ITA SE N'ERA A STAR NEL PARADISO: THE METAMORPHOSES OF AN OVIDIAN MADRIGAL IN TRECENTO ITALY

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The employment of characters and situations drawn from classical mythology as textual subject matter is typical of the Trecento madrigal. One such work, inspired by Ovid's narrative of Pluto and Proserpina, is distinguished by its appearance in first position among the works of two composers in the Squarcialupi manuscript. The text,

Ita se n'era a star nel Paradiso
Cogliendo fior Proserpina cantava
Quando per l'amor suo Pluto cercava.

Così m'aparve, ond'io m'inamorava,
La donna ch'adoprò le mani e 'l viso
Per far chi mai da lei fosse diviso,

Benché meglio di me fece Plutone,
Che la rapì, ma i' stetti in prigione.

which was set to music by both Vincenzo da Rimini[1] and Lorenzo

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1. Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Palat. 87, f. 35v.
The Text above reproduced, is taken from Corsi' edition (see note 15).

Masini,[2] may not as yet be identified as the work of a particular poet. However, it may be shown to represent something more than a conventional medieval manifestation of a traditional mythological theme. The poem reveals a modern attitude toward the Proserpina mythos which characterized French and Italian literary endeavors beginning only around the middle of the fourteenth century.[3]

The details of the earliest versions of the myth of Proserpina, her abduction by and marriage to the god of the underworld, and her perennial return from her infernal prison to the earth's surface in the springtime, varied from teller to teller. Homer, Euripides, Timaeus and Callimachus all transmitted versions of the tale.[4] For the medieval world, the primary source for the legend was the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, or more precisely, the several so-called «moralized» versions of that work which captured the interest and imagination of the European literary community in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[5] Much of Ovid's version of the myth was based upon Callimachus, but Ovid, in Book Five of the *Metamorphoses,* prefaced the traditional narrative with an element drawn from another model: Virgil's *Aeneid.* In the *Aeneid,* Cupid inflamed Dido with love for Aeneas at the insistence of his mother Venus, who feared Dido's opposition. Ovid borrowed that scenario, but replace the characters. According to Ovid, Venus's fear of Pluto prompted her to encourage Cupid to fire an arrow at the god, thus inspiring his immediate love for Proserpina.[6] Ovid's introduction of this element into the Proserpina myth laid the foundation for the tale's function as a basis for later love poetry. However, the love component of the Ovidian original was largely ignored in medieval versions of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, which

2. Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Palat. 87, ff. 45v-47.

3. The Proserpina tradition is treated at length in H. ANTON, *Der Raub der Proserpina,* Heidelberg 1967.

4. W. BREWER, *Ovid's Metamorphoses in European Culture,* Boston 1933, pp. 195-98.

5. H. ANTON, *op. cit.,* pp. 13-27.

6. W. BREWER, *op. cit.,* p. 195.

focused upon the story of the abduction of the goddess as a parable for uncontained desire and loss of innocence. In France, the *Ovide moralisé* of ca. 1291-1328, and in Italy the exposition upon the *Metamorphoses* by Giovanni del Virgilio, portrayed Pluto as a symbol for the Christian Satan or Lucifer.[7] In the standard early fourteenth-century reading, the Proserpina stood as an allegory for the unblemished Christian soul, abducted from its innocent paradise by the Devil.[8] The Proserpina story became an object of renewed literary interest beginning in the 1340s and 1350s. The *Ovidius moralizatus*, written ca. 1342 by Petrarch's friend Pierre Bersuire, did not abandon the traditional moralistic stance with regard to the pagan deities.[9] By the decade of the 1350s, though, Petrarch himself had discarded the moralistic implications of the Pluto-Proserpina story, and had invoked the couple as *exemplum amoris* in the *Trionfo d'Amore*. In so doing he may have been following the lead of Boccaccio, who had included Pluto and Proserpina as representatives of the power of Venus and the triumph of Love in the *Amorosa visione* of 1342-43.[10] Neither Petrarch nor Boccaccio referred to the element of the abduction, and the protagonists were thereby transformed effectively into a classical love pair.

The earliest revision of the moralized Proserpina myth by a French poet appeared in Machaut's *Confort d'ami* of 1357. Machaut's narrative for the most part followed the action of the *Ovide moralisé*, but with the conspicuous absence of any moralistic glossing.[11] Significantly, Machaut altered one aspect of the narrative. He cited Proserpina's beauty, rather than the outside agency of Cupid, as the inspiration

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7. H. ANTON, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

8. H. ANTON, *op. cit.*, p. 17, and R. BERNHEIMER, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1952, p. 133.

9. See F. GHISALBERTI, *L'Ovidius moralizatus di Pierre Bersuire*, «Studi romanzi», XXIII, 1933.

10. H. ANTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-35.

11. H. ANTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-31. See also J. FRAPPIER, *Orphée et Proserpine ou la lyre et la harpe*, in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévales offerts à Pierre le Gentil*, Paris 1973, pp. 282-83. Machaut's *Confort d'ami* is edited in E. HOEPFFNER, *Oeuvres de Guillaume de Machaut*, III, Paris 1921, pp. 83 ss.

for Pluto's pursuit of the goddess.[12] With this, the couple entered the realm of the courtly love relationship, typically based upon the first sighting of the beloved.[13] The implication of a similarly-motivated attraction is clearly present in *Ita se n'era*. Although the madrigal does not neglect the abduction, it is hardly treated with a moralizing tone. More important, the function of the myth as a parallel image for a «realistic», however formalized, love relationship, removes the poem from the allegorical sphere of the earlier moralized Ovids, and identifies it as a representative of the modern, courtly approach to the classical characters.[14]

The madrigal is further distinguished by its elegant superimposition of another literary model upon that of the basic Ovidian image. That model is the well-known passage in Dante's *Purgatorio,* Canto 28, in which the poet comes upon the figure of Matelda gathering flowers in the earthly Paradise, and is reminded of Proserpina, who found herself in just such a paradise, gathering flowers, prior to her abduction.[15] The anonymous madrigal poet has described a similar response to a virtually identical scene. That the image of Proserpina depicted in the first terzetto of the madrigal is in fact drawn largely from Dante is suggested by the detail of her singing, an element lacking in the Proserpina tale, but incorporated by Dante into his portrayal of Matelda.

In short, *Ita se n'era* is but one example of a madrigal text which for several reasons must have held considerably more interest for contemporary listeners than might be immediately apparent to the

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12. G. DE MACHAUT, *Confort d'ami*, 11. 2353-2360.

13. See, for exaple, ANDREAS CAPELLANUS, *The Art of Courtly Love,* trans. John Jay Parry, New York 1969, p. 28.

14. See H. ANTON, *op. cit.* pp. 36, for a discussion of later artistic manifestations of the Proserpina mythos, and its place in early humanistic literature.

15. *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 11. 37-51: *e là m'apparve... una donna soletta che si gia / cantando e scegliendo fior da fiore / ond'era pinta tutta la sua vita... «Tu mi fai remembrar dove e qual era / Proserpina nel tempo che perdette / la madre lei, ed ella primavera».* Cited by G. CORSI, *Poesie musicali del Trecento,* Bologna, Commissione per i testi di lingua 1970, p. 74.

modern reader. Readily observable, on the other hand, is the unconventional character of the musical settings. *Ita se n'era* stands as a stylistic landmark for both Lorenzo and Vincenzo, as is confirmed by its primacy of place in those sections of the Squarcialupi manuscript devoted to the works of the two composers.

Of the two settings of the poem, Lorenzo's is unquestionably the more visually striking, generally intriguing, and clearly representative of the musical personality of its creator. Lorenzo's madrigal has been entered in the Squarcialupi manuscript twice in succession, each version having been cast within the framework of a different notational system. The first version is notorious for its unique notational symbols.[16] It is likely that the symbols originated with Lorenzo himself, in light of his well-documented penchant for experimentation in sound and structure[17] and his apparent delight in musical puzzles.[18] Lorenzo's setting of *Ita se n'era* ranks among the most expansive two-voice madrigal settings of the century. It is half again as long as his average work.[19] The magnitude of the composition's structure is underscored by the virtuosic aspect of both voice parts, which exhibit an unrivalled density of discrete notational units.[20]

Vincenzo's composition upon the same text is conceived on a considerably more modest scale. Still, within the limited extant corpus of Vincenzo's works, *Ita se n'era* is matched in rhythmic complexity and

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16. The unique notational symbols include semiminims distinguished by oblique rectilinear flags, and minims with circles attached to the tip of the stem or bottom point of the rhomboid. The notation of Lorenzo's madrigal is discussed by N. PIRROTTA, *The Music of Fourteenth-Century Italy*, III, Rome 1962, pp. III-IV, and this author, *Musical Tastes in Fourteenth-Century Italy: National Styles, Scholarly Traditions, and Historical Circumstances*, Ph. D. diss., Princeton University 1981, pp. 88-92.

17. Those experiments included a madrigal with verto and chiuso endings in the ritornello, an isorhythmic madrigal, and a caccia in French chace style.

18. Still awaiting unimpeachable resolutions are the monophonic ficta exercise *L'antefana* and the ritornello of Lorenzo's caccia, *A poste messe*.

19. Most of Lorenzo's madrigals contain roughly sixty to seventy tempora, while *Ita se n'era* contains nearly one hundred.

20. For example, the cantus melisma on the penultimate syllable of «cantava» (line 2) contains some 108 notes within the space of eleven perfect tempora.

contrapuntal interest solely by the composer's only other setting of a mythological text, the madrigal *Ahi, sconsolato ed amoroso Tròiolo*.[21] These two madrigals by Vincenzo are united not only in their use of mythological romances as models for contemporary love relationships, but even more significantly by several aspects of musical structure and gesture. The musical similarities between them are so great, in fact, as to raise the possibility that regardless of his sources for the texts, Vincenzo may have conceived of the two settings as a related pair, or as part of a cycle. Most telling in this regard is the number of shared rhythmic and melodic motives which ornament the texts in strikingly similar ways. Both works open with a five-tempus exposition of the pentachord d'-a' stated first vertically, and then linearly throught virtually identical sequences of binary and ternary semiminims (identified as motive α in Examples 1 and 2). Motive β, which begins in the sixth tempus of both pieces, is a figure consisting of a broken, or embryonic, syncope chain. It forms the essential generative gesture for both compositions, and is often used to set a name in the text, as at measure 21 of *Ita se n'era* (see Ex. 1a) where it corresponds to the text phrase, «Proserpina cantava,» and measure 33 of *Ahi, sconsolato,* where it sets the words, «triste Dido» (see Ex. 2b). In both madrigals, the close of the first phrase on a unison d' in measure 13 is preceded by a temporary staticization of the melodic motion in both voice parts on an a pedal (identified as motive α in Examples 1 and 2). The terzetti of both madrigals are set in octonaria, with a shift in each case to duodenaria at the ritornello. Both ritornelli are constructed from motives derived from the scalar tetrachord a to d', reiterated at various rhythmic levels. That the similarities between these two works do not stem from lack of musical inventiveness on Vincenzo's part is revealed by the fact that they have little in common with the composer's other

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21. The text reads: *Ahi sconsolato ed amoroso Tròiolo | Abandonato da la ria Brisèida! | Ahi trista Dido per l'engrato Enéida! | Vostro dolor nel cor me fa memoria | Tanto più forte, quanto ch'è 'l pretèrito: | Fedel, amando, un sol no me fa mérito. | Ahi, ch'un dolce parlar, falso endizio, | Lasato m'ha nel doloroso ospizio!*

extant works, which are fashioned out of much simpler, rhythmically straightforward scalar and turning motives.[22]

Any temporal or conceptual connection between Vincenzo's two mythologically-inspired madrigals does not, of course, illuminate the nature of the relationship, if any, between his and Lorenzo's settings of *Ita se n'era*. A dating of ca. 1360 for both composer's settings of that madrigal seems plausible, and would accord well with the biographical and stylistic evidence, placing the works in the maturity of both composers. Gallo's work in the archives of San Lorenzo has established the outline of Lorenzo's career as a canon at that Florentine institution from 1348 until his death in 1372 or 1373.[23] In the case of Vincenzo, biographical information has been limited to that provided by the musical manuscripts. I have little to introduce in the way of evidence for Vincenzo's musical career, but I can report that on the basis of the Squarcialupi portrait, in which the composer is depicted in Benedectine garb,[24] and the attribution in Paris 568, which identifies him as *L'Abate Vicencio da Imola*,[25] we may identify the composer with a fair degree of certainty as an abbot of the Benedectine monastery of Santa Maria in Regola (originally Santa Maria in Arenula), one of the principal religious institutions of medieval Imola.[26] An inventory of the abbey, compiled in 1413, includes undated references to papal privileges relating to the election and confirmation of an Abbot Vincentius, granted by Pope Innocent VI.[27] Vincenzo's election must therefore

22. The stylistic contrast is most clearly illustrated by a comparison of *Ita se n'era* with Vincenzo's *Già era 'l sol*, ed. N. PIRROTTA, *The Music of Fourteenth-Century Italy* cit., III, pp. 45-46.

23. See F. A. GALLO, *Lorenzo Masini e Francesco degli Organi in S. Lorenzo*, «StudiMus», IV, 1975, pp. 57-64.

24. See T. MARROCCO, PMFC VII, p. IX.

25. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds ital. 568, f. 31v.

26. See G. C. CERCHIARI, *Ristretto storico della città d'Imola*, Bologna 1847, p. 431.

27. The complete inventory was published by S. GADDONI, *Inventari dell'Abbazia I-molese di S. Maria in Regola*, in *Atti e memorie della r. deputazione di storia patria per le provincie di Romagna*, 4/6, 1916, pp. 316-360. Items 114, 183, 187 and 216-18 mention Abbot Vincenzo. Although the privileges listed in the inventory are credited simply to Pope Innocent, the date of 1362 attached to the document cited in note 28, below,

have occurred after 1352, the first year of Innocent's reign. A dated payment by this Abbot Vincentius is recorded in the papal *Obligationes et Solutiones* for 1362, establishing a terminus ad quem for Vincenzo's election.[28] In the autumn of 1364, Vincenzo ordered the taking of a census.[29] Very likely this was one of the composer's last official acts, for in the following year he was succeeded by Umberto da Novara, whose capable leadership of the abbey extended through the year 1405.[30] We may, then, posit 1365 as a probable death date for the composer, who might have been a victim of the plague which devastated the Romagna in that year.[31]

Although the musical sophistication of the *Ita se n'era* settings, as well as the biographies of their composers, supports a hypothetical dating in the 1360s for both compositions, their precise chronological order or contemporaneity must remain an open question. A comparison of the musical details of the two works reveals little in the way of obvious relationships, with one provocative exception. The broken-syncopation motive β found in Vincenzo's madrigal also appears in a structurally vital position in Lorenzo's composition. Although not stated until measure 12, it constitutes the first piece of musical material which is not clearly introductory in nature. The first eleven measures of Lorenzo's composition consist largely of an ascending melodic sequence which leads dramatically up to the first d' of motive β (see Ex. 3). This interpretation of the opening passage is supported by the texting of the madrigal in both the Squarcialupi manuscript and British Library Additional 29987.[32] In both sources, the text in the cantus is broken

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enables us to identify the pontiff in question as Innocent VI (r. 1352-64) rather than Innocent VII (r. 1404-06).

28. Published in H. HOBERG, *Die Einnahmen der Apostolischen Kammer unter Innocent VI. Zweiter Teil: Die Servitienquittungen des päpstlichen Kammerars*, Münich 1972, p. 178 (no. 667).

29. See S. GADDONI, *L'estimo di Bubano del secolo XIV*, in *Atti e memorie della r. deputazione di storia patria per le provincie di Romagna*, 4/2, 1912, p. 324.

30. S. GADDONI, *Inventari* cit., p. 318.

31. See J. LARNER, *The Lords of Romagna*, New York 1965, p. 73.

32. Florence, Bibl. Laur., Palat. 87, f. 45v and London, British Library, Additional Ms. 29987, f. 43v.

off at the end of the word «paradiso», and recommences with «Ita,» followed by a repeat of the first line of text, beginning in measure 12 with the first note of motive β. Again, the temporal relationship between the two composition is not illuminated by this evidence. However, it may serve to strengthen the case for one composer's having known the work of his contemporary. More important from a broader perspective, the observation that within this circumscribed group of compositions a particular motive, a particular configuration of rhythm and melody, may bring into clearer relief specific elements of poetic structure and/or content, raises the possibility of a rhetorical interpretation of the musical gesture. Scalar motives in broken syncopation are rarely found in the earlier works of Giovanni da Cascia, or in the anonymous madrigals of the Rossi codex. By the 1370s, musical motives of this sort often took the form of the unbroken scalar syncopation chain (hinted at by the end of Ex. 2b), which constitutes one of the most characteristic features of Landini's ballata style.[33] Although caution must exercised in the formation of evolutionary views of musical style, I believe that we may take the *Ita se n'era* madrigals as reflective of Italian music and musical poetry in a stage of metamorphosis from the more static melodic and narrative conventions on the second third of the Trecento toward the more lyrical, less oratorical quality which characterized much of late fourteenth-century Florentine song. The musical settings of this engaging poem indicate that the *dulcedo* which we generally associate with the later polyphonic ballata style was already germinating within the virtuoso madrigal repertory of the 1360s.

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33. I have addressed the issue of the development of this aspect of Landini's style in a paper, *In Search of Landini's Cadence: A Reassessment of Some Compositional Conventions in Trecento Polyphony,* delivered at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (October 1984).

Ex. 1

Vincenzo da Rimini
Ita se n'era a star

Ex. 2

Vincenzo da Rimini
Ahi, sconsolato

Ex. 1a
Vincenzo
Ita se n'era
mm. 21-25

Es. 2a
Vincenzo
Ahi, sconsolato
mm. 19-20

Ex. 2b
Ahi, sconsolato
mm. 33-34

Ex. 3
Lorenzo Masini
Ita se n'era star
mm. 8-15

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