

Chapter 7

The ‘Humble’ and ‘Sublime’ Genres, the  
Pastoral and Heroic Styles:  
Rhetorical Metamorphoses in Benedetto  
Marcello’s Cantatas

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In musical history the categories of the pastoral and the heroic bring to mind the titles of two of the most popular symphonies of Beethoven, on the shoulders of which rests, however, an ancient and complex rhetorical doctrine. There exist various ways of expressing ideas (*res*) via words (*verba*): this stylistic multiplicity is reflected in the so-called *genera elocutionis* or *genera dicendi*, to which, among others, Cicero, in his *Orator* (VI, 20–21), and Quintilian, in his *Institutio oratoria* (XII, 10.10), make reference. In particular, Cicero, borrowing the terminology of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, classifies the three *genera dicendi* as *grave*, *medium* and *tenuē*.

In the middle of the thirteenth century the English grammarian John of Garland elaborated in his turn a tripartite scheme that was destined to enjoy great favour in Western culture: the *rota Vergilii*. The main works of Virgil – the *Bucolics*, the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* – became, respectively, the paradigms of the *stilus humilis*, the *stilus mediocris* and the *stilus gravis*. To each of these styles were assigned particular places, proper names, plants, animals and social classes: to take an example from the field of botany, the beech tree (*fagus*), named right at the start of Virgil’s first eclogue, belonged to the *stilus humilis*, the apple tree (*melus*) to the *mediocris*, the laurel (*laurus*) and the cedar (*cedrus*) to the *gravis*.

One text of fundamental importance to Italian poetry and music in the Renaissance was Pietro Bembo’s *Prose della volgar lingua*, in which the threefold classification of the *rota Vergilii* was changed into a bipartite one comprising the categories of the *piacevole* (pleasing) and the *grave*.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the *sublime* arrived later, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, with the modern reception of the treatise *Peri hypsous*, composed in Greek by an unknown author of the Imperial era, today conventionally named Pseudo-Longinus. In 1674 Nicolas Boileau, in his successful French translation, chose to render the Greek adjective

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<sup>1</sup> Pietro Bembo, *Prose di M. Pietro Bembo nelle quali si ragiona della volgar lingua* (Venice, 1525).

*hypsos* as ‘sublime’ (as shown in the work’s title, *Le traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours*), a word already encountered occasionally in Latin literature (for example, in Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, in the phrase ‘genus sublime dicendi’) with the significance of a style that was not only serious and elevated but also capable of generating perturbation and exaltation. Boileau himself traced the source of everything ‘sublime’ back to the poetry of Homer.<sup>2</sup> In the following century, with Edmund Burke’s work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the concept of the sublime was counterposed systematically to the beautiful, implying an overthrowing of harmonious order by the forces of nature, by the lower depths or by the infinite.<sup>3</sup>

So the classification of the *genera elocutionis* as *humile*, *medium* or *sublime*, as we find it in the treatises on rhetoric of the twentieth century (one thinks of Heinrich Lausberg’s fundamental work *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*), is the product of a centuries-old stratification that certainly has its roots in classical Latin literature but has received important increments from later periods.<sup>4</sup> In the musical domain, the polarity of the *Pastoral* and *Eroica* symphonies of Beethoven certainly goes back to the Virgilian archetype codified by John of Garland, but implies a conversion of the threefold ordering into a twofold one: the world of the shepherds clearly corresponds to the *Bucolics*, that of the heroes to the *Aeneid*. To the first is assigned a *genus elocutionis humile*, to the second a *genus grave* or – following the terminology of Pseudo-Longinus as revisited by Boileau – a *genus sublime*.

The same distinction observed in Beethoven finds an interesting precedent in the Italian cantata repertory of the early eighteenth century. There exist, indeed, *ordinary* compositions, the poetic texts of which pursue amorous themes in pastoral contexts, but there are also *extraordinary* compositions – those for which Eugen Schmitz coined the felicitous term *Sujetkantaten*<sup>5</sup> – in which the protagonist is a hero or heroine drawn from mythology or history. It goes without saying that the *genus humile* is naturally suited to the first type, while the second inclines towards the *genus grave* or *genus sublime*.

Benedetto Marcello (1686–1739), one of the most productive composers of chamber cantatas alongside Alessandro Scarlatti, orients his own musical language in both directions, according to the poetic text and the choice of subject. His *genus humile* tends towards musical simplicity, small dimensions and regular *da capo* form for arias. In contrast, his *genus sublime* privileges complexity, artifice, monumental proportions and departures from the norm. In this specific repertory

<sup>2</sup> Nicolas Boileau (trans.), *Le traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours* (Paris, 1674).

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757).

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik* (Munich, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Eugen Schmitz, *Geschichte der weltlichen Solokantate* (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 151–4.

harmonic solutions may assume the most unconventional and unpredictable features, while forms tend to become asymmetrical and open-ended.

Although he was active also as a *letterato* and as a theorist of music, Marcello unfortunately left no treatise dealing specifically with the *genera elocutionis* as applied to cantatas.<sup>6</sup> Be this as it may, his musical oeuvre conforms very well – perhaps more exactly than that of any other contemporary composer – to the theoretical matrices described above: so much so that Giovenale Sacchi, one of the Venetian composer's earliest biographers, used the adjective 'eroico' to denote the subgenre of the *Sujetkantate*, clearly distinct from cantatas of an Arcadian-pastoral character.<sup>7</sup>

It is worth mentioning that this polarity between the 'pastoral' and the 'heroic' finds application, albeit in different terms and with the numerical proportions reversed, also in the operatic repertory of the same time, where *pastorali* constitute a subsidiary genre alongside the more mainstream, 'heroic' *drammi per musica*. A letter of the poet Apostolo Zeno dating from his period of residence at the Viennese court refers explicitly to these two different theatrical genres.<sup>8</sup>

If it is true that the aspiration towards the *genus sublime* implies an abandonment of stylistic conventions in favour of exceptional solutions, it follows that views of an artistic creation conceived in this fashion will oscillate between enthusiasm on the part of some and rejection and incomprehension on the part of others. Charles Burney, in the course of his travels in Italy, described vividly the disorientation he experienced when listening to Marcello's cantata *Cassandra*, whereby the latter – in Burney's words – 'entirely sacrificed the music to the poetry, by changing the time or stile [*sic*] of his movement at every new idea which occurs in the words; this may, perhaps, shew a composer to be a very sensible man, but at the same

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<sup>6</sup> Among the bibliographical sources cited by Marcello in the prefaces to the volumes of his *Estro poetico-armonico* we find Cicero's *De oratore*. For a complete list of these sources, see Marco Bizzarini, *Benedetto Marcello* (Palermo, 2006), p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> [Francesco Luigi Fontana and Giovenale Sacchi], *Vita di Benedetto Marcello patrizio veneto* (Venice, 1788), p. 86: 'Altro libro pur di cantate tutte eroiche senza strumenti'. This old biography of Marcello was originally written in Latin by Francesco Fontana, but on the basis of notes assembled by Giovenale Sacchi. The Italian-language version, though published anonymously, was probably prepared for the press by Sacchi.

<sup>8</sup> *Lettere di Apostolo Zeno cittadino veneziano*, 3 vols (Venice, 1752), vol. 2, p. 373 (letter from Apostolo Zeno to Luisa Bergalli dated 26 May 1725): 'Altri studi più sodi mi chiamano a sé nel declivio in cui sono; e debbo omai pensare ad altro sviluppo che a quello di pastorali e di drammi'. Reinhard Strohm observes apropos of the librettos written in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: 'Pastoral themes, and their characteristic kind of stage decoration, were popular throughout this period, and to alternate them with heroic plots was a frequent strategy of impresarios in Italy as well as abroad'. See Reinhard Strohm, 'Apostolo Zeno's *Teuzzone* and its French Models', in *Dramma per musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, CT and London, 1997), pp. 121–33, at p. 124.

time it must discover him to be of a very phlegmatic turn, and wholly free from the enthusiasm of a creative musical genius'.<sup>9</sup>

An opposite opinion to Burney's was held, in the mid-eighteenth century, by the Italian scholar Francesco Algarotti, who was a cosmopolitan figure, a friend of Voltaire, a traveller in Germany and Russia, a connoisseur of the figurative arts and a popularizer of the most recent scientific theories of Newton. In his *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (Venice, 1755), which anticipates ideas later developed in the *Alceste* of Calzabigi and Gluck, Algarotti observed:

Who ever was more animated with a divine flame in conceiving and more judicious in conducting his works than Marcello? In the cantatas of Timotheus and Cassandra and in the celebrated collection of psalms he hath expressed in a wonderful manner, not only all the different passions of the heart, but even the most delicate sentiments of the mind. He has, moreover, the art of representing to our fancy things even inanimate.<sup>10</sup>

But the imposing corpus of cantatas composed by Benedetto Marcello, of which over two hundred specimens survive, is not in the least monolithic: the *genus humile* and the *genus sublime* confront one another repeatedly, and there are occasional opportunities for mediation between musical expressions that appear by turns extremely simple and extremely complex.<sup>11</sup>

It was noted earlier that in Marcello's cantatas the *genus sublime* is often identified with those works dealing with heroes and heroines of Antiquity. The catalogue of this Venetian composer offers a rich collection of them: classical epic – including Virgil – is represented by Andromache, Cassandra, Medea and Dido; Roman history by Cato, Lucrece and Cleopatra; biblical lore by

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London, 1771), p. 160.

<sup>10</sup> The quotation reproduces the text of an anonymous English translation of Algarotti's *Saggio* given in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York, 1950), p. 672.

<sup>11</sup> For Benedetto Marcello, as for many other composers of the period, we are still far from possessing a truly complete list of the surviving cantatas, despite the all efforts that have so far been made, among which the authoritative catalogue in Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *The Music of Benedetto and Alessandro Marcello. A Thematic Catalogue* (Oxford, 1990), stands out. After Vivaldian musicology has managed in recent years to announce the exciting discovery of several new works, we ought, by the same token, to expect that a much less exhaustively studied composer such as Marcello could give rise to future discoveries of some significance. For an overview of Marcello's cantatas, the reader is referred to the following studies: Marco Bizzarini (ed.), *Benedetto Marcello. Le cantate profane: i testi poetici* (Venice, 2003); *Benedetto Marcello*, pp. 148–76. On Marcello's *Sujetkantaten*, see Colin Timms, 'The Cassandra Cantata of Conti and Marcello', in Claudio Madricardo and Franco Rossi (eds), *Benedetto Marcello: la sua opera e il suo tempo* (Florence, 1988), pp. 127–59, and Michael Talbot, 'The Effects of Music: Benedetto Marcello's Cantata Il Timoteo', in Madricardo and Rossi, *Benedetto Marcello*, pp. 103–25.

Herod. Indeed, the psalms of Marcello's *Estro poetico-armonico*, especially in their frequent sections scored for single voice and continuo (with the possible accompaniment of concertante instruments), share not a few stylistic traits with the secular *Sujetkantaten*.

The present essay aims to examine more closely the process of metamorphosis that in Marcello's vocal music leads from the *genus humile* to the *genus sublime*. In particular, we will see how the composer, in the act of transforming, at the levels of structure and function, the poetic and musical material of a cantata on the subject of love manages successfully to adapt it to the needs of a composition of an elevated and heroic stamp.

The cantata in question is *Dove fuggisti, o dio* (SF A97),<sup>12</sup> preserved in a version for alto and continuo in manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.<sup>13</sup> Cast in the simple form aria–recitative–aria (ARA), with *da capo* repetition prescribed for both arias, the composition has a poetic text on the well-worn subject of the separation of lovers. In the first aria a female character, presumably a shepherdess, bewails the mysterious departure, which could be a deliberate desertion, of her lover, Tirsi. In the recitative the protagonist adds to her personal grief a note of bitterness expressed in three urgent questions. Love and nostalgia, at any rate, prevail in the concluding aria, which transmutes the last utterance of the recitative into a heartfelt prayer – ‘ricordati di me’ – without giving in to possible thoughts of revenge.

Dove fuggisti, o dio! <sup>14</sup>	Where are you fleeing, o God!
speranza del cor mio,	hope of my heart,
Tirsi adorato?	beloved Tirsi?
Se muovi lunge il piè,	When you travel afar,
no che del mio non v'è	there is no unhappier
cor infelice	heart
più sventurato. ( <i>Da capo</i> )	than mine.
Ah Tirsi, ah caro ben, questa mercede	Ah Tirsi, ah my beloved, is this
si rende alla mia fede?	the reward paid to my fidelity?
Ove son le promesse e i giuramenti	Where are the promises and the oaths
	you swore
di pria morir che mai lasciarmi? Oh	to die before leaving me? Oh God!
dio!	

<sup>12</sup> The sigla ‘SF’ refer to the catalogue by Eleanor Selfridge-Field cited in the preceding note.

<sup>13</sup> Shelfmark: Cod. It. IV n. 968 (= 10751), ff. 35r–36v.

<sup>14</sup> I am happy to accept the suggestion made by Bruno Brizi to use lower case for the transcription of the casual exclamatory phrase ‘o dio!’ in order to distinguish it from the preface to a prayer addressed to the (or a) Deity, ‘o Dio!’. This distinction has significance also for the metamorphosis from the *genus humile* to the *genus sublime* that we shall describe shortly.

perché fuggi, amor mio? Vanne, ma sappi almeno che dell'afflitto seno altra pace or non sento a' miei martiri che il pensar dove sei, dove t'aggiri.	why are you fleeing me, my love? Go, but know at least that I find for my torments no peace in my wounded breast but the thought of where you are and what you do.
Sin che lontano sei, ho tutto il mio piacer, caro, in pensar a te. Tu ancora per mercede di mia costante fede ricordati di me. ( <i>Da capo</i> )	As long as you are far from me, I gain all my pleasure, dearest, from thinking of you. Show pity for my steadfast constancy by still remembering me.

The manuscript in the Marciana, which in terms of the music paper employed and the style of handwriting is visibly different from musical sources of the early eighteenth century, dates perhaps from the end of that century.<sup>15</sup> The work is headed by an illuminating remark: 'Confrontisi questa cantata col Salmo XXI del Marcello!' ('Compare this cantata with *Salmo XXI* of Marcello!'). On this point, it is very easy to verify that the 'A' section of the cantata's first aria bears surprisingly strong musical resemblances to the setting of the first lines of *Salmo XXI*, as published in the fourth volume of the *Estro poetico-armonico*.<sup>16</sup> We clearly have here a case of self-borrowing processed via a series of adaptations – starting with a completely new poetic text – that effect a transition from the *genus humile* to the *genus sublime*.

The transformation of the text at the opening of the two works seems to recall the traditional procedures of *contrafactum* or *travestimento spirituale*:<sup>17</sup>

<i>Cantata SF A97</i> Dove fuggisti, o dio! speranza del cor mio, Tirsi adorato?	<i>Cantata SF A97</i> Where are you fleeing, o God! hope of my heart, beloved Tirsi?
<i>Salmo XXI</i> Volgi, mio Dio, deh volgi un de' tuoi guardi e ti piaccia mirar da quali e quante miserabili angustie io sono oppresso: perché così mi lasci in abbandono?	<i>Psalms XXI</i> Turn, my God, pray turn one of your glances towards me and behold by what, and by how many, miserable tribulations I am oppressed: Why do you abandon me so?

<sup>15</sup> The watermarks of this manuscript are not visible.

<sup>16</sup> The eight volumes of Marcello's work were published in 1724 and 1726 by the Venetian printer Domenico Lovisa. Tomi 1–4 came out in the first year, Tomi 5–8 in the second.

<sup>17</sup> A *travestimento spirituale* is a religious paraphrase of a secular original.

In reality, the genesis of the two poetic texts was completely unconnected. Girolamo Ascanio Giustiniani, the author of the Italian-language verse paraphrases of the first fifty psalms, set to music by Marcello, merely translated and elaborated in poetic fashion the Latin text of the Vulgate Psalm XXI, the first verse of which reads: ‘Deus Deus meus, respice in me: quare me dereliquisti?’.

Marcello and Giustiniani themselves regarded this psalm as ‘venerando fra tutti’ (‘to be venerated among [them] all’) since, according to an established theological tradition, ‘Davidde in mezzo alle sue miserie ed alle sue afflizioni profeticamente e maravigliosamente descrive la morte, la sepoltura, la risurrezione di Gesù Cristo in figura di lui, la vocazione de’ gentili e lo stabilimento della Chiesa’ (‘David, amid his tribulations and afflictions, prophetically and marvellously prefigures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the vocation of the Gentiles and the establishment of the Church’).<sup>18</sup> It would have been difficult for the anonymous author of the text of the cantata *Dove fuggisti, o dio* to have thought of taking holy scripture as his literary model; it would have seemed to him out of place, if not actually blasphemous, to adapt the words of the crucified Saviour as reported by the Gospels (Mark 15.34; Matthew 27.46) to become the lovelorn lament of a simple shepherdess. Nevertheless, despite their different genesis, the two texts have in common the theme of abandonment, and it was probably for this reason that Marcello deemed it opportune to re-use the same musical ideas, founded on the same *affetto*, while organizing them according to a different *genus elocutionis* implying changes in the composition’s morphology and instrumentation.

If we compare the cantata in the late Venetian manuscript with the printed edition of *Salmo XXI*, a difference of scoring leaps to the eye: the cantata employs alto and continuo, while the psalm has alto, two concertante *violette* (violas) and continuo. Closer inspection of the cantata suggests, however, that the apparent absence of instruments is deceptive: in the opening ritornello, indeed, the continuo part contains too many rests to be viable on its own. We therefore have to conclude that the musical text, in the form transmitted to us for alto and continuo alone, is manifestly incomplete right from its opening bars. A rapid survey of the other cantatas contained in the manuscript supports the idea that this musical source is simply a short score, or a copy for the use of singers (the description ‘Parte che canta’ appears, indeed, at the head of the volume), that transcribes only the vocal part and the continuo and omits the obbligato instruments.<sup>19</sup>

The original scoring is impossible to establish with certainty. One might start, with the example of the psalm to hand, by hypothesizing the presence of two violas and continuo, but this solution would be too *recherché* for a secular cantata and unparalleled in the rest of Marcello’s cantatas known at present. A more standard ensemble would be that of two violins, viola and continuo, as used for most of

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<sup>18</sup> The Gospel of St John (19.24) refers in an explicit way to the text of Psalm 21 (which corresponds to Psalm 22 in the Hebrew and Protestant numbering).

<sup>19</sup> On the nature and purpose of a short score in this repertory, see Michael Talbot, *Tomaso Albinoni. The Venetian Composer and His World* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 118 and 193.

the arias in Marcello's serenatas and oratorios. This form of ensemble would also allow, if desired, the addition of a concertante cello.

The solution to the problem proved easier than expected. Selfridge-Field's catalogue lists a second source of the cantata *Dove fuggisti, o dio*: the manuscript B. 2849 in the library of the Conservatorio 'Luigi Cherubini', Florence. From what the catalogue tells us, this would be the same collection of cantatas contained in the Venetian manuscript, and scored, similarly, for voice and continuo (i.e., in short score); but in reality the Florentine volume contains the full scores, complete with all the instrumental parts omitted from the Marciana source. The cantata *Dove fuggisti, o dio* appears at the end of the volume, at ff. 233–246: in this instance, without any annotated reference to the psalm. Its instrumental component is scored, apart from the continuo, for just a pair of violins without viola. The instrumental parts of the cantata and those of the psalm are very similar, with the difference that the two violins yield their place to two violas, causing the music often to be transposed down an octave. The *genus sublime* here obviously implies a lowering of the tessitura.

Marcello himself, in the preface to readers (headed 'a' leggitori') in the fourth volume of his *Estro poetico-armonico*, supplies a reasoned argument for his choice of scoring:

Il Salmo vigesimoprimo *Deus Deus meus respice in me &c.*, siccome concorda la maggior parte de' sacri interpreti e spositori esser una profezia ed una figura del Redentore del mondo spirante sopra la Croce, così non si è giudicato disconvenevole, anzi creduta si è precisa necessità, di comporlo ad una sola voce, e colle maniere più flebili e più adatte a tanto lugubre compassionevole avvenimento, cui per rendere espresso in più efficace maniera e per isvegliare negli ascoltanti lo possibile più forte dolore nel riflesso del gran mistero, si è accompagnato colle violette, stromento per sé medesimo (quando trattato sia egli da esperta mano) atto ad indurre agevolmente commuovimento e tristezza. Perciò ben rifletta qualunque virtuoso cantore debba eseguire esso Salmo a ciò ch'egli esprime e che rappresenta; quindi piuttosto colla pia tenerezza del cuore che coll'artifizioso vagar della voce schiettamente 'l pronunzi, che non saravvi chi l'oda, e pe' gravissimi dolorosi sensi e per la melodia lamentevole ond' espresso ne viene, che internamente non si contristi non poco e non senta parte di quel necessario compungimento che si richiede a così alto e doloroso mistero.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Estro poetico armonico. Parafrasi sopra li primi venticinque salmi, poesia di Girolamo Ascanio Giustiniani, musica di Benedetto Marcello, patrizi veneti*, vol. 4 (Venice, 1724), pp. 1–2: 'Since the Twenty-first Psalm, *Deus Deus meus respice in me* etc., is agreed by the majority of sacred interpreters and commentators to be a prophesy and prefiguration of the Redeemer of the World dying on the Cross, it has not been deemed unseemly – indeed it has been thought necessary – to compose it for a single voice and in a very mournful manner best suited to such a lugubrious and compassion-arousing event. In order to express this in the most effective way and to stimulate in listeners the greatest possible grief in the contemplation of this great mystery, it is accompanied by violas,

Example 7.1 B. Marcello, Opening aria of the cantata *Dove fuggisti, o dio* (source: Florence, Biblioteca del Conservatorio ‘Luigi Cherubini’, Ms. B. 2849, ff. 233r–234v).

**Adagio assai, schietto sempre**

The musical score is written for four parts: Violin I (VI 1), Violin II (VI 2), Alto, and Bassoon (B.c.). The key signature is G minor (three flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Adagio assai, schietto sempre'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the initial measures, with dynamics of *p* and *f* indicated. The second system continues the piece, featuring a triplet of sixteenth notes in the first measure of the first system, with dynamics of *p* and *f* alternating throughout. The Alto part is mostly silent, and the Bassoon part provides a steady accompaniment.

instruments that in themselves (when played by expert hands) readily induce compassion and sadness. Therefore, any practised singer who has to perform this psalm should think carefully about what he is expressing and depicting; thus he should enounce it simply with tenderness of heart rather than with artificial vocal flights, so that there will be none who hears it, with its feelings of the deepest grief and the dolorous melody that expresses it, who does not grow not a little sad inside himself and does not experience the necessary remorse required by such an exalted and sorrowful mystery?.

6

*f* *p*

Do - ve, do - ve fug - gi - sti, o di - ol, spe -

8

- ran - za del cor mi - o, Tir - - - si a - do - ra - to? Do - ve,

10

do - ve fug - gi - sti, o di - ol, spe - ran - za del cor mi - o, Tir -

12

si.a - do - ra - to, Tir - - - si.a-do-ra - - - - -

14

- - - - to, Tir - - - si.a-do-ra - to?

16

Do - ve? Do - ve fug-gi - sti, o

18

di - o!, spe - ran - za \_\_\_del cor mi - o? Do - ve,

20

do - ve fug - gi - sti, o di - o?, spe - ran - za del cor mi - o, spe -

22

- ran - za del cor mi - o? Do - - - ve fug - gi - sti, o di - o? Do - ve,

24

do - - - ve fuggi - sti, o di - o!, do - ve, Tir - si - a - do - ra -

26

- to, do - ve, Tir - si - a - do - ra - to, do -

28

- ve, spe - ran - za, fug - gi - sti, cor mi - o, Tir -

30

- si\_a - do - ra - to.

32

Se muo -

34

- vi lun - ge il piè, no, che del mio non v'è

36

cor in - fe - li - ce più, più sven - tu - ra - to, no, —

38

— che del mio non v'è cor — in - fe - li - ce più, più —

40

— sven - tu - ra - to, più — sven - tu - ra - - - to.

D.C.

It is clear that, chronologically speaking, the secular cantata precedes the psalm, which, in certain aspects, constitutes its *travestimento spirituale*: this explains the change from conventional instrumentation with two violins to the unconventional one with two violas. Seeing that the psalm was published in 1724, the cantata must have been composed earlier, even if present knowledge does not allow us to be more precise.

Between the Venice manuscript (which we will hereafter call VE) and the Florence manuscript (FI), ignoring the string accompaniment, there is a substantial identity of musical text. FI is in every instance anterior to VE: this can be gleaned not only from the general appearance of the manuscript but also from the *usus scribendi*, or notational style. For instance, in VE the key signature has three flats as opposed to the two in FI (and in the cognate movement contained in the *Estro poetico-armonico*), which one may take as further evidence that the Venetian source is the work of a copyist of a later date who found a need to modernize the key signature for C minor, whereas Marcello, like many other Italian composers of the same period, followed the traditional practice going back to the *tuoni salmodici* of the seventeenth century, which normally required one flat fewer. FI is also more copiously endowed with tempo and dynamic marks: among other things, VE opens with the simple tempo mark *Ad[agi]o*, whereas FI directs: *Adagio assai, schietto sempre*. The idea of *schietto sempre* brings clearly to mind the preface to the psalm mentioned earlier, where the singer is enjoined to avoid ‘artifizioso vagar della voce’ in order to set in relief ‘schiettamente’ – that is, in an unadorned manner – the expressive content of the poetic paraphrase. The vocal part, originally notated in the alto clef, appears here in the treble clef.

Example 7.2 B. Marcello, *Salmo XXI* (B621), bars 1–29.

Grave

The musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves are for Violin I (Vla 1) and Violin II (Vla 2), both in C minor. The third staff is for the Alto voice part, and the bottom staff is for the Bass continuo (B.c.). The tempo is marked 'Grave'. The key signature has three flats. The score includes dynamic markings: 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). The vocal part is in the treble clef. The basso continuo part includes markings for 'Vlc solo' and 'Tutti'.

3

*p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

*p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

*Vlc solo* *Tutti* *Vlc solo* *Tutti* *Vlc solo*

6

*p*

*p*

Vol - gi, vol - gi, mio Dio, deh vol - gi, deh

*Tutti*

8

*p*

*p*

vol - gi un de' \_ tuoi \_ guar - di e ti piac - cia, ti piac - cia mi - rar da qua - li\_e

*Vlc solo* [Tutti]

10

quan-te mi-se - ra - bi-li-an-gu - stie io so - no, so - no, op-pres - so, e ti piac -

*Vlc solo*

12

- cia, ti piac - cia mi-rar da qua - - li e quan-te — mi - se - ra - bi - li-an-

14

- gu - - - stie io so - no, so - no, op-pres - so.

*Tutti**Vlc solo*

16

*p* *f*

*p* *f*

Per - ché, per - ché co - si mi

*Tutti* [*Vlc solo*] *Tutti*

18

*p*

[*p*]

la - sci, mi la - sci in ab - ban - do - no? deh, mio

20

Dio, vol - gi, vol - gi un de' tuoi guar - di, deh, per - ché, deh, per - ché co - si mi

22

la - sci in ab - ban - do - no, per - ché, mio

[Vlc solo]

24

Di - o, per-ché mi la - sci, per-ché mi la - sci in ab-ban-do - no, in ab - ban-

26

- do - - - - no?

*Tutti*

28

Let us now attempt to compare in detail the ‘A’ section of the first aria of the cantata – following the text given in FI (see Example 7.1) – with the opening section of *Salmo XXI* (see Example 7.2). At a macrostructural level, one notes the suppression in the psalm of the ‘B’ section of the aria and of the consequential *da capo*. The ‘A’ section of the aria, which runs to 33 bars in common time, is slightly pared down – to 29 bars – in the psalm. It was stated earlier that the two poetic texts, apart from their shared subject of abandonment, have nothing in common.

The sequence, in the aria, of two *settenari piani* in *rima baciata* followed by a *quinario piano* is changed in the psalm to become four *endecasillabi sciolti*.<sup>21</sup> But the metrical structure of the two poetic texts is less important than the ‘cantilena’ – the configuration of the words, with their various repetitions, in the musical setting. The aria follows the practice that, by the second decade of the eighteenth century, has become routine, and is followed regularly by Marcello, of setting twice in succession, in two discrete periods, or *intercalari* (as these were called in the eighteenth century), the lines of the first semistrophe.<sup>22</sup> This is how the ‘cantilena’ works out in the two periods of the ‘A’ section of the aria; in the right-hand column the corresponding number of syllables for each section of text appears:

<sup>21</sup> *Settenari*, *quinari* and *endecasillabi* are, respectively, lines of seven, five and eleven syllables. A *piano* line places the final accent on the penultimate syllable. *Rime bacciate* follow the pattern AABB etc. *Sciolti* means unrhymed.

<sup>22</sup> An aria stanza is commonly divided into two semistrophes that correspond, respectively, to the ‘A’ and ‘B’ sections.

<b>First period</b>	<b>(total of 52 syllables)</b>
Dove, dove fuggisti, o dio,	9
speranza del cor mio,	7
Tirsi adorato,	5
dove, dove fuggisti, o dio,	9
speranza del cor mio,	7
Tirsi adorato, Tirsi adorato, Tirsi adorato.	5+5+5
<b>Second period</b>	<b>(total of 85 syllables)</b>
Dove, dove fuggisti, o dio,	9
speranza del cor mio,	7
dove, dove fuggisti, o dio,	9
speranza del cor mio, speranza del cor mio,	7+7
dove fuggisti, o dio, dove, dove, fuggisti, o dio,	7+9
dove, Tirsi adorato, dove, Tirsi adorato,	7+7
dove, speranza, fuggisti, cor mio,	11
Tirsi adorato.	5

The systematic repetition of the word ‘dove’, which creates an effective expressive intensification, often transforms the original *settenari* into effective *novenari*. One notes how, in the penultimate line of the table (‘dove, speranza, fuggisti, cor mio’), the composer freely reorders words drawn from the first two lines of poetry, creating a synthetic *endecasillabo*. In the second period, however, the delivery of the lines becomes even more artificial and complex. The syllable-count reaches a total of 52 syllables for the first period and 85 for the second: a grand total of 137 syllables.

The ‘cantilena’ of the psalm is laid out very differently:

<b>First period</b>	<b>(total of 63 syllables)</b>
Volgi, volgi, mio Dio, deh volgi un de’ tuoi guardi	13
e ti piaccia, ti piaccia mirar da quali e quante	14
miserabili angustie io sono oppresso	11
e ti piaccia, ti piaccia mirar da quali e quante	14
miserabili angustie io sono oppresso.	11
<b>Second period</b>	<b>(total of 57 syllables)</b>
Perché, perché così mi lasci in abbandono?	13
deh, mio Dio, volgi, volgi un de’ tuoi guardi	11
deh perché, deh perché così mi lasci in abbandono?	15
perché, mio Dio, perché mi lasci?	9
perché mi lasci in abbandono?	9

First and foremost, the distinction between the two periods is subtler: it no longer arises from textual restatement but, rather, from applying the musical technique of the *Devisé*, with its opportune repetition of the first word (‘Volgi, volgi’ in the first

period, ‘Perché, perché’ in the second).<sup>23</sup> It is clear that the interrogative element ‘Dove, dove?’ that characterized the aria through its insistent iterations finds its counterpart in the psalm less in the colourless ‘Volgi, volgi’ than in the much more urgent ‘perché, perché?’ The syllable-count shows that the first period acquires, in the psalm, a slight supremacy, inverting the situation in the aria, where the second period enjoys a marked preponderance.

In re-using the music of the aria, Marcello had to solve the problem of providing two texts of such radically different lengths (7+7+5 syllables in the first vis-à-vis 11+11+11+11 in the second) with a similar musical treatment. Rather than presenting in succession two settings of the same semistrophe, as required by the compositional practice of the ‘double period’, the composer divided up the four cumbersome *endecasillabi* of the psalm paraphrase into two groups: the first comprising the first three lines, and the second comprising only the fourth, followed by a reprise of the opening line. In so doing, he achieved a very well-balanced distribution of lines, since each line could count on at least one complete repetition.

Let us now compare the length in bars of the respective sections:

Aria	Psalm
Instrumental ritornello: 5 bars (+ 3/4)	Instrumental ritornello: 5 bars (+ 3/4)
First period: 9 bars (+ 2/4)	First period: 9 bars (+ 2/4)
Second period: 15 bars	Secondo period: 11 bars
Ritornello (coda): 3 bars	Ritornello (coda): 3 bars

The bar-count confirms similarly that in his psalm Marcello sought to rebalance the length of the two periods by taking out a few bars from the second.

Although they have the same length, the introductory instrumental ritornellos are not identical. The lowering of the tessitura caused by the replacement of the violins by violas inspired Marcello to introduce a further tone-colouring effect: the addition of a part for *violoncello solo* in the bass that constantly alternates with the assembled *tutti* instruments (cellos, contrabasses and harpsichord). In the continuo part of the cantata, separated by long rests, there were only *tutti* entries. The solo cello, which matches the timbre of the violas well (it was clearly better not to leave them exposed), creates, throughout the introductory ritornello, a three-part contrapuntal texture fuller than that employed in the cantata. Then there is an important musical variation in the second bar. In the cantata there was a simple echo repetition by the violins, *piano*, in the lower octave, rounded off by a phrase in dotted rhythm over a dominant in the bass; but the psalm presents a contrasting consequent leading to the dominant of F minor. The latter solution not only seems more elegant but, more especially, relieves the violas of the need to descend below their available range; change was therefore unavoidable.

<sup>23</sup> A *Devise* (German for a heraldic device) is a short, detachable opening motto. It is commonly heard first alone and then, after an instrumental interruption, together with its continuation.

The first vocal period exhibits fewer changes than the preceding ritornello. Beyond the necessary adjustments to the vocal line caused by the wholesale replacement of the poetic text and the changed number of syllables, one remarks once more the addition to the continuo part of passages for solo cello that on occasion (for instance, in bars 12 and 13) fill in what were originally, in the cantata, rests in the bass line. Another point to note is that the viola parts here largely retain the register of the earlier violins, except when, as occasionally happens, they are taken down an octave, as in bars 13 and 14.

As for the second vocal period, we have already seen that in the psalm Marcello effects a noticeable contraction. In particular, the composer cuts the passage running from the last crotchet of bar 20 to the third crotchet of bar 23, which is based on the same motif as the opening ritornello: in the *genus sublime* superfluous repetitions tend to disappear. Marcello additionally remodels bars 27–30,<sup>24</sup> removing a cadential phrase of four crotchets coincident with the words ‘Tirsi adorato’, between bars 26 and 27. This melodic formula was in fact too predictable and too firmly linked to a closed form to be retained in the new context. For a similar reason, the composer rewrites the final cadence of the vocal part in the psalm. Whereas, in the cantata, this drove in time-honoured fashion towards the tonic (‘Tirsi adorato’), in the sacred composition it creates a sense of suspense matching the question mark of the text (‘perché mi lasci in abbandono?’) by ending on B $\sharp$  and dominant harmony: this melodic–harmonic incompleteness is clearly tailored to an open form. The same interrogative character is captured at the start of this period by the new *Deive* on the word ‘perché?’, which, with its rising fifth, is very different from the earlier setting of the equivalent ‘dove’, with its falling octave (Example 7.1, bar 16).

In the concluding ritornello, largely unchanged, the first violin in the cantata becomes the second viola in the psalm, its notes taken down an octave except in the final bar. At this point, the two paths diverge. The cantata continues with a brief ‘B’ section for the aria (nine-and-a-half bars), based throughout on the same musical materials. Starting in E flat major, this passes via various modulations to G minor. The psalm, however, proceeds to an entirely new movement (Adagio, 3/4, E flat major), at the end of which no *da capo* occurs.

\* \* \*

To conclude: the cantata and the psalm share a metre (C), a key (C minor) and a basic *affetto* (a lament over abandonment); both works employ a battery of expressive resources that include dissonant suspensions and melodic chromaticism. But the change of register arising from the move from a secular to a sacred context

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<sup>24</sup> During this passage, in the Florentine manuscript of the cantata, the continuo is silent, the second violins playing a *bassetto* notated in the bass clef. In contrast, the psalm normalizes the writing by retaining the bass in the continuo.

has necessitated some rhetorical transformations in conformity with the *genera elocutionis*, thus:

**Cantata *Dove fuggisti, o dio***

*Genus humile*

two *settenari* plus a *quinario*

rhymed verse

Adagio assai

violins in a high register

no solo–tutti contrast in the continuo

predominantly ‘a 2’ in the ritornello

closed form (ABA) with *da capo*

overt division into two periods

unequal length of the two periods

frequent motivic repetition

standard melodic formulas

‘Dove, dove?’

**Salmo XXI**

*Genus sublime*

four *endecassilabi*

unrhymed verse

Grave

violas transposed to the lower octave

solo–tutti contrast in the continuo

‘a 3’ in the ritornello

open form (A) without *da capo*

less overt division into two periods

similar length of the two periods

less frequent motivic repetition

fewer standard melodic formulas

‘Perché, perché?’

In the mid-eighteenth century the composer and musical theorist Charles Avison made explicit mention of the category of the sublime and of Marcello’s *Estro poetico-armonico*. In his *Essay on Musical Expression* of 1752 Avison proposes a classification of the fifty *Psalms* under three ‘styles in musical expression’: Grand, Beautiful, Pathetic. Each of the three styles is in its turn subdivided into three sub-categories: the Grand into the Sublime, Joyous and Learned; the Beautiful into the Cheerful, Serene and Pastoral; the Pathetic into the Devout, Plaintive and Sorrowful.<sup>25</sup> In comparison with the twin categories of the Pastoral and the Heroic with which we began, Avison’s system appears rather cumbersome, but it is clear that the Pastoral belongs to the Beautiful, while the Heroic – at least, by implication – should be assigned either to the Grand or to the Pathetic, according to whether the expression is grandiloquent or more intimate. In every case, this is a distinction that primarily concerns musical expression, or the *affetti*, rather than the *genera elocutionis* in any strict sense. This is why Marcello’s *Salmo XXI* is not placed by Avison in the category of the Sublime but instead in the sub-category (within the Pathetic category) of the Sorrowful – a destination to which he would probably also have consigned the secular cantata *Dove fuggisti, o dio*.

Since the musical quality is elevated in both of the compositions studied, leaving aside their respective *genera*, it is not out of place to end with a laudatory quotation taken from Antonio Eximeno’s book *Dell’origine e delle regole della*

<sup>25</sup> See Charles Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression* (London, 1752), as reprinted in facsimile from the second edition of 1753 (New York, 1967); see also Roger Barnett Larsson, ‘Charles Avison’s “Stiles in Musical Expression”’, *Music & Letters*, 63 (1982): 242–61.

*musica* (1774). Let these words act as a stimulus to rediscover in our modern age the value of the vocal chamber music not only of Benedetto Marcello but also of all his more interesting contemporaries:

Nelle composizioni del Gasparini, Bononcini, Marcello e Clari appare già posto a chiaro lume il vero scopo della musica col difficile accordo dell'espressione del contrappunto. Solamente mancarono a questi compositori le parole del Metastasio; ma compensarono questa mancanza con altre bellezze, che a poco a poco vengono ora mai in disuso; eglino non erano troppo vaghi di quei tritumi di note, che senza effetto particolare straccavano le braccia de' sonatori; ma ogni nota era una pennellata di maestro, che richiedeva nell'esecutore somma esattezza, abilità e buon gusto.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Antonio Eximeno, *Dell'origine e delle regole della musica, colla storia del suo progresso, decadenza e rinnovazione* (Rome, 1774), also reprinted in facsimile (Hildesheim, Zürich and New York, 1983), p. 439: 'In the works of Gasparini, Bononcini, Marcello and Clari we already see clearly enunciated the true purpose of music, reconciled with difficulty to the expression of counterpoint. These composers merely lacked the words of Metastasio, but they compensated for this lack with other beauties, which today are passing little by little into disuse; they were not over-enamoured of those floods of notes that, without making any particular effect, used to weary the arms of the players; but every note was a the brush-stroke of a master, which demanded of the performer the highest precision, proficiency and good taste'.