

Musical Notes on Persuasive Voices in the *Gerusalemme liberata*

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1. Body and Soul

Zarlino says,

Ma se 'l parlare ha possanza di muover gli anima e di piegargli in diverse partiti, e ciò senza l'armonia e senza il numero, maggiormente avrà forza quando sarà congiunto coi numeri e coi suoni musicali e con le voci ... gran forza ha da se stesso il parlare; ma molto più ha forza quando è congiunto all'armonia... (Zarlino 164)

Gioseffo Zarlino (1517-1590) was tooting his own horn, so to speak. He was not a poet or orator, but a musician, composer, and music theorist. Of course, he would be interested in supporting the ancient wisdom that music had special powers, and that singing was much more effective at “moving and bending the soul” than simple speech.

That said, it is a view that we can find throughout Aristotle, Plato, Quintilian, and Cicero, and it is continually reported and sustained by influential writers throughout Italian history. Castiglione, for example, through Conte Lodovico, gives one of the most famous recapitulations of the many powers and uses of music according to ancient and popular wisdom. In *Il libro del cortegiano*, Conte Lodovico defends music as not only useful and beautiful, but necessary knowledge for the courtier:

...ricorderò quanto sempre appresso gli antichi sia stata celebrata e tenuta per cosa sacra, e sia stato opinione di sapientissimi filosofi il mondo esser composto di musica e i cieli nel moversi far armonia, e l'anima nostra pur con la medesima ragion esser formata, e però destarsi e quasi vivificar le sue virtù per la musica. Per il che se scrive Alessandro alcuna volta esser stato da quella così ardentemente incitato, che quasi contra sua voglia gli bisognava levarsi dai convivii e correre all'arme; poi, mutando il musico la sorte del suono, mitigarsi e tornar dall'arme ai convivii. E dirovvi il severo Socrate, già vecchissimo, aver imparato a sonare la citara. E ricordomi aver già inteso che Platone ed Aristotele vogliono che l'om bene istituito sia ancora musico, e con infinite ragioni mostrano la forza della musica in noi essere grandissima, e per molte cause, che or saria lungo a dir, doversi necessariamente imparar da puerizia; non tanto per quella superficial melodia che si sente, ma per esser sufficiente ad indur in noi un novo abito bono ed un costume tendente alla virtù, il qual fa l'animo più capace di felicità, secondo che lo esercizio corporale fa il corpo più gagliardo; e non solamente non nocere alle cose civili e della guerra, ma loro giovar sommamente.... (Castiglione 105-107)

Music is necessary for the praise of God, to inspire farmers and pilgrims, to make children

sleep (and here he paraphrases Quintilian, and perhaps also Brandolini, whom he has already cited¹). It functions in all these things because it exercises a direct influence on the soul. Thus, Lodovico convinces Giuliano, who concludes that music is “not only an ornament but a necessity to the Courtier” (Castiglione 64-65).

This conclusion, however, does not negate Giuliano’s concern about the appropriate times and occasions for the practice and enjoyment of music. More than the efficacy of music or its capacity to influence the soul, it is the proper use of these given properties which concerns the little gathering. While music has been known since ancient times to provide “refreshing spiritual food”, it is also considered a vanity by some. The “pleasure” and “sweetness” of music causes concern, mostly due to the identification of these traits with women. It imperils the positive male traits of activity and straightforwardness. Only women should be so vulnerable to music, as their “tender and gentle spirit is easily penetrated by harmony and filled with sweetness” (Castiglione 63).

Being “penetrated” and “filled” (*penetrati, ripieni*) by music was just as sexual as it sounds. Indeed, while it was proper to women to be penetrated, it is just this kind of relationship which was improper to men. And it is a literal fear of physical penetration that colors these men’s discussion of music.

According to the medical science, the sense of hearing worked in a very physical way. Song and voice were both airy substances which moved via sense perception through the material body to the immaterial soul. The human voice manipulated air (the element of spirit), transferring physical sensation directly into the ear of the listener. The sound of song originated inside one body and ended inside – penetrated – another. This can be seen in Galen, Hippocrates, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and – just to bring this up to speed with our time period – and Marsilio Ficino, too.

Ficino, in his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, is especially concerned with music’s unique relationship with the soul, which it “matches”. He also notes that the “cause of the voice and of hearing is its divinely ordained aim: speech and discipline and the moderation of the movements of the soul” (Marsilio Ficino et al. 132). However, the reverse would also be true: the voices of others, having direct access to the ear of the soul, were also uniquely able to lead it astray. Alcibiades drunkenly accuses Socrates of this in Plato’s *Symposium*. Just as Marsyas induced

¹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1.10.16; Brandolini 12.

Dionysiac ecstasy by the use of his flute – he “with instruments used to charm the souls of men by the powers of his breath” – Socrates produces the same effect “with words only”, and is able to “amaze and possess the souls of every man, woman, and child who comes within hearing...”. Indeed, for this, Alcibiades calls Socrates a bully.

Because music is by nature “organized”, “ordered”, in pitch and rhythm, Plato saw it as a tool for education: the ordering of the body according to the scheme already established in the music (Plato 1260-1269).² In addition, “more than anything else, music and rhythm find their way into the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it” (Plato 646). Augustine would later write about a similar concern about music in churches, when he worries about its seductive power, separate from the holy words. He risks continually to be moved more by the music than by the text, though he acknowledges the utility of music in drawing people towards the nourishment of God before they even understand the words (Book X).

By now, I hope the problem is clear as a bell: listeners, according to these beliefs about song, are vulnerable to persuasion, that is, having someone’s voice, an organized vibration that constitutes a physical manipulation of the element of spirit, reach into their open ears and bend their very souls. Now, going back to the utility of music, remember that it’s not always a literal *bard* who persuades warriors to go into battle: sometimes it’s just a courter, prince, orator using musical *techniques* in his speech. Music is composed of pitch and rhythm, and both of those can be used in oratory without necessarily singing. So although everyone acknowledges that *sung poetry sung by a beautiful woman with a beautiful voice* is *most* effective, this would be only the highest form: emotions may be swayed also via speech that incorporates musical elements. And if emotions are moved or created against the reason and the will of the listener, it ends up looking very much like magic.

2. Divine models

In the *Gerusalemme liberata*, some of the most effective instances of persuasion occur when they are in line with the beliefs about music that I have just outlined. They can be read as instances of enhanced “musicality” which, in turn, have greater persuasive power than simple truths or falsehoods do by themselves.

² *Laws*, II, 664c-665a; 672e..

At the very start of the *Liberata*, there are two obvious models of influence on the actions of others: God and Pluto. While God gives simple and even perfunctory orders, with no special flourishes, Lucifer uses persuasion and elegant words, casting them from the start as an infernal device. He is a marvelous and persuasive orator. Later, these divine models are imitated by their earthly proxies.

Following tradition, we begin with divine will. God wants the Christian army to finish its task. God calls Gabriele to him and very simply communicates his orders, while Pluto needs to convince his followers. By contrast, indeed, Pluto's parallel oration to his demonic henchmen is a marvel of rhetoric. Unlike the *Re del mondo*, whose orders to Gabriele occupy a single octave and come across as a bit impatient and perfunctory, Pluto performs an address of nine full octaves to a vast audience of infernal minions. The oration is in an elevated style, using ample rhetorical devices to remind his audience of their cruel fate, recount the nature and resurrection of Christ in hyperbolic terms, ask a set of rhetorical questions pointing to the futility of self-pity, anticipate the effects of defeat at Jerusalem, flatter his followers, and, finally, give orders to hinder the Christian army.

From the start, the side of good seems to be at a disadvantage when it comes to rhetorical prowess; God's truth is simple, bare, and short, while the lies of Lucifer are flattering, elegant, and effusive. The persuasive mode is cast as an infernal one, while God's straightforward exhortation does not flatter and promises no reward. (Neither does Goffredo's.)

In the same canto, the earthly champions of Lucifer and the Heavenly Father imitate the rhetorical characteristics of their gods. Alete, whose very name (from the Greek *alēthēs*, "sincere, frank, faithful," 150) signals ironic juxtaposition with his sweet falsehoods, is identified as a deceptive speaker. From the first, it is not his words in particular which carry the deceptive value, but the way in which he speaks them. Tasso's characterization is laden with luxurious adjectives: Alete's "parlar" is "facondo e lusinghiero e scòrto, / pieghevole costumi e vario ingegno / al finger pronto, a l'ingannare accorto: / gran fabro di calunnie, adorne in modi / novi..."(Tasso II:58.4-8).

As we will also see in the next example, that of Armida, "adornamento" possesses special significance in the context of oral communication. It can refer not only to eloquent word choice, but also to qualitative vocal ornamentation. Caccini, in *Le nuove musiche* (1601), expresses the prevailing wisdom that ornamentation in singing is suspect, to be used judiciously and sparingly, because it is a kind of beauty that appeals only to passion, not to reason. Ornaments

(“adornamenti,” “que’ lunghi giri di voce”) should be used only in certain occasions, and in general, in “musiche meno affettuose”. Because they cause “titillatione à gli orecchi” they can induce a false sense of pleasure and affection, to be avoided, because it leads *away* from appreciation of the text and the exercise of reason (Caccini 5).

It is just this operation which Alete enacts with his “accuse, [che] paion lodi” (Tasso II:58.8). He performs flattery with his whole body, enacting a *gesto* of honor and submission before he begins to speak. Tasso describes his speech imitatively, with hyperbolic grandiloquence: “di sua bocca uscìeno / più che mèl dolci d’eloquenza i fiumi” (II:61, 5-6). Like Lucifer’s, Alete’s address is long, full of rhetorical devices, and flattery. When he finally concludes, “l suo parlar seguìro / con basso mormorar que’ forti eroi” (II:80,1-2). Alete’s attempt to convey doubts and a skewed perception of the truth is portrayed as a sonorous transmission. His sound is re-seated in the mouths of his listeners. If we remember the magical connotations of “mormorare” according to Fabio Giunta (2012), the act takes on an even more sinister, even occult tone.

But his influence is not sufficient to sway the Christian captains. Goffredo’s rebuttal notes how Alete conveyed both courteous and threatening remarks “dolcemente”; it is as though the “sweetness” permeates all of Alete’s words, not only the courteous ones. Moreover, Goffredo casts his own response as a direct qualitative opposite: “risponderò, come da me si suole, / liberi sensi in semplici parole” (II:81.7-8). Francesco Erspamer has observed how it is finally Argante’s frank response—of few, yet clear words, and a powerful gesture—which “liberates” both Christian knights and the reader of uncertainty by presenting them with a reassuringly stereotypical enemy. Paradoxically, Argante, a pagan, is the “first to reveal absolute integrity” (Erspamer 126). This integrity is also marked in the audience’s reaction. The sonorous response of the Christian knights to Argante differs markedly from that to Alete. The latter transmitted a low murmur akin to his own discourse, and the former has likewise inspired a warlike shout which is reassuring in its unity (“concorde grido”). It is the same kind of aural transmission, of influence externalized and demonstrated by the quality of the listeners’ sonorous production. It is also the qualitative aspect of Argante’s act, his grand and open gesture as opposed to Alete’s humble, downward one, Argante’s few, brusque words as opposed to Alete’s many, sweet ones, that convey his greater trustworthiness and honor.

The scene shows how the different types of oral presentation, including gestuality—not just the content of the discourse—, positively or negatively characterizes the two pagans and Goffredo.

Alete's sweetness is portrayed as more dangerous than Argante's open threat of war because it can wield mysterious influence. Argante's rough challenge, instead, results in the positive value of "concordia"—and I underline the musicality of this metaphor—among the knights.

3. Le note e le note di Armida

Where Alete fails, Armida succeeds. Her powers of deception are more potent. She utilizes some of the same techniques, but more successfully, and she brings additional deceptive strategies to the table. It is she who performs the next successful instance of explicit "persuasion"; this occurs in the tale of Guglielmo. He recounts how Armida succeeded, for a time, in tricking some knights away from the army. Eventually, though, most of the knights win free of Armida's trap; "solo a Rambaldo il persuade" (X:69.6). In a similar vein, Rinaldo "è persuaso" (XIV:58.5) by the golden letters promising an island full of wonders (it turns out that the wonder is Armida herself).

Why is her deception so effective, in the end? There are certain sonorous qualities to her speech that render it qualitatively different—more seductive—than ordinary discourse. From the beginning, Pluto directs her in terms of qualitative sound effects, ordering, "Bagna di pianto e fa' melati i preghi, / tronca e confondi co' sospiri i detti" (IV:25.2-3). Her prayers should be "sweet" but also rhythmically broken by sighs. She should use both "dolci sguardi e de' be' detti adorni"—ornamented words. Just as Alete uses to great effect, and just as Caccini warns against, Armida uses ornamentation to enhance the content of her discourse. She is better at this technique than Alete, since she incorporates subtler gestuality and a more compelling rhythm, but also because the soprano voice was supposedly better suited to these techniques than the tenor. Girolamo Ruscelli synthesized this popular viewpoint, saying that the highest form of music or poetic declamation is reserved to beautiful women:

...la piu' grata, et la più perfetta armonia, che in questo mondo per corso umano si possa udire, è un componimento di bellissimo soggetto, spiegato con bellissime, & ornatissime parole, in versi, et cantato con perfetta ragion di musica, da gratiosa & bella donna ... & di grata & gioconda voce. (Ruscelli I)

In short, Armida, armed with a beautiful face and voice, represents the pinnacle of oral poetic expression and therefore a most dangerous threat. Her beauty does the first work of capturing the Christian knights to her cause, but it is when she speaks to Goffredo that she unleashes her most powerful weapon: "sì che i pensati inganni al fine spiega / in suon che di dolcezza i sensi lega" (IV:38.7-8). Just as Amore and Laura captivated Petrarch with the power of voice, Armida captures

Goffredo with her fantastic tale. She is so eloquent that even when she's finished, her silence "speaks": "Ciò detto, tace; e la risposta attende / con atto che 'n silenzio ha voce e preghi" (IV: 65:1-2). Goffredo's confusion, then, is seated in his involuntary emotional response ("pietoso affetto"); his heart doubts, while his mind tells him not to trust her, a pagan. When his knights, more easily swayed by Armida's performance, volunteer to help her, she thanks them "in dolci e care note" (IV:85.1).

"Note" may simply mean "words", but it is often used in connection to magical incantations. Certainly, it fits in the *endecasillabo* and often rhymes with "pote" or "puote", and one must always keep in mind this kind of poetic exigency, --as well as its long history of usage in other contexts with other meanings -- but its most common appearance throughout the *Liberata* is in connection to magical incantations.³

The link between "note" and magical incantations also suggests a blurring between the spoken and the sung and intimates that mages or priests use a different mode of oral expression than do normal people, one more akin to musical "note" than editorial paraphrases generally allow.

For instance, it recurs at Armida's enchanted island as part of the indispensable role of sound in entrapping Rinaldo: when Armida casts her spell on Guglielmo and the other knights,

Con una man picciola verga scote,
tien l'altra un libro, e legge in basse note.
Legge la maga, ed io pensiero e voglia
sento mutar, mutar vita ed albergo.
(X:65.7-8, 66.1-2)

Armida's declamation (sight-reading?) transforms her listeners. Before anyone realizes that they have been transformed into fish, they first notice the mutation of "penseri et voglie". Tellingly,

³ Its other common use is in relation to what mages know, what occult things are "known" (note) to them. For example, when Lucifero orders Armida to go to the enemy camp, he refers to occult knowledge: "gli accorgimenti e le più occulte frodi / ch'usi o femina o maga a lei son note". Significantly, since Armida is both a female and a mage, she disposes of two dangerous types of occult knowledge and, given the superior quality of the female voice in singing and incantation, is uniquely well-positioned to exercise these powers.

Other instances of "note" support its connection to magical formulae and a special incantatory mode. In the next canto, Piero the Hermit provides the divine counterpart in the Christian army's procession: "Preceda il clero in sacre vesti, e canti / con pietosa armonia supplici note". When Piero's hymns reach the marveling pagans on the walls, their "gridi" cannot disturb the "casta melodia soave" and the "sacre note". It is an awe-inspiring moment and, indeed, marks a shift in the Christian army's spirit: it is rejuvenated by this oral profession and performance of faith. It is also the most explicit use of "note" in a musical/formulaic sense. The mage of Ascolona refers to magical formulae as "note" banned by God: "tolga Dio ch'usi note o suffumigi / per isforzar Cocito e Flegetonte". And in Canto XIX, Erminia's knowledge of medicinal magic is described in similar terms: "Dittamo e croco non avea, ma note / per uso tal sapea potenti e maghe".

the Petrarchan allusion refers us back to the celestial siren sonnet, the same quoted before in Armida's initial speech to Goffredo. The magical incantation is part and parcel of the aural spell she had already begun to weave "d'un parlar dolce e d'un bel riso" (X:65.1), but the use of "note" marks a shift in her mode of discourse from a normal register to a singsong, incantatory one.

"Note" appears once again in Armida's *locus amoenus*, this time in a verse of explicit musicality, as part of a concert of seductive sounds (we also notice the presence of "mormorare", signaled by Giunta as another aural cue for magic):

Vezzosi augelli infra le verdi fronde
temprano a prova lascivette note;
mormora l'aura, e fa le foglie e l'onde
garrir che variamente ella percote.
Quando taccion gli augelli alto risponde,
quando cantan gli augei più lieve scote;
sia caso od arte, or accompagna, ed ora
alterna i versi lor la musica òra.
(XVI:12)

The musical spell can only be contrasted, later, by the powers of sight and reason, the direct opposites of hearing and emotion. When Rinaldo finally comes to rescue Tancredi and the other knights at her castle, Guglielmo describes him in terms of action and sight, stressing the evidence of his own eyes and the measurable results obtained. Like Rinaldo's own salvation reflected in his shield, it is a return to clarity, to objective and accurate judgment measured by confirmed actions and eyewitness accounts.

A main difference between sight and sound is the temporal one. Sight supplies meaning in an instant, while sound – especially song – requires a space of time. Sight enables immediate, spontaneous assessment and reaction; sound, instead, necessitates a process of listening which pulls the listener along in time. In order to make sense of sonorous input, the listener must follow its track. This is not the case with sight, where the evidence either is there or isn't; the presentation of a thing is immediate. In a sense, communication via sound has *already* persuaded, simply by necessitating a kind of *following* through time in search of meaning; things seen, instead, may startle or fascinate, but the choice of continuing to lend attention through time remains more clearly with the viewer.

After the rescue, Guglielmo immediately prioritizes dispelling another "falso romor", another kind of false sound: "Falso è il romor che qui risuona e porta / sì rea novella, e salva è la

sua vita” (X:72.3-4).

Rinaldo is not dead, and for Guglielmo, it is important to dispel this “resounding” rumor, the final episode in the Armidian adventure of wicked illusions and aural falsehoods.

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