily, beautiful soul”), and bits of “in mezz’al divin choro” (“in the midst of the Divine chorus”) and “il ben di cui bramar maggior non lice” (“the goodness, more than which one should not desire”). The last 24 measures slow down harmonically and



82

Cantus I  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior non

Altus I  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior non

Tenor I  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior non

Bassus I  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior non

Cantus II  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior non

Altus II  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior non

Tenor II  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior

Bassus II  
il ben di cui bra - mar mag - gior non

90

C.I  
li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

A.I  
li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

T.I  
li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

B.I  
li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

C.II  
li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

A.II  
li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

T.II  
non li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

B.II  
li - ce, mag - gior non li - - - - ce.

**Example 5: *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice*, measures 82-end**

metrically, and broaden out into an expansiveness that aligns with the text, which here speaks of “celestial treasure” and the goodness of God’s love.

### **Space at San Geminiano**

The expansiveness of this setting found a counterpart in the performance space to create an atmosphere of strength and power. The double choir setting, as well as the periodic built-in echoes, point towards a larger performance space than the other pieces I have discussed thus far, such as the church itself. In the church of S. Geminiano, the nuns would all have been singing from the same room (the nuns’ choir), though Cesis probably separated the choirs as much as space allowed within that room. Still, the live acoustics of the church and the probability that the nuns’ choir was situated in a loft of some kind, above the main space and looking down at the proceedings, likely resulted in a performance with two main characteristics: 1) The reverberation in the church would have augmented the echoes musically built in to the piece, with various iterations of “Quest’è la bell’e santa vincitrice” resounding over and over again; and 2) to the audience, the music, sung as if the musicians were themselves in heaven (“This is the beautiful and saintly conqueror”), would be descending from above their heads.

The nuns at S. Geminiano likely combined their instrumental and vocal forces to perform this piece, as at least two, if not three or four, of the vocal lines fall below the typical female vocal range.<sup>17</sup> Spaccini notes that in 1596 S. Geminiano had “every type of instrument,” specifically mentioning Faustina Borghi, who played *cornetto* and organ, and Cesis herself, who in addition to her talents at composition played the lute

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<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, each part at the beginning is marked “*alla quarta bassa*” (a fourth lower), an instruction that might have resulted in even more instruments.

exceptionally well.<sup>18</sup> The combination of instruments and voices would have sonically filled the sanctuary, especially at the end of the piece, where all eight parts come together in jubilation.

### ***Io son ferito, sì, Parody, and Stigmata***

While Cesis glorifies St. Catherine's strength of both mind and body in *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice*, in *Io son ferito, sì*, she celebrates and eroticizes the bleeding wounds of St. Francis. Also for double choir, this piece is unique in Cesis's surviving repertory in that it is a parody: in specific, of Palestrina's *Io son ferito, ahì lasso*. Cesis very cleverly inverts the original text (by an anonymous poet), and in so doing, alters its meaning from secular to sacred eroticism. Cesis's piece, told through the perspective of Saint Francis upon receiving the stigmata, retains enough of the original poem, melody, and counterpoint of Palestrina's immensely popular setting to be instantly recognizable to audiences. Indeed, the parody would not have worked if the listeners, nun and lay alike, had been unable to recognize the source of the material.

Palestrina's madrigal for five voices (published in 1561) was one of his most well known; its influence can be seen in its multiple versions and parodies in the decades following its publication. Not only did Palestrina himself re-use the material in a mass,<sup>19</sup> other composers such as Banchieri, Orazio Vecchi, and Lassus also used this piece as a subject of musical parody, in masses as well as in madrigal comedies. Instrumental divisions on Palestrina's madrigal by Bassano, Rognoni, Dalla Casa, and Bovicelli, for

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<sup>18</sup> Spaccini, vol. 1, 34.

<sup>19</sup> The mass in question is *Petra Sancta* (1600). It is possible that Cesis knew the mass version as well as the madrigal. *Ave verum corpus*, a motet once attributed to Palestrina but whose composer is currently unconfirmed is an ornamented version of this piece. My thanks to Candace Smith for drawing my attention to these parodies.

example, would have only served to increase its popularity. The extent of Palestrina's influence on Cesis can be seen in her table of contents, which lists the title of this piece as *Io son ferito, ahi lasso* – the same title as Palestrina's madrigal – even though the words “ahi lasso” do not appear in Cesis's version.

Though it is unlikely that the audience, sitting in a convent church, would have believed initially that they would hear the entirety of Palestrina's very secular *Io son ferito, ahi lasso*, they almost certainly would have thought of the erotic song. Thus, Cesis's humor becomes apparent as she presents a double entendre, racy on the one hand, and spiritual on the other. I can imagine winks and conspiratorial smiles playing throughout the room at the start of the performance.

Cesis's juxtaposition of secular and erotic texts within convent walls and her subsequent eroticization of St. Francis's stigmata again contribute to a pre-existing artistic tradition: St. Francis in ecstasy was a main theme among painters at the turn of the seventeenth century, and images of him laid back in a swoon, eyes closed, and often in the presence of an angel, were depicted by Caravaggio (1571-1610), Morazzone (1573-1625), and Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1649), to name a few. (See Figs. 4-6.)

Caravaggio's version is the most overtly erotic of the three pictured here, in part due to the homoerotic undertones; both the angel and St. Francis are beautiful young men, and the angel is not only gazing lovingly at St. Francis, but has tucked his fingers under St. Francis's belt. The other two paintings, remarkable in their similarity, depict ecstasy moving into St. Francis through the medium of music. In both the Caravaggio and the Morazzone, the experience has laid St. Francis prostrate: ready, as it were, to be penetrated both literally and figuratively by God's grace. That Cesis contemplates St.



**Figure 4: *St. Francis in Ecstasy* (1595) by Caravaggio**

Francis's ecstasy in music adds further weight to the theme of erotic penetration. The experience of music is necessarily penetrative, as sound waves physically enter our ears. The musical penetration in this piece correlates with and in essence re-enacts God's penetration of St. Francis, assisting in possible erotic-ecstatic experiences among the singers and audience members.

Cesis's text skillfully alters the typical themes of unrequited love: suffering, desperation, and emotionally damaging yet invisible wounds, to represent their opposites: the love flowing between Saint Francis and God, the sweetness of physical pain that leads to greater spiritual awareness, and wounds that are both visible and a source of delight.



**Figure 5: *The Ecstasy of St. Francis* (1615) by Morazzone**



**Figure 6: *St. Francis of Assisi Comforted by a Cherub with a Violin* (circa 1628/30) by Gioacchino Assereto**

**Palestrina's *Io son ferito, ah! lasso*:**

Io son ferito, ah! lasso  
e chi mi diede accusar pur vorrei,  
ma non ho prova;  
e senz'indizio al mal non si da fede:  
ne getta sangue la mia piaga nuova.  
Io spasm'e moro; il colpo non si vede.  
La mia nemica armata si ritrova.  
Che fia tornar a lei crudel partito,  
che sol m'abbia a sanar chi m'ha ferito.

I am wounded, alas,  
and I want to accuse her who wounded me,  
but I have no proof;  
without evidence of evil, no one will believe it:  
nor does my new wound pour forth blood.  
I shiver and die; the blow cannot be seen.  
My armed enemy regroups.  
What good would it do to return to her – cruel fate  
because only she who wounded me can heal me.

**Cesis's *Io son ferito sì*:**

Io son ferito sì ma chi mi diede  
accusar non vò già se ben ho prova:  
cinque piaghe nel corpo ne fan fede  
che versan sangue. E della piaga nova  
io non spasm'è non moro. E pur si vede,  
il mio nemico ben si trova  
ma di chiodi d'amor, ò bel partito,  
che sanato m'ha quel he m'ha ferito.

I am wounded, yes, but I do not wish to accuse  
the one who has done this to me although I have proof:  
five wounds in my body which pour blood testify to this.  
And from the new wound I do not suffer or die.  
And yet it can be seen my enemy is well-armed,  
but with nails of love, o what good fate,  
for he who wounded me has healed me.

The text/music relationship in Cesis's piece must be regarded from two different angles: the meaning of the text with respect to its musical setting (as autonomous from Palestrina's work), and the textual and musical similarity, or parody, between Palestrina's work and Cesis's work, creating situational meaning through juxtaposition.

These relationships are not mutually exclusive of one another, and both types of relationships can be analyzed in a single line. For example, Palestrina’s setting of “crudel partito” (“cruel fate”) has a thin yet piercing texture, full of suspensions and dissonances. Cesis, in completely inverting the overall import of the poem, changes “crudel partito” to “o bel partito” (“o what good fate”). Her setting of “o bel partito” is musically joyful, with a thick, eight-part texture and major chords moving in fifths (F, C, G, C).

111

Cantus  
cru - del par - ti - to

Altus  
(a) lei cru - del par - ti - to, che

Tenor I  
cru - del par - ti - to, che

Quintus  
lei cru - del par - ti - to

Bassus  
lei che

**Example 6: Palestrina’s “crudel partito”, measures 111-119**

The form of Cesis’s motet alternates between fidelity to Palestrina’s original and demonstrations of her own musical creativity. Cesis develops a musical texture conducive to textual clarity to hold her audience’s admiration of her new material juxtaposed with Palestrina’s. In places where the two texts are most similar (in terms of words in common, not meaning), Cesis uses Palestrina’s entrances, though sometimes she assigns different voice parts to the various lines. However, Cesis uses Palestrina’s entrances as a point of departure; generally, after the first iteration of such lines, Cesis composes her own endings.



98

Cantus I  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to,

Altus I  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to,

Tenor I  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to,

Bassus I  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to,

Cantus II  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to, o bel par - ti - - to

Altus II  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to, o bel par - ti - to

Tenor II  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to, o bel par - ti - to

Bassus II  
ma di chio - di d'a - mor o bel par - ti - to, o bel par - ti - to

**Example 7: Cesis's "o bel partito", measures 98-106**

During lines of rewritten text that have few words in common with the original, Cesis highlights such changes homophonically with her own composition (often during the second iteration of a phrase), such as during “ma chi mi died’accusar non vò già” (“but I do not wish to accuse the one who has done this to me”) beginning in measure 26, and “ma di chiodi d’amor” (“but of nails of love”) in measures 98-100. (See example 7.)

In the analyses that follow, I begin with the parodies – the lines of music (and often text) that are most similar syntactically (though often with opposite meanings) – and conclude with the settings of entirely new musical lines that are paired with completely rewritten text (again, with meanings generally opposite the text of Palestrina’s madrigal).

Musically the two pieces begin in an identical manner: the first tenor opens with three repeated notes, at which point an altus voice enters a fourth higher in imitation, followed by the cantus, and several measures later, the bassus. The main difference between the two versions at the beginning is the fact that Palestrina’s text, with the elision of “ahi” at the end of “ferito” (fer-ri-to/ahi las-so), contains one more syllable than Cesis’s text. This seemingly minor difference alters Cesis’s cadence. Instead of aligning the musical and textual cadences as Palestrina does (on the second syllable of “lasso”), Cesis separates her musical and textual cadence, making the musical line end on “Io,” as the tenor repeats the first line of text.

The image displays two musical staves for Tenor I. The top staff, labeled 'Tenor I', shows the beginning of Palestrina's piece. It starts with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a '1' above the first measure. The notes are: a half note G4, a half note A4, a half note B4, a half note A4, a half note G4, and a whole note F4. The lyrics are 'Io son fe - ri - to,/ahi las - so'. The bottom staff, also labeled 'Tenor I', shows the beginning of Cesis's piece. It has the same notation as the top staff for the first five measures. The notes are: a half note G4, a half note A4, a half note B4, a half note A4, a half note G4, and a whole note F4. The lyrics are 'Io son fe - ri - to si, Io'. There is an '8' below the first measure of the bottom staff.

**Example 8: Palestrina’s Tenor (top) compared with Cesis’s Tenor I, measures 1-5**

While this first instance, in the tenor I line, seems to be more musically awkward than meaningful, the reason for this change is easier to see in the three voices that enter following the tenor’s initial entrance. Whereas Palestrina makes a falling half-step on the sighed “ahi lasso” (“alas”), demonstrating an affectual stasis and a melancholic wallowing of sorts, Cesis elides most of her musical lines by using the word “ma” (“but”), indicating not only that the textual statement is half-complete, but that something different from the original text will follow. This particular point in the music, where the

two compositions diverge, would have been important for Cesis during performance, because it is precisely at this moment that her piece ceases to be a well-known secular erotic madrigal and becomes a spiritual (albeit still erotic) one.

5  
Cantus I  
Io son fe - ri - to si ma

9  
Bassus I  
Io son fe - ri - to si ma

**Example 9: Cesis's Cantus I, measures 5-9, and Bassus I, measures 9-13.  
Note how "ma" falls on the half-cadence.**

In performance, singers would have phrased this line not as a sigh, as they would have done for Palestrina's piece, but as a renewal of energy, poised to continue the thought. While listeners might have noted the new words (and in turn new rhythms prompted by a change in syllable count) as early as the fourth measure, the pitch content remains identical to Palestrina's until the fifth vocal entrance (which for Palestrina was the final entrance, as his piece was scored for five voices). At this point, Cesis draws out the first tenor cadence, allows the first altus to proceed with the second line without pause, and cuts the first cantus line by one measure. From here, Cesis broadens out, increasing the number of musical lines with imitative entrances until she has a double choir. (See examples 10 and 11.)

1

Cantus

Io son fe - ri - to/ahi las - so,

Altus

Io son fe - ri - to/ahi la - - - so,

Tenor

Io son fe - ri - to/ahi las - so, io son fe - ri - to ahi las - -

Quintus

Bassus

Io

10

C.

io son fe - ri - to/ahi las - - - so!

A.

ahi - - - las - - - - - so! e

T.

- so! e chi mi - - - die - -

Q.

Io son fe - ri - to/ahi las - so!

B.

son fe - ri - to/ahi las - so! e chi

**Example 10: Palestrina's *Io son ferito, ahi lasso*, measures 1-17**

1

Cantus I  
Io son fe - ri - to si ma

Altus I  
Io son fe - ri - to si ma chi mi

Tenor I  
Io son fe - ri - to si, Io son fe - ri - - - -

Bassus I  
Io

Cantus II

Altus II

Tenor II

Bassus II

10

C.I. chi mi die - - - de

A.I. die - - - - - de, ma chi mi die - de, ma chi mi

T.I. - to si ma chi mi die - - - de,

B.I. son fe - ri - to si ma chi mi dei - - - - - de,

C.II. Io son fe - ri - to si ma chi mi

A.II. Io son fe - ri - to

T.II.

B.II.

19

C.I. ma chi mi

A.I. die - - - - - de ma chi mi

T.I. ma chi mi

B.I. ma chi mi

C.II. die - de ma chi mi die - d'ac - cu - sar non vò già

A.II. si ma chi mi die - - - de ac - cu - sar non vò già

T.II. Io son fe - ri - to si ma chi mi die - d'ac - cu - sar non vò già

B.II. son fe - ri - to si ma chi mi die - d'ac - cu - sar non vò già

**Example 11: Cesis's *Io son ferito, sì*, measures 1-27**

The next major textual section, “io non spasm’è non moro” (“I do not suffer or die”) is similar enough syntactically to Palestrina’s “io spasm’è moro” that Cesis is able to use most of his entrances. She shuffles around Palestrina’s lines and gives them to different vocal parts, and adds some of her own counterpoint. The end result was likely hauntingly familiar for listeners, yet at the same time new. (See Examples 12 and 13.)

68

Cantus  
(pia) ga nuo - - - va. Io spas - m'e

Altus  
nuo - - - va. Io spa - sm'e mô - ro

Tenor  
nuo - va. Io spa - sm'e mô - ro io spa - sm'e

Quintus  
Io spa - sm'e mô - ro io

Bassus  
Io spa - sm'e mô - ro

75

C.  
mô - ro e mô - ro

A.  
io spas - sm'e mô - ro il col - po

T.  
mô - ro io spa - sm'e mô - ro

Q.  
spa - sm'e mô - ro il col - po non si

B.  
io spa - sm'e mô - ro il col - po

**Example 12: Palestrina’s *Io son ferito, ah! lasso*, measures 68-80**





(In Example 13, the underlined ‘io’s denote a similar entrance in the Palestrina, while the italicized ‘io’ denotes Cesis’s newly composed entrance.)

After each of the eight voices has a chance to enter the polyphonic texture of “io non spasm’*é* non moro,”<sup>20</sup> for the second iteration of the phrase, all but two voices sing “io” simultaneously. The distinction in this line of text between Cesis’s version and Palestrina’s lies in the two instances of “non” in Cesis’s line, crucially negating the sentiment. It is this word that is highlighted here. While the six voices commence singing “io” together, they get to “non” at different times, resulting in back to back iterations of the word. (See example 13; the successive iterations of ‘non’ are bolded.)

As this line ends, the texture reduces by half, and Choir II begins the next phrase, “il mio nemic’armato.” Just as before, the text is similar enough to the original (“la mia nemica armata”) that Cesis uses Palestrina’s music. The tenor II line enters half a beat early in measure 78 as Palestrina’s tenor line, but all subsequent entrances occur in time until the final three entrances, which add newly composed lines. Finally, this same sequence of events happens during “che sanato m’ha” (measure 109) instead of Palestrina’s “che m’abbia a sanar” (measure 122).

While many of her parodied lines retain Palestrina’s staggered, polyphonic texture, Cesis’s newly composed music is largely homophonic, serving to highlight her new words and provide textural variety. One particularly important instance of this use of homophony occurs during “ma chi mi diede accusar non vò già/se ben ho prova;/cinque piaghe nel corpo” (“but I do not wish to accuse the one who has done this to me although I have proof: five wounds in my body”). These words confirm the

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<sup>20</sup> In all nine entrances (the second bassus repeats its line twice in succession, and thus has two entrances), only one entrance – tenor II, measure 68 – is newly composed.

devotional nature of the text and connect the composition firmly with the Feast of Saint Francis. Indeed, the move from a single choir singing “ma chi mi diede accusar non vò già” to double choir for “se ben ho prova;/cinque piaghe nel corpo” would have dramatically increased the volume as all eight parts described Saint Francis’s stigmata in a straightforward, declamatory tone. Cesis clearly wanted to highlight the poetry above all else during these six measures. The rhythms align closely with the rhythm of spoken Italian – again, for maximum clarity – and the setting in all eight parts is syllabic (with the exception of “prova” in tenor I and cantus II lines).

The text here describes St. Francis’s stigmata and is both graphic and violent. To reinforce this image harmonically, Cesis constructs an unexpected shift from the soft hexachord to the hard hexachord over the word “corpo” (“body”). Prior to this brief modulation, this section emphasizes C and G. An F# appears for the first time in measure 30, and then again in 32, though both times it is somewhat hidden in the altus line. By the end of the line, however, both cantus lines wrench their F-naturals up to F#s, exposing the F# at the top of the texture on “corpo”. This harmonic move is surprising both in context, as it directly follows an F Major triad, and in register, as the F#s occur in three lines (cantus I, II and altus II) which are registrally separated from the other voices. The cantus singers further emphasize this harmonic stabbing by singing an F before moving to the F# on the second syllable of the word “corpo.” Just as the nails of love pierce the body of Saint Francis, the F#s pierce the harmonic fabric over the word “body.”

Cesis’s textual mimesis continues several measures later over “versan sangue” (“pour blood”), where the blood flowing from Saint Francis’s body is paralleled in a rapid step-wise descent motive that passes back and forth among the cantus, bassus,

26

Cantus I  
ma chi mi die - d'ac - cu - sar non vò già se ben ho pro - va cin -

Altus I  
ma chi mi die - d'ac - cu - sar non vò già se ben ho pro - va cin -

Tenor I  
ma chi mi die - d'ac - cu - sar non vò già se ben ho pro - va cin -

Bassus I  
ma chi mi die - d'ac - cu - sar non vò già se ben ho pro - va cin -

Cantus II  
non vò già se ben ho pro - va cin -

Altus II  
già se ben ho pro - va cin -

Tenor II  
già se ben ho pro - va cin -

Bassus II  
non vò già se ben ho pro - va cin -

35

C.I  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de che

A.I  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de che

T.I  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de che

B.I  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de che

C.II  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de

A.II  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de

T.II  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de

B.II  
- que pia - ghe nel cor - po ne fan fe - de, ne fan fe - de

**Example 14: Cesis's "cinque piaghe nel corpo", measures 26-42**

and tenor I lines. In Palestrina’s madrigal, the wounds in question are invisible, and his line of text does not include “versan” (pour), but rather “nè getta sangue” (which in this case is closer to “spurt” than “pour”).

56

Cantus  
de

Altus  
de

Tenor  
nè get - ta san - - gue la mia

Quintus  
de nè get - ta san - - gue la

Bassus  
nè get - ta san - - gue la mia

61

C.  
nè get - ta san - - gue la

A.  
nè get - ta san - - gue la mia

T.  
pia - ga nuo - va nè get - ta san - - gue la mia

Q.  
mia pia - - ga nuo - - va

B.  
pia - ga nuo - - va

**Example 15: Palestrina’s “ne getta sangue”, measures 56-66**



To reflect the inner emotional agony, Palestrina moves to the hard hexachord. The performer can further dramatize the anguish by emphasizing the percussive nature of the word “getta”. Cesis’s text, made joyful through her changes, has little need of such agony, and instead appears alongside graceful, fluid lines to depict the flowing of blood.

Cesis’s setting of the last line of text demonstrates her skillful use of Palestrina’s musical lines (periodically made homophonic), her reinterpretation of those lines, and her newly composed music, all over her revision of the original poetry. Beginning in measure 106, Choir I sings “che sanato m’ha quel” homophonically, using Palestrina’s altus, tenor and bassus lines from measure 60, and then Choir II sings the entire phrase homophonically, using lines from Palestrina’s cantus, altus, and quintus parts (taken from his measure 61). The phrase builds, now polyphonic, over the next 15 measures, until Choir I returns to an iteration of the phrase in homophony. Finally, in measure 134, both choirs state the text, which begins homophonically and ends polyphonically, as various parts branch out into staggered syncopations that effectively slow down the rhythm to a grand scale, and dramatically announce the completion of the piece.

The sheer number of repetitions and variations of the final line of text (spread out over 37 measures) demonstrates the magnitude of this final statement to the message and import of the piece itself. This “takeaway” message – that of the spiritual healing powers of the Divine – is cleverly encompassed in what is, but for the gender of the “wounder,” the original final line of text. The clever thematic shift in meaning thus retains nearly the same “punch line” as the first text, but this time carries much deeper significance in the lives of both the singers and the audience.

106

Cantus I  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel

Altus I  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel

Tenor I  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel che sa - na -

Bassus I  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel

Cantus II  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel che m'ha fe - ri -

Altus II  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel che m'ha fe - -

Tenor II  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel che m'ha fe - ri -

Bassus II  
che sa - na -

115

C.I  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel che m'ha sa -

A.I  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel che m'ha fe - ri - to

T.I  
to m'ha quel che m'ha fe - ri - - to

B.I  
che sa - na - to m'ha quel che m'ha fe - ri - - to

C.II  
to

A.II  
-ri - - - - - to, che sa - na - to m'ha quel che

T.II  
-to, che sa - na - to m'ha

B.II  
to m'ha quel che sa - na - to m'ha





Interestingly, the Rule of Saint Augustine uses a similar comparison, likening a physical wound to the emotional “wound” of falling in love or succumbing to infatuation.<sup>21</sup> Since the Rule was to be read aloud in its entirety weekly within every Augustinian convent, Cesis was probably quite familiar with this example. It is not surprising, therefore, that she would have used this metaphor.

### **Singing Bodies**

Much as the tortured and martyred bodies of saints exist on a grand scale in public consciousness, certain acts of individual penance performed by members of the general populace also take place in a public arena, especially when the purpose for such penance is threefold: to appease God, to demonstrate publicly that one is acting piously, and, most notably among both male and female religious, to model proper penitential behaviors. Penance operates on both internal (emotional and intellectual) and external (physical) levels, and penitential acts demonstrate for God and for the community one’s level of devotion and remorse for sins committed. Public activities such as wearing a hairshirt, flogging oneself, or fasting punish the physical body for shortcomings of the soul. Another (less severe) form of penance manifested through the body is fervent prayer and emotional contrition rendered in musical performance.

Musical performance in a religious context affords the opportunity for a public display of collective penance, both for the singers giving voice to their own contrition,

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<sup>21</sup> See *The Rule of Saint Augustine*, Part IV: Mutual Responsibility in Good and Evil, Item 8. Items 3-11 of this section deal with flirtatious behavior with the opposite sex, and the steps a convent should take to cure such infatuations and desires. The second paragraph of Item 8 states: “Imagine, for example, that your sister had a physical wound which she wanted to conceal for fear of undergoing medical treatment. Would it not be heartless of us to say nothing about it? Rather, would it not be an act of mercy on our part to make it known? How much greater, then, is our obligation to make our sister’s condition known and to prevent evil gaining a stronger hold in her heart, something much worse than a physical wound,” 31.

and for listeners internally doing the same. In this way, the listeners and the singers share similar feelings, though they experience the music differently: one group allows the sounds to enter and flow through their bodies, and the other group generates the sounds with their bodies while also allowing the music to flow over and around them. The sounds the nuns generated would have bathed all involved in the music of penance; and amongst themselves, their expelled breaths (holy breath, or *pneuma*, if one follows the trope of nuns as earthly angels to its logical conclusion) similarly mixed and enveloped one another, effecting yet another level of spiritual cleansing.

*Peccò Signor* follows a trajectory of spiritual transformation through the confession of sin. The singers (either all speaking as one entity, or each individually speaking for herself), through the declaration of their transgressions cleanse themselves of sin and strive for spiritual ecstasy. The first few lines of text are wracked with emotional pain, suffering, and penitence, though by the end, a light glimmers brightly: an image of eternal life.

***Peccò Signor (della medesima)***

Peccò Signor quest'alma, hor piagn'e grida  
il suo grave fallire,  
e tua clemenza tua pietà l'affida,  
che se col tuo morire  
già la tornast'in vita  
hora gli prest'aita  
acciò disciolta dal corporeo velo  
lieta se'n voli a rivedert'in cielo.

O Lord, this soul has sinned, it now weeps and cries out  
its grave failing,  
and entrusts itself to your clemency and to your mercy,  
for if with your death  
you once returned to life,  
now come to its aid  
so that, unbound by its bodily veil,  
it may fly happily to see you again in heaven.

The music of the first half displays strongly Phrygian tendencies, thus reflecting an atmosphere of tragedy and despair through liberal use of the *fa-mi* half step across all eight parts. This half step generates an appropriately grave affect and threatens to sweep the singers into spirals of anguish. Phrygian is perhaps the most despairing of the modes. Zarlino writes that Mode 3 “moves one to weeping”<sup>22</sup>, and McClary mentions how composers of Western art music in the seventeenth century sometimes “flirted with Phrygian qualities...to mark grief,”<sup>23</sup> a description that fits *Peccò Signor* and the soul’s grief over distancing itself from God through sin.<sup>24</sup>

The Phrygian qualities are apparent from the outset, as the first two entrances outline the two main pitch areas common in practical uses of this mode: E and A. In its first iteration, “peccò” (“I have sinned”) begins squarely on a sustained E-natural *mi* in the altus I line, moves up to *fa* on an F-natural, and then falls back to its original E-natural on “Signor.” With the second entrance, tenor I begins on an A and moves up to E in measure 5 by way of a B-natural to E leap, thus reinforcing the Phrygian harmonies.

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<sup>22</sup> Gioseffo Zarlino, *On the Modes*, Part Four of *Le Istitutioni Harmoniche*, 1558, trans. Vered Cohen and ed. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 64.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 209.

<sup>24</sup> Fear of death relates also to anxiety about sin, as unresolved sins, after death, keep the soul from entering Heaven. William Kimmel traces what he terms the “Phrygian inflection” in music that deals in some way with the topic of death from the Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See “The Phrygian Inflection and the Appearances of Death in Music,” *College Music Symposium* 20:2 (Fall 1980): 42-76.

1

Cantus I  
Pec - - - cò Si - gnor, pec - cò Si -

Altus I  
Pec - cò Si - gnor, pec - cò Si -

Tenor I  
Pec - - - cò Si - gnor que - st'al - - ma, pec - cò Si -

Bassus I  
Pec - - - - cò Si - gnor, pec - cò Si -

Cantus II

Altus II

Tenor II

Bassus II

11

C.I  
gnor que - st'al - - - ma,

A.I  
gnor que - st'al - ma,

T.I  
gnor que - st'al - ma,

B.I  
gnor que - st'al - - ma,

C.II  
Pec - - - - cò Si - gnor que - st'al m'hor pia - gn'e

A.II  
Pec - cò Si - gnor que - -

T.II  
Pec - cò Si - gnor que - st'al - -

B.II  
Pec - cò Si - gnor que - st'al -

19

C.I.  
hor pia - gn'e gri - da

A.I.  
hor pia - gn'e gri - da

T.I.  
hor pia - gn'e gri - da

B.I.  
hor pia - gn'e gri - da

C.II  
gri - da, hor pia - gn'e gri - da il

A.II  
st'al - ma, hor pia - gn'e gri - da il

T.II  
ma, hor pia - gn'e gri - da il

B.II  
ma, hor pia - gn'e gri - da il

**Example 18: *Peccò Signor*, measures 1-25  
Note the prevalence of E-F and B-C half steps.**

In this beginning section, the prevalence of sonorities focused on A provides a common and practical solution to the Phrygian “problem” of stifling harmonic motion away from the final.<sup>25</sup> This modal ambiguity, or bi-modality, results in a musical “divided consciousness”<sup>26</sup> that reflects the divided consciousness, as it were, of a nun in seventeenth-century Italy. Just as her mind struggles between earthly matters, sin, and guilt, it also strives towards Divine grace and spiritual closeness with God. Cesis modally

<sup>25</sup> Susan McClary, *Modal Subjectivities: Self-fashioning in the Italian Madrigal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 208-210.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

demonstrates both her skill at composition and her access to preexisting musical works that use such sophisticated techniques to similar (though generally secular) ends.<sup>27</sup>

In this first section, the pervasive half step generates a tenacious hold on all of the singers. While many hover around E and F at the beginning, others get stuck between B-natural and C-natural. Phrygian affects nearly every voice part at least once in the first 15 measures, miring the singer between either E and F or B and C.

By the second line, “hor piagn’e grida” (“it now weeps and cries out”), both choirs are able momentarily to pull away from this emphasis on E, A, and B to cadence on D. The Phrygian does not disappear altogether, though. Emphasis on the *mi-fa* half step returns periodically. For example, in measures 29-31 (“il suo grave fallire” – “its grave failing”) cantus I sings a stepwise ascending line that repeats a high F-natural before falling back to E, and ultimately ending on a D. In this case, the “grave failings” of the soul are trapped in a narrow window bordered by impenetrable half steps: C# and D on the bottom, and E and F-natural on the top. As these half steps appear in the uppermost voice, they are more audible than they might have been in a lower register, and remind the listener of the initial struggle with Phrygian.

28

Cantus I

il suo gra - ve fal - li - - re,

**Example 19: “il suo grave fallire”, Cantus I, measures 28-33**

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<sup>27</sup> McClary lists several composers who utilize the Phrygian to depict utter despair, or who play with mode-mixture for layered cultural meanings. Among them are Willaert (“Lasso, ch’i ardo”), Marenzio (“Tirsi morir volea”), Gesualdo (“ ‘Mercè,’ grido piangendo”), and Verdelot (“Sì suave è l’inganno”). See *Modal Subjectivities*, 209-211.

Four measures later, cantus I once again sings in this range, but the F-natural seems to have lost its sticking power, and is followed not by the E of before, but by a D. Fittingly, this line occurs over “e tua clemenza” (“and your clemency”). The mention of God’s mercy temporarily releases the cantus line (and the entire choir) from the tenacious hold of the Phrygian mode.

A relapse into Phrygian-filled despair occurs in measure 52, when altus II begins “che se col tuo morire” (“for if with your death”) with pitches nearly identical to the opening lines. Two measures later, bassus II enters on A and inserts a B-flat half step into the line, imitating the altus II entrance. Cantus II enters in 57 on E, and the Phrygian tendencies take hold of the texture once more.

33

Cantus I  
(re,) e tua cle - men - za

Altus I  
(re,) e tua cle - men - - za

Tenor I  
(re,) e tua cle - men - za

Bassus I  
(re,) e tua cle - men - - - za

Cantus II  
e tua cle - men - za, e tua cle - men -

Altus II  
e tua cle - men - za, e tua cle - men - - -

Tenor II  
e tua cle - men - za, e tua cle - men - - -

Bassus II  
e tua cle - men -

42

C.I. tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - - -

A.I. tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - - -

T.I. tua pie - ta l'af - fi - - - da, l'af - fi -

B.I. tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - - -

C.II. za tua pie - tà l'af - - - - - fi - - - -

A.II. -za tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - da, l'af - fi - - -

T.II. -za tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - da, l'af - fi - - -

B.II. za tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - - -

48

C.I. da, tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - - - da,

A.I. - da, tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - - - da,

T.I. da, tua pie - tà l'af - fi - da, l'af - fi - - - da,

B.I. da, tua pie - tà l'af - fi - - - - - da,

C.II. - - - da,

A.II. - da, che se col

T.II. da,

B.II. da,

**Example 20: Peccò Signor, measures 33-53**



52

Cantus II  
 Altus II  
 Tenor II  
 Bassus II

che se col tuo mo - ri - re, che se col tuo mo - ri - re

che se col tuo mo - ri - re, che se col tuo mo -

**Example 21: “che se col tuo morire”, Choir II, measures 52-60**

Typically, Cesis has written a great deal of movement into this piece via rapid scalar passages, creating a fluidity of polyphonic lines that weave around one another. Instances of this type of movement in the first half of the piece occur over particularly important words, such as “piagn’e grida” (weeping and crying out), “clemenza” (forgiveness), and “affida” (entrusts). (See examples 19 and 21.)

This technique works especially well to highlight the moment when the overall affect of the text changes from anguished to hopeful. “Già la tornast’in vita” (“you once returned to life”), Christianity’s miracle of miracles, is set to a galloping rhythm complete with trumpet-like fanfares of ascending fusae. The dactylic motive occurs eleven times over the course of ten measures. The rhythm and the brief fanfares create a celebratory affect that in measure 86 cadences on A, with the third of the triad – the C# – sparkling in the highest voice, a technique of which Cesis was especially fond.

The most joyful section of this piece comes at the end, when the text reveals the soul’s excitement over its future reunion with the Divine in heaven. Cesis chose to set this final line – “lieta se’n voli a rivedert’in cielo” (“[the soul] may fly happily to see you again in heaven”) – in triple meter, possibly to indicate the Holy Trinity, while also

making a clear distinction between the anguished beginning and the joyful ending. Cesis combines this with a dramatic modal shift to Dorian sonorities. The soul's struggle between sin and despair, reflected in the Phrygian harmonies of the beginning, give way to eternal life, declaimed in the Dorian mode.

Dorian was an appropriate choice to replicate the triumph of God. Zarlino calls Dorian one of the most stable modes, and notes that Dorian by nature is "religious and devout," recommending it best be used "with words that are full of gravity and that deal with lofty and edifying things."<sup>28</sup> It is during this last section that sharps become increasingly pervasive, especially on F, G, and C, as if the higher pitches were to somehow point towards the heavens. While triads on A and E become major early on during the statement of this last phrase, those on D remain minor until the first measure of the return to duple meter (effectively drawing out the ending phrase), where the final repetition of "a rivedert'in cielo" occurs (115). Once again, the major triad is emphasized by the third in the highest voice.

This piece demonstrates for singers and audience alike the rewards of proper penitential practices. The enactment of Phrygian struggle written into the melodic lines that eventually gives way to joyous Dorian stability teaches that through sincere contrition the soul can achieve eternal life.

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<sup>28</sup> Zarlino, 58. Compositionally speaking, Dorian was also a good choice, as both Mode 1 and Mode 3 are closely related to Mode 9 (with a final on A). In this way, the toggling between Modes 3 and 9 in the beginning allowed for the full transformation to Mode 1.

Cantus I

Altus I

Tenor I

Bassus I

Cantus II

Altus II

Tenor II

Bassus II

già la tor - na - st'in

già la tor - na - st'in vi - ta, già la tor -

(re)

già la tor - na - st'in vi - - ta, già la tor - na - st'in vi -

già la tor - na - st'in vi - - - - - ta, già la tor -

già la tor - na - sti in vi - ta, già la tor -

già la tor - na - st'in vi -

C.I

A.I

T.I

B.I

C.II

A.II

T.II

B.II

vi - ta, la tor - na - st'in vi - ta, la tor - na - st'in vi - ta,

na - st'in vi - ta, già la tor - na - st'in vi - - - - ta,

già la tor - na - st'in vi - ta, in vi - - - ta,

già la tor - na - st'in vi - - - - ta,

ta, ho -

na - - st'in vi - ta,

na - - st'in vi - ta, ho -

- - - ta,

Example 22: “già la tornast’in vita”, measures 72-86

Cantus I  
lie - ta se'n vo - - li/a ri - ve -

Altus I  
lie - ta s'en vo - - li a ri - ve -

Tenor I  
lie - ta s'en vo - - li/a ri - ve -

Bassus I  
lie - ta s'en vo - - - li/a ri - ve -

Cantus II  
lie - ta s'en vo - li

Altus II  
lie - ta s'en vo - li

Tenor II  
lie - ta s'en vo - li

Bassus II  
lie - ta s'en vo - li

C.I  
der - - - - ti,

A.I  
der - - - - t'in cie - lo,

T.I  
der - - t'in cie - lo,

B.I  
der - - t'in cie - lo,

C.II  
a ri - ve - der - - -

A.II  
a ri - ve - der - - t'in

T.II  
a ri - ve - der - - t'in

B.II  
a ri - ve - der - - -

109

C.I  
lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - t'in

A.I  
lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - -

T.I  
lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - t'in

B.I  
lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - t'in

C.II  
t'in cie - lo, lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - t'in

A.II  
cie - - lo, lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - t'in

T.II  
cie - - lo, lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - t'in

B.II  
t'in cie - lo, lie - ta se'n vo - li/a ri - ve - der - - t'in

114

C.I  
cie - - - lo, a ri - ve - der - t'in cie - - - - - lo.

A.I  
t'in cie - - lo, a ri - ve - der - - t'in cie - lo.

T.I  
cie - lo, a ri - ve - der - t'in cie - - - lo.

B.I  
cie - - - lo, a ri - ve - der - t'in cie - - - lo.

C.II  
cie - - - lo, a ri - ve - der - t'in cie - - - lo.

A.II  
cie - - - lo, a ri - ve - der - t'in cie - - - lo.

T.II  
cie - - - lo, a ri - ve - der - t'in cie - - - lo.

B.II  
cie - - - lo, a ri - ve - der - t'in cie - - - lo.

**Example 23: “lieta se’n voli a rivedert’in cielo”, measures 101-end**

### ***Il mio più vago Sole***

I now turn to Cesis's fourth published piece in the vernacular: *Il mio più vago Sole*. The metaphorical poetry along the lines of Petrarch could be appropriate for a variety of contexts, including personal devotions, internal convent entertainment, or as a musical interlude in a convent play. It draws heavily on sensual imagery and humorism, grounding the text in the language of the body.

### ***Il mio più vago Sole***

Il mio più vago Sole,  
morto, par che più avampi  
e più dell'alme i campi  
scaldar all'ombra d'un bel tronco ei suole;  
e ben è duro sasso  
d'ogn'umor privo e casso  
ò pur terra spinosa e persa in tutto  
quella ch'è sì bei raggi niega il frutto.

My loveliest sun  
is dead, and yet it seems that the more it burns,  
the more it warms the field of souls  
in the shade of a lovely trunk;  
and it is indeed a hard stone  
deprived and extinguished of every humor  
or a thorny and completely lost land  
which denies its fruits to such beautiful rays.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Cesis's other three Italian-language pieces, *Il mio più vago Sole* is scored for only five voices, which, along with the imitative polyphonic style and abundant text/music mimesis, place this piece in the category of *madrigale spirituale*.<sup>30</sup> The *madrigale spirituale* was a genre "principally destined for private performance" and was "not

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<sup>29</sup> All translations of Cesis in this chapter are from Candace Smith's edition, though I have reset the line breaks and replaced "enjoy" in *Quest'è la bell'e santa vincitrice* with "rejoice" and "sores" in *Io son ferito, sì* with "wounds".

<sup>30</sup> Candace Smith makes this genre suggestion as well in her liner notes for *Sulpitia Cesis: Mottetti Spirituali (1619)*, by Cappella Artemisia (Tactus, 2001).

intended for liturgical use.”<sup>31</sup> It was often used during Lent or in paraliturgical contexts, such as confraternity oratories.<sup>32</sup> In fact, ecclesiastical officials compiled anthologies of spiritual madrigals “for use by Christian and pious persons” to encourage devotionally appropriate musicking.<sup>33</sup> Pieces in this genre make use of texts by notable Italian poets such as Tasso, Vittoria Colonna, and Petrarch, to name a few, though the provenance of Cesis’s text has yet to be determined. It is possible, considering Cesis’s other poetic endeavors, that she herself might have composed these lines.

In common with other texts Cesis set to music, this one uses florid, metaphorical language and emphasizes sensual imagery. But Cesis treats this text differently because of its genre, composing a madrigal that seeks to mimic the sensuality and emotions inherent in the text line by line while at the same time writing in a conventional polyphonic madrigal style with fluid, shifting lines, imitative counterpoint, and new melodic material with each line of text.

The quasi-religious text relies on metaphor to link the imagery to devotional themes, such as use of the word “sun” (*Sole*) for “son” (which in Italian would be *figlio*), playing off of traditional poetic themes of the period that compare the sun to the protagonist’s Beloved. In this case, the Beloved is the son of God. The trunk (*tronco*) is the cross under which souls find warmth.

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<sup>31</sup> Suzanne Cusick and Noel O’Regan, “Madrigale spirituale,” in *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 25 April, 2012. For more on the Spiritual Madrigal before 1600, see Katherine Powers, “The Spiritual Madrigal in Counter-Reformation Italy: Definition, Use, and Style,” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Cusick and O’Regan, “Madrigale spirituale”.

<sup>33</sup> Archpriest Giovanni del Bene, quoted in Powers, 14. One imagines that the Church fathers concluded amongst themselves that if people were going to sing madrigals, at least they could sing pieces approved by the church that would be morally uplifting.

Due to the metaphorical text and the madrigal style, this piece was probably written as private entertainment for the nuns and not performed for an outside audience. It is possible that nuns' family members and close friends might have heard this performed in the *parlatorio*, where nuns could entertain visitors through a grate in the wall (sometimes covered with spikes so as to discourage physical contact), but a performance of this piece in the physical space of the church itself is highly unlikely. It is intriguing to imagine the nuns composing, rehearsing, and singing this piece entirely within the convent walls as devotional entertainment during hours of recreation.

The smaller acoustic space of the *parlatorio* or of an interior common room would certainly have resulted in a different performance situation than in the church. Reverberation time would have been much reduced, for even though the walls were made of the same brick and stone, the higher ratio of bodies and cloth (in the form of habits and dresses, and potentially tapestries, cushions, and carpets) to the hard sides of the room would have muted the degree of resonance. Less resonance in this case likely benefited the performers, who would not have to sing polyphony in an echo chamber with their own voices threatening to overtake them.

Part of the potential gratification in singing this piece lies in the close relationship between the verbal imagery and its musical counterpart, all within an enclosed chamber space. The close bodily proximity between singers and audience generates in physical space the intimacy between Jesus and believers to which the text alludes. The text-music relationship heightens the emotional content of the poetry and opens the door to dramatic enacting of the words, which would have been entirely comprehensible to an audience situated just a few feet from the singers. The piece begins with staggered, imitative entrances that abruptly come together to proclaim the word "morto," somberly



announcing the death of the Beloved in measures 18-20. The next segment is a musical rendition of fire, with staggered, quick runs moving both up and down the scale as each voice sings “avampi” (“afame”). These runs occur six times across all five voices in the space of five measures, generating a flurry of activity to represent the flaming heart of the protagonist. During the words “persa in tutto” (“all lost”), the various vocal lines begin long, winding melismas in undulating patterns, as if they themselves were lost and searching for something that is never articulated.

Harmonically, Cesis makes increasing use of the hard hexachord as the piece progresses. Though initially *Il mio più vago Sole* begins in the soft hexachord, this starts to change early on. At critical moments B-flats become B-naturals, F-naturals become F-sharps, and C-naturals become C-sharps. The first instance of this that takes place in more than one vocal line (and thus extends beyond melodic voice-leading) is during measures 25 and 26, at the end of the fiery “avampi” section. The soft hexachord returns, but only briefly. As the text mentions the field of souls warming themselves under the trunk of the cross, the sharps start to creep back into the texture, finally gaining the full complement of raised Bs, Fs, and Cs during the imitative entrances of “scaldar all’ombra” (“warming in the shade”) in measures 31-34.

Cantus

Il mio più va - go So - le, il mio

Altus

Il mio più va - go So - le, il mio più va - go So - - -

Quintus

Tenor

Il mio più va - go So - le, So - - le, il

Bassus

Il mio più

10

C.

più va - - go So - - - le, mor - -

A.

-le, il mio più va - - - go so - le, mor - to,

Q.

Il mio più va - go So - le, più va-go So - le, mor - -

T.

mio più va - go So - - le, più va - go So - - le, mor - - to,

B.

va - go So - le, il mio più va - go So - le, mor -

20

C. -to, par che più/a- vam - pi, più/a- vam - pi

A. par che più/a- vam - - - - - pi, più/a - vam - pi

Q. -to, par che più/a - vam - pi, par che più/a- vam - pi e

T. par che più/a - vam - - pi, par che più/a - vam - pi/e più

B. to, par che più/a- vam - pi e

27

C. e più dell' al - me/i cam - pi scal dar all' om - bra, *scal dar all'*

A. e più dell' al - me/i cam - pi scal - dar all' om - bra, scal - dar all' om -

Q. più dell' al - me/i cam - pi scal - dar all' om - bra, scal - dar all' om - bra

T. dell' al - me/i cam - pi scal - dar all' om - bra, scal dar all' om - bra d'un

B. più, e più dell' al - me/i cam - pi scal - dar all' om - bra

36

C. om - - - bra d'un bel tron' ei suo - - le; e ben è

A. bra d'un bel tron' ei suo - - - le; e ben è

Q. d'un bel tron' ei suo - le; e ben - è

T. bel tron' ei suo - - - - le; e ben è du - -

B. d'un bel tron' ei suo - - - le; e ben è

45

C. du - ro sas - - - so d'ogn' hu - mor, d'ogn' hu -

A. du - ro sas - - - so d'ogn' hu - mor pri - v'e cas - so,

Q. du - ro sas - - - so d'ogn' hu - mor pri -

T. -ro sas - - - so d'ogn' hu - mor pri - v'e cas - so,

B. du - ro sas - - - so d'ogn' hu -

53

C. mor pri - v'e cas - - so o pur ter - ra spi - no -

A. d'ogn' hu - mor pri - v'e cas - - so o pur ter - ra spi - no - sa, o pur ter - ra spi - no -

Q. - - v'e cas - - so o pur ter - ra spi - no - sa, o pur ter - ra spi - no -

T. pri - v'e cas - - so o pur ter - ra spi - no - sa,

B. mor pri - v'e cas - - so o pur ter - ra spi - no -

60

C. sa/e per - sa in tut - - to quel - la ch'a si bei

A. sa/e per - sa/in tut - - - to quel - la, quel - la ch'a si bei rag -

Q. sa quel - la ch'a si bei rag-gi, ch'a

T. e per - s'in tut - - - to quel - la ch'a si bei

B. sa/e per - - - s'in tut - to quel - la, quel -

69

C. rag - gi, ch'a si bei rag - gi nie - - - ga'l frut - - - to.

A. - gi, ch'a si bei rag - gi nie - ga'l frut - - - to.

Q. si, ch'a si bei rag - gi nie - ga'l frut - to, nie - ga'l frut - to.

T. rag - gi, ch'a si bei rag - gi nie - ga'l frut - to, nie - ga'l frut - - to.

B. la ch'a si bei rag - gi nie - ga'l frut - to, nie - ga'l frut - to.

**Example 24: *Il mio più vago Sole* in its entirety**

After moving back into the soft hexachord for a few measures, in measures 46-49 on the word “sasso” (“stone”) the cantus line ascends in a stepwise fashion from A to D, with raised Bs and Cs in between. And finally, both iterations of the word “spinosa” (“thorny”), raised pitches return in the altus and quintus lines (measures 57 and 59, respectively).

This close relationship between the meaning of the text and its depiction in music would have not only made singing it more entertaining (and possibly dramatic, depending on the personalities of the performers), it would have spoken directly to the bodily experiences of the singers themselves. The text overflows with tactile imagery – “avampi,” “scaldar,” “duro sasso,” and “spinosa.” With a little imagination, and with the help of the music/text mimesis, singers could personally feel the burning and warming, the hard rock and the thorny land, and feel their own bodily humors shift while doing so. The text itself even mentions the bodily humors (“d’ogn’umor priv’e casso”) in the context of unbelievers, who without Christ are “deprived and extinguished of every

humor.” The unbelievers have no hope of eternal life and thus are likened to lifeless objects on earth – in this case, stone.

Though the text paints a dire picture of pain and desolation, the piece overall is not somber, but rather joyful and light – appropriate for a piece celebrating love for Christ and the hope his sacrifice brings to humanity. The nuns singing this piece as private devotional entertainment must have been able to imagine the hard stone and the lost, thorny land as their current world and earthly experience. But the promise of everlasting life, partially revealed by the mention of “beautiful rays (“bei raggi”) and “fruits” (“frutto”) that can only come after earthly life, would have been joyful to contemplate and enact through singing. In this way, the death at the beginning opens the doors to reunion with the departed *vis-à-vis* musical performance. Plus, it must have been really fun to sing.

These four vernacular compositions by Sulpitia Cesis maintain strong ties to the body, both textually and musically. During performance of these pieces, singers who were already using their bodies mindfully gained a new layer of corporeal awareness of their relationship to the Divine. As they emphasized St. Catherine’s strong and beautiful body, or the painful yet glorious stigmata of St. Francis, as they meditated on the physical manifestations of penance and separation from God’s grace, or the heady rush of joyful and eternal reunion with the Divine, they would have felt these sentiments within their own bodies. Because these pieces were in the nuns’ mother tongue – Italian, and not their secondary language of Latin – the words would have taken on more visceral meanings for the singers. Every word would have been known and familiar; the overall meaning of the poetry would have emerged effortlessly.

It is possible that these nuns' easy familiarity with the words of these pieces permitted them to engage in even more dramatic enacting and heartfelt musical interpretation than did the pieces with Latin texts. And the fact that Cesis herself wrote and published at least two of these texts demonstrates Cesis's interest in the physical manifestation of holy bodies, as well as her belief that others, lay singers or other nuns who had limited knowledge of Latin but who still wanted to perform devotional music, would also find these pieces meaningful.

## **Conclusion.**

These pieces written by Sulpitia Cesis, Alba Tressina, and Lucrezia Vizzana provide a glimpse of the cultural milieu, spiritual concerns, and public voices of Northern Italian nuns at one particular moment in time – the years between 1619 and 1623. The similarities are apparent in their choice of texts and subjects, as well as in many of the mimetic and erotic compositional techniques they used, while the differences in their voicings and styles, from Vizzana’s monodic *stile rappresentando* to Cesis’s and Tressina’s conservative polyphony, demonstrate a culture of convent music that was varied and vibrant, even within only five years and a 100-mile radius.

Even though this music was published, a grand feat for cloistered women during this period in history, its primary purpose was local. These pieces were meant to be performed and heard; that is, they were meant to do specific work within a specific community. And this work was multifaceted and complex. The performance of these pieces involved nuns on multiple levels: publicly, within the convent, and personally. On the public level, this music participated in familial, civic, and regional politics and pride. This music complicated and in some cases created inter-personal relationships between nuns and others – family, archbishops, curial officials, music teachers, etc. It inflected nuns’ lives and activities within the walls of the convent, as recreation and as a form of para-verbal communication between the sisters, giving voice to their beliefs and innermost ideas. Finally, as private devotional experience, this music assisted nuns in crafting their personal identities and helped them to deepen their relationships with God. It allowed them to be physically present in their bodies while using those bodies towards spiritual ends. It supported their identification and association with angels.



This music offered them key forms of devotional expression, even potentially providing opportunity for true union with the Divine.

The nun's voice, both figurative and literal, was of utmost importance. Generated in their corporeal bodies yet flying to God, nuns' sounding voices worked as a bridge between the spiritual and the physical worlds. The convent space itself was liminal, neither entirely of nor completely removed from the earthly world, and this 'between-ness' extended to the nuns themselves, and perhaps more importantly, their voices, which occupied a transgressive space. Nuns used their voices to sing and pray, but in these two acts, they also asserted a degree of autonomous control over their ideas, sexualities, identities, and spiritualities, which threatened the patriarchal hierarchy and generated massive ambiguity and discord over how nuns might most appropriately use those voices.

As we can see from the pieces I have analyzed here, nun composers often used their music to depict a particular kind of relationship with the Divine – one that took as its primary metaphor the human body and its sensations and emotions. The body – in pain, in love – was the most immediate and visceral, and thus the most powerful and memorable, way of evoking the ineffable and manifesting it in physical form through the pairing of poetry and musical events.

According to Aristoxenus of Tarentum, pupil of Aristotle and son of a renowned musician, music is both a “temporal becoming [and] a spatial being”.<sup>1</sup> Music, in existing neither entirely in time nor space, is similar in many ways to the lives of nuns themselves. Both their musical and life events took place within liminal, non-linear, or ritual conceptions of time in a convent conceived as a space between Earth and Heaven,

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Carpenter, “The Musical Object” *Current Musicology* 5 (1967), 59.

on Holy ground. This similarity is surely part of the reason nuns fought so hard to continue practicing their musical traditions when those traditions were called into question or suppressed.

So where do we go from here? What lies beyond? This dissertation purposely confines itself to a narrow slice of time. I suggest that we now broaden our horizons, and spread out the time constraints. I would like to see how things changed or stayed the same throughout the seventeenth century. For example, if we analyze nun composer Bianca Maria Meda's works, published in 1691, we can see that the sacred erotic at this time was still a powerful component of convent devotions. How did performance and ritual inflect performances of Meda's music? How did nuns at the end of the seventeenth century view themselves and their voices? What new cultural factors have come into play? Which ones have fallen by the wayside? Little research has been done on Meda beyond editions of her music and short biographical entries in reference materials.

A similar avenue would be to focus on repertory throughout the seventeenth century through a lens of queer theory. I would like to undertake a more in-depth examination into the queerness of nuns' voices as articulated through their liminality, or the potential relationships amongst performed embodiment, mysticism, and the "particular friendships" nuns sometimes developed. Did sacred eroticism affect nuns differently than uncloistered individuals, or from those living in heterosocial environments? Did convents seek out sacred erotic works written by other nuns, such as Cozzolani's works that eroticize the Virgin Mary, to perform with their own choirs?

Along these lines, further research is needed into convents with musical practices but no publications, convents that may have obtained and performed the music of Tressina or Vizzana for their own purposes. Were other nuns singing Cesis's version of

*Quest'è la bell'e sancta vincitrice* on the feast of St. Catherine? Cesis's convent shared a city block with two other convents. Did they share music as well? Did Cesis's choir even sing some of her works with the choir from Corpus Christi through one of their "doors of communication"? How might this music have been received in other convents? Cesis dedicated her motets to another nun with the same last name. Did this other Cesis oversee the performance of this music at her own convent?

And yet another direction follows the path of historical sound studies and the relationship between ritual and time. Cyclical notions of time can be linked to oral cultures, where the constant repetition of stories and knowledge is necessary for memory. Nuns lived in a cyclical, ritualistic time, and much of their culture was an oral one. Further research could explore manifestations of ritual, cyclical, and sonic time in devotional music written for and by Early Modern Italian nuns, looking in particular at song texts in this repertory that proclaim a past event as if happening *in the present* during the cycle of the Church calendar, such as "Christ is born"/"Christus natus est" or that refer specifically to temporality within the Christian mythology, such as speaking of the future to come or present occurrences in Heaven.

The possibilities for further inquiry are limitless. This dissertation represents only one step towards understanding the place that performed embodiment, voice, and the body held in nuns' personal devotions. And yet it is an important step. These women's voices were silenced so much in life, despite their fervent desires to be heard. Slowly, through the music they left, we can finally begin to listen.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

Account of the procession of April 29, 1594 to celebrate a new sacred relic in Modena.  
From Giovanni Battista Spaccini, *Cronaca Modenese* (1588-1636), ed. G. Bertoni, T. Sandonnini, and P.E. Vicini (Modena: G. Ferraguti e C.: 1911), Vol. 1, 34.

Aviandosi la processione verso le Monache di San Geminiano, sin alla lor chiesa, dov'era parato un bellissimo altare, dando volta e tornando all'in su verso le Caselle. Questo fu fatto per comodità acciocchè le monache potessero vedere, sendo la porta grande del convento aperta, e dinanzi v'havevano messo un sparaviero fatto a tela di ragno, sendo le monache accomodate per gradi, acciocchè tutte per ordine potessero vedere accomodatamente, sendo di sopra ad una finestra ferrata similmente accomodata, dov'era il corpo della loro musica con ogni sorta d'instromenti musicali, havendo Su[o]r Faustina Borghi mia cugina e figliuola del Sig. Geminiano, al presente abitante in Roma, giovane d'anni 22 virtuosissima in contraponto, di suonare di cornetto et d'organo, et essendo alieva di Fabio Ricchetti, et anco suona di leuto eccellentemente Suor Sulpizia figliuola dell'Ill.mo Signor Conte [Annibale] Cesis. Onde tornando al proposito nostro fecero concerto del motteto suo, qual fu molto lodato particolarmente dal Cavaliere del Cornetto.

## Appendix B

Leon Leoni's dedication to Alba Tressina in his *Sacri fiori, libro quarto* (Venice: Vincenti, 1622). Reprinted in Vittorio Bolcato, *Leone Leoni e la musica a Vicenza nei secoli XVI-XVII: Catalogo Tematico* (Venezia: Fondazione Levi, 1995), 140. Translation by Candace Smith.

ALLA MOLTO ILLVSTRE E MOLTO REVERENDA S. ALBA TRESSINA MONACHA IN  
ARACELI DI VICENZA.

Signora Osseruandissima.

Sgombra la Musica, quasi come di sensi Regina, i noiosi pensieri gioconda la  
tristezza, accende l'animo à li studij pregiati, temprà lo sdegno, l'anima  
incorporea corporalmente addolcisce, e con l'obsequio di cose insensibili preuale in  
reggere il dominio dei sensi. Di questa (oltre à le vostre rare virtù) diueniste  
voi Religiosa amante, all' hora che al seruitio dedicandoui di Dio, voleste con la scorta  
mia faruene lodeuole, e pia posseditrice, & in somma tale, che in questa mia  
musicale GHIRLANDA DI SACRI FIORI, in parte sono intessute le Rose care à le Gratie  
delle vostre nobili Compositioni. Era ben dunque conueniente, che à voi la dedicassi; Si  
perche con la voce vostra canora, con i dolcissimi accenti, e con il vostro canto e suono  
soaue, potesse far ch'ella spiri celeste armonia. Si ancora perche quasi di tutti questi  
fiori il concetto in varie occasioni mi si porgeua dal Molto Illustre Signor Alessandro  
Trento, Vostro Cugnato, & Mecenate de Virtuosi, al quale mi rendo certo, che piacerà  
di gradire, e vezzeggiare con l' amoroso Zeffiro della sua gratia, questi nostri comuni  
fiori, senza che mano alcuna inciuiile lor faccia oltraggio, conseruandoli sempre Aura  
tranquilla. E voi qual Alba nascente con li vostri odoriferi humori imperlate le viuaci

porpore delle vostre Rose, & indorate i miei languidi fiori: acciò che con il valor vostro comparischino quelle altere, e questi pomposi nella Scena de i Musici Giardini. Viuete felice, e siaui sempre fauoreuole il Cielo. Di Venetia li 14. di Decembrio MDCXXI.

Prontissimo à seruirla

Leon Leoni.

TO THE VERY ILLUSTRIOUS AND VERY REVEREND SISTER ALBA TRESSINA,  
NUN AT THE CONVENT OF ARACELI IN VICENZA.

My most observant lady,

Music, almost like the Queen of the senses, chases away tiresome thoughts, cheers sadness, enflames the spirit to valuable studies, tempers disdain, physically sweetens the disembodied soul, and with the obeisance of unfelt things prevails in governing the dominion of the senses. Of this [art] (in addition to your rare virtues) you became a Religious lover when, dedicating yourself to the service of God, you desired to become, under my guidance, a praiseworthy and pious possessor of it, such that this musical GARLAND OF SACRED FLOWERS is partially interwoven with the Roses of your noble Compositions so dear to the Graces. It was thus opportune that I dedicate it to you: indeed, because by means of your musical voice, with exceedingly sweet accents, and your lovely singing and playing, you might ensure that it breathes celestial harmony; and indeed also because the conceits of nearly all these flowers were proffered to me on various occasions by the Most Illustrious Lord Alessandro Trento, Your Brother-in-law and Patron of Virtuosi, whom I am certain will be pleased to delight in and embrace these communal flowers with the amorous Zephyr of his grace, so that no uncivil hand should bring them harm, but instead ever

reserve for them a tranquil Breeze. And you, breaking Dawn, with your fragrant humors, adorn with pearls the vivacious purple of your Roses, and gild my languid flowers, so that with your worthiness the lofty former and the pompous latter [flowers] may appear in the Scene of Musical Gardens. Live happily and may the Heavens be ever favorable to you.

Venice, 14 December 1621.

Readily in your service,

Leone Leoni

## **Appendix C**

*From Capitolo XXXVII. Il canto e il suono, Libro IV of De ecstaticis mulieribus, et illulis (1616) by Federigo Borromeo. Translated into Italian by Francesco di Ciaccia in Da Dio a satana: L'opera di Federico Borromeo sul "Misticismo vero e falso delle donne" (Milano: Xenia Edizioni, 1988), 195.*

Una mistica, di grande santità, morì lasciando fama di sè. Quando era in vita, le consorelle, tutte d'alto livello spirituale, le avevano chiesto di manifestare loro una qualche esperienza, a suo piacimento, della celeste armonia. La monaca, che era soprattutto modesta con un concetto umilissimo di sè, non riteneva di possedere alcun singolare dono e, per un po', diceva di non essere in grado di soddisfare il loro desiderio. Vinta infine dalle loro preghiere, con volto sereno ed allegro tentò di fare qualcosa. Prese in mano uno strumento a corde, che aveva imparato ad usare fin da piccolo, e suonando leggermente accompagnò la musica con un canto così soave e così diverso dalla normale capacità artistica e dal profano gusto, che le persone attorno ebbero a dire di non avere mai sentito al mondo una melodia del genere.

Non abbiamo ragione di dubitare della veridicità e della semplicità del racconto. Quando dunque cantava, questa mistica in breve tempo restava del tutto alienata dai sensi e, non appena cessava di cantare, continuava con la mano estatica a sviluppare la melodia delle corde dello strumento seguendo perfettamente i modi specifici dell'arte musicale.



## Appendix D

The vocal ranges of Alba Tressina's pieces:

<b>Title</b>	<b>Vocal part</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Clef</b>
<i>In nomine Iesu</i> ("Due Alti")	altus primus altus secundus	f# - a'	alto
<i>Quemadmodum</i>	Voce Sola: Alto	g - b'	alto
<i>Vulnerasti cor meum</i>	Voce Sola: Alto	f# - b'	alto
<i>Anima mea liquefacta est</i> ("Due alti & Tenore")	altus primus altus secundus tenore	f# - a' g - a' e - e'	alto alto tenor

I am following the Helmholtz system of pitch notation, which delineates octaves as follows:

C            c            c' (middle C)            c''            c'''

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