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For whom the fire burns:
medieval images of Saint Cecilia and music

Since the sixteenth century, musicians have venerated Saint Cecilia as their protector. Composers, especially in the British tradition, have written lavish pieces in her honor: the multiple *Odes for Saint Cecilia's Day* by Purcell (1683–92), the one by Handel (1739), or the more recent *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* by Benjamin Britten. In the visual arts, the association between Cecilia and music is embodied in Raphael's altarpiece *The ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* (Fig. 1). Painted in 1515–16 for the church of San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna, it represents the saint surrounded by broken musical instruments, with her gaze turned towards heaven, where angels sing from open books. St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, St. Augustine and St. Mary Magdalene join her in the spiritual conversation.[1]

The origins of the connection between Cecilia and music are brilliantly described in Thomas Connolly's book *Mourning into joy* from 1994.[2] These are mystical and theological, and center around a passage in her *Passio*, written around 500 CE. Cecilia was a Roman christian maiden promised to a pagan noblemen, Valerian. As her nuptials approached, the virgin fasted and wore a hair shirt under her dress to mortify her flesh. At the wedding she despised the playing of joyous music, but "sung in her heart to God alone".[3]

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1. On the commission of Raphael's painting and its devotional significance see GABRIELLA ZARRI, "L'altra Cecilia: Elena Duglioli Dall'Olio", in *Le sante vive. Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500,* Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990, pp. 165–196. The relationship of the painting with music is also described in NICO STAITI, "'L'estasi di Santa Cecilia e quattro santi' di Raffaello. Riflessioni su pittura e musica", *Il saggiatore musicale*, VIII/2, 2001, pp. 177–192.

2. THOMAS CONNOLLY, *Mourning into joy. Music, Raphael, and Saint Cecilia*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1994.

3. "Passio Sanctae Ceciliae", ed. Hippolyte Delehaye, in *Études sur le légendier romain. Les saints de novembre et décembre*, Brussels, Société des Bollandistes, 1936, pp. 194–220: 196, ch. 3. Cited in CONNOLLY, *Mourning into joy*, p. 63.

Fig.1: Raphael, *The ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* (1515–16). Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale.

The episode is described in the response of the first Responsory for Matins of her feast day (22 November), also used as an antiphon for Vespers, Lauds and the daily hours. The text highlights the contrast between the festive music of the wedding and Cecilia's spiritual singing to God: between the earthly sounds and the inaudible harmony of the saint's prayer.[4]

Cantantibus organis Cecilia virgo in corde suo soli domino decantabat, dicens: fiat domine cor meum et corpus meum immaculatum, ut non confundar.	While the instruments were playing, the virgin Cecilia sung in her heart to God alone, saying: Lord, let my heart and body remain stainless, that I be not put to shame.

Thus, in the Middle Ages, Cecilia represents not sensible, but spiritual music. The iconographic study of Nico Staiti places the beginning of her association with the art in late thirteenth-century Italy.[5] From the beginning, the organ was part of her iconography. The choice of this instrument could derive from a misinterpretation of the responsory where "organis" are mentioned. In the Latin of late antiquity, the world "organum" did not mean the organ, but could describe generic instruments, or the practice of music as well, which Cecilia despised.[6] In later centuries the organ, with its range of tone color and polyphonic capabilities, would become the symbol of celestial harmony.[7] In her first known representation, an antiphonary from around 1260 preserved in Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile, Cecilia appears in contemplation while a man plays the organ and another inflates the bellows (Fig. 2).[8] In other instances, she holds the instrument, but — significantly — she does not touch its keys: for example, in a statue for the church of Saint Cecilia in Verona created around 1300.[9] In a miniature from an Italian book of about a century later (c. 1400),[10] the saint hears the worldly music of organ and trumpet, but she gazes away towards a higher call, an

4. Text from *Breviarium Romanum. Editio Princeps (1568)*, ed. Manlio Sodi – Achille Maria Triacca, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999 (facsimile edition), p. 932. This is also the text of a number of Renaissance motets for the saint, with settings by Lasso, Palestrina and Marenzio among others.

5. NICO STAITI, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia. L'immagine e la musica*, Innsbruck – Lucca, Studien Verlag – LIM, 2002, pp. 18–20, 26.

6. PETER WILLIAMS, *The organ in Western culture,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 3–5 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music).

7. CONNOLLY, *Mourning into joy*, p. 14, and STAITI, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia*, p. 26.

8. Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile, Antifonario II, f. 122v. See STAITI, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia*, pp. 19–20.

9. Master of Santa Anastasia, *Santa Cecilia*, Verona, Museo di Castelvecchio. See STAITI, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia*, pp. 19–20, 24.

10. London, British Library, *Add.* 29902. See STAITI, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia*, pp. 22–23.

iconography prefiguring Raphael's later altarpiece. But which were the early literary associations of Cecilia with music? And, more importantly, which were the first musical ones?

Fig. 2: *Saint Cecilia*. Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile, Antifonario ii, f. 122v.

Surprisingly, one of the earliest references comes from two of the main sources of Trecento secular polyphony, the Squarcialupi codex (Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. *Mediceo Palatino* 87) and the manuscript London, British Library, *Add*. 29987. *Dappoi che 'l sole* by Nicolò del Preposto is an Italian caccia with the two upper voices in canon over a tenor.[11] Little is known of the composer; certainly he was in Florence in 1362,

11.   Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, *Mediceo Palatino* 87, f. 82v and London, British Library, *Add*. 29987, ff. 41v–42r. Modern editions of the caccia are in *Polyphonic music of the fourteenth century*, vol. 8 *Italian secular music, Part 3: Anonymous madrigals and cacce, and the works of Niccolò da Perugia*, ed. Thomas Marrocco, Monaco, Éditions de l'Oiseau-Lyre, 1972, pp. 117–125; and in Antonio Calvia, *Ballate, madrigali e cacce intonati da Nicolò del Preposto. Studio e edizione critica*

when a document associates him with Gherardello and other musicians during a visit to the Florentine monastery of Santa Trinita, one of the centers of musical life in the city.[12] From the same document we know that he was the tutor of a youth of the noble Adimari family, a circumstance that suggests a solid association with the Florentine intellectual and social élite. Nicolò set to music a number of poems by Franco Sacchetti and Nicolò Soldanieri, but was also a poet himself, as testified by attributions to him in the literary manuscript Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, ms. 1081.[13]

The caccia *Dappoi che 'l sole* is one of the more extended in the repertory, spanning some 247 breves. As is common for the genre, it is poetically and musically divided in two parts. The first usually describes a hunting or a fishing scene with naturalistic precision. In the second, the erotic meaning of the hunt is revealed, sometimes with crude realism. *Dappoi che 'l sole* does not strictly fit the mold: instead, it describes an evening fire and the attempts to put it out.

In her reconstruction of the long text, Maria Teresa Brasolin had classified it as an astrophic caccia, noting a lack of repetitions in the poetic form.[14] The first section occupies almost the entirety of the text: here the verses freely alternate *quinari*, *settenari* and *endecasillabi*, with frequent *rima baciata* and some unrelated rhyme-words. The confusion of the scene, typical of the genre, is poetically imitated by the call-and-response gestures that fragment the verses: for example at vv. 6–7 "Ov'è, dov'è?" / "È qua!" "Su, su, […]" or at vv. 9–10 "O tu de la campana, / suona!" "Don, don, don, don!" "All'arm'all'arme!". At the end the goal is reached, and the fire is extinguished. The final rhyming couplet gives a sense of conclusion through two *endecasillabi* with truncated endings. Here, normally, the metaphor of the main text is revealed. In *Dappoi che 'l sole* the narrator leaves the

commentata dei testi e della musica, Università di Siena, Scuola di dottorato europea in Filologia romanza, a.a. 2011–12, pp. 118–119 (text) and 296–309 (music).

12. FRANK D'ACCONE, "Music and musicians at the Florentine monastery of Santa Trinita, 1360–1363", *Quadrivium*, XII/1, 1971, pp. 131–51: 145–6. On Nicolò's biography, the most up-to-date discussions are CALVIA, *Ballate, madrigali e cacce*, pp. 13–24; and GALLIANO CILIBERTI, "Niccolò del Preposto da Perugia", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, http://www.treccani.it/biografie (accessed January 2016).

13. See LUCIA MARCHI, "Chasing voices, hunting love. The meaning of the Italian caccia", *Essays in medieval studies*, XXVII, 2011, pp. 13–32: 26–27; and LAUREN JENNINGS, *Senza vestimenta. The literary tradition of Trecento song*, Farnham (Surrey), Ashgate, 2014, pp. 81–89 (Music and material culture series).

14. MARIA TERESA BRASOLIN, "Proposta per una classificazione metrica delle cacce trecentesche", in *L'Ars nova italiana del Trecento, IV*, ed. Agostino Ziino, Certaldo, Centro di Studi sull'Ars Nova Italiana del Trecento, 1978, pp. 83–105.

scene, and on his way home sees a woman who captures his heart. In the text of the London manuscript, she is hidden inside a numerical senhal: "one hundred and one, one hundred and one, with fifty-one and A," which, read as Roman numerals, spells out the name CICILIA.[15] According to the Trecento poetic theorist Antonio da Tempo, such a technique is a way to conceal the dedicatee from a large portion of the audience.[16] To make the reference more accessible, the Squarcialupi codex provides a resolution of the senhal, writing the last verse as "C.i. C. i. con l.i. e A" ("C.i. C. i. with l.i and A"). Here is the text of *Dappoi che 'l sole* and its translation:[17]

Dappoi che 'l sole i dolçi raçi asconde		After the sun concealed his sweet rays
et la luna dimostra suo splendore,		and the moon showed her brilliance,
senti' un gran romore		I heard a great noise
forte gridare: "Al fuoco, al fuoch', al fuocho!"		and loud cries of "Fire, fire, fire!"
et po', stando un poco:	5	and then, after a while:
"Ov'è, dov'è?"		"Where, where is it?"
"È qua!" "Su, su! Ogn'uom su, fuor le lucerne,		"It's here!" "Quick, everyone, take your lanterns,
lumiere con lanterne!"		lamps with lights!"
"O tu de la canpana,		"You, with the bell,
suona!" "Don, don, don, don."		ring it!" "Dong, dong." "Alarm, alarm!"
"All'arm'all'arme!"	10	
"Tu, to' la cervelliera,		"You, take the helmet,
la scur'e la gorgiera!"		the axe and the gorget!"
"Tosto, tosto, ché 'l fuoco pur s'apiglia."		"Quick, quick, for the fire takes hold."
"Manda per la famiglia!"		"Send for the servants!"
"All'acqu'all'acqua!" "Su con le meçine!"	15	"Water, water!" "Come on with the buckets!"
Chi porta docce, chi recava scale,		Some brought pumps, some carried ladders,
chi si facea male		some got hurt,
e chi dicea: "Accorri!" "Omè, soccorri!"		and others shouted: "Hurry!" "Oh, come to help!"
"O tu della trombetta,		"You with the bugle,
suona!" "Tatin, tatin."	20	play!" "Ta ra, ta ra."

15.   MARCO GOZZI, "Alcune postille sul codice Add. 29987 della British Library", *Studi musicali*, XXII/2, 1993, pp. 249–278: 270–271. Gozzi points out that the same use of Roman numerals to hide the name Cecilia can be found in a fourteenth-century tondo in the Monastery of S. Francesco in Fiesole, and he suggests that the fire described in the caccia could have taken place there. In my opinion, the tondo simply testifies to the common use of such technique in Trecento Italy.

16.   ELENA ABRAMOV-VAN RIJK, "Luchino Visconti, Jacopo da Bologna and Petrarch. Courting a patron", *Studi musicali*, n.s., III/1, 2012, pp. 7–62: 10–12. Da Tempo does not describe this specific technique of hiding the name in Roman numerals.

17.   The text follows the critical edition given in CALVIA, *Ballate, madrigali e cacce*, pp. 118–119. Differently from Calvia, I choose to maintain the last verse as given by the London codex (the non-resolved numerical senhal), as I believe that the version of Squarcialupi is a *lectio facilior*, and not the original reading. The translation is mine.

"Ciascun si tiri a dietro!"		"All stand back!"
Chi sgonbra et chi rubava		Some cleared out, some stole,
et qual acqua versava		and others threw water,
et tal rompea l'uscio con l'accetta.		and one broke down the front door with an axe.
Qui ognun s'affretta	25	Here they all hastened
pur d'amorçare 'l fuoco et le faville.		to quench the fire and the sparks.
Passat'eran le squille*		It was well past the time for Matins
quando maestri, con grand'argomento,		when the masters cried out with firm proof (or:
gridavan: "Tutt'a chasa, ch'egli è spento."		grand argument):** "All go home: the fire is out."
Tornando vidi, et sempr'al cor mi sta,	30	On going back I saw, and she always remains in my heart,
cent'un, cent'un, con cinquantun e A. (= CICILIA)		one hundred and one, one hundred and one, with fifty-one and A. (= CICILIA)

* The *squilla* is a small bell used to call for Vespers and Matins. It was also used to signal fire. See *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini* (TLIO), s.v. *Squilla*, http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/ (accessed June 2015). Since the fire starts after dusk, I believe that its extinguishing should be placed at Matins, around 2 AM.

** On the alternative translation, see my discussion below.

Musically, both sections of the piece are introduced by a canon at the unison between the upper voices at a distance of eight breves. The first part is in *divisio senaria imperfecta*, where the second changes from imperfect to perfect. This change serves not only to create variety, but also to mark a point of particular hermeneutical significance, in this case the appearance of the woman.

The canonic construction of the two upper parts in the caccia tends to limit the number of possible consonances. The opening section of *Dappoi che 'l sole* has a strong prevalence of vertical combinations of *g-b-d* and *a-c-e* differently distributed in the voices.[18] If quite static harmonically, the caccia offers an extremely vivacious rhythmic counterpoint. Entire passages are set in syllabic declamation. Characteristic are short phrases and repeated notes, especially at the rapid exchanges of the text (ex. vv. 6–7, 9–10 etc…). There are also imitations, musical and poetic, of certain sounds: an interval of a fourth for the "don don" of the bells, a fifth for the "tatin" of the trumpet (vv. 10 and 20). Especially in the first section, the result is an agitated piece which

18. I am not suggesting any kind of triadic conception of the counterpoint, but simply the repetition — certainly audible — of vertical combinations. In his analysis of *Dappoi che 'l sole*, Mikhail Lopatin goes as far as implying the presence of an ostinato on *g* and *a* at the beginning of the piece. See MIKHAIL LOPATIN, "Canonic techniques in the caccia. Compositional strategies and historical development", *Plainsong and medieval music*, XXIII/2, 2014, pp. 179–200: 195–196.

seeks to mimic the confusion of reality.[19] In the final distich, the two upper parts imitate each other with a long melisma built on a descending sequence, and entrust the spelling of the numbers to relatively audible declamation.

The poetic text of a number of compositions by Nicolò can be dated from 1355 to 1373, based on their presence in Franco Sacchetti's *Il libro delle rime*.[20] Since the composer was active around 1362, it seems plausible that *Dappoi che 'l sole* was created in the same two or three decades after the middle of the century, a date that could also reconcile stylistic features that partially refute each other. On one hand, the presence of relatively frequent parallel perfect consonances points to a contrapuntal writing typical of the first part of the Trecento.[21] On the other, the large scale of *Dappoi che 'l sole* seems almost like a prelude to the most extended piece in the repertory, *Cacciando per gustar / Ai cinci, ai toppi* by Antonio Zacara da Teramo, written towards the end of the Trecento or even at the beginning of the Quattrocento.

At first glance, *Dappoi che 'l sole* follows all the conventions of the genre. A scene full of action and dialogue is followed by the speaker's meeting with a woman. The fire is a common erotic metaphor. There are plenty of examples, but one in particular could be significant here, because it comes from a text of a *canzona* attributed to the very same Nicolò del Preposto.[22] The text calls on Love and complains about its cruelty:

> Sai ben, crudele [Amore], in quanto amor m'accese
> la fiamma tua di quella che m'ha tolto
> l'anima e il corpo [.....]
> (You know very well, o cruel [Love], to what a great passion your flame ignited me
> toward the one who took away my body and my soul […])

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19. Nino Pirrotta talks about "musical impressionism". See Nino Pirrotta, "Piero e l'impressionismo musicale del secolo XIV", in *L'Ars nova italiana del Trecento. Primo convegno internazionale, 23-26 luglio 1959*, ed. Bianca Becherini, Certaldo, Centro di Studi sull'Ars Nova Italiana del Trecento, 1962, pp. 57–74: 63.

20. The dates are based on the order of Sacchetti's canzoniere. See Franco Sacchetti, *Il libro delle rime*, ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno, Firenze – Perth, Olschki – University of Western Australia Press, 1990 (Italian medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1).

21. On the stylistic features of Trecento music and their chronological implications see Maria Caraci Vela, "Le intonazioni polifoniche de 'La fiera testa che d'uman si ciba'. Problemi di contestualizzazione e di esegesi", in *Musica e poesia nel Trecento italiano. Verso una nuova edizione critica dell'"Ars nova"*, ed. Antonio Calvia – Maria Sofia Lannutti, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2015, pp. 93–141.

22. "Cansone chontra amore per uno innamorato di una giovane et ella di lui e volendosi chongiungere di uno volere lo giovane perdeo la virtù ativa et non poteo advegna che sperasse tornare al disiato chaso e fecela Nicholo soprascripto" ("Canzone against Love […] made by the above-mentioned Nicholò"), Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, ms. 1081, f. 112. Edited in Emilio Costa, "Il codice parmense 1081 (Appendice)", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XIV, 1889, pp. 31–49.

Thus, the erotic interpretation could be the most obvious, but a problem arises. In order to follow the literary topos, the fire should be ignited by the vision of the woman, or at least, continue to burn at her appearance. But in *Dappoi che 'l sole* the fire is extinguished before the narrator sees Cecilia. Why?

To solve this apparent contradiction, we need to resist the temptation to identify Cecilia with a contemporary aristocratic woman — there could be plenty by this name — but rather look at the most famous and venerated, Saint Cecilia. Going back to her *Passio*, we can follow the events leading toward her martyrdom. The night of the wedding, Cecilia revealed to her spouse Valerian that an angel guarded her virginity, and would slay him if he attempted to violate it. Incredulous, Valerian agreed to go to the catacombs, where he was converted by Pope Urban. Eventually also Valerian's brother, Tiburtius, was baptized. Thus, Cecilia's chastity transforms Valerian's erotic love into christian charity. The second part of the *Passio* is dedicated to the arrest, interrogation and martyrdom of Cecilia, Valerian and Tiburtius. The virgin was first condemned to be suffocated in a bath in her house, but after a day and a night her tormentors found Cecilia unharmed. She was then beheaded, but three blows and three days were necessary for her to die.[23]

In the late Trecento, Cecilia's cult and the meaning of her martyrdom are evident in Chaucer's *The Second Nun's Tale*. The text did not have wide critical reception, being judged a mere anglicization of the saint's legend; instead, it was often interpreted as a prelude to *The Canon Yeoman's Tale*, which is supposed to precede.[24] Indeed, the tale retells the saint's story in verse: the Prologue and the first part are based on the *Legenda aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, and the second expands on her martyrdom.[25] Although in the *Passio* Cecilia had been condemned to death by overheated air, in Chaucer the Roman prefect Almachius orders her to be burned in a bath

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23.   CONNOLLY, *Mourning into joy*, pp. 66–78.

24.   V.A. KOLVE, "Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* and the iconography of Saint Cecilia", in *New perspectives in Chaucer criticism*, ed. Donald M. Rose, Norman (Oklahoma), Pilgrim Books, 1981, pp. 137–174; and JOSEPH E. GRENNEN, "Saint Cecilia's 'chemical wedding'. The unity of *Canterbury Tales*, fragment VIII", *The Journal of English and Germanic philology*, XXIII/5, 1966, pp. 466–481. *The Canon Yeoman's Tale* centers on alchemy: thus, Grennen interprets Cecilia and Valerian's union as a "chemical wedding" and the saint's story as a metaphor of alchemical transformation. This interpretation is opposed by Kolve.

25.   See *Chaucer major poetry*, ed. Albert C. Baugh, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963, p. 501.

of red flames.[26] The theme of fire is also anticipated in the Prologue, where the poet describes Cecilia as "always burning in bright charity".[27] Chaucer particularly emphasizes the saint's insensibility to the fire, making it the pivotal point of her martyrdom: he describes Cecilia as remaining "al coold" among the flames. The fire is symbol of lechery, the same sexual desire manifested by Valerian on their wedding night. Cecilia's impassivity is not merely a sign of divine intervention, but a symbol of chastity protecting her from carnal desire.[28]

Thus, in the late medieval imagination, Cecilia had survived the flames of her martyrdom, emerging from them physically and psychologically cool. Along with the organ, the fire became a constant element in Cecilia's iconography. This is evident in a *predella* by the the Florentine Bernardo Daddi (fl. 1310–48), where the naked Cecilia stands in prayer in a giant cauldron placed on open flames. One of the executioners feeds the fire, while the other prepares the beheading. The Roman prefect and two soldiers observe from a distance (Fig. 3). The scene depicts quite faithfully the fire described by Chaucer; it also combines the two moments of the martyrdom, the cauldron and the beheading, in a single visual moment.[29]

26.   "Brenne hire right in a bath of flambes rede". geoffrey chaucer, *The Second Nun's Tale*, line 515. The references are to the text as edited in *Chaucer major poetry*, ed. Albert C. Baugh, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963.

27.   "Brannynge evere in charite ful bright". chaucer, *The Second Nun's Tale*, line 118.

28.   kolve, "Chaucer's *Second Nun's tale*", pp. 148–150.

29.   Now in Pisa, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo. A similar image is in the altarpanel for the Church of Saint Cecilia in Florence (early fourteenth century), now at the Museo degli Uffizi. See barbara russano hanning, "From saint to muse. Representations of Saint Cecilia in Florence", *Music in art*, xxix/1–2, 2004, pp. 91–103.

Fig. 3: Bernardo Daddi (fl. 1310–48), *The martyrdom of Saint Cecilia.* **Pisa, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo.**

This trajectory of the *Passio* can be retraced in the caccia: first the fire, then its extinguishing, and finally the appearance of Cecilia. The putting out of the fire represents the victory over the instruments of her martyrdom. Only thereafter can she show herself in full glory. Immediately after appearing to the narrator, Cecilia attaches herself to his heart: "Tornando vidi, e sempre al cor mi sta, cent'un, cent'un, con cinquantun e A. (CICILIA)" / "On going back I saw, and she always remains in my heart, one hundred and one, one hundred and one, with fifty-one and A. (CICILIA)" In the medieval imagination, the heart was not simply the seat of love, but an emblem of the whole person and its moral character. This is the same symbol used in Cecilia's prayer to God, done "in her heart alone". The last couplet of the text, normally unveiling the erotic meaning of the caccia, here assumes a more broad significance of moral respect, and perhaps even devotion.

The drastic change of context, from an earthly scene to a venerated saint, is not sudden, but is prepared by the last verses preceding the final distich (vv. 27–29): "Passat'eran le squille / quando maestri, con grand'argomento, / gridavan: 'Tutt'a chasa, ch'egli è spento.'" / "It was well past the time for Matins / when the masters cried out with firm proof (or: grand argument): 'All go home: the fire is out.'" The most significant and enigmatic words here are "maestri" and "argomento". In late medieval Italian, both terms have different meanings, one intellectual, and the other linked to the world of practical knowledge. "Maestro" was a title given to a very learned person, possibly to an university teacher or a doctor of theology, but also

— more humbly — to anybody versed in a practical art, such as carpentry or masonry.[30] "Argomento" can also be interpreted differently. On one side, it recalls the logical disputations of scholastic philosophy; on the other, the word can mean "sign" or "proof".[31] Thus, the verses could describe the master artisans in charge of putting out the fire, finally announcing — with firm proof — that the danger is over. In a more intellectual interpretation, the masters crying out could be the theologians, armed with their subtle and powerful arguments. The appearance of the doctors of theology at this particular point strengthens the identification of Cecilia with the saint. Moreover, the ambiguous meaning of the verses is perfectly functional to the shift of register. In a way, the artisans of the earthly scene are transformed into theologians in order to introduce the celestial, hidden meaning of the text.

This interpretation of the caccia raises a series of significant hermeneutical questions. Is *Dappoi che 'l sole* a secular, or a devotional piece? Or both? And how much can we attribute a sacred or spiritual significance to a secular artistic product, or vice versa? More in general, to what extent can we interpret a work of art without drifting away from it? And if we do, would this product lose its original meaning?

A look into aesthetics provides some historical framework. In the Middle Ages, beauty was grasped and described according to different criteria.[32] One is the theory of proportion, which judges an object according to the balance of its parts and gives great value to a mathematical view of nature and art. This is the most important theoretical justification of the beauty of music. The Pythagorean-Boethian theory of musical consonances allows a quasi-scientific appreciation for the art, liberating it from the mere judgment of the ears. The concept of *musica mundana* also connects it with the mathematical perfection of the creation.

The medieval mind also judges according to the aesthetics of *claritas*. Light, emanating from God, infuses all bodies in the universe with different degrees of radiance, giving them their brightness and color. This idea theoretically justifies the natural attraction for the brilliant colors that we find in paintings, miniatures and stained glass windows. Kolve suggests that

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30. *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, Firenze, Tipografia Galileiana di M. Cellini e C., 1863 (5th edition), s.v. "Maestro".

31. *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, s.v. "Argomento".

32. Umberto Eco, *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1986.

The Second Nun's tale is about "clarity, light, brightness and fire", and he goes as far as postulating an influence of this aesthetic on the text as a whole.[33]

A third influential theory of beauty has its roots into the medieval tendency towards symbols and allegory. Umberto Eco distinguishes between the two concepts of "metaphysical symbolism" and "universal allegory".[34] The first takes on Greek and Roman philosophy, and interprets the world's beauty as a reflection of its creator. On a more earthly level, the theory of universal allegory allows the reading of nature as a forest of symbols: thus bestiaries, lapidaries, fables and moral tales.

To this allegorical interpretation of nature, other contemporary thinkers added an allegorical theory of art, particularly fitted for visual and literary products. From the thirteenth century on, the symbolic value of art became more and more prominent, and was crowned in the aesthetic thought of Thomas Aquinas. For the philosopher, the act of connecting a poetic image to its allegorical meaning is done automatically and effortlessly in the mind of the reader. Thus, art needs to have one meaning only, called "parabolic" by Aquinas, which connects — is a single mental act — the literal sense and its interpretation. When great emphasis is given to the arts, the symbolic power of nature tends to lessen. A new sensibility for the concrete and particular, reflected in Occamist philosophy of the fourteenth century, supported a proto-scientific vision of the natural world. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the allegorical meaning of nature is taken over by art, and nature is free to be observed and described in itself.[35]

In the framework of this aesthetic sensibility we can understand an artistic product such as a caccia, which contains a detailed and realistic description of nature in its first part (the fire and its extinguishing, or a hunt), followed by the revelation of its allegorical meaning in its second (the encounter with the woman). This progression of events in a single piece seems to reflect Aquinas' "parabolic" meaning of art being grasped at once, in a quick mental act.

For the medieval observer the allegorical significance of an artistic object not only adds aesthetic value, but is embedded in it. The question now is how to evaluate the relationship between the two realms of meaning, the secular and the sacred. Again, the problem seems to be a purely modern one,

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33.   KOLVE, "Chaucer's *Second Nun's tale* ", p. 157.
34.   ECO, *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 56 and ID., *The aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 137–162.
35.   ECO, *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages*, pp. 58–64.

considering how the Middle Ages are "an age marked by an extraordinary integration of values".[36] As Michael Camille writes, "the sacred and the profane overlapped, shared languages, subjectivities and identical visual codes. The same artist who illuminated the Roman de la Rose one day would be back to the usual Bibles and Psalters the next […]".[37]

In the realm of love, the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) described his own relationship with the divinity with the same poetic imagery used to depict erotic desire. Thus, there is no shame in the earthly and the divine Cecilia of *Dappoi che 'l sole* sharing the same poetic and musical language. The apparent dichotomy between sacred and profane love was already overcome in the *Passio,* as the Roman Cecilia did not consummate her wedding, but converted her pagan husband to the love of God. Moreover, in the medieval imagination, a certain erotic appeal was often connected with female sanctity. The fairness of the body was a sign of the goodness of the soul, a principle inherited from classical thought. Many forms of martyrdom involve the saint's nakedness, and their visual representation induces some form of voyeurism: this is the case of Fig. 3, where Cecilia's naked upper body emerges from the cauldron of her torture.[38]

In the realm of music, the theory of *musica mundana* as a reflection of the harmony of the universe encourages an allegorical interpretation of a polyphonic piece. The musical consonances of the caccia can easily reflect an outer world of perfect proportions.

We should not forget, though, that medieval culture was not only preoccupied with the transcendent, but also manifested a strong appreciation for the earthly pleasures provided by natural and artistic beauty.[39] In this perspective, it would be a mistake to conceive *Dappoi che 'l sole* only as a homage to a celestial creature. The Benedictine Gilbert of Stanford describes Scripture as a river whose flows and currents continuously produce new meanings. The readers can draw from this pool of sense according to their intellectual ability or needs.[40] Thus, different audiences could have interpreted the caccia on different levels. The numerical senhal is difficult to decipher by

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36.   ECO, *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 12.

37.   MICHAEL CAMILLE, *The medieval art of love. Objects and subjects of desire*, New York, Abrams, 1998, p. 22.

38.   CATHERINE LAWLESS, "Sexuality and depiction of the female saint in medieval Tuscany", in *Sexualities, textualities, art and music in early modern Italy. Playing with boundaries*, ed. Melanie L. Marshall – Linda L. Carroll – Katherine A. McIver, Farnham (Surrey), Ashgate, 2014, pp. 75–93.

39.   ECO, *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages*, pp. 4–16.

40.   GILBERT OF STANFORD, *Commentarium in Canticum*, 20/225, cited in ECO, *The aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 146.

simply listening to the piece. The version transmitted by the London codex, which only gives the Roman numeral and not their corresponding letters (cent'un, cent'un, con cinquantun e A" / "one hundred and one, one hundred and one with fifty-one and A") is difficult to interpret without the support of a written document. A large portion of the listeners could have enjoyed the lively musical counterpoint and implied its most common meaning, the erotic one. The reference to the saint and her *Passio* would have been evident only to a more sophisticated audience.

Could there be the possibility of a third meaning? The object of desire that attaches itself so strongly to the narrator's heart might be neither a woman, nor a saint, but Cecilia *as* music, thus music itself. The medieval personification of the art is often represented as a fair lady holding the organ, as for example in a lower margin of the Squarcialupi codex (Fig. 4).[41] From an iconographical point of view, Lady Music and the fifteenth-century Saint Cecilia of the Cathedral of León (Fig. 5) are extremely close. The only difference is the fact that Cecilia only holds the instrument, whereas Lady Music has her fingers on it. In the later centuries, Saint Cecilia and Lady Music would be completely conflated.[42]

But what kind of music — celestial or worldly — does Cecilia symbolize in *Dappoi che'l sole*? The polyphonic piece points to an association not only with spiritual music, but with contemporary practice. With its rhythmically busy counterpoint, its call and responses, and its imitations of the sounds of nature, the caccia represents, more than any other Trecento genre, a quintessential example of worldly music. Why does this reference to Cecilia first appear in a caccia, a clearly secular and partially marginal genre of the Italian Trecento? One might have expected it to surface in more appropriate circumstances, for example in a madrigal, with its history of political and celebrative topics, or, even better, in a motet. With its usual allegorical transfer of hunting into a symbol for the pursuit of love, the caccia seems to be an apt genre for more subtle hidden meanings.

The legend of Saint Cecilia is a quintessential story of transformation of profane into sacred love, of *cupiditas* into *caritas*. The meaning of her legend is also subjected to a hermeneutical metamorphosis. She had scorned worldly

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41.   TILMAN SEEBASS, "Lady Music and her 'protégés' from musical allegory to musicians' portraits", *Musica disciplina*, XLII, 1988, pp. 23–61: especially p. 31 and note 30. In the Squarcialupi codex, Lady Music is on f. 121v, in the lower margin of the opening page of Landini's section. She also closely resembles the portrait of the composer, a possible hint at musical practice.

42.   STAITI, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia,* pp. 76–86.

Fig. 4: *Lady Music*, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, *Mediceo Palatino* 87 (Squarcialupi codex), f. 121v.

music at her nuptials in name of a more spiritual one. Through a long and complex process, Cecilia became the patron saint of the music that she had despised. Starting at the end of the fifteenth century, she not only holds the organ, but starts playing it, in what was to became a familiar iconography

Fig. 5: Spanish school, *Saint Cecilia*, Cathedral of León, second half of the fifteenth century.

(Fig. 6).[43] In 1585, the *Compagnia dei Musici di Roma* was put under the protection of two saints now officially associated with music: Gregory the Great and Cecilia. In 1607, Marco da Gagliano founded the *Accademia degli Elevati* in Florence, a new musical society under the protection of Cecilia, to whom a mass was to be sung every year on her feast day.[44]

In the second half of the fourteenth century, *Dappoi che 'l sole* represents a stage in this process of transformation, pointing towards a still-fluid relationship between Cecilia's legend and the realm of music. As a woman, Cecilia brings love and joy after the destruction of the fire. As a saint, she appears in glory overcoming the flames of her martyrdom. As music, she inspires a long-standing passion for the art. It is the music of a caccia that prepares her surprising appearance, a music that, as I pointed out,

43.   STAITI, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia,* pp. 32–33.
44.   RUSSANO HANNING, "From saint to muse", p. 91.

Fig. 6: Orazio Gentileschi (1563–1639), *Saint Cecilia playing the organ.* **Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel Kress Collection.**

seeks to imitate the cacophony of reality. Here Cecilia carries out another transformation: through her power, the power of music, this cacophony can be sublimated into the perfect world of musical consonances. The caccia is thus a witness to the transformative power of music, a splendid example of pleasure — as Roland Barthes would have put it — in fourteenth-century polyphonic art.