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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

THE MADRIGALS OF GESUALDO

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Music in the Graduate
School of Boston University

Boston University

June, 1954

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INTRODUCTION

Gesualdo, the eminent madrigalist,
Played the lute well, and was not a bad regalist.
At keyboard extemporaries,
He beat all his contemporaries, ¹
As, later, did also a lad we call Liszt.

The purpose of this thesis is to show that Gesualdo made a substantial contribution to the emphasis of the madrigal composition in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I shall attempt this aim by a summary history of the rise, development, and perfection of the madrigal as an art form.

I shall follow the history of the madrigal from its inception in the fourteenth century, through its fluctuations in the fifteenth century, up to the magical touch of Gesualdo's musical skill which placed the madrigal at the height of its power and artistry. He contributed to the assured development of the madrigal, and placed it in its musical eminence more than any other one of his contemporaries.

The thesis will develop, in part, the personal characteristics of Gesualdo as a man, in order, to intensify the artistic genius of Gesualdo as a musician. I have sought the opinions of the musical critics of this madrigal period to reiterate the importance of Gesualdo's work in the madrigal. From these sources and my own free investigation of the madrigal period in the well-documented histories of the

¹
Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine, Carlo Gesualdo,
(London: J. Curwen & Sons, Ltd. 1926.) p. 77.

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY MADRIGAL

The traditional form of the madrigal, first created by the poets and reaching its apex in the sixteenth century, is a composition on a profane subject (pastoral or sentimental,) written for voices only, harmonically or contrapuntally, and artistically.

It can be traced back to the Provençal pastourelle, but its character underwent a great change in the interval, for it now no longer treats of adventures in love with rustic beauties. Its poetic form is strictly regulated and its object, especially in the older madrigals of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Sacchetto, is the contemplation of nature.¹

As to the origin of the term madrigal, one is forced to say that the etymology of the word is uncertain. In an early fourteenth century work by Francesco da Barbarino, we find that he used the Latin word "matricale," (belonging to the womb" or "matrix") from which we can draw the conclusion that the madrigal originally denoted a poem in the mother tongue.²

Others say that it came from the Italian, "madre," and signifies a Poem, addressed, as is said to have been the case

¹ J. Combarieu, Histoire de la Musique (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1953,) p. 505.

² Gustave Reese, Music in the Middle Ages (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1940,) p. 362.

with the first Madrigals, to Our Lady.

The word mandrialis as used by Antonio da Tempo in 1332, designated a rustic kind of pastoral poem.

Again it is thought to have come from the Spanish Madrugada (the break of day.) So that if we take it as coming from the Provencal pastourelle, it would mean the "song of the shepherd," the pastoral poetry; on the other hand if we say it was derived from the Spanish, it would mean "the morning song."

According to Monsieur Vincent d'Indy, the "madrigal seems to have been a vocal composition written in general for three to six voices, on a profane subject and very erotic."¹

Monsieur Maurice Emmanuel considers the madrigal "as an imitation of the motet, in a modern tongue and in a profane style."

All authorities are agreed on one point: viz., that the name was first given to a certain kind of poem, and afterwards transferred to the music to which it was sung, written for three or more voices, in the ancient Ecclesiastical Modes, without instrumental accompaniment.²

Poetry went hand in hand with music. The fourteenth century was the first great flowering time of Italian ver-

¹ Louis Schneider, Claudio Monteverdi, (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1921), p.224.

² W.S. Rockstro, Esq. Madrigal, Groves Dictionary, ed. Sir George Grove, II (1890), p.187.

nacular. The lyrics of Dante and Petrarch and those of their contemporaries, were set by the composers of the day and freely sung.

The most ancient madrigal composer whose name is known to us is Pietro Casella, Dante's friend of whose music he speaks as,

"That amorous song
Which erst was wont my every
care to lull.

(Purgatorio, Canto II)

Again:

"Then he began so sweetly
That the sweetness still sounds within me.

1. 113-114

Milton alludes to him in his Sonnet to M.H. Lawes:

"Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
Than his Casella, whom he woo'd to sing
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory."

Longfellow in his translation of Dante says:

"Casella was a Florentine musician and friend of Dante, who here speaks to him with so much tenderness and affection as to make us regret that nothing more is known of him." ¹

Alexandre Masseron, in his translation of Dante, Purg., II, 76-123, says of Casella; "Musicien, ami de Dante, qui débarque, avec beaucoup de retard, sur la plage du purgatoire, au moment où le poète y arrive lui-même, et qui y donne un petit concert." ²

None of Casellas' compositions is extant.

¹ Henry W. Longfellow, Translator, The Divine Comedy of Dante, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1888). Note 91, p.367.

² Alexandre Masseron, Translator, Dante, (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1948).

A typical fourteenth century madrigal consists of one to four stanzas of three 7, or 11 syllable lines, each stanza being sung to the same music; and of a ritornello of two lines set in a contrasting rhythm, occurring at the end. The ritornello, then, is not a refrain. The matter of the madrigal is usually contemplative, idyllic.

Madrigals were composed chiefly by the members of the early Italian School; e.g. Jacopo da Bologna and Giovanni da Cascia. In the second half of the fourteenth century the madrigal was largely abandoned in favor of the ballata.¹

The trecento madrigal as regards style may best be described as an "ornamented conductus style," contrasting sharply with the genuinely polyrhythmic style of contemporary French music. The Italian coloraturas of the seventeenth century were foreshadowed in its impressively designed ornamenting lines.

Upon examination of Landini's two-voiced madrigals, one will notice that he rather strictly adheres to the just described type, but arrives at a freer treatment in his three-voiced examples. These are all through-composed and show French influence in their polyrhythmic texture. The madrigal "Sy dolce non sono" of Landini, is an example of a through-composed form. This is one of the few examples found in medieval music showing a discrepancy between the literary

¹ Gustave Reese, Music in the Middle Ages, p.362.

and the musical structure of a composition based on a poetic text. Although the poem is an eight-line madrigal, yet it is not set to music in the corresponding musical form, a a b, but is through-composed. Thus it anticipates the procedure which was universally adopted for the sixteenth-century madrigal. Its connection with the tradition of the fourteenth century appears from the fact that it has an isorhythmic tenor,¹ with a talea of seven measures.

Although the madrigal was influenced by the past, yet it still voiced a new spirit. In the thirteenth-century polyphony, the individuality of the parts was paramount; the fourteenth-century madrigal seems to desire a greater relationship between them.²

After Landini's time, the word madrigal lost its musical suggestion and was applied only to a poetic form. Not until the sixteenth century is the madrigal again heard of.

¹ Cf Appendix

² Gustave Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages*, p.364.

CHAPTER II

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY MADRIGAL

The sixteenth century might be compared to ours as a period of radical musical change.

The Italian generation of about 1585 to 1615 must have been as racked by controversy as our own is. The lovers of the older art could not see that most of the new men were producing anything as rich in expression and as masterly in technique, as the old art that they so despised. The solidly schooled classicists of the period could only smile indulgently at the dilettantism of the time. This older generation, knowing the perfection of the art that it had taken centuries to develop, would often be nettled at the lack of understanding of it displayed by some of the younger spirits, whom they regarded as little more than semi-amateurs.¹

"What the new style was in the utmost need of on the theoretical side," says Ambros, "was a properly developed theory of harmony, of structure, of modulation, of accompaniment; of all this neither Doni nor anyone else had the least conception." It was not till afterwards, when the practitioners had discovered all these characteristics, that theory entered as usual; testing, searching, getting down to foundations, and win from the practice that now lay ready to

¹ Ernest Newman, A Musical Critic's Holiday, (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1925). p. 175.

its hand the rules that in turn could govern and lead practice.¹

At the turn of the century, too much thought had been given to Peri, Caccini, and Monteverdi; too little thought to the changes that were going on in the madrigal.

Artusi admits that there is much that is good in these new madrigals, but there is too much that is novel in them.

"The texture is not ungrateful," he says, "but he, [Monteverdi] introduces new rules, new modes, new kinds of phrases, that however are harsh and unpleasing to the ear, and could not be otherwise; for if the good rules are broken, rules founded partly on experience, the mother of all things, partly on nature, and partly on demonstration, we must believe that these novelties are deformities of the nature and of the propriety of true harmony, and far removed from² the true end of music which is to give delight."

The innovations of that period were very much to the taste of the average music-lovers of the time. Artusi was merely an arrogant and obstinate pedagogue of no particular importance even in his own day.

The real ancestor of the sixteenth-century madrigal was the frottola, originally a folk-song, whose melody came to be more or less artistically handled by learned composers. As Ambros puts it, "A Frottola thus ennobled became a Madrigal; and a Madrigal, degraded, became again a Frottola."³

¹ Ernest Newman, A Musical Critic's Holiday, p. 176.

² Ibid., p. 179.

³ Donald Ferguson, A History of Musical Thought, (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co. 1939). p.109.

The musicians of the early sixteenth century, at first Netherlands composers working in Italy, cooperated with the poets in order to arrive at a new style of courtly refinement and of artistic expression.

The style of the earliest madrigals, published in 1533, (including eight pieces by Verdelot, three by Carlo, two by Festa,) differs little from that of the late frottolas. These madrigals are written in a very simple homophonic style, as illustrated by "Quando ritrova," by Festa, who was the first native composer of madrigals.¹

Arcadelt's "Voi ve n'andate," published in 1539, represents a considerably more advanced type. It clearly shows the influence of the contemporary motet, but also includes expressive elements proper to the madrigal. For example, the impatient urge of the passage, "Ma struggendo."² This tendency is carried considerably further in Cipriano de Rore's "Da le belle contrade" with its exciting exclamations "T'en vai," its daring change of harmony at "Ahi crud' amor," its word painting of the "Iterando amplessi," and its prophetic use of Chromaticism.³

¹
Cf Appendix II

²
Cf Appendix III

³
Cf Appendix IV

Archibald Davison & Willi Apel, Historical Anthology of Music, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947.)

Cipriano de Rore made a decided shift toward secular music, approximately two-thirds of his output being given over to madrigals. Cipriano, perhaps more than any other composer, endowed the madrigal with all the technical refinements of Flemish music.

About this time the conventional number of voices is increased to five or even six, and all the resources of imitation and antiphony begin to appear. Melody is seen to be like line, in drawing; Rhythm is like motion; chromatic progressions are like subtle inflections of the voice in speech, or the more inarticulate sounds of sighing and wailing. Thus the attempt is often made to suggest through the music very literal illustrations of the ideas conveyed by the text. The possibilities of suggestion which chromatic progression offer are largely made use of as in the "Chromatic Madrigals" of Cipriano de Rore.¹

Marenzio, devoted his best energies to the advancement of secular Art: producing nine books of Madrigals for five voices; six, for six voices; and many later ones. All were so well appreciated, that, even during his life-time, he was honoured with the well-earned title of "Il piu dolce Cigno d'Italia." He has been said to hold a position in the development of the Italian madrigal similar to that of Schubert in the development of the symphony; on the border line between "classical" repose (represented by Arcadelt and Palestrina;)

¹ Donald Ferguson, A History of Musical Thought, p.110.

and "romantic" emotionalism (represented by Gesualdo, Monteverdi.)¹

A collection of madrigals, by prominent Italian composers, published in London in 1588, stirred the interest of the English composers in this form. They adopted the form with enthusiasm, availed themselves of the rich poetic resources around them, and before long gave the madrigal a distinctly English character.

The English composers, following the prevailing musical taste of their times, found effective musical illustrations for the descriptive words or phrases in their texts. They were particularly adept in utilizing dissonant chords to underscore important words. The emphasis on expression is best described by Thomas Morley. In his "A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke" (1597,) he says of the form:

"As for the musick it is next unto the Motet, the most artificial (that is full of artifice) and to men of understanding most delightfull. If therefore you will compose in this kind you must possesse your selfe with an amorus humor ... so that you must in your musicke be wavering like the wind, sometime wanton, sometime drooping, sometime grave and staide, otherwhile effeminat ... and the more varietie you show the better shall you please."

As the century moved toward its close, the madrigal won an overwhelming popularity from composer and layman alike.

¹ Archibald T. Davison and Willi Apel, Historical Anthology of Music, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947. p.234

Every possible device which could add to its attractiveness was employed. The most characteristic of these was the so-called, "madrigalism." Mr. Henri Prunieres' description of it both with regard to method and realization is so acute that it is given here in full:

"The composer does not aim only at transposing into appropriate melody and harmony the prevailing atmosphere of the short poem; he endeavors to paraphrase minutely its ideas and its very language. Long festoons of thirds weave themselves about the chains of love; sighs are transplanted by pauses and breaks in the melody; the idea of duration, of immobility, is expressed by the holding of a single voice, the others carrying on their parts relentlessly. The voices rise on the words heaven, heights, ascension; they fall on the words earth, sea, abyss, hell. The notes scatter in silvery groups around the words laughter, joyous, gay. Finally martyrdom, sadness, pain, cruelty, tears are expressed by audacious discords and unexpected modulations. This preoccupation with literal translation, with the exact rendering of detail, is peculiar to the new style, and ... finally created a vast repertory of musical commonplaces on which composers drew unsparingly." ¹

¹
Henri Pruniere, Monteverdi, (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1924.) p.6.

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The name of Gesualdo in Neapolitan history dates back to the dark ages.

"The family of Gesualdo has always held in esteem the art of music, and many knights and princes who have adorned every age, have often exchanged the pen for the sword, and musical instruments for the pen, as witness whereof the most excellent Prince of Venosa," the subject of the present study. 1

His father, Fabrizio, was "greatly appreciative of music," according to a contemporary writer, Ammirato:

"In this noble art one finds many learned compositions of his which are held in great esteem by the cognoscenti. Moreover he maintained in his own house an academy of all the musicians of the city, whom he supported and favoured most courteously." 2

Some writers seem to think that Ammirato confused the father with the son.

Carlo Gesualdo, the subject of our study, the second son of Fabrizio, was born about 1560. Early in life, he showed a remarkable aptitude for music, which could only have been intensified and stimulated by his environment and opportunities. His teacher is said to have been Pomponio Nenna. Carlo learnt composition and received instruction in the playing of several instruments. He was particularly

¹ Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine, Carlo Gesualdo, p.7.

² Ibid., p.7.

renowned as a performer on the bass-lute. His early reputation was rather that of an executant than of a composer, and of a musical Maecenas and art patron.

Cerreto, in his book entitled "Della prattica Musica, vocale et Strumentale," says of him: (1601)

"Not only did this Prince take great delight in music, but also for his pleasure and entertainment did keep at his court, at his own expense, many excellent composers, players and singers so that I do often think that if this nobleman had lived at the time of the Greeks of antiquity, when one who was ignorant of music was considered uneducated, however great his knowledge of other things, they would have raised up unto his memory a statue, not of mere marble, but of purest gold."

We know that Gesualdo had his own private academy. Chief among the members were; Muzio Effrem, Giovanni Leonardo Primavera, Rocco Rodio, Scipione Dentice, Stefano Felis, Fabrizio Filomarino, Antonio Grifone, and Scipione Stella, a composer, who constitutes the link with Roman¹ music.

Many poets too, were present at the gatherings of the camerata. The foremost of these was Torquato Tasso, the poet of his age.

Gesualdo met Tasso about Easter in 1588, and a close friendship was established between them, which was only terminated by the poet's death in 1595.

Tasso was not only the outstanding poet of his age, but he also belonged to the elite of Italy. He, like those

¹ Alfred Einstein, "The Italian Madrigal," II, (New Jersey: Princeton, 1949.) p.688.

of his circle, believed music to be the first of all the arts. Tasso exhaled music in all his verses. His loves were born at the sound of song, even the voice of a young maiden moved him. He mixed with the great composers of the day, such as, Palestrina, Luca Marenzio, and the Prince of Venosa.¹

He was the greatest living exponent of the literary form known as the madrigal. From 1592 onwards he sent his noble friend forty madrigals, written expressly for him. Eight of these are actually among the Prince's published compositions. The prevailing spirit of Gesualdo's music, its passionate sorrow, elegiac tenderness, and eloquent despair, are essentially a musical paraphrase of the spirit of Tasso's poetry.

To Gesualdo, the text is merely the occasion, the indispensable raw material of his aristocratic music. His relation to his poets is the direct opposite of the relation of the minstrel to the troubadour. Now it is the musician who rides the high horse while the poet holds his stirrup. His texts had to be short. They had to give him the opportunity to shape his music as he pleased by repeating parts of the text.²

It was about the year 1585, that his elder brother Luigi died. This was to be the cause of a most terrible

¹ Leo Schneider, Claudia Monteverdi, p.160.

² Alfred Einstein, The Italian Madrigal, II, p.691.

tragedy in Carlo's life. Since he now became the heir to the title and estates of the house of Gesualdo, it was therefore incumbent upon him to marry and produce descendants. The idea of marriage must have been uncongenial to his temperament, for at a time when the nobility were accustomed to marry at an extremely early age, Carlo was still single at thirty. A contemporary writer tells us that he cared for nothing but music. Still, the obligations of his position proved stronger than his personal inclinations. In 1586, he was married to his first cousin, Donna Maria d'Avalos, who, though only twenty-one, had already been married twice. One chronicler goes so far as to say that Donna Maria was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the kingdom of the Two Sicilies. They seemed to have been happy for some three or four years, which seems as long as Donna Maria could endure one husband. Then, in the year 1590, occurred the terrible event in Gesualdo's life, the murder of his wife and her lover.

How long Carlo remained at Gesualdo is not known, but in 1591, his father died, and he consequently became Prince of Venosa. Gesualdo's life, from this time onwards, is essentially one of intense pre-occupation with music. In 1594, he married Donna Eleonora d'Este.

We next hear of Gesualdo at the Court of the Estes, at Ferrara, in 1594. Ferrara was at this time, the most cultured, enlightened, and splendid city in the whole of Italy.

It was a city of music, the art, which above all others, had always been cultivated there. In the palace of the Grand Duke, there were concerts several times every day. The musical library was reputed to be the most extensive in the world, both in printed books and in manuscripts.

All the most eminent composers of the day were connected, directly or indirectly, with Ferrara. One could have met there Brumel, maestro di cappella; the great Josquin Despres; Vicentino; Cipriano de Rore; Luzzasco Luzzaschi; the brothers Alfonso and Francesco della Viola; all of whom spent the greater part of their active careers at Ferrara. Others who were at some time or other connected with the court of Ferrara, were Willaert; Orlando di Lasso; Luca Marenzio; Palestrina himself, who passed several years at Ferrara, and John¹ Dowland.

The poets, who more than any others, were associated with the great vogue and popularity of the madrigal, namely Tasso and Guarini, were all their lives intimately connected with the court. To this musician's paradise the Prince of Venosa bent his steps. The duke, Alfonso II, died two years after Gesualdo came to Ferrara.

Gesualdo is thought to have returned to Naples or Gesualdo some years later. The last years of his life were very unhappy. In a chronicle entitled, "Roveni di Case Napolitane del suo tempo," by one Don Ferrante della Marra

¹ Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine, Carlo Gesualdo, p.47.

(Duca della Guardia nell' anno 1632,) we read: "The Prince Don Carlo Gesualdo lived to see his crimes punished by God through the infliction of four great misfortunes, resulting in the total extermination of his house and race."

What were these misfortunes? The first, was the great shame he suffered, for the space of two years, due to the conduct of his unfaithful wife, Donna Maria d'Avalos.

His remorse, for having slain Donna Maria, was so great, that in his frenzy, he treated his vassals not only avariciously and lasciviously, but also tyrannically. Perhaps for this, God took to himself, a beautiful male child, whom he had by his second wife, Donna Eleonora d'Ests. This may be considered his second great affliction.

His third affliction was, that he was continually tormented by a vast horde of demons, which gave him no peace.

The fourth was the death of his only son, Don Emmanuele, who hated his father and had longed for his death. Don Emmanuele was Donna Maria's child.¹

¹ Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine, Carlo Gesualdo, p.49.

CHAPTER IV

CRITICAL OPINIONS

What place did Gesualdo hold as an individual musician and as a link in the chain of musical development? We find here two schools of thought. Burney, Ambros, and Eitner, thought Gesualdo a dilettantish experimenter; whereas, Leichtentritt, Keiner, and Heseltine thought him a genius. It was Eitner who said:

"With a perseverance that is positively plebeian, the Prince turned out innumerable madrigals whose harmonic idiom made them real monstrosities for their time. Closer examination perhaps reveals a predilection for Cipriano de Rore, a harmonist of genius, but His Highness did not have talent enough to imitate Rore with success."

Innumerable madrigals? Gesualdo wrote only seven books with about 150 pieces if we count as separate numbers the subdivisions of those madrigals that have more than one section. Besides these seven books of madrigals, he also wrote three books of church music; motets a cinque from 1603; motets a sei from the same year; and responds a sei from 1611.¹

Giovanni Battista Doni (1594-1647,) jurist, eminent classical scholar, professor of rhetoric, and writer on musical subjects, is our most important source for the animated days of this great stylistic change, brought out in the madrigal. Alluding to Gesualdo's extraordinary expressiveness,

¹ Alfred Einstein, The Italian Madrigal, p.692.

Doni affirms that he "had been definitely born for music and that with his expressive melodies he could clothe any harmony." Elsewhere, comparing the compositions of Gesualdo with those of Monteverdi, he noted that "the melodies of the Prince are more varied than those of Monteverdi," also, that his rhythm is more "elegant."

A discordant note sounding in this musical criticism was that of Dr. Burney, who not understanding the boldness and originality of Gesualdo's style, asserted that he found in his compositions, "a perpetual technical incompetence, and the inexperience of an amateur." Fetis, with considerable penetration, says:

"Ce jugement, aussi sévère qu'injuste, prouve seulement que Burney n'a pas compris la pensée originale qui domine dans les madrigaux du prince de Venouse. Tous ces morceaux sont des scènes mélancoliques et douces, où le musicien s'est proposé d'exprimer le sens poétique des paroles, suivant sa manière individuelle de sentir ... Le système de succession des tons employé par Gesualdo n'est pas la modulation véritable car l'élément harmonique de l'enchaînement des tonalités n'existait pas encore lorsqu'il écrivait, mais ces successions mêmes sont une partie de sa pensée et Burney avait tort de les juger d'après les règles ordinaires." ¹

That Burney's and Eitner's views were not the general critical opinion of the century in which they lived, is shown by the appreciative remarks of the important Hawkins, for whom "the distinguishing excellencies of the composi-

¹

Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine, Carlo Gesualdo, p.122.

tions of this admirable author are fine contrivance, original harmony, and the sweetest modulation conceivable."

Monteverdi realized that to achieve intensity in the expression of words or situations, his musical resources must be enriched and not impoverished. Gesualdo may be ranked with him in this respect, as a composer whose art is firmly rooted in the polyphonic tradition, and whose innovations are in the nature of an exuberant growth from the rich soil of the past, and not, as the works of Peri and Caccini, the dubious and tender first fruits of a bleak and untilled land.

Gesualdo, in his own generation, was praised, because musicians found his music remarkable. He was recognized for what he was, an original thinker, a daring harmonist, and a pioneer of pathetic expression. We read in Hawkins's history that Geminiani "has been often heard to declare that he laid the foundation of his studies in the work of the Principe di Venosa."

In Padre Martini's "Saggio di contrapunto (1774-5,) a fine account is given of what Gesualdo really was in comparison with his leading contemporaries in the same genre:

"Gesualdo's style will perhaps appear a little rough to some people today; but his real richness in the finesses of the art and his powerful expression of the words of the madrigals outweigh the touch of morbidezza, the sentimentality, that generally pleases the hearers."

In a remarkable harmonic passage from Gesualdo, quoted by Ambros, the latter asks: "But how does it help the composer to have captured this wonder-beast? There fails him the right understanding of this construction."

To which Dr. Leichtentritt replies that he cannot see how Gesualdo can be said to miss this understanding, as "the employment of these altered chords is absolutely correct according to the rules of the new harmony." However, the famed critic Ernest Newman says:

... "This is to miss the whole point of Ambros's criticism. The whole point of his criticism is that a composer may be a remarkable harmonic innovator, but not see all through and all round his new effects, so that, instead of their being woven into the very tissue of his style as a whole, they remain embroidered, as it were, upon it." ¹

Gesualdo seems to have had two different styles; one for ordinary purposes, one for purposes of pathos and word-painting. Ambros was as keen as Dr. Leichtentritt in clearly perceiving that Gesualdo's modulations were not only remarkable for their own time, but perfectly logical in ours. ²

"Gesualdo reminds us ... of a naive savage, who rapturously feasts on a delicious fruit that has dropped from a tree on his path, but troubles no further about the tree itself, much less of a rational cultivation of this, so that he may bring his master more of such fruits."

¹ Ernest Newman, A Musical Critic's Holiday, p.213.

² Ibid., p.213.

Both Ambros and Keiner note, that the harmonist in Gesualdo does not find it always easy to square matters with the contrapuntist. Yet, Ambros calls him a genius.

The harmonic innovations of Monteverdi, Gesualdo, and others were primarily motivated by the desire to "paint" this or that significant word. Dr. Leichtentritt in discussing sixteenth-century counterpoint, says of Gesualdo:

"With the eye of genius, Gesualdo had perceived what it has taken us centuries to reach. He knows already that all the chromatic tones (even all the conceivable chords) can be added to any major or minor scale whatever; which is the quintessence of modern harmonic theory ... According to twentieth-century conception of harmony, Gesualdo undoubtedly ranks among the greatest harmonic masters."

There is a connection between the music of Gesualdo's motets and his life. The motets consist of nothing but cries of anguish, self-accusation, and repentance. The whole seems to be a musical reflection of the famous altarpainting in the Capuchin monastery at Gesualdo, where we see the composer, under the patronage of his uncle, Carlo Borromeo, being commended by the Saints and by Our Lady to the mercy of the Saviour.¹

Gesualdo seems to have been influenced by Marenzio. The latter, with all his taste, was a practical musician, not a humanist. Gesualdo, as a member of the high nobility had received the education of his class and had undoubtedly read

¹ Alfred Einstein, The Italian Madrigal, p.692.

and understood Vincenzo Galileis' mocking diatribes against "eye-music" and other forms of symbolism. Gesualdo is a pure expressionist.

CHAPTER V

CREATIVE ARTIST

To ears that are satiated with the diatonic, one of the chief delights of modal music is its quality of unexpectedness which, paradox though it may seem, does not altogether wear off with familiarity. The absence of key-feeling and the illusion of free and wayward modulation present us with continual surprises; and it is this element of surprise which chromaticism so greatly enhanced. There can be no doubt that the old composer felt, as we do, that chromaticism quite literally gave "color" to music.

Gesualdo stands as far away on the other side of the tonic and dominant system as certain modern composers, whose idiom may be roughly described as one of modality tempered by chromaticism, stand on this side of it. Gesualdo's compositions are based on the twelve-note scale, rather than the ecclesiastical modes on the one hand, or the diatonic major and minor scales on the other.¹

Gesualdo was a creative artist whose best works retain their expressive significance to the present day. Since practice precedes theory in musical matters, it is almost impossible for the technical parlance of his day to provide any explanation of the workings of his strange mind. It would be more profitable for those who encounter Gesualdo's

¹ Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine, Carlo Gesualdo, p.95.

music for the first time, to consider it as a purely expressive phenomenon.

If one were to attempt to make a survey of the rise and development of chromaticism during the three centuries preceding Gesualdo, one would derive his information from the works of theorists who concerned themselves almost exclusively with sacred music.

As regards harmony, it is a cause of wonder that men who were entirely unaccustomed to think of music in terms of chords, yet managed to achieve, by skilful manipulation of lines and rhythms alone, harmonic effects of the greatest beauty and appropriateness.

We, who have all been brought up on the four-square tune harmonized in chords which are merely subsidiary to the tune, necessarily find it very difficult to cast our minds back to the time when music was conceived in terms of pure line. If we fail to realize this fact, we cannot properly appreciate the significance of those composers who first thought of employing purely harmonic effects to heighten the expressive power of their music.

It is in the madrigals of the sixteenth century that the gradual development of the harmonic sense can best be studied. All through this period we find that the use of discords, chromaticism, and bold original harmonic progressions, are invariably occasioned by some particular emotional point in the words of the madrigal which the composer wished to emphasize in his music.

Cipriano de Rore in his Latin ode, displays not only an harmonic sense very much in advance of that of his contemporaries, but also a remarkable sense of tone-color, being designed for the unusual combination of four bass voices. The opening bars of the ode are quoted in Appendix V.

In the works of Rocco Rodio (1581) and Guiseppe Caimo (1585,) we find experiments in "word-painting," of considerable interest from the technical point of view, and by no means negligible from the aesthetic.¹

All these composers, however, fade into comparative insignificance beside the figure of Luca Marenzio, the greatest of all the Italian Madrigalists. He was rivalled only by Palestrina in melodic invention. His chief praise lies in the most consummate skill, by which he handled polyphonic structure in the traditional manner. While Palestrina paid but little heed to the methods of the newer harmonic school, Marenzio, was keenly alive to the possibilities of the new style. Thus while sacrificing none of the older polyphonic methods, he was able to enrich them with the added wealth of chromaticism and the new harmonic resources derived from it. Notice in Appendix VI, an extract from Marenzio's 9th book of five-part madrigals (1599) the bold melodic outlines and independence of the individual parts; the strikingly original progressions of harmony; and the magnificent shape and structure of the whole passage, which illustrates with such

¹
Cf Appendix VII

perfection the spirit of the words:

Solo e pensoso i piu deserti campi
Vo' misurando a passi tarde lento.

In the field of harmonic expressionism, Gesualdo stands out in isolation as a figure of extraordinary originality and indubitable genius. From the outset, as we have seen Gesualdo was always occupied with the problem of personal expression. In his most mature and, harmonically, most advanced compositions the line of an individual voice part generally shows us quite logically how the most surprising progression has been brought about; a single note in one of the parts, chromatically altered by an accidental, becomes a kind of pivot on which the harmony swings away from the expected resolution into what, in modern parlance, would be called a remote key.

Gesualdo, the true musical genius who made a deep impression upon the following generation and upon posterity in general, does not appear until after 1594. It is a piece from his sixth book of which Pietro della Valle writes in his famous letter to Lelio Guidiccione: "For its pitying and compassionate expression, I particularly liked the Prince of Venosa's, 'Resta di darmi noia', a famous piece."¹

It is a piece that is most extreme in its attitude. What caused this development of the eccentric side of his nature? Was it his acquaintance with the music of Luzzaschi,

¹
Cf Appendix VIII

who stood at the head of the Este court music? Luzzaschi dedicated his 4th book of madrigals to Gesualdo on September 10, 1594, less than a year after Gesualdo's arrival in Ferrara.

In the dedication Luzzaschi expressly says:

"Inasmuch as Your Excellency has in various ways made known to the world, both far and near, that you esteem my compositions, feeble though they be, I have resolved to dedicate to Your Excellency the first appearance of these madrigals, which now leave my hands." ¹

In comparing Gesualdo's madrigals with those of Luzzasco's, one finds that in Gesualdo's music, everything is more energetic, restless, and impassioned than it is with Luzzasco's, whose music tends to be more quiet and harmonious.

From the outset, Gesualdo goes further harmonically, his motifs are less simple and "diatonic;" he avoids pairing his voices. Fundamentally, however, the two styles are the same. In both there is the same breaking up of the piece by rests in all the voices, both have the same motet-like expositions in close imitation, and the same epigrammatic brevity. ²

Again, we can see how closely Gesualdo approaches the Ferrarese madrigal style when one examines the work of a musician who represents this style in its purest form. This is Count Alfonso Fontanelli, who cannot very well have studied with anyone but Luzzasco. Fontanelli might be called Gesualdo's harmonious and well-balanced counterpart. ³

¹ Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, p. 698.

² *Ibid.*, p. 703.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 704

In a letter of Count Fontanelli to the Duke of Ferrara, published for the first time in the monograph, "Il Principe di Venosa e Leonora d'Ests" (Milano-Bocca, 1941) there are interesting references concerning Gesualdo. In another letter written on the 21st of May 1594, we learn that Gesualdo did not cease from writing "Arie di Firenze," arias that he caused to be executed, in the society that he frequented, by Scipione Palla, who was in his circle, and who was a teacher to Giulio Caccini.¹

There is also a singular resemblance between this musician-prince and his contemporary, Caravaggio. The painter created a style remarkable for its vigor, handling of light and shadow, coloring and emotional depth. Yet, his magnificent pictorial compositions are often marred by emphasis on naturalism. With Caravaggio, Gesualdo appears as an innovator deeply intrigued by experiments; like some of his nineteenth century colleagues, he seems to have tried his chords and modulations on the keyboard of his instrument, and thus arrived at the most sublime or the most bizarre sounds.²

Gesualdo was interested solely in expressing the poetic and dramatic content of the text. He did not care for tonal unity; the madrigal became in his hands a free sequence of impressions, pictures, and musical outbursts. The beauty of

¹ Francesco Vatielli, Monumenti I, (Roma: Istituto Italiano, Per La Storia Della Musica, 1942.) p.x

² Paul Henry Lang; Music in Western Civilization, (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, Inc. 1941. p.326.

his harmonic language is often remarkable, and the boldness and ingenuity of his modulations rival, if they do not surpass,¹ those of Marenzio and Monteverdi.

So that, one might say, that what specifically characterized Gesualdo's madrigals was their harmonic independence, their sense of balance of form, their brilliant contrapuntal writing and particular felicitousness in giving tonal expression to every shade, emotion, and sentiment of the words.

"Gesualdo was a composer of extraordinary genius," wrote Philip Heseltine, "whose works ... still live in the fullest sense of the word as vivid and passionate exclamations of the human soul."

Gesualdo's contribution to the first period of dramatic music was no less important than the contributions of Peri and Monteverdi.

Gesualdo, was, in the madrigal, the most genuine and immediate representative of the following characteristics; the exaggerated importance of the sense of the word, the exaggeration of pathos, and the accentuation of color.

Historically, his position is important as being that of one whose ability was great enough to translate the harmonic tendencies of the most advanced of his own and past ages into terms of high art. In the history of the madrigal, Gesualdo's name stands supreme.

¹
Cf Appendices IX and X.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has exhibited the history of the madrigal through two centuries, from the fourteenth through the sixteenth when it was at the apogee of its power. So great was that power that its echoes still charm the musical world.

The fifteenth century has not been touched because during it this especial music form waned and finally died out.

It flourished in a renaissance movement toward the first third of the sixteenth century, gradually growing in importance in musical artistry until the last decade of the century, when it found its ultimate exposition in the works of Gesualdo.

Perhaps the very torturous personality of the passionate nature of Gesualdo, might have been one of the means by which this turbulent energy burst its banks in the harmonies of the madrigals, which he has left as an enrichment for music.

These artistic characteristics have been analysed in the course of this thesis. The Opinions of contemporary musical critics, and those of a later time, have stressed the work of Gesualdo, in molding the form of the madrigal to a piece of consummate musical skill.

Although we may lament the weakness of the passionate man, yet we glory in the power of the artist. Therefore, we rightly hail Gesualdo as the Madrigalist without a peer.

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APPENDIX I

Sy dolce non sono

Francesco Landini (1325-1397)

Sy dolce non sono no ch'li' e. f.

Contra tenor

Sy dolce non sono no ch'li' e. f.

Tenor

Sy dolce non sono no ch'li' e. f.

Quando a se tra su fia u' el' e to

Quando a se tra su fia u' el' e

Quando a se tra su fia u'.

schì

to. schì

el' e to. schì

This example is through-composed. It contains an isorhythmic tenor.

Source: F. Ellinwood, The Works of Francesco Landini, (1939)



APPENDIX II

Quando ritrova

Costanzo Festa

Quando ri-tro-va la mi-a pas-to-rel-la al pra-to con te pe-cor-in

pas-tu-ra, lo mi gli-a-co-sta pre-to la sa-to; La mi re-spon-de

tu sia il ben-ve-nu-to. C' poi dei in quel-la: O gen-til

pas-to-rel-la, non men cre-del che bel-la, dei del mio ben ri-bel-la.

er-ser me co-tan to du-ra Così re-spon-dan-d'el-la:



APPENDIX III

Voi ve n'andate

Arcadelt - 1539

Voi ve nian-dat al cie-ni-plant al cie lo ac-chi beat'e san-ti, Co'il

Co'il vostro chiaro lumie con miei can-ti, Co'il vostro chiaro lu-mie con miei can-ti, col...

Et io che co'il ... can-ti, e con miei can-ti.

Et io che son di ge-lo ben' un con-frate so-lo. Per-rei le-

Notice the impatient urge in the passage below

Ora strug-ger-do, mi-tor-no, Ora strug-ger-do mi-tor-ni in

etc.



APPENDIX IV

Da le belle contrade

Cipriano de Rore (1557)

dal. ce de-si- Ten vai hai mi!

Spe-ran-ga del mio cor dal. ce de-si- Ten vai hai mi, Ten

mi! Ahi crud' a-mor, Ahi crud' a-mor!

vai, hai mi! Ahi crud' a-mor! Ahi crud' a-mor!

A te-ran-do gl'am-ple-si, A te-ran-do gl'am-ple-si

te A te-ran-do gl'am-ple-si, A te-ran

A te-ran-do gl'am-ple-si intant no di, mi...

Notice the expressive elements in the above extracts.
 Daring change of harmony at "Ahi crud' amor," its word-
 painting of the "Iterando amplessi," and its use of chromaticism.



APPENDIX V

Latin ode

Cipriano de Rore (1555?)

Notice:

- 1) harmonic sense in advance of that of his contemporaries.
- 2) remarkable sense of tone-color
- 3) close chromatic harmonies.

APPENDIX VII

Giuseppe Caimo (1585)

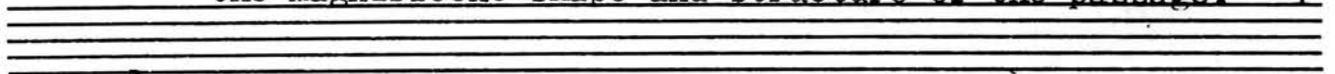
A remarkable example of Caimo's treatment of the words "aspre spine" (sharp thorns)



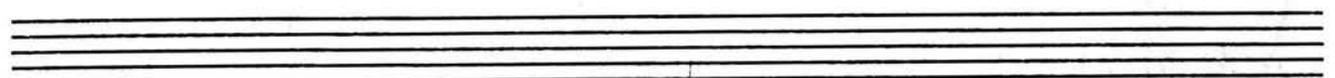
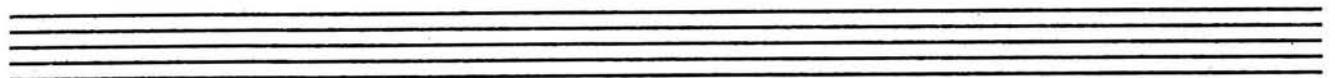
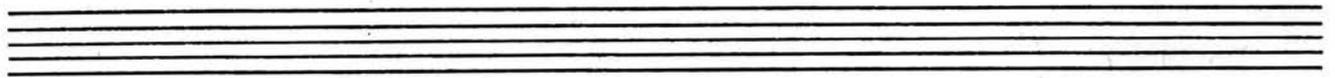
APPENDIX VI

Solo e pensoso Luca Marenzio (1599)

Notice: The bold melodic outlines; the independence of individual parts; the original progressions of harmony; and the magnificent shape and structure of the passage. 1



1 Philip Heseltine, Carlo Gesualdo, p.115

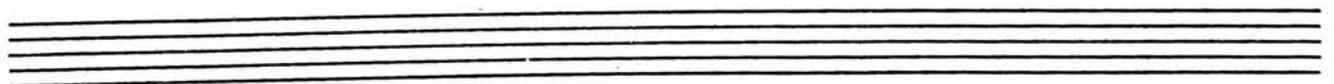
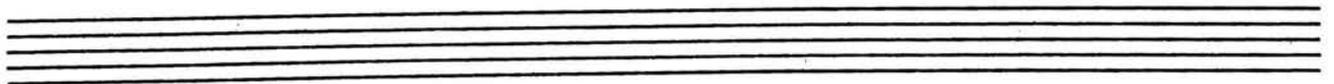


APPENDIX VIII

Resta di darmi noia

Gesualdo - 1611

This piece is most extreme in its attitude.



Luci serene e chiare, continued.

The musical score consists of five staves. The first staff is the vocal line with the lyrics: *struggie nò si duol, mai' e nò lan... que...*. The second staff is the piano accompaniment. The third and fourth staves show further instrumental parts. The fifth staff continues the piano accompaniment. The music features various dynamics such as *mp*, *p*, and *pp*, and includes articulation marks like accents and slurs.

Notice the word-painting; the almost fugue-like passage; the modulations.



Io pur re- spi- ro, io pur re- spi- ro

Io pur re- spi- ro, re- spi- ro
Io pur re- spi- ro re- spi- ro

in co- si gran do- lo
in co- si

Io pur re- spi- ro
in co- si gran do- lo.

re, in co- si gran do- lo.
gran do- lo.

re, in co- si gran do- lo. re.
in co- si gran do-

in co- si gran do- lo. re, do- lo. re.

re, C tu, e tu pur vi- vi, pur vi- vi, e tu pur vi- vi,

re, C tu, e tu pur vi- vi, pur vi- vi, e tu pur vi- vi,

lo- re, C tu, e tu, pur vi- vi

C tu, e tu pur vi- vi, pur vi- vi

pur vi- vi.

Motet like in its use of imitation. The above is an extract.



APPENDIX XI

Moro lasso al mio duolo Gesualdo 1611

Die Walkure Wagner - 1855

On Craig Dhu Delius - 1907.

Compare these extracts and see if Gesualdo was not ahead of his time.

"Moro lasso al mio duolo," from Gesualdo's Book VI, is almost coloratura, and chromatic. The music modulates throughout.



TRANSLATION

The following paragraph is a free translation of the quote found on page nineteen:

This judgment, as severe as it is unjust, only proves Burney's inability to appreciate the Prince of Venosa's originality of ideas. All these pieces are melancholic and sweet, whereby the musician has sought to express the poetic sense of the words according to his own individual way of feeling. The system used by Gesualdo in the progression of tones is not that of real modulation as we know it today, for harmonic sequences as such had not yet been developed, but these successions were part of his inspiration, and Burney did wrong in judging them according to the ordinary rules.

Here is a free rendering of the Italian words of the madrigal "Resta di darmi noia," found in Appendix VIII, page forty:

Still in my heart is grieving
This false and bitter fancy,
I never more can be
That which pleases thee.
Dead is for me all joy,
Hope cannot cheer me
Once again to be joyful.