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Issue 9 - Scrutinizing Surfaces

'Inclosed in this tabernacle of flesh': Body, Soul, and the Singing Voice

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Voice is a kind of sound characteristic of what has soul in it; nothing that is without soul utters voice.

(Aristotle 1993: 420^b)

Wee cannot come perfectly vnto the knowledge of man, vnlesse first wee doe well see into the Essence both of the body and the soule. Now the knowledge of the soule cannot be made manifest but onely by her operations, which also seeing she doth not performe without the helpe of corporall organs, there is a necessity imposed, that wee also vnderstand the exact composition of the body.

(Crooke 1615: 647)

Our soule useth thoughts and discourses which, cannot be declared as long as it is inclosed in this tabernacle of flesh [...] Therefore that which is framed in voice, & brought into use, is as a river sent from the thought with the voice, as from his fountain.

(de la Primaudaye 1594: 57r ; 1618: 377)[1]

[1] As both a singer and a student of Renaissance music, I have long been interested in how early modern singers and their listeners understood that peculiar borderland of the self, lying between interior and exterior, between imagination and embodiment, between articulation and sense, that is inhabited by the voice. Notwithstanding the impact of the invention of audio recording and replay in 1877 that has forever changed our ability to listen to, and endlessly re-hear our own and others' voices – a momentous 'loss of innocence' that none of us who is able to hear can ever recover – voice still remains enigmatic. It is no sooner uttered or perceived than it vanishes, flitting about above and beneath, or perhaps constantly moving back and forth through, the surface of sensual experience. Always just out of reach, voice (live or recorded) is characterised by its physical and conceptual liminality. For example, is it inside or outside the body? Does it change between utterance and perception, first hearing and memory? (see Connor 2004). The issue for Renaissance philosophy appeared to hinge on voice's questionable immateriality. The French Protestant 'popular scientist', Pierre de la Primaudaye, seemed to sense that even though voice is elusive, it is perhaps only just beyond our grasp:

Now when this voice and speach is propounded with the mouth, it is invisible to the eyes, so it hath no body wherby the hands may take holde of it, but is insensible to all the senses, except the hearing; which neverthesse cannot lay hold of it or keepe it fast, as it were with griping hands, but entring in of it selfe, it is so long detained there whilst the sound reboundeth in the eares, and then vanisheth away suddenly.[2]

Yet for all its ephemerality, voice is nevertheless everywhere in the early modern human domain, epitomised by its critical role in the formation of individual and collective identities, and, in its specialised manifestation as speech and language, the near saturation

of social interactions. These include such fields as 'the literary', which we nowadays think of as mediated by the eye rather than the voice, but which until well into the eighteenth century was for most people primarily an oral and aural – and thus a communal – dimension. Because of this ubiquity, voice had an importance in areas we barely notice now, including as a symptom of ill-being, a readable marker of temperament and character, and a privileged interface – and medium of intercession – between the mundane and the spiritual.**[3]**

[2] The singing voice, meanwhile, seems to have potency additional to that of mere speaking (now, no less than in the early modern period), able to play yet more games both with its utterers and its hearers. It is as if the vocal residue we experience particularly clearly *besides* both the word text and the melody of a song may be 'voice and nothing more', and it connects us to a realm beyond linguistic meaning; as Mladen Dolar puts it, voice is 'the bearer of a deeper sense, of some profound message' and 'is endowed with profundity: by not meaning anything, it appears to mean more than words [...] it seems still to link with nature, on the one hand – the nature of a paradise lost – and on the other hand to transcend language' (2006: 30).

[3] Taming, controlling and manipulating the singing voice in order to harness that power and then using it to enchant those who listen, as the finest singers of Renaissance Europe apparently could, entails a combination of highly sophisticated physical and mental skills that can take years to master. These include coordination of breath, almost infinitely rapid adjustments of the minute and untouchable gristle and muscles in the vocal tract and mouth that make up the organs of voice, and the manipulation of acoustic space in response to aural feedback. Its greatest adepts have been admired – worshipped, even, in certain circumstances – since time immemorial. In Western culture, singers' powers to bewitch can be deployed to either positive or negative effect: traditionally, singing's 'good magic' is usually exercised by men, while female song is almost always potentially dangerous, and usually to males. Thus Orpheus rescued Eurydice from Hades with the power of his voice and David calmed Saul's rage by singing psalms, while the sirens lured sailors to their deaths with irresistible singing. And in Handel's operatic reworking of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* in 1711, the warrior Rinaldo is tricked into captivity by the singing of two mermaid sirens, who divert his mission to save his beloved Almirena, kidnapped by the witch, Armida. She then attempts to undermine the hero's noble but all too human resolve, by magically taking on the physical shape of his beloved, even to the extent of singing a seductive aria in 'Almirena's' simulated voice. In the end, only good (Christian) magic can counter Armida's powers and save the lovers from death. Little wonder, then, that such an intangible, volatile, and yet formidable phenomenon as the singing voice and its effects on the emotions and the bodies of listeners should have exercised the closest attention of philosophers, poets, connoisseurs and scientists from classical and early modern times to our own.

[4] My aim in this essay is to consider how early modern constructions of the singing voice are embedded into a range of philosophical discourses that spread far wider than the usual concerns of music scholarship. At the risk of oversimplifying to the level of caricature, for music-historians of the early modern period, singing voices are primarily of interest as the instruments that articulate(d) musical compositions. Of course, this is not to say that musicologists do not concern themselves with the ways in which the act of singing has

always been a fundamental component of the broader contexts, both social and emotional, in which vocal music is and was performed; and for this reason, singing remains a potentially rich medium through which to investigate musical objects and musical experiences. But in order to make sense of the copious and complex range of early modern reference to the singing voice and its role in the human sensorium, the emotions, and above all, the operation of the physical body, it is necessary to be prepared to pass through the purely 'musical' dimension of representations of singing to the substrata that underpin and explicate voice's wider role in the making of early modern identity.

[5] This investigation of early modern singing begins, then, not with music, notated or otherwise, but rather with a poem, made in conscious imitation of classical models but nevertheless directly focussed on a 'live' experience of the singing voice. The poem was not only written with the express intention that it should be sung, but its content is itself a meditation on the way that the singing voice operates on the listening body. Close consideration of this text leads, in the second part of the essay, to an investigation of some of the broader concepts, both philosophical and 'scientific', which lie behind the poem's engagement with the operation of a particular singing voice, and its effects on the body of the one who listens. My intention is, hopefully, to provide a model for fresh ways of considering a fundamental human phenomenon, that is in my view important to comprehending early modern consciousness, but whose discussion is normally subordinated to the rather different interests of historical musicologists.

Singing and Listening

[6] One poet active in the second half of the sixteenth century with a particular interest in singers, the singing voice and, in particular, the experience of hearing and listening to singers, both male and female, was Battista Guarini. Besides his most famous literary achievement, the tragi-comic pastoral, *Il pastor fido*, Guarini was a prolific writer of texts specifically designed to be set to music. His poems (including the famous series of set-piece songs in *Il pastor fido* itself) were taken up by just about every significant madrigal composer of the age, not least Claudio Monteverdi, whose surviving published *oeuvre* includes no fewer than forty-two settings of Guarini's verse.[4] The poet spent most of his life working at Northern Italian courts, mainly Ferrara, but also Savoy, Mantua, Florence and Urbino, where fine vocal performance and its consumption was not only appreciated, but actively indulged in as a form of cultural currency.[5] In the case of Guarini's native Ferrara, where he spent the majority of his life working at the court of Duke Alfonso d'Este II, singing was assiduously cultivated, perhaps to the point of obsession. Here the poet was able to observe and, indeed, contribute to the Mannerist revolution in the conception and performance of vocal music that occurred in Italy during the latter decades of the sixteenth, and the first years of the seventeenth centuries. This revolution was driven by an intellectual desire to forge a new kind of affective connection between words and music, an intensified focus on the voice itself, and the application to singing of traditional courtly tenets of *difficoltà* and *sprezzatura*; it depended for its practical realisation on levels of vocal virtuosity beyond almost anything known in Europe up until then, and Alfonso's court was for a while its crucible.

[7] Guarini's wife, Taddea Bendidio, was a noblewoman and successful singer, and in 1580, at the age of seventeen, their daughter, Anna, became a member of the famous 'concerto delle donne' at the Este court in Ferrara as a singer and lutenist. The 'concerto' was an

exclusive ensemble of virtuoso musicians maintained by Duke Alfonso d'Este II and his sister, the Duchess of Urbino from the late 1570s until 1597, when Alfonso died. Their talents were jealously protected and only displayed as part of the performances within the court's *musica secreta* at exclusive soirées in the family's private apartments.[6] This ensemble, and similar groups of mostly female virtuose in Mantua, Florence and later Rome, and other courts outside Italy, played a critical role in taking the prevailing courtly style of singing and developing it in such a way that it came to be characterised by an almost fetishistic attention to eloquent virtuoso display. The main technical feature of this performance style was the continuous embellishment of the basic vocal line of a song both with sometimes breathtakingly fast filigrees of decorative runs and ornaments produced in the throat ('cantar di gorga'), and other vocal effects including sliding, sighing, gasping, swelling and retracting the sound, which, together with visual stimulation as the women played their instruments while singing (in Ferrara these were the harp, lute and viola da gamba), had the effect of superimposing a sensual lustre on the musical surface.[7] Within a short time, what the German composer, teacher and theorist, Michael Praetorius, described in 1619 as 'der jetzig Newen Italienischen Manier zur guten Art in singen' (the latest new Italian style for achieving a good manner of singing), rapidly became the benchmark for art singing across most of Europe, leading more or less directly to the so-called 'bel canto' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and, in turn, creating a hegemony of what is an essentially Italian vocal aesthetic that still in many ways bears sway in classical singing today.[8]

[8] Another feature of the 'new' style, however, was its role in the social transformation of the conditions in which secular singing occurred in elite spaces. Beginning in these same North Italian courts around the 1570s, male courtiers were gradually relieved of the necessity to demonstrate their *virtù* through active participation in collective music-making; the focus now was on sophisticated performances by professional virtuosos – notably women, and instead of singing himself, the courtier strove to achieve pleasure and, potentially, spiritual enlightenment, through 'active listening'. Guarini's poem, 'Mentre vaga Angioletta', is not only one of the finest literary evocations of this kind of male experience, but also one of the most detailed descriptions of virtuoso singing from the entire early modern period.[9] This is one reason why the poem is of such interest to musicologists; another is that we happen to know a considerable amount about its composition in response to a specific request from Duke Alfonso in 1581, and its obvious connection to the particular accomplishments of the singers of the Ferrara *musica secreta*. Finally, because, of the six composers known to have published settings of the poem; the last and most famous to do so was Claudio Monteverdi, who included a remarkable version for two tenors and basso continuo in what would be the final (eighth) volume of his madrigals published in his lifetime, *Madrigali guerrieri, et amorse* (1638).[10]

[9] The poem was written on commission in 1581, and first appeared in print only four years later in 1585 in the third edition of what would become a long-lived series of poetic miscellanies (first issued, but without Guarini's poem in 1582) consisting principally of works by the Perugian poet, Cesare Caporali, where it was one of just three poems by Guarini included in the volume. The three poems were retained in substantial sections devoted to other poets in numerous reprints and fresh editions of Caporali's poems, as part of miscellanies published over the course of the following fifteen years.[11] Meanwhile, the text also appeared along with a much larger group of Guarini's poems, as part of a

compendium of 'excellent writers of our age', published by Benedetto Varoli in Casalmaggiore in 1590, with the claim that the contents were 'newly gathered' (see Figure one).^[12] The poem was subsequently included in Guarini's *Rime*, the first volume devoted solely to his poetry, published by Giovanni Battista Ciotti in Venice in 1598.^[13]

[10] There are a number of small but significant differences between the text of the poem as it was published by Caporali and Varoli, and that in the 1598 *Rime*, and it is impossible to know if the version of the text in the Caporali and Varoli collections is the form in which Guarini originally sent it to Duke Alfonso, or if it is a corrupted version in early circulation, and so it remains as yet unclear whether the changes we find in the version in the 1598 *Rime* were Guarini's corrections to the earlier editions, or second thoughts.^[14] Given the significance of a first 'collected works', it seems reasonable to suppose that the poet himself had in hand the publication of the *Rime*, and it is for this reason that I think we have to take the differences seriously, not least because they have major implications for the way that poem can or must be read.^[15]

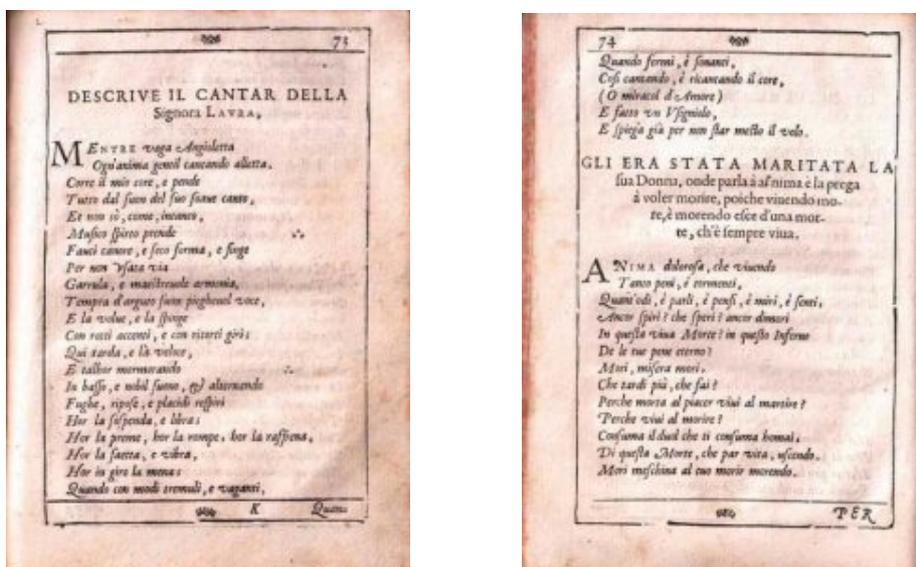


Figure one.^[16]

Here is the poem, with the two versions side by side, in order to show the textual and punctuation differences between them.

Caporali / Varoli (1585, ff.)	Guarini, <i>Rime</i> (1598)
	Gorga al' canterice
Mentre vaga Angioletta*	Mentre vaga Angioletta
Ogni anima gentil cantando aletta.	Ogni anima gentil cantando aletta.
Corre il mio core, e pendè	Corre il mio core, e pendè
Tutto dal suon del suo suave canto;	Tutto dal suon di quell souve canto;
El non s'è come in tanto,	3 El non s'è come intanto
Mastico spinto prende	Mastico spinto prende,
Fuasi canere, e seco forma, e finge	Fuasi canere, e seco forma, e finge
Per non usate via,	Per non usate via
Garrula, e maestrevole armonia	Garrula, e maestrevole armonia.
Tempra d'arguto suon piaghevole voce,	10 Tempra d'arguto suon piaghevole voce,
E la volve, e la spinge	E la volve, e la spinge
Con rotti accenti, e con ritarti giri;	Con rotti accenti, e con ritarti giri
Qui tarda, e la veloce.	Qui tarda, e là veloce;
E tal'hor mormorando	E tal'hor mormorando
In basso, e nobil suono, & alterando	15 In basso, e mobil suono, ed alterando
Fughe, e ripose, e placidi respiri,	Fughe, e riposi, e placidi respiri,
Hor la sospende, e libera,	Hor la sospende, e libera,
Hor la prora, hor la rompe, hor la raffirma	Hor la prora, hor la franga, hor la raffirma;
Hor la saetta, e vibra,	Hor la saetta, e vibra,
Hor in giro lo mena;	20 Hor in giro la mena,
Quando con modi tremolo, e vaganti,	Quando con modi tremoli, e vaganti,
Quando ferri, e scrauti	Quando ferri, e scrauti.
Così cantando, e ricantando il core	Così cantando e ricantando, il core,
(O miracol d'Amore)	O miracol d'Amore,
E' fatto un' Usignolo,	25 È fatto un usignolo
E spiega già per non star mesto il volo.	E spiega già per non star mesto il volo.

*/'angioletta' in some editions/

[11] Guarini's style in his madrigal texts is typically condensed and often convoluted, and both grammar and punctuation make it at times quite difficult to decipher the correct meaning (if indeed, Guarini intended only one), which naturally impinges on any effort at faithful translation: 'Mentre vaga Angioletta' is no exception. The problem is compounded, as I have already hinted, by some of the differences between the two versions, the 'Caporali/Varoli' text and that in the 1598 *Rime*, both issued after its original composition (1581), but still within the poet's lifetime. Monteverdi's setting follows the Caporali/Varoli version, and because the madrigal is well-known, there have been many published translations of this version into English included in sleeve notes to recordings and modern editions of the music; needless to say, there is a range of variant readings of its meaning by translators. One of the most opaque and problematic moments of the poem (but, frustratingly, also one of its most important) on account both of its lacunary grammar and the positioning of punctuation, comes at lines 5–9. The problem hinges on the subject of 'prende (it takes)' in line 6: 'it' is normally understood to refer to the 'musical spirit' that somehow takes over, or takes on the form of Angioletta's singing throat (that is, her voice is the subject of the poem). But if we take the comma after 'prende' in the 1598 *Rime* (the first publication devoted solely to Guarini's poetry) at face value, 'it' could now refer, rather, to 'my heart' (i.e., the listening protagonist of Guarini's poem).^[17] If this latter is the case, then, as we will see, it follows that the listener's heart (which becomes physically transformed in the course of the song) remains the principal subject throughout the poem and is, somehow, itself 'doing the singing'; this reading appears to be confirmed in the closing quatrain ('Così cantando, e ricantando, il core, / O miracol d'Amore, / È fatto un usignolo'), and leads, as this essay will seek to explain, to an interpretation of Guarini's poem rather different to those by recent readers. It is very possible that Guarini wished deliberately to maintain this ambiguity, in order to evoke the struggle of the poet to capture something that cannot be captured: an 'ecstasy' brought about by listening to Angioletta's voice that transcends rational thought. Such an explanation permits the reader to embrace the double meaning rather than needing to resolve it.^[18]

Translation

[12] While singing, charming Angioletta entices every gentle [well-born] soul: my heart races, and hangs completely on the sound of her sweet song; and in the meantime – I know not how – it takes [on] musical spirit, [and] a singing throat [or: musical spirit takes on [the form of] a singing throat], and with it shapes and feigns [or: imitates], in a strange way, loquacious and masterful harmony. It [either 'her singing throat' or 'my heart-become-throat'] tempers lissom voice with sparkling sound, and turns it, and pushes it with broken accents, and twisting, turns here slowly, and there quickly; and sometimes murmuring in low, moving [*Capiroli/Varoli*: noble] sounds, and alternating fugues and rests and calm breaths, it now holds it, [then] frees it, now presses it, now breaks it off, now reins it in, now shoots it and vibrates [it], now turns it around, sometimes in trembling and wandering tangles [*Capiroli/Varoli*: 'tones'], at others, firm and sonorous. Thus singing [*i.e.*, Angioletta], and singing again, [*i.e.*, in the sense, of 'singing after, or in imitation of, her singing'] my heart – O miracle of love – is made a nightingale, and now takes flight so as not to stay within me [or, in *Capiroli/Varoli*: 'so as not to be sad'].

[13] One of the first features that strikes one on reading the poem is surely its list of minutely observed vocal effects. In the course of the poem Guarini refers, albeit somewhat tangentially, to at least twenty individual technical elements of singing that can be found described in singing treatises or the written-out ornamentation in many notated songs of the period. [19] They lead the 'reader's ear' along a switch-back ride of pushing, pressing, rushing, pausing, shooting up and swooping down. In this respect, Guarini has clearly made a great effort to fulfil the details of his commission, described in the letter he sent accompanying the poem when he submitted it to Duke Alfonso d'Este II. The poet was at pains to point out the fact that he has matched the required description of vocal virtuosity with his own literary virtuosity:

I am sending the Canzonetta Your Highness commanded of me, in which I have endeavoured to describe the *sgorgheggiare* and the *tirate* and *groppi* that are made in music. This is a new and quite difficult thing, and, as far as I know, not hitherto attempted by any other poet, modern or Greek. Among the Latins, only the divine Ariosto in one of his odes, and Pliny, the ancient writer, have attempted it. I believe that the Musician [*performer/composer*] will find much invention in it by which to do it justice, as you yourself will best be able to hear'.

[20]

Following this first impression, we begin to notice other things: for example, Angioletta does not appear to be giving a formal 'performance' in the modern sense of 'deliberately communicating with her audience', but rather is overheard 'while singing', albeit by a group of 'gentle souls', who are 'merely' delighted by her singing ('alietta' has an implication of superficiality) rather than deeply affected, as would be a truly attuned and focussed listener such as, for example, Duke Alfonso himself (as Guarini implies when he says in his dedication 'com'ella stessa ottimamente potrà udire'). In fact, Angioletta herself is never presented to the protagonist's (or our) eyes at all, only to the ears. Thus, her display of 'cantar di gorga' hugely magnifies the physicality of her vocal organ; but she – and her singing – are at the same time somehow 'disembodied', a 'quantum' duality that, as we have seen, is one of voice's characteristics.

[14] Meanwhile, our attention as readers is drawn to the 'emotive surface' of the song: neither the listener nor we are party to its lyrics or its musical structure, and these seem to be of no importance to the effect of her singing on the poem's protagonist (about which, more later). But the most extraordinary discovery comes when we realise that it is not (or at least only) *Angioletta's* singing throat which is being put through its paces, so much as the listener's *heart*, first set racing by hearing the sound of Angioletta's singing, and then 'left hanging', before being infused by a mysterious 'musical spirit' that has the power to take control of it and cause it to change its material form. The heart is understood not just a metaphor for the listener's emotional response to the allure of Angioletta's siren singing, but also as a physical entity capable of undergoing material transformation ('I know not how') into another bodily organ, in this case, 'fauci canore' (literally, a 'singing gullet' – or perhaps 'vocal tract').**[21]** The listener's heart takes on a life of its own, and in the form of a 'vocalising tube' produces a loquacious and musical harmony in sympathy with (or perhaps, ventriloquized by) Angioletta's own singing throat. And now, in its new garb, the heart-as-throat is made to engage in a thrilling duet with Angioletta, mirroring ('feigning' or 'imitating') her every warble and musical effect ('ricantando'), together producing a 'garrula, e maestrevole armonia', before eventually taking on another new form, this time as a nightingale, and taking flight, perhaps symbolising an ecstatic mutual 'death' ('O miracol d'Amore'), as the protagonist's singing soul is finally 'released' from her controlling throat, and his own body. This is an echo of the Ariosto poem that had served as one of Guarini's models for 'Mentre vaga Angioletta', in which the listener's soul strives unwillingly to leave Giulia's mouth, where it has lodged, drawn from his own body by her singing ('How the melody has stolen me away from myself! / And still I am not myself, still / my soul does not know how to leave your open lip.' See note 24, below).

[15] That Claudio Monteverdi also understood the poem in this way is suggested by his musical setting: up to line 5 he sets the text for a solo (tenor) voice singing completely unaccompanied (a scoring which as far as I know is not only unique to the composer, but not found in any other published vocal music of the period); at the words 'Musico spirito' the voice is joined by the accompanying instrument(s), perhaps signifying the speaker's 'loss of independence' as 'musical spirit' begins to take over his heart; and then at the words 'Garula e maestrevole armonia', a second tenor joins the soloist and sings with him, imitating his every ornament and passage, apparently mirroring the 'duet' between Angioletta's throat and the listener's 'singing heart'.**[22]**

[16] Massimo Ossi suggests that Guarini may have intended to portray Alfonso himself as the listener described in the poem, linking the duke's known predilection for both solitary and particularly intense listening to the singers of his *musica secreta* to the scene played out in the poem, as it moves from the general effect that Angioletta's singing has on 'any gentle soul' (which presumably refers to the kind of exclusive courtier audiences who would normally expect to experience this kind of sophisticated singing), to focus on the specific listening experience of one 'soul', whose almost involuntary surrender to the web-like intricacies and emotional roller-coaster of the vocal display causes him to be transformed and his soul literally to be transported by it.**[23]**

[17] Whether or not the protagonist is meant to be Alfonso, Guarini himself, or another 'expert' male listener, the poem is clearly not simply a eulogy of the vocal skills of a singer called Angioletta, but also an account of what can happen to the body while 'overhearing'

someone who happens to be in the act of singing (*'Mentre vaga Angioletta ... cantando'*). [24] Guarini's intense focus on the process by which the listener's body is affected by Angioletta's singing suggests that the taxonomy of dynamic and *rubato* effects, and the specific throat-produced ornaments (known collectively as 'gorgie' (hence the 'sgorgheggiare' which he name-checks in his letter to Alfonso) may be, for this most informed cataloguer of the 'cantar di gorga' style, just the raw material for his wider exploration of the 'deep physiology' of listening to singing (was Guarini perhaps assisted in his use of technical terms by his daughter, Anna? The commission was from the beginning for a poem to be set to music and to be sung, rather than read). [25]

[18] The clues are in his use of a series of words that carried substantial charge in early modern psychosomatic theory, including 'anima' (soul), 'core' (heart), 'spirto' (spirit – or *spiritus*), 'fingere' (to feign or imitate), 'formare' (to shape), and 'armonia' (harmony). Guarini's listener declares his mystification at what is happening to his body ('E non sò come intanto') and that something unusual, although not entirely impossible, is going on as his heart, infused with a mysterious 'musico spirto' becomes, 'per non usata via', a singing throat. Is Guarini's poem, then, simply a flowery literary fantasy woven around the titillating exposure and display of a female virtuosa's vocal effects to an aural version of the male 'gaze' (which is how it is traditionally read)? [26] Or does the poet draw on established contemporary philosophical and medical concepts in order to fulfil his commission to explore the power of a singer's voice to transcend the listener's bodily integrity and effect a fleeting unity of souls, something which must surely have been a subject of serious discussion among Duke Alfonso's d'Este II's connoisseurs of singing? [27]

[19] In the second part of this essay, I want to explore the wider context of Guarini's own investigation of the potential effects of vocality and listening suggested by the ambiguities of 'Mentre vaga Angioletta', in order to try better to understand both the early modern view of the role of voice, hearing, and 'spirit' in mind-body relations, as well as the wider allure and impact that the virtuoso singing voice had in the late sixteenth century. I should at this point perhaps emphasise that, as with Guarini's poet, my interest in this particular investigation is the voice itself (Dolar's 'voice and nothing more'), and not the 'musical content' of song. In this sense, this is not an investigation of musical form and content, so central to early modern philosophical discussion of the so-called 'power of music' (*musica humana*), although readers not familiar with this aspect of early modern musical philosophy will be well-rewarded by exploring it. [28]

Voice

[20] For Aristotle, whose interpretation of natural phenomena was, as we will see, central to early modern physiology and psychology, voice is a primary indicator of life in sensate beings: 'Voice is a kind of sound characteristic of what has soul in it' (1993: 420^b 5). His subsequent aetiology of voice as 'the impact of the inbreathed air against the windpipe', and continuing, 'the agent that produces the impact is the soul resident in these parts of the body', epitomises the dual identity of voice: a 'sound' produced by the impact of air, and also something 'material' located inside the body, that is, in 'the windpipe', or as we would now more precisely specify, the vocal tract (1993: 420^b 27). [29] In Aristotle's dense definition, voice is a fulcrum around which three key 'drivers' pivot: soul, breath and sound, which, together with hearing (implicit in Aristotle's invocation of 'sound', that has to be heard in

order to elicit whether an entity is animate or not), are essential to understanding early modern vocality, and in particular, as far as this essay is concerned, its specific manifestation as singing.

[21] Potentially the most arresting aspect of Aristotle's explanation of the ultimate cause of voice is, perhaps, his direct and apparently unproblematic use of the word 'soul', that can't help but create a potential barrier to our being able to appreciate the wider importance of the Aristotelian paradigm, otherwise so fundamental to understanding early modern conceptions of the functioning of the body. Nevertheless, it is necessary to find a way to be comfortable with the idea of soul within an 'objective scientific' account of the generation and perception of singing. Luckily, late-Renaissance technical investigations of voice provides an excellent model for the accommodation of classical Greek philosophical concepts to 'new' empirical methodology. Indeed, as Jennifer Richards and I have recently argued, late-Renaissance writing about the voice is remarkably stable, considering the changes which we know were going on in the period in terms of the description and conception of the body and in particular, the effects of a notable 'dis-membering' of the unitary body as a result of new approaches to dissection, coupled with a growing scepticism of all received knowledge of nature unverified by observation. One reason for this relative stability is, of course, the extraordinary tenacity of the authority of Aristotle and of his disciple Galen in early modern discourse on the body.**[30]**

[22] As the 'new materialist anatomy', that had its foundations in sixteenth-century Italy, was predicated on the critical reading of classical physiological texts in parallel with visual and tactile contemplation of the dissected body, increasingly serious attempts were made to 'pin down' voice and reconcile its two states – physical and ethereal – through dissection, coupled, of course, with intense study of the knowledge and wisdom received from Classical authorities.**[31]** Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) famously broke the medieval taboo on the process of literally opening up the human body and its constituent parts to scrutiny as physical mechanisms. His contemporary, Gabriele Falloppio (1523–1562), established through dissection alone the interconnectedness of the sense organs in the head, and especially between the ear and the vocal tract. Following in Falloppio's footsteps, his pupil and successor to the Chair of Anatomy at the University of Padua, Girolamo Fabricio (1537–1619), and then *his* student and successor (as well as, it seems, rival), Giulio Cesare Casserio (1552–1616), enormously advanced understanding both of the anatomy and function of the voice and of its closest sibling, the ear. In his monumental treatise, *De voce auditusque organis*, Casserio described the structures of the organs of voice and hearing to a level of precision beyond anything done before in print.**[32]**

[23] But it is Pierre de la Primaudaye, in his *French Academy*, who perhaps most vividly captures the mechanics of the link between soul and body in terms of the voice's role in the 'traffic' between the subject's interior, and the external world:

Our soule useth thoughts and discourses which, cannot be declared as long as it is inclosed in this tabernacle of flesh [...] And so wee say that there are two kindes of speech in man, one internall and of the minde, the other externall, which is pronounced, that is the messenger of the internall, that speaketh of [or from] the heart. Therefore that which is framed in voice, & brought into use, is as a river sent from the thought with the voice, as from his fountain.**[33]**

The motivation to expel this internal discourse to the outer world is sparked by the impulse of reason, but the medium of its passage is physical. In classic Aristotelian and Galenic physiology, air is drawn into the body in order to cool the heart, an organ always hot and in danger of over-heating. As it is driven out in its heated form, the air beats against the walls of the trachea creating sound in the form of unmodulated voice. The pitch and articulatory power of this column of air depends on its speed and its temperature, and this in turn, depends on the temperament of the utterer. The air then reaches the 'impediment' of the larynx, where, in order for this air to resonate and make sound, it is now turned back on itself so that it can reverberate, and this is the reason, according to Galen, why the surface of the trachea is flexible and made up of gristly rings that help redirect the air and amplify the sound it carries.^[34] In his simplification of the structure and action of the voice for a lay readership, de la Primaudaye demonstrates how, through divine design, speech is a subsequent function of voice, which in turn is the result of the action of the thorax and the laryngeal passage:

For first, speech could not be without voice, for the which God hath created many instruments that are all necessary for that purpose, as namely the vesell of the throat, the winde-pipe, the throate, the lungs, the breast, & certain back running sinews appointed thereunto by reciprocal motions. Al these parts helpe onely to make the voice of man, without any framing of speech, except it bee the vessel of the throat [...]. For it serveth first to stay the aire from rushing in over fast & violently into the lungs, & from entering in too cold & over sodainly unto them. Then it serveth also to divide & distribute the aire when it ascendeth from the lungs, that it may be the better scattered and dispersed into all parts of the mouth. And by this means this instrument fashioneth the voice, & causeth it to yield a sound, & so prepareth it for the tongue, that it may be articulated & framed into speech by the same

[24] Voice, according to Aristotle, is the medium or raw material generated by the impact of inbreathed air on the larynx and from which speech 'is framed'; 'pure' voice, flowing, in de la Primaudaye's words, 'as a river sent from the thought', is antecedent to speech. Aristotle distinguishes between two sorts of vocal utterances, voice (*phone*) and language (*logos*): humans share *phone* with animals, which even without *logos*, emit vocal signs in the form of cries, calls or threats, and these elicit automatic recognitions and responses from other organisms. This, then, allows animals to form, as Francis Sparshott explains, 'correlating groups or societies': voice is, in this sense, 'bound to the immediate motivation and occasion of its utterance in a way that linguistic utterance is not' (1997: 201-2). Language, reserved uniquely to humans, has another relationship with voice: its artificial grammatical organisation naturally becomes habituated in normal, informal speech, but linguistic signs can be syntactically organised and re-organised, inscribed (in memory or in writing) and retrieved and then articulated vocally (verbalising) if and when desired.

[25] The classical model of human vocal articulation privileges the centrality of syntax and grammar. In singing, on the other hand, the voice naturally reorders the focus of attention of the ear from syntax to expression, and thus has powers of communication that transcend the chatter of the linguistic, allowing it perhaps to invoke that animal level of the non-verbal which Aristotle assigns to *phone*. At its most elemental, singing can manifest in the form of pure vocalizing, or melisma, devoid of any linguistically fixed component, 'the bearer of

what cannot be expressed by words' (Dolar 2006: 30). Not, of course, that this renders the singing voice in any way inferior to the verbalising voice in its potential to affect the intellect, and in turn, the body.

[26] Here let's briefly recall Guarini's account of Angioletta's singing and something that he conspicuously failed to mention: what (if anything) she was singing *about*. In fact, the protagonist seems altogether oblivious to (or at least, uninterested in) the song's verbal text (de la Primaudaye's 'speech'), but rather concentrates, as we have seen, on naming (and contrasting) her non-verbal vocal gestures. (Neither does Guarini's protagonist have anything particular to say about what we today might describe as the 'timbral quality' of Angioletta's voice – no mention of that early modern catch-all descriptor of desirable female vocal quality, 'dolce', for example). In de la Primaudaye's terms, the singer's breath striking the larynx and laryngeal tract (Guarini's 'fauci canore') certainly 'fashioneth the voice and causeth it to yield a sound' that is then 'scattered and dispersed into all parts of the mouth', and articulated as singing – but not necessarily 'verbalised'. It is as if Angioletta's vocality of ornament and affect has the power to bypass the process by which the intellect interprets language, performing its work on the ear and in turn, acting directly on the heart and through a process of sympathetic physical response, transforming the soul. [35]

[27] But what of the precise mechanism by which Angioletta's 'speechless' singing voice, which we now know, as understood in the later sixteenth century, comes 'as a messenger from the soul', came to be heard and perceived by Guarini's listener? And how might early-modern philosophical thinking explain how her voice, specifically because her style of singing is apparently so potent, was able to exercise its power not only to transform the listener's heart through the medium of 'musico spirito' into a 'virtual singing organ', but also in so doing, to cause his soul to become united with hers in an 'out-of-body' duet, in which the poet's throat/heart 'sings again' the vocal gestures of Angioletta's voice?

Soul and Body

[28] Plato thought that the soul is independent of the body; by contrast, Aristotle is clear that although the soul and the body are ontologically different from one another, neither can exist separately. For Aristotle, the soul of an animal is 'material', 'a body, of fire or air or little round atoms, not identical with the animal's body but present in it, moving it and being moved by it' (Menn 2002: 84). Plato meanwhile had explained in the *Timaeus* that the body was created as a *container* for the soul: 'All of these [the elements] the creator first set in order, and out of them he constructed the universe [...] Now of the divine, he himself was the creator, but the creation of the mortal he committed to his offspring. And they, imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul; and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body, and so made it to be the vehicle of the soul' (1970: 275). One paradox in Plato's conception of the 'form' of the soul that is much discussed is of potential relevance to our investigation of both the liminality and the transformative properties of voice: Plato asserts that unlike the body, which consists of composite parts and is thus 'in a state of perpetual influx and efflux', the soul always has the same condition and is thus unlikely to have 'parts' (1970: 247). And yet, just after the passage in *Timaeus* about the creation of the immortal soul, Plato explains that within the body there is also 'a soul of another nature which [is] mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible affections' – pleasure, pain, rashness, fear, anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray' (1970: 275). This explains in turn the construction of the body, which is fashioned specifically in order to

house it: the seat of the immortal soul is located in the brain and exercises reason, while 'fearing to pollute the divine any more than was absolutely unavoidable, they gave to the mortal nature a separate habitation in another part of the body, placing the neck between them to be the isthmus and boundary. And in the breast, and in what is termed the thorax, they encased the mortal soul'. Note that this privileged part of the body, an 'isthmus' between the realms of the immortal, or rational soul, and the mortal, or sensual soul, is the neck – precisely the location of the laryngeal tract. Within the thorax, there is a further division (at the waist), so that the 'inferior soul which is endowed with courage and passion' lives in the upper part, nearer to the neck, 'in order that being obedient to the rule of reason, it might join with it in controlling and restraining the [baser] desires when they are no longer willing of their own accord to obey the [command of reason]' (1970: 275).**[36]** Plato's model thus sees the soul as inhabiting the body, but, unlike Aristotle's view, remaining separate from it: Plato's explanation, in its most simplistic sense, is the 'dualist' account of soul and body, that first Aristotle, and later, Christian doctrine (albeit with caveats), rejects.

[29] The most important medieval philosopher to consider classical Greek conceptions of the relation between body and soul within a Christian world view was, of course, Thomas Aquinas. He accepted Aristotle's idea that the rational soul gives motion to the body. The problem that both Aristotle and Aquinas saw with the dualist account is that if, as Plato's model suggests, the soul is 'superior' to the body it inhabits, why should they be united, as clearly they are? Aquinas (following Aristotle) argues that the sensitive soul (that animals have, but not plants, which only have vegetative soul) needs the body in order to exercise its vital functions (for example, drawing breath, and, in our case, the resulting generation of voice). Similarly, the rational soul that, exclusive to humans, enables acts of the intellect, is dependent on sensation and this, in turn, requires body: 'For it is the very same man who perceives that he both understands and senses, and yet sensation does not exist without the body. Hence, the body must be a part of the man'.**[37]** Aquinas had to face up to an inherent contradiction in opposing a dualist position. On the one hand, 'the human soul is the form of the body [...which] implies that man is composed of body and soul'. But on the other, humans are capable of thought that does not require the body; therefore, in principle at least, the soul does indeed have an existence separate from the body. Aquinas resolves this conundrum by explaining that:

Above other forms there is found a form, likened to the supra-mundane substances in point of understanding, and competent to an activity which is accomplished without any bodily organ at all; and this is the intellectual soul: for the act of understanding is not done through any bodily organ. Hence the intellectual soul cannot be totally encompassed by matter, or immersed in it, as other material forms are: this is shown by its intellectual activity, wherein bodily matter has no share. The fact however that the very act of understanding in the human soul needs certain powers that work through bodily organs, namely, phantasy and sense, is a clear proof that the said soul is naturally united to the body to make up the human species.**[38]**

Hearing and Spiritus

[30] Aquinas may have been intent on preserving an immaterial form of pure intellectual soul to satisfy theological principles, but classical and early modern medical theory had to

deal with the fact that however immaterial thought might be, soul – that distinguishes the living from the dead – has to have some kind of material form that animates the body. The solution, ultimately derived from the Stoic philosophy of *pneuma*, proposes a 'bodily, or animal spirit' ('spiritus') that acts as a medium of communication between the immaterial soul and the physical body. *Spiritus* was envisaged by classical physicians 'as the subtlest kind of matter in the universe below the moon: like a kind of gas, it could not be perceived by the senses, but it was nonetheless material, and its departure from the body broke the link between body and soul, form and matter, and constituted death' (Glick, Livesey, and Waillis (eds) 2005): 426). In medieval and Renaissance medical theory then, *spiritus* is not soul, but rather the material substance that connects soul and body, and which effects the motions of the body. *Spiritus* was understood to reside in the cavities of the brain and to flow along the nervous system to the sense-organs and the muscles, controlling sense perceptions, motor activity and lower-level psychological activity such as 'appetite, sensus communis, and imagination'. (Walker 1972 repr. in Gouk (ed.) 1985: 122).

[31] For the pragmatic Francis Bacon, it was a small step further to reach the conclusion that to all intents and purposes, *spiritus* and soul are the same, and that soul is thus material. In *De augmentibus scientiarum* (1623), for example, he argues that:

Since the sensible or animal's soul must clearly be thought to be corporeal substance, attenuated and made invisible by heat; a vapour (I say) conflated out of flame-like and airy natures, endowed with the softness of air or receiving impressions, and with the vigour of fire for launching actions; nourished partly by oily, partly by watery things; covered by the body, and in perfect animals located chiefly in the head, running through the nerves, and replenished and repaired by the spirituous blood of the arteries; as Bernardino Telesio and his disciple, Agostino Donio, have in some measure not quite uselessly asserted [...] This soul might better be called by the name *Spiritus*. [39]

Bacon developed these ideas further in a number of works, for example, the *Sylva Sylvarum*, which includes his investigation of the operation of sound and hearing in the context of his understanding of *spiritus*. Although Bacon's work post-dates Guarini by more than a generation, his acknowledgement of his indebtedness in developing his theory of material soul in *De augmentibus scientiarum*, which is an explanation of the way in which hearing acts on both animate and inanimate bodies, causing sympathetic responses, to the works of two late-sixteenth century philosophers, Bernardino Telesio's *De Rerum Natura juxta propria principia* (1565), and *De natura hominis* (1581) by Telesio's disciple, Agostino Donio, means that Baconian philosophy is neither anachronistic nor irrelevant to our understanding of the process described by Guarini in 'Mentre vaga Angioletta'.

[32] The leading modern authority on seventeenth-century science and music, Penelope Gouk, explains that Bacon's natural philosophy was based on the assumption that most natural phenomena, including sound, 'can be explained in terms of the action of spirit and tangible matter; a pneumatic, rather than a purely atomistic, theory of matter'. She continues:

Bacon believed that sound is a species ['an essential element of Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy']: that is, an immaterial entity containing all the qualities of the sounding body within itself, carried by the medium to the ear. [...] one of

the important qualities of sound as a spirit is its affinities to spiritus. [... and he believed] that inanimate bodies respond to sound and resonate or produce echoes because the species of sound mingles with the pneumatical part of the body, its spiritus. Pleasing, regular sounds produce a sympathetic resonance in the body. (2000: 140)

Bacon also followed the Aristotelian and Galenic idea – by the early seventeenth century, with its legacy of the new anatomy, already becoming outdated – that the physiological action of hearing is dependent on *spiritus* that is always circulating in the narrow passages in the head (Gouk 1991 and Smith 1999: 104–105). According to this model, sound travels through the outer air, bearing the imprint of the qualities of its generation. When it passes into the cavities of the ear it transfers its imprint to the *spiritus*, or ‘inbred air’, which filters the sound and delivers it to the ‘animal spirit’, which in turn conveys the sound to the auditory nerve for interpretation and reaction. The mechanism is described in Alexander Read’s 1638 *Manuall of the Anatomy, or Dissection of the Body of Man*:

Hearing is thus caused. First, the aire received in the first cavity, doth gently move the tympanum, which being shaken tosseth the three small bones joynd to it; then the kind of sound is impressed into the internall aire, which having the quality of the sound, and circular by the windings of the labyrinth, to make it pure is conveighed thorow the cochlea, and delivered to nervus auditorius that the animall spirit may present it to the common sense, the judge of all species and forms. (460)

The voice, carrying the imprint of – in de la Primaudaye’s words – ‘the internall, that speaketh of the heart’ has a particularly privileged passage to the intellect, the process elegantly explained in Balthazar Gerbier’s metaphor:

the life of a humane voyce, the very Spirituall Soule of that voyce, that is to say, its sence, is partly Spirituall, and partly Intelectuall; it is that which enters into the pores by permission of the corporall ayre, where it remaines; having knockt at the doore, and obtained entrance, *the spirit then of human speech, which is the speechless sence*, bereaves itselfe of that Corporeall robe, and is conveyed unto our intellectuall parts [my emphasis]. (Gerbier 1650: 24)

Thus the ‘Spirituall Soule’ of the voice is its ‘sense’ and this is a kind of essence, ‘the speechless sence’. As I have suggested, singing can also be considered a form of ‘speechless voice’ and it has a critical property in its ability to bypass the rational processes of language, and its passage from the ‘internal speech’ of the utterer’s soul to the receiver of its imprint through the mechanism of hearing and the body’s subsequent responses is a privileged one, on account of the special ‘supra-audible’ powers of music.

[33] In his consideration of the magical powers of music to affect the bodies of those who hear it, a topic of intense speculation from ancient times to the present day, the leading sixteenth-century occult philosopher, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, explained the particular potency of the singing voice, which is in the words of his first English translator, to ‘pierce [...] even to the inwards of the soul’, drawing on a whole series of concepts now familiar to us:

Singing can do more than the sound of an Instrument, in as much as it arising by an Harmonial consent, from the conceit of the minde, and imperious affection of the phantasie and heart, easily penetrateth by motion, with the refracted and well tempered Air, the aerious spirit of the hearer, which is the bond of soul and body; and transferring the affection and minde of the Singer with it, It moveth the affection of the hearer by his affection, and the hearers phantasie by his phantasie, and minde by his minde, and striketh the minde, and striketh the heart, and pierceth even to the inwards of the soul, and by little and little, infuseth even dispositions: moreover it moveth and stoppeth the members and the humors of the body.[40]

Here we recognise how the voice, in the form of singing, wields its power over the one who hears it (trumping the effects of the sound of a mere instrument) by the 'harmonial consent' of a combination of 'the conceit of the mind' (that is, reason), the 'imperious affection' of the hearer's fantasy (the power of imagination) and the heart (Agrippa perhaps implies here 'emotion'). The voice which the mind perceives has reached it, as we now know, 'as a river from the thought' of the singer; indeed a little further on, Agrippa, in order to explain the transformative process by which the 'inner thought' of the singer's soul is projected outwards in physical form so that it can act upon the hearer, cites the fourth-century Platonic philosopher, Calcidius, who 'saith that a voice is sent forth out of the inward cavity of the breast and heart, by the assistance of the spirit', which we might now read as an even more succinct summary of Aristotle than even de la Primaudaye's.[41]

[34] Agrippa then explains that the singing voice enjoys an especially easy passage to the ear, as it consists of the 'motion' of a 'refracted and well-tempered air' – that is, bearing the imprint of musical harmony; and by virtue, specifically, of that motion (recalling to us perhaps Guarini's 'Garrula, e maestrevole armonia'), it penetrates 'the aerious spirit of the hearer' (that is, his *spiritus* – 'which is the bond of soul and body'). What happens next in Agrippa's description of the process provides a possible key to unlocking Guarini's poem. As we have seen, the role of the *spiritus* is to carry – or, in Agrippa's translator's word, 'transfer' – the 'affection and minde of the Singer with it'. The *spiritus* now acts upon the listener through sympathetic resonance, so that the singer's voice operating through the 'aerious spirit' within the hearer's body 'moveth the affection of the hearer by his affection, and the hearer's phantasie by his phantasie, and minde by his minde' – in other words, a form of sympathetic reaction.

[35] The multi-faceted Renaissance philosophical interest in sympathy and sympathetic action as an explanation of a range of natural phenomena drew in turn on an even richer Classical heritage, exemplified by Plotinus' notion of the nature of *sympatheia*, that argues that all souls are ultimately united, an idea that goes back to Plato. Thus, as Eyjólfur K. Emilsson puts it: 'if, say, a human being is sympathetically affected by something external and distant, this affection is a function of the unity of the World-Soul in which we, through the animation of our bodies, have a share' (2015: 41). 'Musical' examples of sympathy – for example, when the strings of one lute are set in motion if those of another are struck – were regularly invoked in early modern demonstrations of the physical manifestation of an otherwise hidden force (as well as serving as a metaphorical conceit in innumerable literary applications). Giuseppe Gerbino suggests that 'In such a world, the two strings respond to each other's motion because of a mysterious affinity that cannot be directly perceived by the

senses. Thus, the notion of sympathy, especially in the Ficinian-Platonic version, provided an explanation for an otherwise incomprehensible wonder of nature, while sympathetic resonance in its turn provided evidence of the existence of universal sympathy' (2015: 102).

[36] It is a continuation of the metaphor of the striking of an instrument's strings and their sympathetic action on another that informs the next part of Agrippa's extended explanation of the action of the singing voice on the listener's body. Having entered the ear, the singer's voice, through the mediating material of the aeriuous spirit, 'strikes' and 'pierces' the 'inwards of the soul' and then – by virtue of the inextricable connection of soul and body – 'infuseth even dispositions'; thus a 'quasi-physical' action is transformed into a 'physiological' effect. There are further resonances here with Guarini's poem, in which the 'musical spirit' that arises in the listener from hearing Angioletta's voice, first 'forms' and 'imitates' a loquacious harmony; then 'tempers' (I think in the sense in which metal is softened and shaped), 'turns', 'pushes', 'twists', 'holds', 'frees', 'presses', 'breaks off', 'reins in', 'shoots', 'vibrates' and 'turns around' the listener's 'sympathetic voice' as it is made to 'perform' in imitation of Angioletta's singing. Finally, Agrippa adds that the effect of the singing voice 'moveth and stoppeth the members and the humors of the body', implying a forcible loss or complete surrender of the listening body to the singing it hears. Thus the singer's voice has the power ultimately to effect physical (anatomical) and physiological change in another – precisely what Guarini suggests has happened to his listener.

Conclusions

[37] If 'Mentre vaga Angioletta' were the only example of a poem about the effects on the body of hearing virtuosos sing, we might have reason to be wary of locating it so firmly, as I have been doing, within a broader medical-philosophical context. There are, however, a number of other poems both by Guarini, and by contemporaries, which frame the commonplace theme of love aroused by a woman's singing in a similar – if not quite so virtuoso – style to 'Mentre vaga Angioletta'. For example, 'Aure soave di segreti accenti', probably also by Guarini, published twice in 1587 in variant versions, and also set to music for one of the singers of the Ferrara 'concerto' (again, possibly Laura) by their 'musical director', Luzzasco Luzzaschi:

Aura soave di segreti accenti,
 Che da l'orecchia penetrando al core
 Svegliasti là dove dormiva Amore.
 Per te respiro e vivo
 Da che nel petto mio
 Spirasti tu d'Amor vital desio.
 Vissi di vita privo
 Mentre amorosa cura in me fu spenta;
 Or vien che l'alma senta,
 Virtù di quel tuo spirito gentile,
 Felice vive oltre l'usato stile. [42]

[Sweet breeze of secret accents that, penetrating to the heart through the ear, aroused Cupid there, where he was sleeping. For you I breathe and live since you breathed the living desire of Cupid into my breast; I lived without life while the loving cure lay dormant within me. Now it happens that my soul hears the

nobility of your gentle spirit, it lives happy, in another way.]

The physical actions and physiological reactions experienced by this listener references concepts we now recognise: breath; the heart 'penetrated through the ear'; the soul 'hearing' the spirit of the sounding other; and the transformative effect of this aural stimulus on the listener's temperament.

[38] One final example from the court of Ferrara, is by Battista Guarini's greatest contemporary, Torquato Tasso (who also served at Alfonso's court at this time), and, indeed describes the same singer, Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, who is the subject of Guarini's 'Quando in più gravi accenti' (see note 25). Brancaccio was a soldier, courtier, fellow Neapolitan and family friend of Tasso, celebrated for his fine bass voice. In his affectionate 'voice portrait', the poet suggests that Brancaccio's singing could affect his listeners in ways analogous to Agrippa's observations on the power of the singing voice. Thus, as Brancaccio sings, he 'unlooses delightful spirits', and as these penetrate his listeners' bodies, his voice not only, in Agrippa's words, 'moveth and stoppeth the members and the humors of the body' ('harmonizing breasts and calming the imperious emotions of limbs'), but Brancaccio even has the power, through the action of his voice alone, to impose control over feelings of desire that may be awakened in his listeners. Further, in an extension of the Platonic notion of 'universal sympathy', Tasso hints at the singer's Orphic ability to effect change in nature itself, tempering winds and thunder and storms:

Mentre in voci canore
 I vaghi spirti scioglie
 Giulio, tempra in ciel l'aure, in noi le voglie.
 Si placa l'aura e 'l vento
 Placido mormorando
 Risuona e van tuoni e procelle in bando:
 Un interno contento
 N'accorda anco ne' petti
 E i membri acqueta da' soverchi affetti;
 E se pur desta amore,
 Gli dà misura e norma
 Col suon veloce e tardo e quasi forma.[43]

[While in tuneful notes Giulio unlooses delightful spirits, he tempers breezes in heaven, and in us, desires. The air is pacified, and the wind peacefully murmuring sounds forth, and thunder and storms are banished: an inner contentment also harmonizes us in our breasts and calms the imperious emotions of our limbs. And even if love is awakened, he gives it measure and regulation, and with sound fast and slow, form as it were.]

[39] I have already alluded to the rarefied environment at the court of Alfonso d'Este II at Ferrara in the latter part of the sixteenth century in which Guarini's experience – real or imagined – of 'Angioletta's' singing was formed; even at the time, commentators recognised the 'exceptionality' of its musical culture, and in recent years, historians have tried to place the near-mythical practices which Guarini's poem both evokes and to a certain extent helped to foster, within the wider context of Italian vocal practice. It is fair to say, that at such a remove, it is hard to test the proposals that I have been making in this essay about

the ways that early-modern conceptions of 'vocality' may have been more deeply embedded in wider philosophical and medical discourse than recent musical scholarship has apparently needed to acknowledge, and this is primarily because, apart from surviving musical notation of songs, there is an extraordinary paucity of substantive writing about singing itself that could illuminate the topic. I have, however, attempted here to suggest the potential in reading a broad range of different kinds of texts – not least, poetry – to elucidate the nature of 'voice', understood as both physical material able to cross the permeable surfaces that divide one body from another, and as a metaphorical concept that played a critical role in the construction of early modern identity.

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NOTES

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[1] De la Primaudaye's text first appeared in English as *The Second Part of the French Academie (1594)*; *The French Academie: Fully Discoursed and Finished in Foure Bookes* was published in 1618. [\[back to text\]](#)

[2] 'Or quand cette voix & parole est prononcée de la bouche, comme elle est invisible aux yeux, ainsi elle n'a point de corps par lequel les mains la puissant empoigner, ainsi est insensible à tous les sens, excepté à l'ouye, laquelle ne la peut encore empoigner comme à mains estendues, ne detenir, ains estant entrée d'elle mesme, elle est detenue cependant que le son en resonne aux oreilles, & puis s'envanouyt soudain' (Primaudaye 1593 : p. 57^r; 1618 : 378–9. [\[back to text\]](#)

[3] Recent seminal work on voice in the early modern environment includes: Richardson (ed.) 2014; Hunt 2010; Bloom, 2007; Fox and Woolf (eds.) 2003; Smith 1999; Salazar 1995; Dumonceaux 1990. I should like to acknowledge here the great value of the many discussions I have had with Jennifer Richards about questions relating to the voice in early modern culture. [\[back to text\]](#)

[4] For a full list, see Whenham 2007: 421–57. [\[back to text\]](#)

[5] See for example, Newcomb 1986: 90–115; Brooks 2000; Lorenzetti 2003; Wistreich, 2007; Cusick 2009. [\[back to text\]](#)

[6] The main studies of the *musica secreta* and of the musical environment at the d'Este court in general in the final quarter of the sixteenth century are Newcomb 1980; Durante and Martellotti 1989; and Wistreich 2007. See also Stras 2003. [\[back to text\]](#)

[7] That this technical refinement was directly associated with court singing is confirmed in a 'letter on the voice' written for noblemen and published in 1562, in which the author, Giovanni Camillo Maffei, comments: 'il vero modo di cantar cavaleresco, e di compiacere all'orecchia, è il cantar di gorga' ('the true method of noble singing, and of pleasing the ear, is 'throat singing') (1562: 78).[\[back to text\]](#)

[8] See Wistreich 2013.[\[back to text\]](#)

[9] It is not the earliest, however: Laurie Stras notes that Giam' Battista Pigna's poem, 'In giri or lunghi, or scarsi, or doppi, or soli' describes in detail the ornamented singing of another Ferrarese courtier-singer, Lucrezia Bendidio (Tadea Guarini's sister), and was written sometime before the poet's death in 1575 (that is, at least 6 years before Guarini's poem); it is also perhaps significant that another Ferrarese courtier, Leonora Sanvitale, is referred to in a poem by Torquato Tasso describing her performance in an *mascherata*, as 'Bell'angioletta'; Stras 2003: 156–7.[\[back to text\]](#)

[10] A ninth book of madrigals, containing miscellaneous works, was published posthumously. Of the many studies of Monteverdi's setting of Guarini's poem, the most extensive and significant are Ossi 1997 and Gordon 2005; both authors follow the usual assumption that Monteverdi worked from Guarini's 1598 *Rime*, but without commenting on the differences between that version and the actual text of the madrigal as it was printed in 1638. See also Carter 2007: 265.[\[back to text\]](#)

[11] Caporali, 1585. Guarini's 'Mentre vaga Angioletta' is found in at least a further six new editions and reprints of the 'piacevoli rime', primarily devoted to Caporali's poems but with works by numerous others including Torquato Tasso and Giovanni Mauro, and published in Venice, Ferrara and Piacenza before the end of the sixteenth century: *Rime piacevoli di Cesare Caporali, del Mauro, et d'altri auttori* (1586); *Rime piacevoli di Cesare Caporali, del Mauro et d'altri auttori* (1588); *Rime piacevoli di Cesare Caporali, del Mauro, et d'altri auttori* (1590); *Rime piacevoli di m. Cesare Caporali, da Perugia* (1592); *Rime piacevoli* (1595); *Rime piacevoli di Cesare Caporali, accresciute di moltre [sic] altre Rime* (1596). See Pompilio.[\[back to text\]](#)

[12] Varoli 1590: 73-4. See also Durante and Martellotti 1997: 94, n.8. The poem was one of just two Guarini poems included in *Scelta di rime di diversi moderni autori. Non più stampate. Parte prima*, Genoa: Bartoli, 1591, p. 90. See Vassalli, 1997, 8.[\[back to text\]](#)

[13] Guarini 1598: f.130^v–131^r; modern edition: Guglielminetti (ed.) 1971): 311 (this is not a critical edition, but it purports to be based on the 1598 *Rime*). See also Thomas 2010. There are some very small typographical and orthographical differences between the 'Caporali' prints and that by Varoli (for example, line 2: 'Ogni anima' (Caporali), 'Ogn'anima' (Varoli)). These are inconsequential for the purposes of this essay, but I have included a facsimile of the Varoli version for comparison (see Figure one).[\[back to text\]](#)

[14] See Vassalli, 1997, 9.[\[back to text\]](#)

[15] Scholars usually assume that the title in modern editions of the poem, 'Gorga di cantatrice' (literally 'The (female) singer's throat') is original; but this heading first appeared only in the *Rime* (1598); in Caporali's volumes the poem appears without title, but

in Varoli (1590) it is headed 'Describe il Cantar Della Signora Laura'. This almost certainly refers to Laura Peverara, a Mantuan recruited to the Ferrarese *musica secreta* as a virtuoso singer and harpist in 1580, the same year as Anna Guarini; also in the same year, Laura was the dedicatee of an entire volume of sonnets, madrigals and other poems by diverse authors, commissioned by the Academia Filarmonica in Verona and set to music by many of the leading composers of the day; see Durante and Martellotti 2010 and Stras 2015. Scholars apparently unaware of the version of the poem in the Varoli volume have expended considerable speculation on identifying 'Angioletta' (see, for example, Reiner 1974: 31–33). Whether or not Laura Peverara was, indeed, the true inspiration for the poem (and other circumstantial evidence supports such an assumption, but see n. 9, above), Guarini's 'Angioletta' could be understood as simply a generic name he chose to give his 'unseen' virtuoso female singer (the 'cantatrice' in the title in the 1598 *Rime* edition). **[back to text]**

[16] Guarini, 'Describe il cantar della Signora Laura' in Varoli 1590: 73–74. I am grateful to Cristina Farnetti of the Direzione Generale Archivi in Rome and to Marcello Eynard at the Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai in Bergamo for supplying me with these images. **[back to text]**

[17] This comma, present in the 1598 *Rime*, is left out in the modern Guglielminetti edition, notwithstanding its claim to be following the 1598 *Rime* text. For comparison, a facsimile of the 1598 *Rime* is available online at <http://tinyurl.com/h9g7dfe> (accessed 13 November 2016). **[back to text]**

[18] I am grateful to Tim Carter for suggesting this idea, and, indeed, for his generous private discussions with me about the problems of translating and deciphering the poem, and the issues that it raises. **[back to text]**

[19] There are a number of contemporary sources which list such vocal effects, how they are to be executed, and how they should be applied in the performance of songs; the most prominent to do so systematically are: Zacconi 1592: I, Chapters 61–66; Conforti 1593: 25; Caccini 1602: 11; Rognoni, 1620/ 1970). **[back to text]**

[20] 'Mando la Canzonetta che mi fu da V. A. ordinate. Nella quale mi sono ingegnato di descrivere lo sgorgheggiare, et le tirate, e i groppi, che si fan nella musica. Cosa nova, et difficile assai; et per quell ch'l habbia fin qui veduto, da niun rimatore, né tampoco da Poeta Greco, et tra latini dal divinissimo Ariosto in una sua ode, et da Plinio prosatore antico solamente tentata. Nella quale credo, che 'l Musico troverà molta invenzione di farsi onore, com'ella stessa ottimamente potrà udire'; letter from Battista Guarini to Duke Alfonso II d'Este, 20 August 1581; in Durante and Martellotti 1982/ 1989:145; my translation, based on the one by Ossi 1997: 253. The reference to Pliny the Elder is to his description of the nightingale's song in *Naturalis historia*, X, 43, and the reference to Guarini's illustrious forerunner as Este court poet, Ludovico Ariosto, is the latter's description of the equally virtuosic singing of a woman named Giulia, in *Qualem scientem carminis et lyra*, in *Lirica Latina*, Carmina XVIII (for the key passages see note 24, below); see also Durante and Martellotti 1982: 94, n8. The final sentence of the letter (not included by Ossi in his translation) implies, I think, either that Guarini assumed that the poem would be turned into a song by one of the singers of the 'concerto'; or that it would be set by 'l Musico' (quite possibly Luzzasco Luzzaschi, Duke Alfonso's *maestro di cappella*). **[back to text]**

[21] 'fauci' is of course, plural, although it is often used to refer to a singular mouth cavity, as in 'fauci del leone (the lion's jaws)'; however, in this context the use of the plural form of 'fauce' could signal that Guarini is imagining the 'musico spirto' transforming multiple – or more precisely – two, 'vocal tracts': Angioletta's singing throat and her 'adept' listener's 'heart/throat'.**[back to text]**

[22] It is, of course, telling that Monteverdi scores the song for two male voices, rather than as a solo for a (female) soprano.**[back to text]**

[23] Anyone in a position to overhear Angioletta singing can be assumed to have been 'gentle': but this does not in itself guarantee listeners with particularly advanced sensibilities, whereas Guarini may well have intended to flatter Alfonso as being more astute and amenable to transformation than even this relatively sophisticated crowd of courtiers; see Ossi 1997: 254.**[back to text]**

[24] Interestingly, another poem written by Guarini around the same time describing the singing of another member of Duke Alfonso's private household, the courtier, Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, hinges on the conceit that if the listener was not able to see who was singing, they might mistake Brancaccio's deep rumbling voice for a musical earthquake: 'E chi n'udisse il tuono, / senza veder chi 'l move e chi l'accoglie, / diria: "Forse il gran mondo / è che mugge con arte? e dal profondo spira musico suono?"' ['And whoever should hear and enjoy the sound without seeing who is producing it would say, "perhaps the whole world is rumbling artfully and breathing musical sound from the deep"']. See Wistreich 2007: 196–7. In the version of this poem in the *Rime* (1598, f. 119r), it begins: 'Quando i più gravi accenti (when the deepest accents)' and this is the version normally cited; interestingly, in the first known edition (the same volume as one edition of Guarini's 'Mentre vaga Angioletta': Varoli 1590: 97), the opening word is 'Mentre', the same word with which the poem about Angioletta also begins; 'Quando' ('when') evokes a mundane kind of hearing in which the listener is primarily passive, whereas 'mentre' ('while') suggests a measured period of consciously focussed concentration.**[back to text]**

[25] Each of Guarini's acknowledged models plays its part in the construction this 'two-stage' drama. Pliny the Elder provides an anthropomorphic catalogue of the nightingale's vocal 'style' in terms of human singing technique: 'et nunc continuo spiritu trahitur in longum, nunc variatur inflexo, nunc distinguitur conciso, copulatur intorto, promittitur revocato, infuscatur ex inopinato interdumet secum ipse murmurat, plenus, gravis, acutus, creber, extentus, ubi visumest, vibrans, summus, medius, imus' ['At one moment, as it sustains its breath, it will prolong its note, and then at another, will vary it with different inflexions; then, again, it will break into distinct chirrups, or pour forth an endless series of roulades. Then it will warble to itself, while taking breath, or else disguise its voice in an instant; while sometimes, again, it will twitter to itself, now with a full note, now weighty, now sharp, now with a broken note, and now with a prolonged one. Sometimes, again, when it thinks fit, it will break out into runs, and [pass through] in succession, high, middle, and low'] (Pliny the Elder 1906: 10.43; Bostock and Riley 1855: 510 (adapted)). Meanwhile, Ariosto dwells on the irresistible effect of one Giulia's singing on the narrator, and particularly, the apparent migration of his soul into her body: 'Ut ut canoros / quaero iterum modos! / Ut ut mihi me surripuit melos! / Nec mecum adhuc sum; adhuc hiulco / nescit abire animus labello. / Nec si sciat, vult mitti; / adeo et bona et grata tenetur compede' ['How I look for those musical modes again! / How the melody has stolen me

away from myself! / And still I am not myself, still / my soul does not know how to leave your open lip. And if it knew, it would not want to be sent away, / so firmly is it held by a bond both good and pleasant'.]; Ariosto 1954: 50; I am grateful to Peter Mack and Paul Botley for their generous help with this translation. **[back to text]**

[26] For example, in Bonnie Gordon's probing reading of Monteverdi's setting, she locates the poem within the tradition of the 'bawdy anatomical blazon', reading it as 'taking the female voice apart in a musical and poetic rhetoric of violent dismemberment, partitioning something that once possessed an organic unity'; Gordon 2005: 137. **[back to text]**

[27] For example, the Mantuan poet, Muzio Manfredi, was clearly convinced that he had been subject to the 'supernatural' power of singing the one time he was admitted to the *musica secreta* on 27 December, 1583. Writing to Ferrante II Gonzaga, Count of Guastalla, he reported: 'Sappia poi che il Sig. Duca Serenissimo mi fece andare la sera [...] alla musica sopranaturale, che non vi era altri che io di forestieri, et mi fece dare il Libro delle compositioni, che cantavano quelle Diavole, ma io sprezzando si fatto favour dissi che delle Rime ne poteva sempre leggere, ma non sempre vedere, et udire cantar creature tali, et che per ciò, per conto mio, il Libro si poteva riporre. Mi fu data ragione con qualche applauso dell'avvedimento mio. Vidi, udii, stupii, trasecolai, trasumanai'. ['Know, too, that the Lord Duke invited me in the evening ... to go to the supernatural music (and there were no other guests there besides me), and he had me given the book containing the songs which these devils were singing; but I, turning down this favour, said one could read [such] poetry anytime, but one could not always see and hear such creatures singing, and that for that reason, so far as I was concerned. the book could be put aside. My prescience was granted approval with some applause. I saw, I heard, I was struck dumb, I was transformed, I was disembodied!']; in Durante and Martellotti 1997: 152. **[back to text]**

[28] See, for example, Kim, 2015; Palisca 1985. **[back to text]**

[29] See also Connor 2007. **[back to text]**

[30] Richards and Wistreich 2016: 276–93; see also Hairston and Stephens 2010; Hillman and Mazzio (eds) 1997. **[back to text]**

[31] Richards and Wistreich 2016: 281–89. **[back to text]**

[32] Casserio, 1600 [1601]), partially trans. by Hast and Haltsmark 1969: 1–33. Casserio was the first to show, among other things, that 'the skeleton of the human larynx is cartilaginous and not osseous, and he correctly illustrates the ventricles of the larynx, the anatomy and function of laryngeal muscles, and provides a description of laryngectomy': Riva, Orru, Pirino, and Riva (2001): 171. **[back to text]**

[33] 'nostre ame use de pensées & discourse, qui ne peuvent faire pendant qu'elle est enclose en ce tabernacle de chair: [...] Et par ainsi nous disons qu'il y a deux sortes de parole en l'homme, à scavoir l'une interieure ou mental, & l'autre exterieure, laquelle se prononce, & la messagiere de l'interieure qui parle au Coeur. Parquoi celle qui est formée en voix, & prononcée en parole, & vient en usage, est comme le ruisseau qui est envoyé de la pensée avec la voix, comme de sa fontaine'. De la Primaudaye 1593: 57^r; 1618: 378. **[back to text]**

[34] 'The cartilage of the rough artery [i.e., the trachea], then, is the special instrument of the voice itself, and the rough artery would have been made entirely of cartilage, needing neither ligament nor tunic if it were not obliged to move when the animal breathes in and out, blows, or utters a sound. As it is, however, since the rough artery in all these actions must become longer and then shorter again, and also narrower and then wider again, it is reasonable that instead of being made of cartilaginous substance alone. Which is incapable of expanding and contracting, it should receive in addition membranous substance too in order that it may be readily set in motion in these ways': Galen 1968: 338. **[back to text]**

[35] Music historians might be surprised by Guarini's focus on the foregrounding of 'vocal display' as the potent element of Angioletta's singing, rather than the expression of the text: he was, after all, a poet specializing in writing words for song. The move towards privileging the importance of the words over vocal 'excess' was already becoming the key driver of the musical avant-garde in Florence and, to certain extent, in other centres of experimentation, including Ferrara; within a generation it would be the defining feature of the madrigal, and made opera possible; see Wistreich 2012. **[back to text]**

[36] See also Goetz and Taliaferro 2011: 15–16. **[back to text]**

[37] 'propter hoc quod ipse idem homo est qui percipit se et intelligere et sentire, sentire autem non est sine corpore, unde oportet corpus aliquam esse hominis partem'; Aquinas 2016. **[back to text]**

[38] 'Super omnes autem has formas invenitur forma similis superioribus substantiis etiam quantum ad genus cognitionis, quod est intelligere: et sic est potens in operationem quae completur absque organo corporali omnino. Et haec est anima intellectiva: nam intelligere non fit per aliquod organum corporale. Unde oportet quod illud principium quo homo intelligit, quod est anima intellectiva, et excedit conditionem materiae corporalis, non sit totaliter comprehensa a materia aut ei immersa, sicut aliae formae materiales. Quod eius operatio intellectualis ostendit, in qua non communicat materia corporalis. Quia tamen ipsum intelligere animae humanae indiget potentiis quae per quaedam organa corporalia operantur, scilicet imaginatione et sensu, ex hoc ipso declaratur quod naturaliter unitur corpori ad complendam speciem humanam': Aquinas 2016, trans. Rickaby 1905. **[back to text]**

[39] 'Anima siquidem sensibilis, sive Brutorum, plane substantia corporea censenda est, à calore attenuate, et facta invisibilis; Aura (inquam) ex natura flammae aërea conflata, aëris mollicie ad impressionem recipiendam, ignis vigore ad actionem vibrandam dotata; partim ex oleosis, partim ex aqueis nutrita; Corpore obducta, atque in animabilibus perfectis in capite praecipue locata; in nervis percurrans, & sanguine sprituoso arteriarum refecta & reparata, quemadmodum Bernardinus Telesus, & Discipulis Donius, aliqua ex parte, non omnino inutiliter, asserverunt [...] & spiritus potius appellationem quam anima indigitari possit'. (Cited and translated in Walker 1972: 121). **[back to text]**

[40] 'Verum cantus quem instrumentalis sonus plus potest, quatenus praeter harmonicum concentum ex mentis conceptu ac imperioso phantasiae cordisque; affectum proficiscens, simulque; cum aëre fracto ac temperato aërum audientis spiritum, qui animae atque; corporis vinculum est, motu facile penetrans, affectum animumque; canentis secum transferens, audientis affectum movet affect, phantasiam afficit phantasia, animum animo,

pulsatque; cor, & usque ad penetralia mentis ingreditur, sensim quoque; mores in fundit: movet praeterea membra atque; sistit, corporisque; humores'. Agrippa 1533: 157; tr. J.F. 1651: 257. [**back to text**]

[41] 'Chalcidius ait vocem ex penetrali pectoris et cordis gremio mitti, nitente spiritu'. Agrippa 1533: 157. tr. J.F. 1651: 257. [**back to text**]

[42] See Durante and Martellotti: 1997: 100. [**back to text**]

[43] Tasso, 'Sopra la voce del Brancatio' in Solerti (ed.) 1898–9: III, 269; first published in 1582 in two different collections: *Delle rime del signor Torquato Tasso*, 2 vols (Venice: Aldo) and *Scielta delle rime del Sig. Torquato Tasso* (Ferrara: Baldini); the latter has a dedication to Lucrezia d'Este, Duchess of Urbino, signed on 30 November 1581; see Solerti *Le Rime*, 1 (Bibliografia), pp. 202–4; note Tasso's use of the word 'forma' in the final line, which echoes Guarini's in 'Mentre vaga Angioletta', line 7. [**back to text**]

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