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MELISMA, TACTUS, AND POETIC METER

by MARGARET MURATA

Music historians have often cited Giulio Caccini's criticism of excessive ornamentation in the vocal music of his time, emphasizing the importance of the syllabic, declamatory style of *recitar cantando* that he helped establish in his *Le nuove musiche* of 1602, a volume generally recognized as the first publication of chamber monody.¹ The new style formed the basis for a threefold paradigm of innovation: largely syllabic melodic lines, accompaniment in a style different from the vocal line and partly to be improvised, and performance loosened from mensural regularity. Nonetheless, *passaggi* never disappeared from Caccini's own chamber compositions, as he himself acknowledged.² Once *passaggi* are in your ears, throat and fingers, they are hard to suppress. Embellished monodies, solo cantatas and motets appear in prints and manuscripts well past the 1630s. Florid solos may indeed have been heard in greater proportion than we see in surviving scores. The old paradigm saw *coloratura* as a holdover, a given in certain improvised genres but only acceptable within certain conventions in the new monody. This essay illustrates in brief how *passaggi* in fact participated in projecting the vivid attention to text that was one of the foundations of *recitar cantando* and also that features of the *passaggi* themselves suggest that the rhythmic freedom we attribute to declamatory monody was not entirely a matter of singers' subjective choices.

Modern performers and historians have long studied tutorial illustrations of how to embellish intervals. Their historical tables of *passaggi* make us well aware that any improvising instrumentalist or singer must still decide – or strategize – *what* intervals in *which* rhythmic positions to embellish and, in each instance, to what extent.³ Our standard concept of *passaggi* (as opposed

¹ The narrow sense of the term 'monody' designates *recitar cantando* accompanied by basso continuo harmonization, for stage or chamber performance in Italian ca. 1580–1625/30, excluding strophic arias and canzonettas. It was not then a current term and today is widely used in musicology to mean any vocal solo accompanied by basso continuo, whether in a song-like or recitative style. The present text uses the term with an even broader historical application.

² In his *Von der Sing-Kunst*, (§38), Christoph Bernhard distinguished between *passaggi* that occur within a *tactus* unit and *coloratura*, melismas extending beyond one *tactus*. He dropped this distinction in his later *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus* (dated within the 1650s). For both treatises in English see Walter Hilse, „The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard“, in: *Music Forum* 3 (1973), 1–196, 23. Caccini discussed *passaggi* in the preface to *Le nuove musiche*, Florence: Marescotti 1602, [iii]; 2nd ed. with Eng. trans. by H. Wiley Hitchcock, Madison: A-R editions 2009. I use *passaggi* here for melismas extending a half semibreve or longer.

³ See for instance Francesco Rognoni, *Selva di varii passaggi*, Milan: Filippo Lomazzo 1620; facsim. Bologna 1983. See also Karl Gustav Fellerer, „Monodie Passeggiati [sic]“, in: *Muzikološki Zbornik/Musicological Annual* 17/1 (1981), 65–86; and Bruce Dickey, „Ornamentation in Early Seventeenth-Century Italian Music“, in: Stewart Carter (ed.), *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, 2nd ed. rev. Jeffery Kite-Powell, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2012, 293–316.

to brief graces) puts them in two places – as cadential flourishes and as word painting. But both categories still regard melismas as local ornaments. Two monodic settings by Giulio Caccini and Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger⁴ show that composers employed *passaggi* to project both mensural organization and prosodic structure and that their distribution of melismas helps create a cumulative musical shape that serves to interpret the poetry.

As an exercise, a young singer might be set to write out embellishments for a set of strophes over the same bass line.⁵ In a similar format, Example 1 illustrates synoptically how the location and extent of *passaggi* are choices, using a set of strophic variations composed by Orazio Michi. The example superimposes five strophes of just the first quatrain of the canzonetta *Sin a qual segno, o Dori*.⁶ It shows that where *passaggi* occur may have little to do with individual words, just as in instrumental improvisation.

Ex. 1 From [Orazio Michi], *Sino a qual segno o Dori*, from I-Rn Mus. ms. 56, fol. 42v–47, first half only of strophes 1–5.

1. Sin a qual se - gno, o Do - ri, ar - ri - ver -

2. Il ram-men - tar - m'ac - cor - ra ch'o - gni mia

3. Di - co-no i sag - gi a - man - ti che sen - za spe -

4. Ca - der ma - ri - no sco - glio ri - per - cos -

5. Vi - ver sen - pria tor-men - to spen - der il

⁴ Complete scores of both, edited to illustrate this essay, are in the Appendix (227–280). The Caccini has been recorded by Claudine Ansermet and Paolo Cherici on *G. Caccini. Il cantar d'affetto* (Stradivarius 2010); the Kapsperger by Gian Paolo Fagotto and the ensemble Il Furioso on *Kapsperger, Libro secondo d'arie* (Toccata Classics 1996).

⁵ Margaret Murata, „More observations on Italian florid song“, in: *Analecta Musicologica* 36 (2005), 343–372.

⁶ Transcribed from I-Rn Mus. ms. 56, fol. 42v–47, a volume considered to be an Orazio Michi holograph.

4

rà per me tua cru - del - tà? E'l mar
ver - de spe-me in - a - ri - di, e co -
me A-mor non du - re - rà ; e
so dal mar, for - se ve - drò Non già
più bel fior di gio - ven - tù, e poi

3#

register varies with stanzas

7

de miei do - lo - ri, Quan - d'al -
m'in su l'au - ro - ra Già tra -
che di-strut - t'in pian - ti Que - sta
tuo fie - ro or - go - glio pla - ca -
chia - mar con - ten - to la - ca -

8^{vb}

10

lu - ra d'A - mor si pla - che - rà?

(tra) - mon - tò de miei de - li - tie il di.

roc - ca del cor al - fin ca - drà.

- to o men a - cer - bo io mi - re - rò.

ten' im - mor - tal di ser - vi - tù.

(8).....]

Each of the five strophes forgoes melismas in the same four measures, those that lead to the end of the binary „first half“ (mm. 8–9 and 11–12). Otherwise, each strophe has a different surface rhythm. The first has no half-bars moving in sixteenths; the last strophe fills six half-bars with them (on the words „spend the best bloom of your youth“ and „then“). Strophes 2, 3, and 4 each distribute three half-bars of sixteenths in different places. Only m. 7 asks for *passaggi* every time. This single measure consistently maintains rhythmic motion for reasons of musical shape. It is too early to be called cadential; and after the word „sea“ in strophe 1, the other stanzas gurgle on the words „how,“ „that,“ „already,“ and „then.“ In short, text does not generate the various *passaggi* of m. 7. Furthermore the most melismatic measures tend to lead up to cadences, rather than being part of the cadences themselves. A fairly regular continuo part, typical of the canzonetta style, anchors the rhythmic whole, with only three bars in the continuo line (mm. 4, 8, and 11) pushing forward when the voice reduces its motion, except for m. 4 in the second and last strophes.⁷ In such strophic variations, the improviser-composer has a canvas on which to distribute embellishments that is as wide as the number of strophes.

Through-composed Renaissance melodies embellished by later composers also had built in rhythmic controls, since most came from polyphonic textures and

⁷ In m. 4 of these two strophes (and elsewhere), Michi uses the *virgola* marks that tell the singer that syllables are being set in unusual locations.

reflected the regular harmonic changes in the polyphonic originals, as well as the typical coordination between tonic syllables and tactus units. A few measures from Stefano Landi's elaboration of the soprano and bass lines from Arcadelt's madrigal *Dunque credete ch'io* illustrates this (Example 2). The rhythms and figures of Landi's *passaggi* are from the early 1600s. The bass line, however, keeps its 1530s steady progress and imparts its modal flavor throughout.⁸

Ex. 2 Stefano Landi, opening of *Dunque credete ch'io*, from his *Arie a una voce*, Venice 1620, 58–62.

Original barring, editorial beaming reflects minim and semibreve units where possible. Measure numbers count by semibreves in this and all other musical examples.

The musical score consists of three systems of staves. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a basso continuo line (bass clef). The first system (measures 1-8) shows the vocal line with lyrics: 'Dun - que cre - de - te ch'i - o, Dun - que cre -'. The second system (measures 9-14) shows the vocal line with lyrics: '- de - te ch'i - o, cre - de - te ch'i -'. The third system (measures 15-18) shows the vocal line with lyrics: 'o. o vo - gl'o pos sa'. The basso continuo line is a steady, slow-moving bass line. The vocal line features various ornaments, including trills (tr) and a fermata (F) at the end of the second system.

NB: Landi's original mensuration sign indicates *tempo alla semibreve*; his barring for the most part is *alla breve* throughout.

It is one thing, however, to add diminutions to an already existing melody, as in the Michi and Landi solos. It is another to invent a through-composed melodic line against a bass for a lyric poem of only five to fourteen lines conceived basically as a recitation with its own, integral *passaggi*. Did embellishments distend or hide the already irregular lyricism of the „New Music“? When a singer-composer decided to *gorgheggiare*, were verse forms as well as tactus temporarily suspended?

⁸ In Stefano Landi, *Arie*, Rome: Bartholomeo Magni 1620, 58–62, a solo madrigal noted long ago by Ambros. In a volume of variation forms, it is one of two madrigals. Arcadelt set the poem in his first book of madrigals, reprinted countless times well into the 17th century. The poem falls into five pairs of lines of either 7 or 11 syllables. With its sheer quantity of *passaggi*, Landi appears to have distended the relative line lengths. Each of the ten lines has at least one *passaggio*, and, for example, all but two of the eleven syllables of line 2 bear embellishments. Nevertheless the overall accentual shape of the poem remains surprisingly intact, because despite its ornamental excess Landi's monody adheres to the text-to-tactus model of Arcadelt's 4-voice madrigal. Landi's basso continuo part is effectively a *basso seguente*, almost semibreve for semibreve constructed from Arcadelt's tenor and bass parts. The steadiness of Arcadelt's harmonic rhythm controls Landi's vocal line. Silke Leopold discussed how this solo madrigal differs from those by Caccini in *Stefano Landi. Beiträge zur Biographie, Untersuchungen zur Vokalmusik*, 2 vols, Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner 1976, v. 1, 132–134.

Cantar ottave

Before considering monodies in the sense of *recitar cantando*, however, it is useful to look at two sixteenth-century Italian recitational genres characterized by improvised melismas. Both would have been well known to the earliest proponents of *recitar cantando*. The first is *cantar ottave*, the unwritten practice of singing (and often inventing) repeated stanzas of eight isometric poetic lines. This oral monophonic tradition, as heard in the twentieth century, includes unmeasured melismatic singing within and at the ends of the eight recitational poetic lines (though frequently not at the end of line 7).⁹ Fig. 1 shows typical descending cadential flourishes on penultimate syllables; these move to both non-tonic and tonic pitches.

The figure shows a musical score for an eight-line stanza of *cantar ottave*. Each line is numbered 1 through 8 and includes a timing annotation in seconds. The lyrics are written below the notes, with dashed lines indicating melismas. The notes are in a single melodic line on a treble clef staff.

Line	Timing (sec)	Lyrics
1	7.8	'Sto lem bodel mio La - zio mai e poi ma - - - - - i
2	7.4	qua lu nque co sa l'a vrà ab ba - ndo na - - - - - to
3	6	non so s'è be llo' m'ò vùn que - - - - - tu va i - - - - -
4	6	in nes sun al tro sei co si a da tta - - - - - to
5	6.4	nel mio ba gu - gno tu m'in co o ntre m'in con tre ra - - i
6	7	la de'a la gu - na c'è il pro te tto ra - - - - - to
7	3.6	que s'è quel mio pa e se e ta - nto va le
8	2	ul ti mo le mbo po po lo la sia - - - - - le

Fig. 1 *Ottava* improvised by Pietro De Acutis in 1984, from Maurizio Agammenone, „Maestri della voce, maestri del tempo,“ in: *L'arte del dire. Atti del convegno di studi sull'improvvisazione poetica, Grosseto, ... 1997*, [Grosseto] 1999, Ex. 6, p. 155.

⁹ See Paul Collaer, „Lyrisme baroque et tradition populaire“, *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 7 (1965), 25–40; Giovanni Kezich, *I poeti contadini*, Rome: Bulzoni 1986; and especially the modelling in Agammenone's „Maestri della voce, maestri del tempo“, in: Paolo Nardini (ed.), *L'arte del dire. Atti del convegno di studi sull'improvvisazione poetica, Grosseto, 14–15 marzo 1997*, [Grosseto]: Biblioteca comunale Chelliana 1999 (Quaderni dell'Archivio delle tradizioni popolari della Maremma grossetana 4), 139–161, esp. 154–157. Figure 1 transcribes a recording of singer Pietro De Acutis (b. 1952), made in August 1984, given as Ex. 6 in „Maestri di voce“ cited, p. 155, and as Ex. 7 on p. 194 in Maurizio Agammenone, „Modi di contrasto in ottava rima“, in: M. Agammenone and Francesco Giannatasio (eds), *Sul verso cantato. La poesia orale in una prospettiva etnomusicologica*, Padua: Il Poligrafo 2002, 163–223.

Maurizio Agamennone calls these melismas „acoustic markers“ of the poetic lines, which every listener would have expected to form two rhyming quatrains. Parallels to such markers can be found in notated *recitar cantando*, as on the sixth syllable (*pie-*) of the 7-syllable line that opens Caccini's *Se voi lagrime a pieno* (see the score in the Appendix to this essay). The semibreve on the sixth syllable of the second line (*-lo-* in m. 10) – which begins with the same turn figure as in the previous poetic line, might seem to invite the singer to improvise a parallel *passaggio*, but it also suitably suggests an *esclamazione* (<>) of dolor. Note how Caccini's bass line loses rhythmic motion under both of these melismas, though of course it retains its harmonic force.

Solo falsobordoni

The second improvisatory style lies in late 16th- to early 17th-century solo singing of *falsobordone* in Rome. Singers embellished psalm chants of many repeated tones over static harmonies. Since the psalms were treated as Latin prose, *falsobordoni* projected no regular poetic shapes. Murray Bradshaw's studies of Roman *falsobordoni* give us a good idea of the kinds of musical figures typical of this style and their textual meaninglessness. In Ex. 3a from Francesco Severi's *Salmi passaggiati*,¹⁰ there is no verbal reason to decorate the word „et,“ and the short scale on „tabescet“ functions as a standard antepenultimate lead-up to the cadence. In fact, decorating words that form no textual rhythm in a music style without its own harmonic rhythm runs the danger of dissolving any sense of musical meter, even though Severi published his *falsobordoni* in mensural notation. These *passaggi* exist in a much flatter and open rhythmic space than do the same kinds of embellishments growing from lines of verse; they are much less anchored to any structural model than are the free melismas of unaccompanied *ottave*. Therefore it is of great interest that Severi's performance advice for his *falsobordoni* includes instructions that pertain to the rhythm of their declamation (see Fig. 2).

¹⁰ Francesco Severi, *Terzo tuono: Beatus vir*, verse 9 (Rome: Nicolò Bordonì 1615), 19; a digital reproduction is available at the *Gallia* website of the Bibliothèque nationale <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9059755v> (1 May 2015). A modern edition with an English translation of the preface is in Francesco Severi, *Salmi passaggiati (1615)*, ed. by Murray C. Bradshaw, Madison: A-R Editions 1981. See also Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone. A Study in Renaissance and Baroque Music*, Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler 1978 (Musicological Studies and Documents 34), 106–111 and, more recently, Ignazio Macchiarella, *Il falsobordone fra tradizione orale e tradizione scritta*, Lucca: Libreria musicale italiana 1995.

Tenore 19

Peccator uidebit, et irascetur dentibus suis fremet et
 ta " be " scet Desiderium peccatorum pe " ri "
 bit

Alto Falso Bordone' del 5. Tuono 30

Quoniam confirmata est super nos miseri " cor di " a
 ius Et ueritas Domini manet
 in " ter " num

Exx. 3a-b From Francesco Severi, *Salmi passaggiati per tutte le voci nella maniera che si cantano in Roma sopra i falsobordoni di tutti i tuoni ecclesiastici*, Rome 1615, pp. 19 and 30. By courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Fig. 2

From Francesco Severi, *SALMI PASSAGGIATI PER TUTTE LE VOCI NELLA MANIERA CHE SI CANTANO IN ROMA SOPRA I FALSI BORDONI DI TUTTI I TUONI ECCLESIASTICI* *Da cantarsi ne i Vespri della Domenica e delli giorni festivi di tutto l'Anno* (Rome: Nicolò Borboni 1615), „Ai lettori,“ pp. [iii–iv]

Secondo. Che quando nel cantare li Versetti occorre rà che si recitino molte parole sopra una Nota, si dicano con gratia femandosi sempre sopra la prima sillaba, e si passi presto la seconda, e così di due in due sillabe, con avvertire anco di fermarsi sul ultima sillaba della parola.

Terzo. Che quando si canteranno le crome che haveranno puntata la prima, si cantino con vivacità ma non molto presto, e li punti non si percuotino molto.

Quarto. Che quando si troveranno le crome che haveranno puntata la seconda, si cantino non molto presto, et per haver facilità nel cantarle bisognerà passar presto la prima Croma, e fermarsi su la seconda.

Quinto. Che le semicrome si cantino con vivacità et presto il più che sarà possibile, purchè siano spiccate dal petto e non dalla gola come alcuni fanno, che in cambio di dar gusto all'orecchio, generano confusione, e disgusto.

Sesto. Che si fermi un poco chi canta dove ritrova la lettera F, e questo tanto quanto non paia di cantare seguitamente l'un passaggio con l'altro, non interrompendo la voce il che si doverà fare nelle note che saltano et alle volte nel fine della battuta purchè non siano passaggi di semicrome di più battute i quali bisognerà cantare tutti seguiti fino al fine.

Severi's second instruction, for instance, avoids evenly recited syllables on the same note. He recommends lengthening the first note of two a bit, grouping them two and two. (He does not mention any specific rhythmic values.) The third and fourth instructions pertain to the tempo character of dotted eighths, which should be lively, but not too fast. He recommends that sixteenth notes be sung *vivace* and „as fast as possible.“ Again, no specific rhythmic contexts are mentioned, and the instructions are abstract, having nothing to do with either text meanings or mensuration.

These principles reflect a musical performance not strongly anchored to a steady tactus beat, recalling similar instructions in Frescobaldi's prefaces to his published toccatas. In solo performances, of course, a keyboard player does not worry about coordinating left and right hands. Severi's sixth instruction, however, with its use of the rubric *F* for „fermare,“ shows one kind of liberty taken with such melismas.

Sixth. The singer should pause a bit where you find the letter F, and this is to avoid seeming to sing one *passaggio* after another, without interrupting the voice; you should make this [pause] on notes that leap and at times at the end of a [tactus] bar, unless there are *passaggi* of sixteenth notes for several bars, which should all be sung continuously until the end.

Although Severi explains these *fermate* as signals of change from one type of *passaggio* to another, they are in effect lengthenings that delay a downbeat,

helping to coordinate points of arrival with the continuo player (Ex 3b).¹¹ Similar *fermate* may be found written out in other kinds of solo pieces. Example 4 gives three samples. As an analytic-interpretive tool, the usefulness of little *fermate* to set up arrivals would lie in weighing where such arrivals occur and in whether they just predict cadences or happen within phrases. In Ex. 4, each

Ex. 4a G. Caccini, *Se voi lagrime a pieno*, mm. 5–7, from *Le nuove musiche e nuova maniera di scriverle*, Florence 1614, p. 19.

Ex. 4b S. Landi, *Dunque credete ch'io*, mm. 12–15, from his *Arie a una voce*, Venice 1620, p. 58.

Ex. 4c) G. G. Kapsperger, *Io vo' piangendo i miei passati tempi*, mm. 8–12, from from his *Libro secondo d'arie*, Rome 1623, p. 1.

editorial [F] precedes an odd-numbered semibreve bar where a chord changes, which suggests that the pauses help define measures or hypermeasures. Although Roman solo *falsobordoni* as a genre are very different from monodies, the principles that formed the basis of their improvisational practices would have been well known to singers like Caccini and would have been aurally familiar to instrumentalists like Frescobaldi or Kapsperger.

¹¹ Severi, *Quinto tuono: Laudate Dominum*, verse 2, mm. 13–14 (Rome: Nicolò Bordini 1615), 30.

Passaggi in monody

Needless to say, composers do not set texts in standard ways. Of settings of the 14-line poem *Sfogava con le stelle* by Ottavio Rinuccini, published by Caccini in 1602, Giovanni Ghizzolo in 1609, and a much-cited one by Ottavio Valera in Rognoni's 1620 treatise, Ghizzolo has only one *passaggio*, a semibreve long, on the exclamation „Ooooo, immagini belle.“ As a virtuoso bass, Valera included more extreme *passaggi* than did Caccini, who limited himself to two cadential flourishes for lines 12 and 14. Valera, however, is surprisingly only slightly more liberal, conventionally defining poetic line endings with cadential embellishments at the ends of lines 2 and 3 and then at lines 13 and 14. For this poem, neither Caccini nor Valera chose to use embellishments on internal words of the poetic lines.

Let us take a closer look, however, at Caccini's *Se voi lagrime a pieno*, which is a five-line madrigal poem with 7-7-7-7+11 syllables. Text 1 lays out the poem with its line repetitions as Caccini set it. Syllables with *passaggi* are represented in bold type, with dots below. It is easy to see that the only poetic lines set with penultimate cadential embellishments are the first line (set in m. 5-6) and the last (mm. 27 and 39). The absence of cadential melismas for any repetition of the next to last line (line 4) also recalls the similarly undecorated next-to-last lines in *ottava* singing. Longer tones at the ends of melismas like „F“-pauses prepare points of arrival at mm. 6, 27, and 40, as may also – as covered in Severi's rule 6 – leaps at the ends of melismas (see the joints at mm. 12-13, 16-17; 18-19; and 40-41, all similar descending minor thirds). Do these points of arrival mark poetic structures or purely musical ones? Taken all together, the rhythmic configurations of Caccini's *passaggi* more often articulate units one breve in length rather than the semibreves indicated by the *C* mensuration sign. With the exceptions of mm. 16 and 28, which will be discussed later, each point marks the beginning of a hypermeasure (or hyper-tactus unit) of two semibreves, in accordance with Caccini's original barring.

I am not the first to notice that Caccini's usual mensuration sign indicates *tempo alla semibreve* but that the barring in his prints often marks out an *alla breve* meter.¹² These breve units do not only conform to the declamation of the poetic subphrases, as at the very opening when „Se voi, se voi“ repeats as two breve-length subphrases. In fact, the barlines in Caccini's 1614 print occur at regular breve intervals until m. 35, which is notated as a single semibreve measure. It is followed by units of two breves and one penultimate

¹² This is not uncommon. See Hitchcock's discussion of mensuration sign and tactus in Caccini, *Le nuove musiche* (see n. 2), 46-47, n. 21. Positioning of barlines in monodic scores is far from consistent in these decades, and it is not clear why their use arose – since singers sang without them, or whether their notation somehow served chamber ensemble performances in which beating time would have been unseemly. (In paintings in which we see a soloist's hand giving the tactus, the usually-amateur singer is likely singing from a part.) Michi's barlines, as in Ex. 1, are often mensurally regular. In other composers barlines may mark conceptual rhythmic or even text units.

Text 1: Giulio Caccini, *Se voi lagrime a pieno*, from *Le nuove musiche e nuova maniera di scriverle* (Florence 1614), pp. 19–20.

syllable/ line	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Se	voi	lá-	gri-	<i>me a</i> ...	<i>pié-</i>	no				
							EM				
2	non	mo-	strá-	(a) - te il	do- ...	ló-	re				
							AM				
3	ch'en-	tro	rac-	<i>chiú-</i>	de il ...	sé-	no,				
							CM				
4	<i>a</i>	ché	ver-	<i>sá-</i>	te ...	fó-	re,				
							AM				
	<i>a</i>	<i>ché</i>	ver-	<i>sá-</i>	te	fó-	re?				
							AM				
5	Stá-	te-	vi	dén-	tro e GM/ AM	sof-	fo-	<i>cá-</i>	te il	<i>có-</i>	re. EM
	A	<i>ché</i>	ver-	<i>sá-</i> ...	te	fó-	re?				
							AM				
	Stá-	te-	<i>vi</i>	dén-	tro e GM/ AM	sof-	fo-	<i>cá-</i>	te il	<i>có-</i>	re. EM

*If you, tears, don't fully reveal the grief enclosed in my breast,
why do you pour forth? Stay inside and suffocate my heart.*

Word repetitions within poetic lines are not shown.

Bold italics and dots represent syllables with graces (...) and melismas (.....).

Double and single (at system breaks) vertical lines mark divisions *alla breve*.

semibreve (m. 40), which „makes up“ for m. 35.¹³ Furthermore the melismas without ending leaps or longer-note markers described above also contribute to a prevailing sense of *tactus alla breve*. Rhythmic similarity and stepwise motion between the ends of odd-numbered semibreve bars and the beginnings of even-numbered ones make smooth connections, for example, at the

¹³ In both printed and manuscript music of this period, *cursus* marks but no barlines appear at the ends of staff systems. In Caccini's 1614 print, no barline appears after m. 36 until m. 40, because there is a system break between m. 37 and m. 38.

joints between mm. 13 and 14; 19–20; and 37–38. Furthermore, the few places where Caccini avoids a syllable on a beat occur at the second halves of breves, that is, at the even-numbered barlines of mm. 12 (*ch'entro*), 22 and 24 (*statevi*), and 30 (*a*). Note also that *passaggi* correctly begin on stressed syllables, but for the most part they finish on „weaker“ semibreves, thus rolling into stressed measures on a new stressed syllable. This also contributes to fluid movement *alla breve*. In the continuo part, line articulation by breves is also clear up to at least mm. 15–16, and then again from mm. 21 to the end. For example, the E-major chords of mm. 7, 9, and 13 with the A-major chord at m. 11 define a harmonic area; and the repeated bass figure in mm. 11 and 13 with the V–I cadence to C major make m. 15 a point of arrival, at the end of the third poetic line.

Since we are dealing with rhythmic notation that is still more mensural than metric, it is also helpful to remember that in notation *alla breve*, the rhythmic value of the semiminim (♩) is eligible to be not strictly metric, as are the *crome* (♩♩) and faster subdivisions in 2/2. In other words, when the tactus is the breve, quarter-note values can also contribute to the effect of *sprezzatura*. For example, in *alla breve* the two quarters in mm. 7–8 or mm. 25–26, can be sung unequally.¹⁴

The double vertical lines in Text 1 show how these *alla breve* units coordinate with Caccini's poem and its word stresses. In line 1, the breve unit that begins in m. 5 adds musical stress by syncopating the „la-“ of *lagrime*, while the melisma on „pie-“ of *pieno* provides an initial syllable stress as well as a marker for the end of the poetic line. Line 2 is similar, except that the ear marks the breve by the 7–6 suspension on the stressed syllable „-stra-“ that makes an E7 chord on m. 9. Melismas provide parallel word stresses on syllable 4 for *racchiúde* and *versáte*, in mm. 13–14, 16–17, and 19–20. Breve units and melismas operate similarly for the remaining two lines. None of this is extraordinary, given the graceful breadth of declamation that results, which sounds „naturally“ fitted to the lyrical complaint of the poem. What reveal Caccini's sensitive text setting, however, are the anomalies, the deviations from what could have been a straightforward musical setting of *Se voi lacrime a pieno* in twenty-one breves, which it is not.

Caccini alters both poetic and musical regularities when the main phrase of line 4 arrives, which is in regular iambs: *A ché versáte fóre*. For the first time, the unstressed first syllable „a“ is exclaimed with *tirata* that jumps to the stressed second syllable „che“ on what should be a weak semibreve (m. 16). Furthermore, the ear encounters more uncertainty within m. 16, as the E5–C5 seems to echo the earlier F5–D5 minor third, and Caccini stresses the syllable „-sa-“ with a melisma, but on the last semiminim (♩) of the bar. Not only does „-sa-“ begin before the downbeat of m. 17, it also sits on a D-minor

¹⁴ The continuo player is also free to unequalize quarter notes; but even if the continuo sounds even quarters, the singer can, as a more conversational than formal response, sing uneven ones.

chord across that barline (as it does at the repetition in mm. 30–31), where one might have expected some kind of change. Caccini in short has quickly destabilized the regularities of mm. 1–15. Furthermore, even though the cadence to an A-major chord at *fore* in mm. 17–18 looks on the page just like the cadence to a C-major chord in mm. 14–15, they are not going to feel rhythmically parallel. The last syllables of lines 1–3 all fell on breve „downbeats“; the last syllable of line 4 in m. 18 is either just another semibreve downbeat or it's an upbeat in *alla breve*.

Caccini restates line 4 in mm. 18–21, moving again with a new melisma on *versate*, to the same concluding A-major chord. This restatement illustrates how, depending on where a rhythmic pattern falls in the *tactus alla breve*, the same rhythmic pattern can be set with different mensural „weights.“ Cases in which the beat *before* a tonic arrival is conceptually strong and the arrival to a tonic itself is „weak“ („inhaled,“ as it were) are common occurrences in polyphonic singing, making unweighted last notes to contrapuntal phrases. The soprano, tenor, and bass lines in m. 42 of Ex. 5 all sing the closing syllable of the poetic line on the weak second semibreve of the *alla breve* measure.¹⁵

Ex. 5 Johannes Lupi, *A jamais croy recouvrer mon adresse*, mm. 41–42, from Susato's *Premier livre des chansons à quatre parties*, Antwerp 1543, (f. 7).

41

(li) - es - - - - - se; le

8 et li - es - - - - - se; le main - te -

8 (li) - - - - - es - - - - - se;

re - pos et li - es - - - - - se; le

The only poetic line to finish on a weaker measure to this point is exactly Caccini's m. 18. When he repeats the poetic line with different *passaggi*, the weights of the hypermeasures are now reversed, so that the final tonic A in m. 21 does coincide with a breve downbeat, corresponding to the A cadence in m. 11. The restatement of line 4 in mm. 19–21 first restores a breve em-

¹⁵ The passage comes from Ex. 3 of the invaluable chapter „Metric hierarchy, articulation, and rhythmic flexibility“, in: Anne Smith, *The Performance of 16th-century Music: Learning from the Theorists*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, 61–64. Facsimiles of the original part books are available online at http://www.us.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780199742615/examples/music_ex3/?view=usa.

phasis by a leap to the downbeat of m. 19 on the accented *che*; second, it provides a word stress by a longer melisma on *versáte*; and third, it gives a final syllable on a breve beat. The rhythmic bumpiness, then, of mm. 15–18 sounds in retrospect deliberate and expressive – the effect of pent-up repression dismayingly revealed.

Something similar occurs with the two statements of the final poetic line („Statevi dentro ...“). Measure 27 has the same melisma as the one in m. 6 that helped create a breve beat on m. 7; but m. 27 is the third (strong) semibreve of four, not the weaker sixth of seven. The harmonic progressions under the voice also differ. In mm. 6–7, the submediant precedes a dominant chord in a half cadence; in mm. 26–28, the voice and bass push to a vii6 or V6 of A minor, which then springs back to the dominant. For the listener, the melisma in m. 27 first of all correctly embellishes the accented syllable „co-“ of *core*; but the way it ends creates an accent on the final B-natural at the same time that m. 28 is the second, weaker semibreve of a breve unit. Caccini maintains this equivocation with a rest of silence on the next semibreve beat (m. 29); and then he further weakens the first and last word accents in the poetic lines by keeping them off of the main beats. In m. 30, *che* is delayed; in m. 31 „fo-“ falls on a weak minim, as do „den-“ in mm. 33 and 35 and „co-“ of *core* in m. 38. This ensures that the embellished syllables on the downbeats of mm. 31, 33, 35, 37, and 39 can be heard in a continuous sweep – *alla breve*, as the cadential embellishment moves to finally stress the last syllable of *core*.

Performers respond to many of the rhythmic subtleties I've pointed out here without the necessity for such perhaps over-determined analysis. Rehearsing *alla breve* often allows all of the faster figures to find their own shapes and weight and avoids phrasing that is too square and choppy. It improves the delivery of the Italian poetry with its unstressed syllables at the ends of poetic lines. It can cure limp melismas and remove the irritation of too many equally stressed „goal notes.“ Above all, it can reveal the moments in which mensural regularity yields to ambiguity as a technique of monodic rhetoric. In *Se voi lagrime a pieno*, these moments are interpretive of the struggle between the poem's conflicting desires both to express and to repress emotion.

Indeed, the embellishments yet to be considered contribute to the physical presentation of the poem. Poetic line 2 has a short flourish on syllable 5 on „grief.“ The third and fourth lines, which are both repeated, reinforce this metric position by embellishing syllables 4 and 5 together, on the opposing words „enclose“ and then „pour out.“ In addition, the two statements of line 4 with the rising *tirata* on „a“ help push to the cadence of line 4 on A major, half-way through the monody (m. 21). The placement of these embellishments on *a pieno*, „do-“, of *dolore*, *racchiude*, *a*, and *versate* are, however, more than temporary word illustrations. If the *passaggi* represent the singer's tears, which he is trying to hold back, one could say that in the course of the poem, the embellishments accumulate to the extent that they block the ending: there is no closing A chord. At first, ornaments on syllables 5 and 6 for the first and second lines function simply to define the 7-syllable line. Then they „well up“ like tears in the four statements of the third and fourth lines, by emphasizing

syllables that come earlier in the line, syllables 4 and 5. Finally, the addition of melismas to the 1st and the 2d syllables of line 4 for the first time in the piece acts to delay the opening of the last line („Statevi dentro“). This leaves the middle of the single long line, „dentro“ – on the word that states the physical locus of the poem – empty and wide open for the satisfyingly conventional melismatic suffocation by tears, on syllables 8 and 10.¹⁶

What gives Caccini's conclusion its elegance, however, is that despite the varying lengths of *passaggi* set to the same text phrases, the monody ends as a balanced A B B' form, with three sections of exactly the same length (mm. 15–28 = 29–42). Perception of that final form requires a mental reordering of mm. 15–21 from its position at the end of a grammatical and musical unit, when line 4 „A che versate fore“ is repeated from m. 29. Caccini's decision to retain the E-major chord of m. 28 as the final chord of the piece aerates the musical form while it also lightens the direness of this lament.

Melismatic treatment is common in monodic settings of poems made up of entirely 11-syllable lines, whether they are in *terzetti*, octaves, sonnets, or strings of couplets. This may be due to the association of hendecasyllables with the improvised singing of *ottave* mentioned in the introduction. Since the scope of this essay precludes examination of each of these,¹⁷ a single sonnet setting by Kapsperger with only five *passaggi* will serve at least to illustrate quite a different effect from the effort to repress tears in Caccini's monody.¹⁸

Text 2: G. G. Kapsperger, *Voi che dietro a fallaci e cieche scorte* from *Libro secondo d'arie*, (Rome 1623), pp. 19–20; sonnet by G. B. Marino.

Voi che dietro a fallaci e cieche scor-↑te,
dal foco vil di due be-**gl'ócch'ac**-↓cesi
da l'or falso d'un crin *le-ga-ti e pre-↑si*,

4 ite per vie precipitose e tor-↑te; / ite per vi-**e precipitose e** tor-↓te: FM (23 bars)

lunge da quel pensier che mena a mor-↓te,
torcete i passi, e d'atra nebbia offe-↓si;
vol-get' i lu-**m' a quell'oggét**-t'inte-↑si

8 ch'a voi proprio dal ciel fu dato in **sór**-↓te. Dm/M (15 bars)

¹⁶ As Text 1 shows, syllable 3 bears an embellishment only in the final iteration of the last poetic line. Syllables 7 and 9 are never ornamented.

¹⁷ Not included in this essay are discussion of the *terzetto* setting „Quel rosignuol che dolcemente a l'ombra“ by Francesco Rasi in his *Madrigali di diversi autori*, Florence: Cristofano Marescotti 1610; facsim. ed. Florence: Studio per Edizioni scelte 1987; and of the highly florid Ruggiero „Venuto è pur quel lagrimabil giorno“ by Ippolito Macchiavelli from I-Vc Fondo Torrefranca ms. 250, ff. 17–21, mod. ed. John Hill, *Roman Monody, Cantata, and Opera from the Circles Around Cardinal Montalto*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997.

¹⁸ For a performing edition with a continuo realization for theorbo, see Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger, *Two Spiritual Monodies*, David Dolata and Margaret Murata (eds), *Web Library of 17th-Century Music* No. 21 (2011), <http://sscm-wlscm.org>, which includes a performance by Gian Paolo Fagotto on the Toccata Classics CD.

Mirate qual bellezz' altra maggiore,
 quai maggior pompe a voi discopr' e mostri,
 11 e quai dilette il crucifisso *a-more!* Am (10 bars)

Stringa omai dolc' e |scald' i desir vostri –
 rotto |crin, ciglio chiuso – e |trovi il core |
 14 nel sangu' e nel pal-|lor, le rose e |gl'ostrì,
nel sangu' e nel pallor, |le rose e gl'o-|stri. Dm (13 bars)

You, who are following guides both false and blind, /inflamed by base fire in two beautiful eyes, / entwined and imprisoned by hair of false gold, / tracking tortuous and precipitous paths, // far from that thought that leads you only toward death, /avert your steps and, affronted by dark fog,/ turn your eyes instead toward that object given / expressly to you by heaven as your fate.

Look upon that other, far greater beauty, / what greater glories and what delights the love that was crucified reveals and shows to you. // Embrace now your sweet and burning desires – / matted hair and eyelids closed – let your heart find/ in His blood and pallor, roses and south winds.

Syllables in bold are set with *passaggi*; syllables in italics bear local graces. Arrows down represent arrivals to the stronger semibreve beat of a breve hypermeasure; arrows up, the weaker second semibreve. In the final tercet, vertical lines show where semibreve barlines occur.

Italian sonnets consist of fourteen lines of 11 syllables each. Kapsperger's *Voi che dietro a fallaci e cieche scorte* sets Marino's equal poetic lines in phrases that are wildly unequal; they vary from 2, 3, 4, 5 or 7 semibreves in length. Harmonic units play a major role in defining many phrases, such as the start from and return to an F-major chord for line 7 (mm. 28–31), or the A-minor chord that begins and ends line 9 (mm. 39–42). Altogether the two quatrains are 23 and 15 bars long, closing on F major and D minor chords; the two tercets are 10 and 13 bars each, closing on chords of A minor and D minor (see Text 2).¹⁹ It is not primarily the presence or absence of *passaggi* that determines this variety in phrase and section lengths, but rather the fact that Kapsperger alternates from declamation at the pace of the semiminim (♩) to declamation at the level of the *croma* (♩), a kind of shift in *tempo dell'affetto* familiar from polyphonic madrigals. Thus consistency in the semibreve *tactus* is necessary to perceive the elasticity of the line settings.

Along with the irregular phrasing goes Kapsperger's distribution of *passaggi*. He avoids ornaments on the penultimate tenth syllable, writing one in fact only for line 8. Its long melisma provides a recognizable, grand close to

¹⁹ Even though the figured bass asks for a D-major chord at the end of lines 8 and 14, the Fs are natural in the vocal line leading up to it.

the first part. As the text example shows in bold, he prefers to use *passaggi* on syllables 8 and 9 or even earlier, in order to lead up to syllable 10 and the dominant (see lines 2, 4, 7, and 14 in Text 2). The last six lines of the sonnet have only one *passaggio*, at the very close. Only twice do lines repeat – line 8 at the end of the first quatrain and the final line of the sonnet. Both of these are melismatic and extend these two closing lines to 11 and 10 bars in length.

Because a sonnet was a familiar, audible verse form – one that did not need musical articulation to be perceived, Kapsperger's setting of Marino transformed its regular Renaissance structure into unequal and uneven – but deliberately shaped – swaths of movement. „Burning eyes,“ the first set of *passaggi* in F major (mm. 5–8), contrasts with the bumpy groups of „tortuous paths“ in mm. 14–22 (nine bars). „Turn your eyes to the object ...“ in mm. 28–30 returns melodically to F, echoing the earlier image, but quickly pushes on to the long phrase that closes the two quatrains: a four-bar *passaggio* on the word „fate“ (mm. 33–36) that heads the turn to a Christian life. Here the pivotal transformation of the poem from the worldly (in F) to the spiritual (in D) occurs when the C naturals in m. 34 of the *passaggio* become C sharps in mm. 35 and 36. In another striking rhythmic contrast, a rapid series of short, angular rhythmic groups and more active harmonic rhythm in mm. 49–52 – like a blind person's tactile embrace of the crucified Christ – gives way to the drawn-out melismatic transformation of „blood and pallor“ into „roses and south winds.“

Kapsperger's print has no contradictions between the *tempus imperfectum* mensuration sign and his barring, which marks out each semibreve. Given the flexible phrasing, his setting also avoids consistent breve hypermeasures. There are, however, several instances in which rhythmic relationships occur between bars within melismas (see the score in the Appendix):

„begl'occhi ch'accessi“

mm. 5 – 6 (weak) – 7 (strong) – 8 – 9 (strong)

Between mm. 5 and 6, the harmony does not change, the melisma moves stepwise, and Kapsperger notates the double beam over the barline. At the end of m. 6, the voice makes an octave leap downward as the chord changes, making m. 7 a point of arrival. The final note of m. 8 acts like a „fermata“ anticipating a point of arrival on m. 9. Thus even if m. 1–4 are heard *alla semibreve*, the second phrase projects breve units.

„sorte“

mm. 33 (weak) – 34 (strong) – 35 (weak) – 36 (strong)

The *passaggio* between mm. 34 and 35 moves stepwise to a weak downbeat, whereas from m. 35 to m. 36 the leap of a m6 stresses the C# downbeat. Thus, even if the listener is hearing by semibreves from m. 24, the repetition of F4 between mm. 32 and 33 is likely to begin stretching the ear by breves, due to the rising line to and the leap away from the C5 at the downbeat of m. 34, reinforced by the leap at m. 36.

Interestingly enough, line 1 of the sonnet ends on the weaker of a perceptible two-bar hypermeasure, as does line 3 (shown by upward arrows in Text 2). The first statement of line 4 also then closes on a weak bar (m. 16), but its restatement ends on a strong one (m. 23), in the same kind of reversal of rhythmic weight that we saw in Caccini. In the closing tercet, the last syllables of lines 12 and 13 do not even fall on downbeats, but instead are set within the second halves of their bars (mm. 50, 52), keeping everything up in the air, as it were, until the final line. In the closing line, Kapsperger uses an unusual combination of beaming and text underlay which is not at all congruent with the spoken iambic accentuation of the text (already heard clearly in mm. 53–55): *nel sángu' e nél pallór, le róse e gl' óstri*. Of these stressed syllables in mm. 56–61, not one falls on the downbeat of a breve hypermeasure. Kapsperger's beaming here seems to indicate quite unorthodox text underlay. Furthermore, since nearly the entire *coloratura* spins out over a single sustained D-minor chord, the unexpected text underlay and absence of aural cues renders the metric perception of mm. 57–59 uncertain and even unimportant. The downward octave leap, however, and change of rhythm at m. 60 both signal a strong beat. A singer with good breath control might then be able to perform the final tonic note as an elegant weak measure, tapering off like the scent of roses in the wind.

★

The Caccini and Kapsperger monodies demonstrate that florid chamber solos of the earlier Baroque use ornamentation judiciously as well as poetically. *Passaggi* were not called upon just to illustrate single words or reinforce the accentual patterns of poetic lines. Their locations in those lines – end, middle, and opening – appear carefully chosen, according to where the lines occur within their poems. Furthermore, specific melodic-rhythmic figures in *passaggi* not only fill and extend, but can also shift the rhythmic organization of the musical tactus by subtly according „weight“ to different points of arrival, affecting perceptions of tactus, cadence, phrase, and section.

Revealing the fine balance of elements that performers must negotiate in bringing such music to life, the Caccini and Kapsperger pieces also reposition the nature and significance of „rhythmic freedom“ in early seventeenth-century Italian monody. The improvisational quality of their *passaggi* suggests the presence of oral traditions, but these would have come from living, not archaic, church, chamber, and urban practices. The naturalness of their vocality results from habit and experience.²⁰ How composers used *passaggi* creates the prized illusion of spontaneous invention – and their variety is remarkable; but the polished craftwork involved in the published versions is evident. Madrigal poetry and sonnets, after all, belonged to refined court culture. Prevailing

²⁰ What we do not know, however, is whether or to what extent vocal production – the sound of the singing – differed between an improvising singer of *ottave* and a chamber singer at court.

principles of rhythmic inequality, moreover, were reciprocally related to a sense of tactus. A performance with *sprezzatura* did not erase aural barlines so much as space them out, using them more as pilasters than as load-bearing columns. The melismas do not betray any failure to suppress vocal virtuosity; neither do they signal anachronistic releases of personal emotion. In their play with musical rhythm, these intricate passages made the singing body part of the poem.

Appendix 1: Giulio Caccini, *Se voi lagrime a pieno* (Florence 1614), pp. 19–20
 Barlines are original; editorial beaming illustrates minim units where possible.

Se voi, se voi la - gri - me a

pie - no Non mo - stra - te il do - lo -

re Ch'en - tro rac - chiu - de, ch'en - tro rac - chiu - de il se -

no, a che ver - sa - - te fo - re; a

che ver - sa - - - - te fo - re? Sta - te - vi den -

tro, sta - te - vi den - tro, e sof - fo - ca - - - t'il

27 syll. 10

co - re; a che ver sa

b # b # b

31

- te fo - re? Sta - te - vi den - tro, sta - te - vi den -

b 4 #3 # b 4 #3 b b 4 #3

36

tro, e sof - fo - ca - - - t'il co -

b b

39

re.

b

Appendix 2: G. G. Kapsperger, *Voi che dietro a fallaci e cieche scorte* (Rome 1623), pp. 22–23
 Barring and beaming as in the original.

1
 Voi che die-tro a fal-la - ci e cie - che scor - te, Dal fo-co vil di due be-gl'oc -

6
 - - - - - ch'ac - - - - - ce - si Da lor'

10
 fal - sod'un crin le ga - ti e pre - si, I - te per vi - e pre - ci - pi -

15
 - to - se e tor - te; i - te per vi - e pre - ci - pi - to -

20
 - - - - - s'e - tor - te.

24
 Lun - ge da quel pen - sier che me - na a mor - te, Tor - ce - te i pas - si e d'a - tra neb - bia of - fe -

28
 si, Vol - ge - t'i lu - m'a quel - l'og - get - t'in - te -

31

si Ch'a voi pro-prio dal ciel fu da-to in sor

35

te. Mi-ra -

40

- te qual bel-lezz' al - tra mag gio - re, Qua-i ma-ggior pom-pe a voi di - sco - pr'e mos -

45

tri, E quai di-let-ti il cru - ci-fis - so a - 3 mo - re. Strin-ga o-mai dolc' e'

50

scal-d'i de-sir vo-stri, Rot-to crin, ci-glio chiu - so, e tro - vi il co - re. Nel san-gu'e nel pal-

54

lor le ro - se e gl'o - stri; nel san - gu'e. nel pal - lor

58

le ro - s'e - gl'o - stri.