"Wer nicht sprechen kan, der kan noch viel weniger singen" : prosodic structure and free ornamentation in Handel's Italian da capo arias

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„WER NICHT SPRECHEN KAN, DER KAN NOCH VIEL WENIGER SINGEN": PROSODIC STRUCTURE AND FREE ORNAMENTATION IN HANDEL'S ITALIAN *DA CAPO* ARIAS

by Jeffrey Gall

It is no easy thing to ornament an *opera-seria's* worth of *da capo* arias. Today, as the postwar early music revival enters its third generation, the task is still likely to be assumed by the music director for the production, a specialist who writes out what he expects his cast of performers to sing. The situation was very different in the eighteenth century, when the ability to ornament effectively was one of the hallmarks of a master singer. The sheer scale of the expectations placed upon the performer to invent ornamental variations is implied in Pierre-Jean Grosley's 1758 description of encores at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples:

> At the operas in Italy, clapping an *arietta* [that is, an aria] is a signal for an *encore*. The orchestra then returns to the prelude, and the *castrato* walks about in a circle, and sings the favourite *arietta* the second time. This is sometimes repeated even to the fifth or sixth time; and in these repetitions it is, that the singer exerts every resource of nature and art, to surpass himself at each repetition, by the variety of gradations which he introduces into the trills, modulations and whatever belongs to the expression. Slight and quick as some of these gradations may be, not one of them escapes an Italian ear [...].[1]

Grosley seems to be saying that if the castrato in question succeeded in pleasing his audience, he might have had to prepare up to six different sets of ornaments for as many encores of the same aria.

Beyond making note of an obvious challenge to the castrato's skills of invention, Grosley raises two other significant points here about the culture of vocal ornamentation in 18th-century Italy. First, he explicitly connects improvised ornamentation with „expression". Second, he notes that the Italian opera audience shows a special ability to judge the singer's success in embellishing the aria. Taken together, these comments imply that vocal ornamentation in the 18th-century Italian tradition had some sort of communicative property which transcended mere showmanship. In other words, Grosley's linkage of

[1] Pierre-Jean Grosley, *New observations on Italy and its inhabitants. Written in French by two Swedish gentlemen*, vol. 2, tr. Thomas Nugent, London 1769, 234. In his Preface to the first volume of Grosley's three-volume memoir, Nugent reveals the true author to be Grosley himself. Grosley's French original, *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'Italie et sur les Italiens par deux gentilhommes suédois*, was published in London in 1764. Man of letters, historian and manuscript collector, Grosley (1718–85) is best known as the person who lost to Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the famous Dijon Academy essay-writing competition of 1749–50, for which Rousseau penned the *Discours sur les arts et les sciences* which propelled him to fame.

ornamentation, expressivity, and Italian understanding is no mere coincidence. It says something about the dialogue between performer and listener which seems implicit in the improvisations of Italian vocal literature throughout much of the 18th century. This study aims to explore certain rhetorical aspects of this process of embellishment which may provide modern singers with paradigms for improvising free ornamention in Italian arias in order to convey meaning.

It is a commonplace that Baroque ornamentation divides into two broad categories: graces, called *accenti* in Italian (trills, mordents, slides, appoggiaturas and the like); and free ornamentation, called variably *passi* or *passaggi*. In practice, the graces seem the easier sort of ornament to apply to the solo line, since they are short and formulaic. Many period treatises and modern studies describe them in detail and provide more or less specific (if at times contradictory) information about the purely musical environments where their use is appropriate.

Free ornamentation is a different matter. Inventing melodic material to vary what the composer wrote looks a lot like composing, and applying these recomposed passages effectively is inherently riskier. Thus 18th-century writers adopt a cautionary tone on the subject: embellishments of this type must not obscure the melody and should be appropriate to the character of the music.[2] Unfortunately, it is difficult to interpret subjective advice like this. An appeal to what is appropriate is an elliptical argument: free embellishment is effective where it is in good taste, but one must already have good taste in order to invent it.[3] Can there be a more concrete approach to applying free ornamentation which is suggested by something within the aria itself?

It is not easy to find an authority who can provide such a guideline. Twentieth-century English-language scholarship on Baroque performance practice tends to focus upon cataloging graces and interpreting period remarks on articulation and phrasing. For 18th-century advice on singing in the Italian manner, the choice of sources is frustratingly slender. Perhaps this should come as no surprise. Learning to perform on select instruments had long been a part of the educational program for the upper classes, and so there was a demand for treatises on that subject; however, *canto figurato* was the province of professionals. In the first decades of the 18th century there still seems to have been no general market for handbooks on florid singing, and the skills of the trade continued to be passed orally from singing master to student. By default then, Pier Francesco Tosi's *Opinioni de' cantori antichi, e moderni*

[2] Donington supplies an excellent sampler of such warnings from the historical treatises. See Robert Donington, *Baroque music: style and performance; a handbook*, New York 1982, 92–96.

[3] The rhetorical *topos ineffabilitatis* surfaces early in Baroque theoretical literature on this topic; cf. Jacopo Peri's remark in his preface to *Euridice* that such ornaments „cannot be written, and writing them, cannot be learned from writing". See Jacopo Peri, *Euridice*, Florence 1600. The English translation is from Donington, *Baroque music*, 92.

(Bologna 1723) is the primary (because it is the only) source of information on Italian vocal performance practice of the early 18th century.[4]

Because it is designed to complement the teaching of a singing master and the work of the professional singer, Tosi's treatise is concerned not only, or even primarily, with listing specific ornamental devices. He presumes that these will be familiar to his readers. Instead, Tosi chooses to focus upon applying them properly and effectively. In his chapter on the aria *(Dell' Aria)*, he confirms the importance of the *da capo* structure in deciding when and where to ornament:

> Among the Things worthy of Consideration, the first to be taken Notice of, is the Manner in which all *Airs* divided into three Parts are to be sung. In the first they require nothing but simple ornaments, of a good Taste and few, that the Composition remain simple, plain, and pure; in the second they expect, that to this Purity some artful Graces [Tosi: *un artificio singolare*, „a singular artifice"] be added, by which the Judicious may hear, that the Ability of the Singer is greater; and, in repeating the *Air*, he that does not vary it for the better, is no great Master [VII, §4].[5]

Perhaps it is because Tosi is addressing those already initiated into the art of singing that his advice often appears to deal „largely in generalities", to quote George Buelow.[6] Yet for all its apparent simplicity, the much-quoted passage above seems worth pausing over once more. It appears that for Tosi at least, embellishment *does* play a role even in the initial A section of an Italian *aria da capo*, and something uniquely inventive is expected in the B section as well. These are „required" as proof of the performer's good taste, that is, his understanding of the „most beautiful design with which the better singers regulate themselves".[7] What is the nature of such a design?

By his own admission, Tosi's arguments are conservative. He seeks to restrain self-indulgent singers from committing those „Abuses and Defects" (Introduction §12) of performance which he believes are a mark of a corrupted age. Nevertheless he plainly expects ornamentation throughout the aria. This suggests that current historically informed attitudes toward embellishing the early 18th-century *aria da capo* may be overly timid.[8] Surely the very „artifice"

[4] Padre Martini confirms that this is so in his correspondence with Mancini; see Edward Foreman's Introduction to Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinions of singers ancient, and modern or observations on figured singing*, tr. Foreman, Minneapolis 1986.

[5] Except where otherwise noted, all citations from Tosi in this study refer to Galliard's English translation; cf. Tosi, *Observations on the florid song; or, sentiments on the „ancient" and „modern" singers*, tr. John Ernest (Johann Ernst) Galliard, London 1742.

[6] George J. Buelow, „A lesson in operatic performance practice by Madame Faustina Bordoni", in *A musical offering: Essays in honor of Martin Bernstein*, Bloomington 1977, 80.

[7] Tosi/Foreman, *Opinions*, 59. Here Foreman's translation of Tosi is closer to the original than Galliard's.

[8] See for example Donington, *Baroque music*, 91, 95. Winton Dean also adopts an admonitory tone on the subject in the preface to his 1976 edition of ornamented arias by Handel; see note 9 below.

which Tosi praises in good singing consists in skillful interventions upon the written text, that is, in ornamentation. According to good taste, these may be graces and short ornamental figures, extended ornamental passages, or effects of phrasing and dynamics such as slurs and swells. Any of these may unify the aria by establishing the singer's personal „design", while amplifying the aria's emotional intensity as it follows its formal pathway from A section to B and back to the *da capo*. The general nervousness one senses today about turning singers loose to ornament such arias must be tempered by Tosi's warnings about the dangers of under-embellishing:

> Let a Student therefore accustom himself to repeat [the airs] always differently, for, if I mistake not, one that abounds in Invention, though a moderate Singer, deserves much more Esteem, than a better who is barren of it; for this last pleases the Connoisseurs but for once, whereas the other, if he does not surprise by the Rareness of his Productions, will at least gratify your Attention with Variety [VII, §5].

> [The master] knows, that a Deficiency of Ornaments displeases as much as the too great Abundance of them; that a Singer makes one languid and dull with too little, and cloys one with too much; but, of the two, he will dislike the former most, though it gives less Offence, the latter being easier to be amended [IX, §59].

To be sure, abundance alone is not the measure of skillful ornamentation. Tosi also inveighs against „Moderns" who overindulge in free ornamentation:

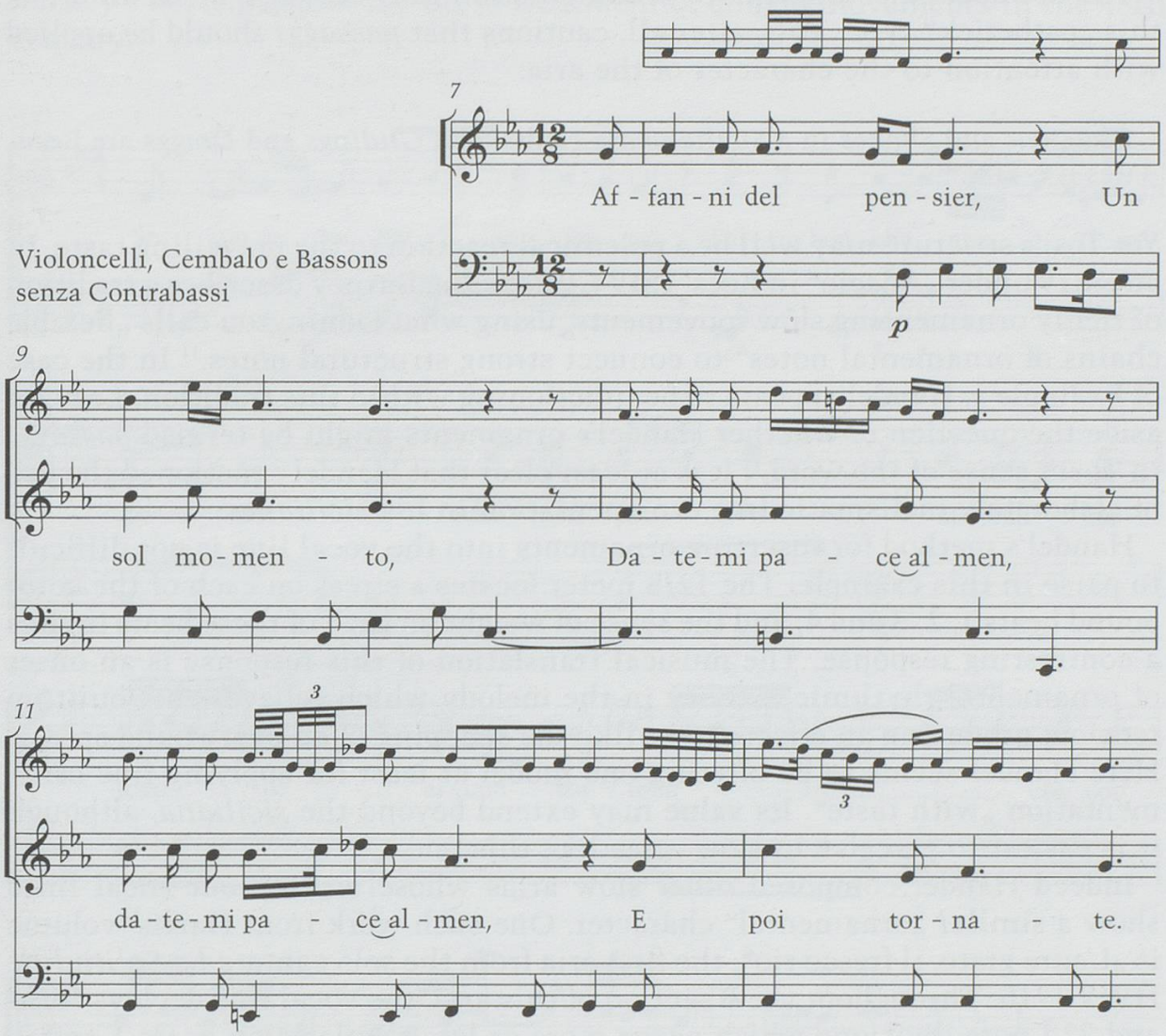
> *Divisions* have the like Fate with the *Shakes;* both equally delight in their Place; but if not properly introduced, the too frequent Repetition of them becomes tedious if not odious [IV, §20].

The singer's challenge is to reconcile these two extremes so as to apply embellishments with taste. Here Tosi, like so many of his contemporaries, urges the student to examine and imitate the best models in order to acquire the desired quality of good judgment:

> Let [the scholar] hear as much as he can the most celebrated Singers, and likewise the most excellent instrumental Performers [...]. Let him endeavour to copy from Both, that he may insensibly, by the Study of others, get a good Taste [VI, §§ 13–14].

Sound advice for Tosi's contemporaries, though for later singers, the scarcity of 18th-century arias with written-out embellishments presents a problem. Nevertheless there are a few published examples easily available today which can stand as models, including Winton Dean's 1976 edition of three ornamented Handel arias and Ellen T. Harris' 2001 edition of Handel continuo cantatas for alto. Both contain transcriptions of highly interesting embellishments by the composer himself. The most extensive ornaments are found in Dean's volume, which offers alto transcriptions of arias from Handel's 1723 opera *Ottone*. All three of these arias belong to the role of Teofane, originally written for soprano; it is not however the transcribing for a lower voice which is anomalous, but

rather the presence of ornamentation. Dean surmises that Handel wrote out the embellishments for an English contralto substituting for an ailing Italian diva (perhaps Cuzzoni). Such a singer would likely have been unfamiliar with the Italian art of florid singing and in need of considerable help.[9]



Ex. 1: Handel, „Affanni del pensier", bars 7–12.

Example 1 shows the initial vocal entrance from the A section of „Affanni del pensier, un sol momento", the first of these *Ottone* arias, together with Handel's suggestions for the *da capo* ornamentation. Despite the *larghetto* tempo marking and the doleful mood of the work, the embellishments are strikingly effusive, and some even substantially transform the original vocal line. They easily exceed the norms of many 21st-century historically informed performances of similar repertory, yet Handel apparently offered

[9] This reference to Dean, as well as the musical examples 1, 3 and 4 cited in this study, are all taken from George Frideric Handel, *Three ornamented arias*, ed. Winton Dean (© Oxford University Press 1976). Used by permission. All rights reserved.

them as what Tosi might have called an „improvement" on the vocal line he originally composed. If Handel is to be credited with good judgment in this case, then it should be possible to discover some system in the approach to embellishment which he is using here.

The abundance of small-note ornamentation may surprise us in an air of this „pathetick" type. Tosi, after all, cautions that *passaggi* should be applied with attention to the character of the aria:

> *Divisions* and *Shakes* in a *Siciliana* are Faults, and *Glidings* and *Draggs* are Beauties [IV, §18].[10]

Yet Tosi's stricture may well be a polemical reaction to the prevailing taste. In an entry under „Adagio" in Rees' 1819 *Cyclopedia,* Burney describes a tradition of richly ornamenting slow movements, using what Donington calls „flexible chains of ornamental notes" to connect strong structural notes.[11] In the case of Example 1, Handel appears to be functioning within this tradition. Leaving aside the question of whether Handel's ornaments might be termed *passaggi* in Tosi's sense of the word,[12] it is at least clear that Handel sanctioned the use of elaborately melismatic free ornamentation in his *sicilianas.*

Handel's method for inserting ornaments into the vocal line is not difficult to parse in this example. The 12/8 meter locates a stress on each of the compound beats 1, 2, 3 and 4, and the sense of weight on each of these beats invites a contrasting response. The musical translation of this response is an onset of ornamental rhythmic activity in the melody which relieves this built-up tension, producing an effect rather like the snapping of an overwound spring. Here Handel seems to be offering one model at least for applying free ornamentation „with taste". Its value may extend beyond the *siciliana,* although it is easiest to perceive in slow arias like this one.

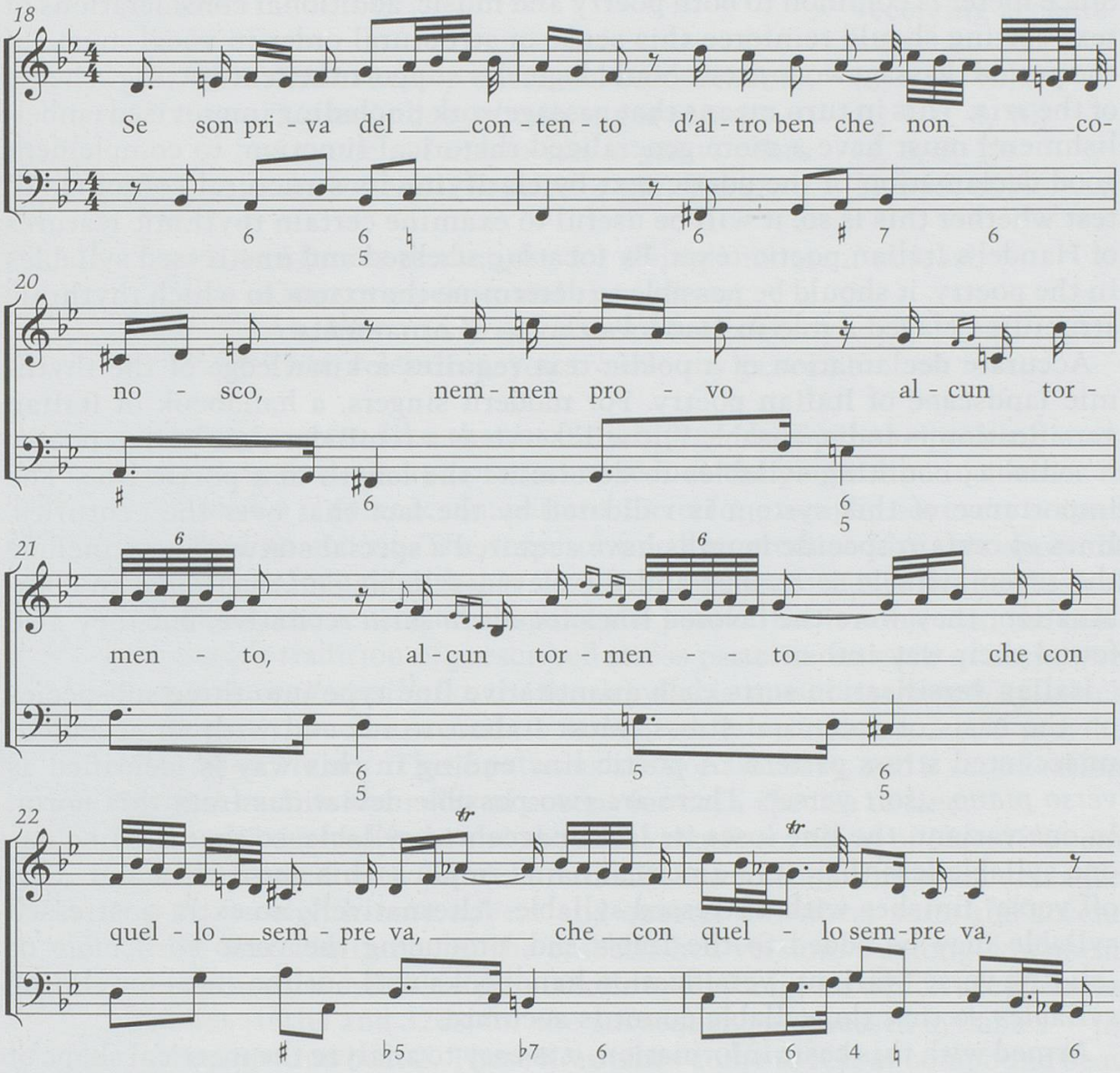
Indeed Handel composed other slow arias whose written-out vocal lines show a similar „ornamental" character. One such work from Harris' volume is „L'aure grato, il fresco rio", the first aria from the solo cantata *La Solitudine* HWV 121b. Throughout the B section of this aria, the vocal line deploys 16th- and 32d-note divisions which occur more or less regularly on beats 1 and 3, the strong beats of the 4/4 bar. At the same time, the musical setting of the text places important stressed syllables in the same rhythmically privileged positions. The coincidence of ornamental effect and word stress is especially clear in the most florid bars, such as bar 21, where the accented second syllable

[10] „Glidings" and „Draggs" are Galliard's renderings of Tosi's *scivolo* and *strascino.*

[11] Donington, *Baroque music,* 99.

[12] Tosi condemns overreliance upon *passaggi di grado,* that is, divisions by stepwise motion (IX, §53). Galliard footnotes this term (which he translates as „gradual Divisions"), making a distinction between „*Passo* and *passaggio.* The Difference is, that a *Passo* is a sudden Grace or Flight, not uniform [...]. A *Passaggio* is a Division, a Continuation, or a Succession of Notes, ascending or descending with Uniformity".

of the word „tormento" on beat 1 is set to a 32d-note sextuplet (Example 2).[13] When the same syllable is repeated on beat 3, the sextuplet even attracts additional small-note gracing. The more one looks for ornamental writing like this, the more one finds it in slow arias. The style appears to confirm Burney's description of the florid treatment of *adagio* movements in the 18th century.



Ex. 2: Handel, *La Solitudine*, bars 18–23.

[13] Handel, *Cantatas for alto and continuo*, ed. Ellen T. Harris (© Oxford University Press 2001). Used by permission. All rights reserved. *La Solitudine* is one of several cantatas in this volume for which Harris supplies Handel's own embellishments. In her Introduction (iv-v), Harris hypothesizes that the composer may have written them out for Elizabeth Legh, amateur musician and early collector of his works. Legh's two-volume collection of Handel cantatas forms the basis of this valuable performing edition.

If Handel's ornamental writing here follows a pattern of bridging the poles of stressed beats with a filigree of passagework, then he is in effect marking a distinction between strong and weak syllables. It is clear that a beat may be strong for purely musical reasons, occurring in accented positions such as a downbeat, or at points where melody contributes to harmonic tension or resolution (at suspensions and cadences, for example). These categories – rhythm, harmony and melody – function together to project meter in Baroque music. Since meter is common to both poetry and music, additional considerations of text-setting should reinforce this sense of structural order in vocal music of the period. Passagework then should logically support the text-setting scheme of the aria. This in turn means that passagework (including improvised embellishment) must have a more generalized rhetorical function: to complement good declamation of the poetic text by clarifying its structural contours. To test whether this is so, it will be useful to examine certain rhythmic features of Handel's Italian poetic texts. By locating stressed and unstressed syllables in the poetry, it should be possible to determine the extent to which rhythmic structures played a role in Handel's choice of ornaments.

Accurate declamation of a poetic text requires a knowledge of the rhythmic landscape of Italian poetry. For modern singers, a handbook of Italian versification is indispensable.[14] It will serve as a reminder that Italian poetry is syllabic, counting syllables to determine the length of a poetic line. The importance of this system is validated by the fact that over the centuries, lines of certain specific lengths have acquired a special status. These include the seven-syllable *settenario* and the eleven-syllable *endecasillabo;* in combination, they were the favored lines for *opera seria* recitative, but they also found their way into arias.

Italian versification sorts each quantitative line type into three subspecies on the basis of accentual stress. Most Italian words end with an accented-unaccented stress pattern. A poetic line ending in this way is identified as *verso piano,* „soft verse". There are two possible deviations from this norm. In one variant, the line loses its last unaccented syllable, so that the line has one syllable less than its numerical name implies; this *verso tronco* or „cut-off verse" finishes with a stressed syllable. Alternatively, an extra unstressed syllable may be added to the line's end, producing the *verso sdrucciolo* or „sliding verse" variant. Versification handbooks will outline rules for eliding syllables so that the syllable count is accurate.

Armed with this basic information, it is easy to analyze the metrical shape of the text Handel set for „Affanni del pensier" (actually the work of his librettist Nicola Haym). A printed libretto helps to determine where each line of the poem ends so that the syllable counting can begin, but if one is not available

[14] An excellent short overview in English can be found in A. Bartlett Giamatti, „Italian", in William Kurtz Wimsatt, ed., *Versification: Major language types,* New York 1972, 148–164. The classic Italian study is Pier Enea Guarnerio, *Manuale di versificazione italiana,* Milano 1893. For German speakers, Giamatti cites W. Theodor Elwert, *Italienische Metrik,* München 1968, but I have not seen this work.

there are other clues to help determine lineation, including punctuation and end rhyme. Both are available in this aria. Taking into account the elided syllables, each line consists of eleven syllables ending in an accented/unaccented stress pattern. The aria text is thus a short poem in four regular *endecasillabi piani* which can be scanned rhythmically as follows:

Rhyme scheme	Text showing accented syllables	Syllables receiving accents
(A)	*Affánni del pensiér, un sól moménto,*	(2, 6, 8, 10)
(B)	*Dátemi páce_almén, e pói tornáte.*	(1, 4, 6, 8, 10)
(A)	*Ah, che nel mésto sén io già vi sénto*	(4, 6, 8, 10)
(B)	*Che_ostináti la páce_a mé turbáte.*	(3, 6, 8, 10)

(Agonies of thought, for a single moment at least,
Grant me peace, and then return.
Ah, how in my sad breast I feel already
That, relentless, you trouble my peace.)

In a quantitative system like that of Italian prosody, English-speaking readers must guard against the temptation to reduce the poetic line to a series of metrical feet with a regular accent pattern. Here, for example, not every second syllable receives an accent. The sense of freedom produced by this apparent irregularity allows for a remarkably flexible rhythmic response in the musical setting. However, the accentual shape of the poetic line is subject to the controls of a complex tradition of prescribed stress patterns for each quantitative line type. For the *endecasillabo,* the tenth syllable must be stressed; syllables 4 and 6 commonly receive secondary stress; while syllables 1, 2 or 3 may be stressed but often are not. These patterns are not arbitrary, and a versification handbook will outline the rules of accent for each species of line.

The accent grid derived from the above rhythmic scansion of Haym's poem may now be compared with Handel's embellished setting. The vocal entrance in bar 8 with its eighth-note upbeat and quarter downbeat suits the accent pattern of the text admirably. In the embellished version, the long downbeat on the stressed second syllable – *an* – is followed by a figure which accellerates by diminutions (16ths and 32ds) for the subsequent unstressed syllables – *ni del pen* – on compound beat 2. These flourishes come to rest at compound beat 3 with the dotted quarter on the accented syllable *-sier.* In these ornaments, Handel clearly associates a stressed syllable of text with a lengthened, often dotted note value and follows it with a flurry of small-note passagework continuing up to the rhythmic anchor of the next stressed syllable. If we examine the rest of Handel's ornaments for this aria, we see that he applies them with near-perfect regard for the stress pattern of the poem.

This accentual model appears to be a productive one for free ornamentation. There is in fact only one exception to its use in this aria: Handel's treatment of the word *pace.* In the unembellished A section he sets this word accentu-

ally, with a quarter/eighth pattern, as in bar 10 (the dotted figure in bar 11 is unusual, but even here the dotting effectively translates the accent on the first syllable). Handel's *da capo* version, however, breaks the pattern of lengthening to mark syllabic stress when the word reappears in bar 10. Here the vocal line proceeds without pause or lengthening through a descending passage of 16th notes. The ornaments Handel reserves for *pace* are agitated figurations indeed, involving complex rhythms and upward leaps of a sixth (bar 10) or a diminished fifth (bar 11). His choices here suggest that a different compositional principle may also be at work in the process of ornamentation.

If composing and embellishing are different sides of the same coin, then period treatises on composition may help to identify Handel's hidden method. One of the best-known among such works, Johann Mattheson's encyclopedic *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg 1739), provides clues. In his chapter entitled „Vom Nachdruck in der Melodie" (On emphasis in the melody, II, 8), Mattheson makes a distinction between the syllabic accent of an individual word and the device he calls „emphasis" (Nachdruck). He defines the latter as a special musical treatment used to draw attention to a significant poetic image or concept:

> [... We] must show briefly how true emphasis is to be distinguished from accent. Here accent only means unusual sound on one syllable of a word [i.e. the stress placed on a single syllable in pronunciation]; for we have seen that in modulation an *embellishment or ornament is demanded* [...]. The mentioned distinction then consists primarily in the following characteristics. First of all the emphasis always falls on an *entire word*, not according to the sound of it but *according to the meaning contained therein;* whereas the accent only deals merely with the syllables, namely with their length, brevity, raising or lowering in punctuation [...]. [T]he aim of accent is only the pronunciation; emphasis on the other hand so to speak points toward the emotion, and illuminates the sense or meaning of the performance [II, 8, §6, 7, 8, 10].[15]

This passage illuminates text-setting techniques of the early 18th century in a variety of ways. Mattheson suggests a double link between poetry and embellishment: first, word accent requires the inflection of an ornamental gesture; and second, an important poetic image chosen for emphasis will necessitate a

[15] „Ehe wir aber ein iedes Stück ins besondre vor uns nehmen, muß mit wenigen gewiesen werden, welcher Gestalt die eigentliche Emphasis von dem Accent zu unterscheiden sey. Hier bedeutet der Accent nur den ausnehmenden Laut der Sylbe eines Worts; da wir hergegen oben gesehen haben, daß er in der Modulatorie einen Zierrath oder eine Manier vorschreibet. [...] Erwehnter Unterschied bestehet demnach vornehmlich in folgenden Eigenschafften. Erstlich fällt die Emphasis immer auf ein gantzes Wort, nicht nach dem Klange desselben, sondern nach dem darin enthaltenen Bilde des Verstandes; der Accent hergegen hat nur mit blossen Sylben, nehmlich mit deren Länge, Kürtze, Erhebung oder Erniedrigung im Aussprechen zu schaffen. [...] Dritens richtet der Accent seine Absicht bloß auf die Aussprache; die Emphasis hergegen zeiget gleichsam mit Fingern auf die Gemüths-Neigung, und beleuchtet den Sinn oder Verstand des Vortrages". English citations of Mattheson's work refer to *Johann Mattheson's Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, tr. Ernest C. Harriss, Ann Arbor 1981.

special musical response as well.[16] Mattheson is very specific about the musical effects appropriate to each of these situations in the text:

> The general rule one has to observe with the accent is this: *that the note belonging to it must be long or prominent.* It is to be observed here that emphasis is not restricted to this; but occurs also on short and passing notes, if they otherwise have something prominent about them [II, 8, §17].[17]

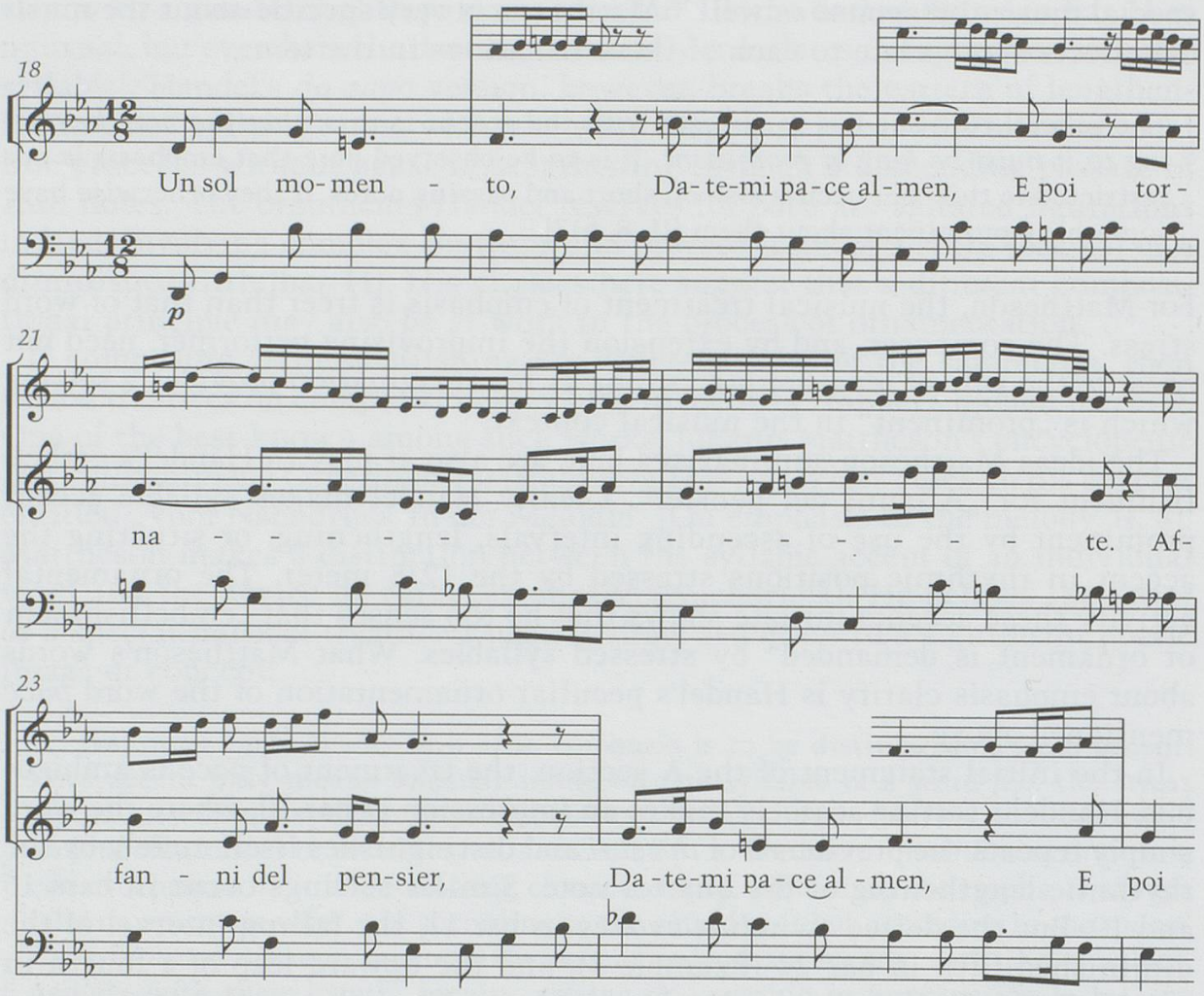
For Mattheson, the musical treatment of emphasis is freer than that of word stress. The composer, and by extension the improvising performer, need not observe the rule of lengthening as long as his imagination provides a setting which is „prominent" in the musical context.

The ideas Mattheson summarizes here are also at play in Handel's embellishment for „Affanni del pensier". Clearly Handel makes syllable accent prominent by the use of ascending intervals, lengthening, or situating the accent in rhythmic positions stressed by the 12/8 meter. The ornamental activity these accents initiate shows that he too senses that „embellishment or ornament is demanded" by stressed syllables. What Mattheson's words about emphasis clarify is Handel's peculiar ornamentation of the word *pace* mentioned above.

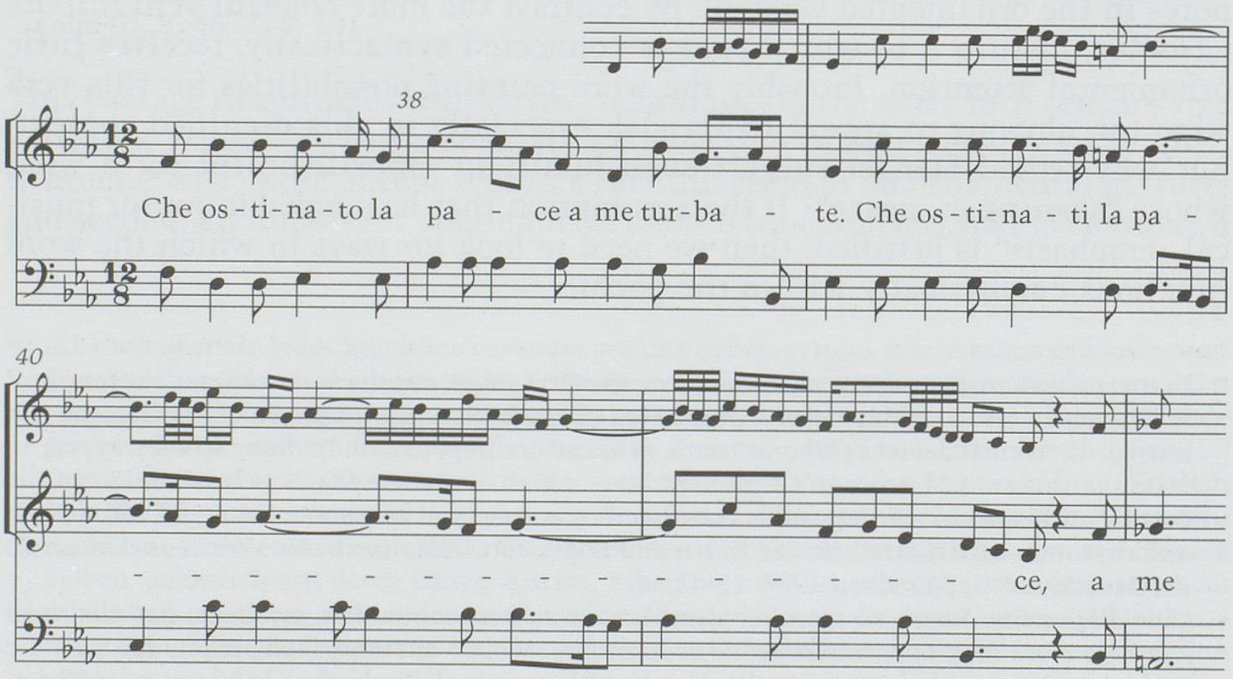
In the initial statement of the A section, the treatment of *pace* is ambiguous. Handel's setting scarcely makes an impression at bar 10, where the word simply repeats the previous F of *datemi* and distinguishes itself merely by the rhythmic lengthening of the quarter note. Similar settings occur in bars 16 and 19. But the dotted twitch it evokes in bar 11, the falling interval of the diminished fifth in bar 24 (Example 3), and the upward leap of a fourth in bar 38 (Example 4) are hints that Handel has conferred a special status upon the word *pace*. Indeed at bar 39 it finally erupts into a lengthy melisma (33 notes in the ornamented version). By contrast the more colorful verb *turbate* („trouble, disturb"), to which *pace* is connected syntactically, receives little ornamental attention. Probably the word-painting possibilities for this verb were too obvious to appeal to Handel, especially in this dignified context. But why would Handel suggest such luxuriant embellishment for a word whose meaning is „peace"? If the assumption that he singled it out for musical „emphasis" is justified, then we need to look for ways in which the word functions emphatically within the poem.

[16] In their six-volume study of ornamentation, the Otts single out the same chapter but interpret it differently, treating Mattheson's discussion of emphasis as an extension of his discourse on musico-rhetorical devices *(Figuren)* such as *anaphora* (repetition). In doing so they appear to miss the thrust of Mattheson's argument here, which is that emphasis is located within the *text* by ontological meaning and is translated by a variety of musical means, including pitch and rhythmic differentiation. See Karin and Eugen Ott, *Handbuch der Verzierungskunst in der Musik*, vol. 1, München 1997, 41–42.

[17] „Die allgemeine Regel, so man bey dem Accent zu beobachten hat, ist diese: *daß die dazu gehörige Note lang oder anschlagend seyn müsse.* Wobey anzumercken stehet, daß sich die Emphasis daran nicht bindet; sondern auch auf kurtze und durchgehende Noten statt findet, wenn sie sonst nur was ausnehmendes haben".



Ex 3: Handel, „Affani del pensier", bars 18–24.



Ex. 4: Handel, „Affani del pensier", bars 37–41.

The clues may lie in the dramatic situation and the words which conceptually frame it. In her emotional turmoil, Teofane appeals to her tormenting thoughts for the respite of „peace". Nevertheless she calls them „relentless" in the aria's B section, indicating that they do not seem inclined to grant her desire. In this tense interplay between hope and fatalism, Handel has a different function in mind for that verb *turbate* from the despairing B section. Rather than exploiting its madrigalistic potential, he uses the word as a double link between the sections. Syntactically tied to its A-section subject *affanni*, it also connects its own direct object *pace* to the A-section verb *tornate* („return") by means of end rhyme. This simple scheme by which the sections make reference to each other can be represented in the following way:

	A section	B section
(Subject)	Affanni ...	[Affanni...]
(Direct Object)	date *pace*, e	la *pace*
(Verb)	*tornate.*	*turbate.*

Handel makes the connection between *pace* and *tornate* musically explicit: in bars 20–22 of the *da capo*, he embellishes the latter with its own melisma of 44 (!) notes.

Handel's decision to treat only these two words to extended melismatic settings suggests that he intends to project them as paired „emphases" in Mattheson's sense of the term. If so, the apparently deliberate link is tinged with tragic irony. The simple A-section settings of *pace* might seem to symbolize a brief respite from Teofane's woes; the textural contrast with the *tornate* melisma of bars 20–21 appears to confirm this impression. So far, we have what the words tells us we might expect: relief for Teofane, followed by a renewed engagement with her trials further down the line. But it is the *pace* of the elaborate B-section setting in bars 32–41 – not that of the A section – which carries greater rhetorical weight. It refers the listener by virtue of its very melisma back to the melismatic „return" of the tormenting thoughts in the A section.

Seen from another perspective, Handel underscores this relationship by using the initial long *tornate* melisma of the A section to anticipate the surprising melismatic setting of the B-section *pace*. He seems to be signalling to the listener that Teofane has little prospect of finding peace, even for a moment. There is a compelling sense of doom which the „emphatic" linking of these two words casts over both sections of the aria. The metaphorical carrier of Teofane's unhappy fortunes, the melisma, spreads from the A through the B section and returns to invade the *da capo* through Handel's additional small-note free ornamentation of the reprise. The A-section and *da capo* figurations on *tornate* literally surround the effusively embellished *pace* of the B section. Peace is held captive through the use of the melisma device. In such an environment, the „return" of the tormenting thoughts and their corrosive effect upon Teofane's fate become a foregone conclusion.

Handel's choice of the word *pace* for musical emphasis, then, explains its unique treatment in the aria – simple and unobtrusive at first, then super-

charged with ornament. In his *da capo* embellishments Handel not only highlights but thwarts „peace", both rhythmically and melodically. The contrast between the ontological meaning of *pace* and the metaphorical impact of its restless figuration could hardly represent Teofane's blighted hopes more strikingly. The passion of despair which informs this lugubrious *siciliana*, the emblematic representation of that passion by the „emphatic" word *pace* and its antithesis *tornate*, and the supportive superstructure of embellishments which signal these key images rhetorically, here fuse into a superbly-crafted, multilayered whole.

If singers take a closer look today at early-18th-century assumptions about text inflection in Italian vocal music, there is no reason they cannot accomplish what Handel achieved so brilliantly in this richly ornamented aria. What many may be avoiding as the turgid symptoms of ornamental overindulgence may be reconstrued as a system for projecting, rather than obscuring, both the structure of a Baroque verse and the emblems of the affect behind it. Free ornamentation need not be „mere empty flourishes" after all, to quote the Otts,[18] although it may have earned a bad reputation in the theoretical literature because of the temptation to use it for empty showmanship.

From this perspective, it is easier to see why an observer like Grosley would associate improvised ornamentation with the „expression" of the aria. Even more significant is that all-knowing „Italian ear" of the 18th-century opera connoisseur. It understood the success or failure of each ornament as an expressive tool because Italian audiences were familiar not only with the „language" of operatic music, but with the language of the text (and the structure of its verse) which the ornamented music inflected. „Whoever cannot speak is even less able to sing", writes Mattheson:[19] a skilled musician must be acquainted with the grammatical *and* rhetorical structures of both language and music. This comment emerges from a chapter in which Mattheson exhorts composers to gain a thorough knowledge of languages and their prosody in order to avoid producing mere „beautiful rubbish" [II, 2, §13]. As we undertake to ornament an early 18th-century *da capo* aria, we should bear in mind Mattheson's implication that the poem must be declaimed properly – for poetry is speech in Baroque opera – before it can be sung effectively.

There is evidence that Italian singers of the Baroque period may have understood the importance of this responsibility. The castrato Giovanni Andrea Bontempi's famous account of the daily training schedule for Virgilio Mazzocchi's pupils at the Capella Giulia suggests that by the 1640s, literature was central to a singing student's course of study.[20] Mazzocchi, who trained singers

[18] „[...] nicht nur leeres Floskelwerk". See Karin and Eugen Ott, *Handbuch der Verzierungskunst*, 45.

[19] Mattheson/Harriss, *Johann Mattheson's „Der vollkommene Capellmeister"*, 254. Mattheson's original is: „Wer nicht sprechen kan, der kan noch vielweniger singen" [II, 2, §29].

[20] Giovanni Andrea Angelini Bontempi, *Historia musica*, Perugia 1695, 170. An English translation of the Bontempi passage may be found in Lorenzo Bianconi, *Music in the seventeenth century*, tr. David Bryant, Cambridge 1987, 61.

for the papal choirs (many of whom also sang in the operas of the Barberini popes), structured morning study around the practice of singing – including embellishment – while afternoons were devoted mostly to theoretical precepts and composing. But both morning and afternoon, pupils received an hour of instruction in letters. At work here is what I take to be the typically Baroque musical culture of grounding the composition and performance of text-based music in a thorough knowledge of literature, including rhetoric. Today, with the operas of Handel and his contemporaries firmly established on the playbills of the world's opera houses, it is time to rethink the place of literary studies in our historical performance curricula. They are essential to the effective performance of the *aria da capo*.