

Interconnecting Music and the Literary Word

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Edited by

Fausto Ciompi, Roberta Ferrari
and Laura Giovannelli

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PREFACE

INTERCONNECTING MUSIC AND WORDS

FAUSTO CIOMPI, ROBERTA FERRARI
AND LAURA GIOVANNELLI

This volume consists of a refined and enriched selection of the papers presented by a group of Italian and international academics, researchers, and independent scholars at the XI International Conference organised by the “Michel de Montaigne” Foundation (Bagni di Lucca, Italy) in collaboration with Pisa University lecturers and with Tony Bareham, from the New University of Ulster. The conference was held in Bagni di Lucca from 9 to 11 September 2016 and was entitled “‘Sphere-Born Harmonious Sisters, Voice and Verse’: The Interconnections Between Music and the Written Word.” The quotation in the title is a modern English equivalent of the second line of John Milton’s “At a Solemn Musick” (“Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heav’ns joy, / Sphear-born harmonious Sisters, Voice, and Vers”),¹ a poem which endeavours to celebrate the heightening power of sacred music and to envisage a marriage between the “divine sounds” of song (Voice) and poetry (Verse). These celestial harmonies seem to touch the very soul of the sensitive listener and hopefully lead him back towards a blessed prelapsarian state, where he is finally released from the bondage of earthly dissonance (and sin) and might feel again “in tune with Heav’n,” immersed in the “perfect Diapason”² of Eternal Life. Such echoes were meant to yield a firm point of departure to our conference, starting from the generally accepted (and traditional) idea of a “sisterhood” existing between musical melodies or harmonies and the evocative, ecstatic effects conveyed by poetic sounds and rhythms.

¹ John Milton, “At a Solemn Musick,” in *The Shorter English Poems*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson, vol. 1 of *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 27.

² Milton, “At a Solemn Musick,” 28.

Mapping the theoretical terrain

John Milton's lines trace back to a long tradition that, at least from Horace onwards, has focused on the interrelations among the arts on the basic assumption that "there are some universal aesthetic principles which must apply equally to all the arts, no matter how different the individual media and traditions may be."³ In the wake of the 18th-century critical and theoretical impulse, this kind of comparative analyses became, as Calvin Brown acknowledges, "a recognized field of study,"⁴ thanks to such seminal contributions as Jean-Baptiste Du Bos's and G.E. Lessing's.⁵ Music and poetry also provided a particularly fertile area of investigation for the musicians and poets of the following century, when the reflection on the interconnections between sound and verse was reinvigorated by the Romantic *Streben* towards a synthesis of all arts.

However, the urge for a more systematic approach to the study of the complex phenomenology of music-and-words interconnections only imposed itself to critical attention in the second half of the 20th century, when a broad interdisciplinary debate came into focus, and various attempts were made at supplying a theoretical framework within which the large spectrum of these intersections could find some sort of formalisation. In his pioneering work, Calvin S. Brown conducted a preliminary survey of the field with the intention to open up new territory for critical exploration. In his 1948 volume, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts*,⁶ Brown first showed the basic elements out of which literature (namely poetry) and music are respectively constructed. He then went on with examining their relationship in a wide range of examples, from "vocal music" and opera to the iconic imitation of sounds in poetry and the use of *Leitmotiv* in fiction. His groundbreaking work, however, was to remain quite isolated: in 1970, Brown himself still lamented that the relationship between music and literature had yet to be accepted as an independent discipline, and tried to advocate a stronger engagement in what he considered a most important branch of comparative studies.

Brown's 1970 essay, "The Relations between Music and Literature," appeared in a special number of *Comparative Literature* which also

³ Calvin S. Brown, "The Relations between Music and Literature," *Comparative Literature* 22: 2 (1970): 98.

⁴ Brown, "Relations," 99.

⁵ The Abbé Du Bos published his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* in 1715, while Lessing's *Laokoon* appeared in 1766.

⁶ Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1948).

featured a seminal contribution by Steven Paul Scher, “Notes Toward a Theory of Verbal Music.”⁷ Scher had already developed his typology of musico-literary relations and phenomena in *Verbal Music in German Literature*,⁸ where he had identified the three broadly defined areas of “music in literature,” “music and literature,” and “literature in music.” These still represent profitable working categories in the field of melopoetics;⁹ in particular, Scher’s studies marked the first organic attempt at a classification of the different typologies of musico-literary interconnections, thus paving the way for a whole generation of scholars who were to gain further insights in specific forms of intermediality and interart relationships. For instance, Scher’s three aspects of musicalisation (word music, verbal music, and structural analogues) constitute the starting point of Werner Wolf’s discussion in *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*,¹⁰ where a theory of the thematisation (at the story level) and imitation (by means of linguistic devices and literary techniques) of music in fiction is illustrated through a historical *excursus* from the 18th-century to contemporary prose narrative.¹¹ Wolf’s concept of the “musicalization of literature” refers to

a presence of music in the signification of a text which seems to stem from some kind of transformation of music into literature. The verbal text appears to be or become, to a certain extent, similar to music or to effects connected with certain compositions, and we get the impression of experiencing music “through” the text.¹²

⁷ Steven Paul Scher, “Notes Toward a Theory of Verbal Music,” *Comparative Literature* 22:2 (1970): 147-56.

⁸ Steven Paul Scher, *Verbal Music in German Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

⁹ The term was coined by Lawrence Kramer in “Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism,” *19th-Century Music* 13 (1989): 159-67. Terminological discussion has been a lively part of the debate, as witnessed by Scher’s and Wolf’s contributions to the seminal volume *Word and Music Studies: Defining the Field*, ed. Walter Bernhart, Steven Paul Scher, and Werner Wolf (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), although nowadays the label “Word and Music Studies” seems to be widely established.

¹⁰ Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 1999).

¹¹ Wolf has further developed his theory within the context of intermediality studies. See for instance his “Literature and Music: Theory,” in *Handbook of Intermediality*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 459-74.

¹² Wolf, *Musicalization of Fiction*, 51.

Thus, since the 1980s, the so-called “Word and Music Studies” have steadily developed and may now be said to embody a well defined field of scholarly investigation for both musicologists and literary theorists and critics, who find constant stimuli at the crossroads of their disciplines. At the same time, a very fertile outcrop of studies on musico-literary intersections in specific literary genres—especially prose narrative—has brought attention on an impressive range of contemporary works in which music plays an unquestionably pivotal role.¹³ As Gerry Smyth observed with reference to British literature and, primarily, fiction-writing and its incorporation of music, “music has grown in significance within contemporary British fiction” and “there are now many more interesting and sophisticated ways to talk about the role and representation of music in the novel.”¹⁴ In other terms, aural cartographies may no longer be considered as isolated or neutral adjuncts, and the same can be said of textual descriptions of performers, musicians, and music lovers.

Against this lively theoretical and creative background, the general goal of the conference was to draw a ramified trajectory bringing into focus an array of analytical and interpretative approaches connected with transcoding experiments, intermedial or multimedia studies, but also with cultural-musicological premises and different kinds of “auditory knowledge.” Along these lines, attention was paid to new categories and sonic effects which exceed the domain of formalist paradigms as well as the purist ideas of music’s non-referentiality and, correspondingly, of “absolute” poetry.

Nowadays, the interest in a variety of performing and listening practices and in the meaningfulness of musical discourse, along with popular music studies, ethnomusicology and the insights into acoustic environments and soundscapes, testify to a growing multidisciplinary perspective which sees music as a pivotal agent within signifying and communication processes. Over the last few decades, an avenue was certainly opened for this perspective by a wide-ranging cultural turn which is still in progress. As Richard Middleton observed not too long ago, it is

hard to delineate with precision all that these various trajectories have in common, beyond a position against pure musical autonomy [...] the new

¹³ See Alex Aronson, *Music and the Novel* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980); Stephen Benson, *Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Gerry Smyth, *Music in Contemporary British Fiction: Listening to the Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Erich Hertz and Jeffrey Roessner, eds., *Write in Tune: Contemporary Music in Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹⁴ Smyth, *Listening to the Novel*, 2.

approaches all stand for the proposition that *culture matters*, and that therefore any attempts to study music without situating it culturally are illegitimate (and probably self-interested).¹⁵

On the other hand, less than fifteen years earlier Lawrence Kramer had found himself adopting apologetic tones when claiming that the subject of his *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* was “the much-disputed idea that music means something, or better yet, something we can talk about.”¹⁶ This clearly suggests how in a relatively short span of time the notion of music’s discursive construction has gathered momentum, while also veering away from the elitism of “highbrow” positions and exclusionary value judgments, not to mention the demise of the traditional categories concerning “serious” and “popular” music. Briefly stated, the possibility for (and capability of) music to turn into a generator of identity and a culturally embedded practice is one of the issues standing at the forefront of contemporary thinking.

A commonly shared view points to the fact that the relevance of socio-political frames and constructs is bound to emerge as soon as one considers when, where, and by whom music is created and received, the channels through which it circulates and the contexts it addresses or revives.¹⁷ Music is thus shown to be closely related to the social sphere and its contingent factors, be they politically, ethnically, or gender-

¹⁵ Richard Middleton, “Music Studies and the Idea of Culture,” in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 2-3.

¹⁶ Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), xi. In a more recent study, Kramer took pains to strike a balance between the hermeneutic categories of “autonomy” vs “contingency,” of music’s semiotic purism vs its engagement with the world; see *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁷ In retrospect, it should be acknowledged that some well-researched outlines of the first stages announcing a shifting away from the paradigm of aesthetic self-referentiality within the arts and humanities field had already appeared in the 1980s. Among them stands *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). While conceding that music still seemed to be the “only one of the arts that has remained largely untouched by such redefinitions of method and subject matter” (introduction, xii), Leppert, McClary and the authors of the essays collected in the volume carefully recorded a change in attitude which did problematise the so far unquestioned reliance on positivism and formalism in this academic discipline. Not surprisingly, the so-called (culturally-orientated) “New Musicology” is to be traced back to the 1980s.

informed. By its partaking in the cultural web, it becomes central “to our understanding of ourselves.”¹⁸

Matters for discussion involve the potential of music, songs, and dance to bring into existence a set of human relationships and boost modes of participation and interaction. Naturally enough, debates also concentrate on how mediation, distribution, and consumption may develop, and they consequently provide a window on the music industry’s broadcasting and economic policy, alongside the “performance space” to which practitioners and various institutional bodies have access.

In this regard, it is worth underlining that in *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Christopher Small significantly distinguished between “music”—a noun conjuring up the self-contained syntax of an abstract and finished art object—and “musicking,” the present participle of a half-forgotten verb evoking a collective and fully contextualised action. In other words, musicking refers to an activity that finds its locus in a seamless and synergic network, in a multiple articulation of meaning to which composers, performers, listeners and any other participants are all called upon to contribute. Grounded in history and society, musicking is an “event” that transcends any score’s coded instructions and is eventually enhanced by such components as interpretation, improvisation, and the channeling of emotions. It acquires political as well as ritualistic connotations and implies taking part, “in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance [...], or by dancing.”¹⁹

In sum, it seems safe to argue that in our time the extent to which music concurs with a politics of participation and fosters social relatedness, identity formation and critical responses (including ideological/political movements), has been systematically analysed in connection with national cartographies²⁰

¹⁸ Leppert and McClary, introduction to *Music and Society*, xix.

¹⁹ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

²⁰ See, for instance, Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), who begins his survey by claiming that “musical participation and experience are valuable for the processes of personal and social integration that make us whole” (1). Taking a lead from U.S. realities, Turino proceeds to conceptualise “music making” in relation to four fields of artistic practice, namely real time performance—where he distinguishes between “participatory” and “presentational” music making—and recorded music, comprising “high fidelity” recordings, which are meant to index or be iconic of live performance, and “studio audio art,” where sounds are created in a studio or on a computer.

and a global, post-9/11 scenario.²¹

This is not to say, however, that the boundaries of Music Studies are definitively settled. In 2016, to cite one salient example, new ground was broken by *Music's Immanent Future: The Deleuzian Turn in Music Studies*, a challenging collection of essays carrying out a multiple-perspective and, as it were, “meta-musical” examination of contemporary research models and practices, both within and outside the academy (e.g., digital technologies and electro-acoustic music). This study crucially draws on Gilles Deleuze’s immanent philosophy principles and anatomises a generative network of relations in our socio-cultural body where “music” can be perceived and thought of as a fluid phenomenon. Such a phenomenon is said to be better understood through the lens of its here-and-now state of becoming, rather than according to the (19th-century German) categories of the “timeless” and “universal.” In this book, music comes into view as a multi-mediated, immanent process which propagates through innumerable folds, embracing “multimodal” listening and a rhizomatic circuitry of instruments, means of production, and sonic environments. To borrow Judy Lochhead’s words,

[d]ifference, materiality and becoming stand at the heart of the ontological questions that flow from Deleuzian philosophy. These concepts open up fruitful pathways into thinking about music because they set out ways to approach music as participatory activity [...] the insistence on becoming leads us to recognise musical works as dynamic events arising from [a] complex network of interactions between the materials of sounding, listening, creating and performing.²²

²¹ In *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, ed. Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), an in-depth study is offered of a post-2001 transnational context where performing music involves a clear attempt to face up and react to systemic violence in the wake of 9/11. These performances succeed in opening a discursive space, in giving iconic shape to sympathetic vibrations and commemorating the spirit of a (Western) unified community. However, their ethos of protest can also incorporate new forms of conservative activism and censorship, of consensus-building and subliminal ideological pressure (e.g., by stressing pathological fears or polarising attitudes) beyond an ecumenical dialogue.

²² Judy Lochhead, “Musical Becomings,” in *Music's Immanent Future: The Deleuzian Turn in Music Studies*, ed. Sally Macarthur, Judy Lochhead, and Jennifer Shaw (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 205.

Tracing the volume's reference points

The distinguishing traits of this collection of essays are to be found in its far-flung dialogic frame, diversified genre and epistemic crossings, and broad time spans. Neither a manifesto for a new school, nor the conceptualised expression of a single theory, this volume virtually posits itself as a meeting ground and a forum for discussion on the state of the art. While trying to find a happy medium between variety and synthesis, a methodological reservoir and a unifying rubric, all our case studies deal with British, American, Anglophone or Italian areas, thus testifying to the presence of a geographical and philological *fil rouge*.

Part I, “Music and/in Literature: Contexts, Interconnections, and Models,” includes five chapters in which music emerges as a driving force, an ingredient woven into the discursive fabric of the literary work as a psycho-emotional catalyser, or a thematised subject of meditation and discussion. The authors also think through the music-literature nexus by specifically engaging the (melodic) sound-word dyad, as well as various phenomena of hybridisation and borrowing. The section opens with an essay by Stefano Ragni, “La Parola Musicale: La Lingua Italiana e la Musica. La Prospettiva Critica di Charles Burney” (“The Musical Word: The Italian Language and Music. Charles Burney’s Critical View”), which works as a sort of prelude on the pregnant and much debated question of the relationship between music and words. Starting from Charles Burney’s discussion of Italian as *the* language of music, Ragni offers a wide-ranging *excursus* in the history of Italian music in England during the early 18th century, touching upon some crucial cultural issues connected with the procedures of art production and fruition. In “‘Moody Food’: Shakespeare and Song,” Christopher Stace considers the references to and the uses of music in some of Shakespeare’s plays (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest*). Besides examining the different types of song Shakespeare employs and the special qualities of his memorable lyrics, the essay investigates the variety of dramatic uses and effects to which songs are put in the plays, trying to discern a development of technique in the playwright’s *oeuvre*. Paolo Bugliani’s “‘Earless Elia, Unmelodic Charles’: Melic Bathos in Charles Lamb’s ‘A Chapter on Ears’” ponders instead the ironic ways in which Charles Lamb, via his essayistic heteronym “Elia,” turns music into a topic for debate through the perspective of somebody who paradoxically describes himself as “having no ear” and as being “organically incapable of a tune.” In his analysis of Lamb’s textual strategies and literary models, Bugliani postulates that the author suggested experiencing music by

concentrating more on the mundane and bodily edge of it than on its sublime and spiritualising effects: that is to say, by considering the prosaic, worldly features of music as opposed to its romantically poetic potential. In “‘Mememormee!’: James Joyce and Michael William Balfe,” Elisabetta d’Erme sketches out the life and works of 19th-century Anglo-Irish composer M.W. Balfe and meditates on the influences that his operas and songs exercised on James Joyce, who manifestly recalled, transformed, and interwove them in multiple ways in *Dubliners*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*. In the last chapter of this first part, Roberta Ferrari’s “‘Sweet, and Sweeter Still’: The Role of Music in Ian McEwan’s Fiction,” McEwan’s partiality for music provides the starting point of a journey intended to explore the rich phenomenology of the word-music interaction in his literary production up to *The Children Act* (2014). Music enters McEwan’s creations in a variety of ways, affecting the form and style, as well as the content of his stories, where the universal language of music, its capability of transcending the intrinsic finiteness of individuals and of the world, qualify it as an alternative, privileged means to tackle the epistemological and ethical issues that lie at the core of the author’s poetics.

Part II, “Music in Literature: Cultural and Performing Policies,” comprises seven chapters which focus on the role of performers, composers, and singer-songwriters; on representation strategies, music(al)ity and singing in the light of cultural and gender policies; on ethno-social, national, and post-national concerns. Shirley Foster’s “‘Finding a Voice’: Women Singers in the 19th- and Early 20th-Century Novel” opens a window onto gender issues through a survey of the oscillating and mixed attitude towards the woman singer, especially in the Victorian age, when music was both seen as an appropriate arena for women’s self-expression and warded off whenever it threatened to disturb the image of feminine modesty and self-effacement. When ushering the performer into the public sphere, music risked exposing women artists to conditions and circumstances that might be at odds with gender expectations. Foster proceeds to comment on the politics of representation of the female musician as paradigmatic of a wider consideration of gender roles in a choice of novels by Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Roberts, George Eliot, George du Maurier, and Willa Cather. Pierpaolo Martino’s “Oscar Wilde and the Language of Music” maps out a rich territory encompassing Wilde’s knowledge and love of music, the references to music and presence of musical structures in some of his major works, the musicality of his verses, aphorisms, and even of his own voice, as reported by many contemporaries. Martino’s attention then shifts to Wilde’s commitment to

the idea of performance in art and life, a fascinating phenomenon that has attracted many 20th- and 21st-century artists—such as David Bowie, Gavin Friday, and Morrissey—who were to set Wilde’s verses to music and write songs inspired by the Irish dandy’s challenging personality and critique of the establishment. In “Janet Ross’s ‘Love of Italian Peasant Songs’: Tuscan Folk Songs and the Victorians,” Claudia Capancioni assesses Janet Ann Ross’s pioneering role for the conservation of the Tuscan peasantry’s cultural heritage, especially a *corpus* of traditional and local songs like *stornelli* and *rispetti*. An English historian and biographer, Ross spent much of her life at the Villa di Poggio Gherardo, outside Florence, as the owner and manager of the estate and its attached farms. She therefore had a direct interaction with the Tuscan farming community and, in the crucial context of the Risorgimento’s nation-building project, realised how important it was to hand down in writing that countryside lore. In works such as *Italian Sketches* and *Canti d’Italia*, she contributed to the canonisation of rural and folkloric traditions via detailed records, transcriptions, and translations. Elena Porciani’s contribution, “‘From A for ABBA to Z for ZZ Top’: Studying the Theme of Popular Music in Contemporary Fiction,” also focuses on popular music but in a completely different chronological perspective: that of the 20th-century rock and pop movements, considered in the context of contemporary mass culture and, in particular, in their relation with fiction. The reverberations of technological evolution on the development of popular music are duly commented on, along with the socio-political effects on several generations of music producers and receivers. Don DeLillo’s *Great Jones Street*, a brilliant novel which teems with opaque references to Bob Dylan’s vicissitudes, is singled out as the postmodernist masterpiece of fiction on musical heroes and on the dark side of the rock star’s soul. A wide typology of pop and rock quotations in contemporary narratives, from Salman Rushdie’s to Bret Easton Ellis’s, is also provided and discussed. In “‘Would Be a Lonesome Old Sail Without a Song’: Popular Music in Postcolonial Literature,” Silvia Albertazzi begins her reflections with a careful portrayal of Leonard Cohen and soon gears our perception to the idea that songs can turn into a huge agent of consciousness-raising and cultural development. The lyrics in pop, rock, rhythm and blues, and folk songs may consequently acquire a significant literary and semiotic value. Albertazzi verifies how English-speaking postcolonial writers enhance these songs within their works, both as a theme and at a linguistic and structural level, from Salman Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Roddy Doyle’s *The Commitments* to Richard Flanagan’s *Death of a River Guide* and Ariel Dorfman’s *The Nanny and the Iceberg*, where

music becomes inextricably intertwined with the unfolding of the story and a political background. Laura Giovannelli's "Olive Senior's *Dancing Lessons: On the Rhythm and Flow of Life*" takes a further look at a postcolonial panorama from the angle of an ethnic and personal identity-construction process. In this Jamaican writer's 2011 debut novel, 20th- and 21st-century music (with jazz in the front line) constitutes a sort of soundtrack accompanying the human and epistemic growth of Gertrude Richards Samphire. An elderly and displaced Caribbean woman, Gertrude manages to interweave her recollections of a traumatic past with the events and relationships established in the present, in a fluid palimpsest where life's hard lessons are positively assimilated to the vital rhythm and sensual flow of a dance, finally allowing her to experience a sense of belonging and feel "the groove bounce through me." Fausto Ciompi's "Peter Ackroyd's *English Music: The Case for Postmodernist Reconstructionism*" places Ackroyd's view of English tradition, as it emerges in his 1992 novel, within the context of a cultural nationalism which rejects "necrofiction," that is to say, the idea that the legacy of the past essentially amounts to dead debris, as well as globalised homogenisation. Through a wide range of musical references and metaphors, Ackroyd paradoxically argues for the recognition and consolidation of the English identity by using the same instruments as the critical deconstructors of the national heritage.

Part III, "Literature and/in Sounds: Intermedial Encounters," consists of three chapters which respectively devote attention to one illuminating case of "literature in music" and to an intermedial interest in iconic analogies, the materiality of sounds, the "economy of noises" and linguistic / structural "arrangements" meant to imitate music. In "What Mick Jagger Learned from John Milton: The Cool Devil from the 1660s to the 1960s," Evan LaBuzetta convincingly demonstrates that the origins of Mick Jagger's "cool" devil in the 1960s are to be traced back to Milton's Satan. The 17th-century poet's radical transformation of the devil in *Paradise Lost* entailed such a deepening of Satan's psychological traits that the figure came to be astonishingly re-evaluated, pitied, empathised with, praised, mimicked, and even danced alongside. In "The Dark Side of the 'Universal Lyre': Sonic Wastelands and Off-Key Tunes in Angloamerican Literature, with Two Case Studies," Alessandra Calanchi explores the acoustic domain that, in the 1970s, Canadian composer and writer Raymond Murray Schafer called "soundscape." Calanchi familiarises the reader with Soundscape Studies through a bird's eye view that juxtaposes the holistic-ecological vision of Walt Whitman and H.D. Thoreau with a darker aspect of American culture: a discordant and dissonant "score" packed with disquieting sounds and sonic media which

fail to harmonise within the common project of a glorious America tuned to a “universal lyre.” The two case studies taken into consideration are H.P. Lovecraft’s short story “The Music of Erich Zann” (1922) and Orson Welles’s radio drama *The War of the Worlds* (1938). Further insights are offered by Francesco Gozzi in “An Experiment in the Musicalisation of Fiction: Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point*,” where he delves into the musico-textual dimension with reference to the novel that in 1928 spelled out the key phrase “musicalisation of fiction.” Huxley carries out an experiment in the use of musical counterpoint as a model for a textual structuring underpinned by two basic procedures. The first intersemiotic rendering consists in the systematic introduction of paradigmatic contrasts between contiguous chapters, scenes, and episodes. The second mode devises the widest possible range of variations and combinations of a few basic themes (love, art, family, and society). Thus Gozzi implicitly shows that, as this book attempts to clarify, both literature and music are continuously and mutually invested in a dialogic redefinition of their communicative and historical functions. In the present world context, sister arts may continue to have a cultural currency only if they keep the conversation of the West alive and willing to recognise the varied music of the globe, as well as of the spheres.

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PART I

MUSIC AND/IN LITERATURE: CONTEXTS, INTERCONNECTIONS, AND MODELS

CHAPTER ONE

LA PAROLA MUSICALE: LA LINGUA ITALIANA E LA MUSICA. LA PROSPETTIVA CRITICA DI CHARLES BURNEY

STEFANO RAGNI

[...] l'italiano suonava armonioso, delicato, dolce, elegante, fluido, gentile, seducente: una lingua corrotta e corrompente, femminile e fatta per l'amore, musicale e nata per la musica.¹

Ogni indagine sulla perfetta funzionalità della lingua italiana al rivestimento musicale dovrebbe avere come atto fondante un celebre passo della *General History of Music*. In esso il padre di tutti i musicografi europei, il suscitatore della moderna storiografia musicale, Charles Burney, stabilisce una sorta di atto costitutivo della ricerca scientifica sul rapporto suono-parola italiana:

È universalmente riconosciuto che la lingua italiana è più sonora, più dolce e di più facile pronuncia di ogni altra lingua moderna: e che la musica italiana, particolarmente quella vocale, proprio per queste ragioni, è stata coltivata con successo più di ogni altra in Europa.²

¹ Harro Stammerjohann, *La lingua degli angeli. Italianismo, italianismi e giudizi sulla lingua italiana* (Firenze: Accademia della Crusca, 2013), 269.

² L'originale si legge in Charles Burney, *A General History of Music: From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (1789)*, ed. Frank Mercer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957), 672. Questo è l'*incipit* del passo: "It is universally allowed that the Italian tongue is more sonorous, more sweet [...]."

Si noti bene: non si parla di bellezza—perché questo non sarebbe un atteggiamento scientifico—ma di funzionalità, di aderenza, di attitudine. Favorita, nei casi specifici, dalla particolare veridicità impressa dai cantanti di lingua madre:

Ora la musica vocale italiana può essere intesa nella sua perfezione solo quando sia cantata nella sua lingua e da cantanti italiani che diano sia alla lingua, che alla musica gli accenti appropriati.³

Sorprendentemente, questa affermazione così importante per la cultura musicale e per il patrimonio linguistico italiano compare, quasi incidentale, nel capitolo della *History* dedicato alla diffusione dell'opera italiana in Inghilterra.⁴ La situazione è fotografata al 1710-1711, allorché Händel era da poco sbarcato in Albione dopo i trionfi romani e veneziani:

È necessario ora riferirsi a un evento avvenuto alla fine del precedente anno, il 1710, che ha avuto grandi conseguenze sull'opera e sulla musica in generale di questo paese. È stato l'arrivo di Georg Friedrich Händel [...].⁵

In queste preziose righe di Burney si sono dunque cristallizzate alcune importanti coordinate: la musica italiana, già apprezzata dai londinesi in forma di “pasticci” come *Pirro e Demetrio* ed *Etearco*, è stata pienamente valorizzata e diffusa grazie al determinante operare di Händel.⁶

L'arrivo di Händel a Londra e il conseguente attestarsi del gusto della lingua italiana favorito dalla diffusione delle sue opere sembra rispondere ai dettami di un destino progettato e di una svolta imposta da una ferrea volontà di affermazione. Dopo essere “sceso” in Italia appena

³ Burney, *General History*, 672. Per la versione italiana del passo, si veda Vittorio Coletti, “L'italiano in Inghilterra nella musica del tedesco Händel,” in *L'italiano della musica nel mondo*, cur. Ilaria Bonomi e Vittorio Coletti (Firenze: Accademia della Crusca, 2015), 53.

⁴ Ove non si manca di affermare che, a differenza dell'illiberale Francia—dove la lingua italiana musicalizzata, nonostante gli sforzi del cardinale Mazarino, è rimasta poco più che tollerata—in Albione si sarebbe applicato un vero criterio liberale di accoglienza: “[...] the English, who tolerate all religions, have manifested not only a liberal spirit with respect to the Italian Opera, but good taste and good sense.” Burney, *General History*, 672.

⁵ Come si vede, la dizione del nome di Händel è quella inglese: “This was the arrival of George Frederic Handel.” Burney, *General History*, 672.

⁶ Si veda tutto il processo dell'attestarsi dell'opera italiana a Londra nella *General History*, nello specifico il Capitolo 6, “Origin of the Italian Opera in England, and its Progress there during the Present Century,” 651-906.

ventiduenne, animato dalla voglia di farsi conoscere, impetuoso e rapinoso come poteva essere un giovane che evadeva dalla tetra provincia tedesca, Händel tentò la carta inglese con la certezza che il bagaglio linguistico dell'impresa italiana non potesse che essere messo a frutto.

Händel aveva infatti trascorso a Roma tre anni, dal 1706 al 1709, con l'intenzione di padroneggiare l'uso della lingua italiana e dei meccanismi morfologici connessi al teatro d'opera. Così ricorda il suo primo biografo: "Aveva sentito parlare così altamente dei cantanti e dei compositori d'Italia, che pensava con insistenza a un viaggio in quel paese."⁷ La motivazione del viaggio non era tanto una permanenza in Italia, del tutto impossibile per un irriducibile luterano, ma la volontà di studiare sul campo tutto quanto concorreva a fare del teatro d'opera italiana un meccanismo perfetto, le cui conoscenze erano utilizzabili in ogni sito d'Europa. Arrogante come poteva essere un ventiduenne pieno di orgoglio e di energie, travolgente e "fascinoso" al punto da saccheggiare i favori di principi e cardinali, il musicista sassone vezzeggiò i gusti degli Ottoboni, dei Pamphili, dei Rospigliosi, dei Colonna, inondando la capitale della cristianità della sua musica "impetuosa." Al culmine del successo, il favore del cardinale Grimani gli consentì anche di concedersi un ultimo fuoco d'artificio a Venezia, con la voluttuosa *Agrippina*.⁸

Il successo delle sue imprese italiane giunse nella capitale inglese riverberato anche dai resoconti dei viaggiatori:

La fama della sua straordinaria abilità era giunta in Inghilterra assai prima di lui, e attraverso vari canali. Alcune persone lo avevano incontrato in Italia. Altre durante la sua permanenza ad Hannover. Fu ben presto introdotto a corte, e onorato da segni di favore della regina. Parecchi nobili erano impazienti di vedere un'opera da lui composta. Per soddisfare codesta brama, in quindici giorni portò a termine *Rinaldo*, la sua prima opera composta in Inghilterra. Le parole di quell'opera erano di Giacomo Rossi.⁹

⁷ John Mainwaring, *Memorie della vita del fu G.F. Händel*, cur. Lorenzo Bianconi (Torino: EdT, 1985), 27. Il reverendo John Mainwaring redasse la sua opera sulla tradizione di memorie attinte da fonti orali della cerchia händeliana. Il testo, apparso nel 1760 a Londra, aveva per titolo *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel. To Which Is Added A Catalogue of his Works and Observations upon Them*.

⁸ Vincenzo Grimani, ambasciatore imperiale al soglio papale, era dichiaratamente ostile alla politica di Clemente XI. Cfr. Stefano Ragni, *Händel in Italia*, vol. 1 di *I viaggiatori musicali nell'Italia del Settecento* (Perugia: Guerra, 1999), 43-81.

⁹ Mainwaring, *Memorie*, 39.

Assegnando al *Rinaldo* e alla genialità del suo autore i motivi del conseguente successo dell'opera italiana a Londra, Vittorio Coletti ricorda come, con questo testo drammaturgico, il musicista tedesco convinse la nobiltà, ma anche i ricchi borghesi, che l'italiano fosse diventato in breve un "prodotto di culto per grandi signori," degni ormai di godersi *the blandishments of the Italian melody*:

In quel primo scorcio di Settecento l'opera in italiano sembrava capace di imporsi sulle situazioni concorrenti. Il successo del *Rinaldo* era l'esito di quella che in termini moderni potremmo chiamare davvero una coproduzione anglo-italo-tedesca. Inglese Aaron Hill, l'autore del copione (ricavato ovviamente dalla *Gerusalemme liberata*) e impresario del teatro; italiano il librettista, Giacomo Rossi, e tedesco Händel, il prodigioso compositore da tempo perfettamente a suo agio con la lingua italiana.¹⁰

Il soggetto del *Rinaldo* veniva incredibilmente offerto da uno spirito bizzarro: Mr Hill, infatti, coltivava interessi che oscillavano tra la prosa, la cura del teatro italiano e l'estrazione dell'olio dalle ghiande di faggio. Probabilmente per lui, come per molti altri, il fascino dell'opera in italiano si mescolava col gioco, con il piacere di maneggiare un oggetto quasi esotico, con quel pizzico di spirito snobistico che non abbandonerà mai i cultori inglesi del melodramma.¹¹

Col determinante contributo di Nicolino Grimaldi, castrato in auge, col libretto scritto da Giacomo Rossi e i fastosi macchinari di Johan Jacob Heidegger, il *Rinaldo* fu un successo determinante per le vicende della lingua italiana a Londra.¹² Hill, desideroso di attirare dalla sua parte l'alta

¹⁰ Coletti, *L'italiano in Inghilterra*, 55.

¹¹ Si può ricordare come, in pieno Ottocento risorgimentale, agisse a Londra, con pieno successo, una compagine di grandi cantanti italiani che, sulle scene dell'Haymarket, tenevano viva la tradizione del melodramma in lingua. E si trattava di nomi come Giulia Grisi, Mario de Candia, Antonio Tamburini, Luigi Lablache. A loro ricorreva frequentemente Giuseppe Mazzini per i suoi spettacoli di beneficenza a favore dei bambini di emigrati italiani. Cfr. Stefano Ragni, "Giuseppe Mazzini e la chitarra: un inedito capitolo de 'La filosofia della musica'," *Gli Annali dell'Università per stranieri* (giugno 1989): 215-23.

¹² Coletti non manca di osservare come l'assunzione del modello linguistico italiano nell'opera fosse anche un'esigenza dei pragmatici londinesi di porre fine all'assurda anarchia dell'opera-pasticcio: "In verità, la svolta verso una piena assunzione dell'italiano in scena non coincise precisamente con l'arrivo di Händel, ma fu propiziata dal desiderio del pubblico più qualificato di cambiare anche queste assurdità linguistiche." Coletti, *L'italiano in Inghilterra*, 54. In tal senso va valutata la considerazione di Fassini: "Accadeva anche non di rado che, là dove il senso era fedelmente tradotto, la necessaria trasposizione di parole facesse apparire

borghesia imprenditoriale, indirizzava la sua Prefazione anche ai “Gentlemen of my Country.” Etica razionale e morale cristiana si mescolavano col senso cavalleresco a cui certamente aspirava il nuovo ceto imprenditoriale; chi poi la nobiltà ce l’aveva per nascita, la vedeva riflessa sulla scena.¹³ Il trionfo händeliano, al di là del valore della musica, offriva alla lingua italiana quella piattaforma di autorevolezza che poté consentire a Burney, che scriveva ormai a giochi fatti, di parlare di una vera e propria “lingua per la musica.”¹⁴

Per un bilancio complessivo sulla reale conoscenza della lingua italiana da parte di Händel si deve ricorrere alle testimonianze dei contemporanei, ad esempio il dottor Quint, che ricordò come l’interlocutore del musicista dovesse attendersi una conversazione in quattro lingue: il tedesco, l’inglese, l’italiano e il francese.¹⁵ Ancora Coletti commenta:

Si dovrà ricordare che Händel usava correntemente, oltre il nativo tedesco, l’italiano e l’inglese, e scriveva comunemente lettere in francese [...]. Insomma un poliglotta per il quale il tedesco era la madre lingua, l’italiano la lingua della professione, il francese la lingua della comunicazione

assurda in una lingua la musica che era naturalissima nell’altra, e spesso il più bel passaggio di un’arietta ed il più bel trillo toccava in sorte a un *therefore*, ad un *because*, ad un *of*.” Sesto Fassini, *Il melodramma italiano a Londra* (Sala Bolognese: Forni, 1979), 8. Il testo riproduce l’edizione originale del 1914. Fassini cita passi delle *Notizie letterarie ultramontane per uno de’ letterati d’Italia*, Tomo I, parte prima (Roma: Pagliarini, 1743), 124.

¹³ Reinhard Strohm, *I libretti italiani di Händel*, in Mainwaring, *Memorie*, 124-25.

¹⁴ Osserva Ilaria Bonomi: “Tra ’600 e ’800, dunque, la musica rappresenta un campo privilegiato dell’influenza culturale italiana, dotato di un prestigio più costante rispetto ad altri campi della cultura: un campo privilegiato per la conoscenza della lingua italiana, e nel quale la penetrazione dell’italiano lessicale presenta una continuità estranea all’italianismo nel suo complesso, e una maggiore concentrazione proprio nel secolo, il XVIII, della flessione dell’influsso culturale e linguistico italiano sull’inglese.” Ilaria Bonomi, “Italianismi musicali nel mondo,” in Bonomi e Coletti, *L’italiano della musica*, 19.

¹⁵ Winton Dean, *Händel* (s.l.: Ricordi-Giunti, 1987), 79. Già a metà del ’700 l’effetto dell’opera italiana sulla scena politica inglese si era comunque affievolito, disperdendo un patrimonio accumulato grazie alla musica: “l’opera italiana [...] costituisce uno stimolo all’apprendimento dell’italiano durante il XVII e il XVIII secolo e i grammatici del Settecento non perdono l’occasione per procacciarsi il favore di una nuova parte del pubblico inglese, sollecitando, nelle premesse delle loro opere, lo studio dell’italiano, utile per capire il significato delle arie [...] per apprezzare una lingua adatta al canto e, in generale, per tutti gli amanti della musica.” Lucilla Pizzoli, *Le grammatiche di italiano per gli inglesi (1550-1776): Un’analisi linguistica* (Firenze: Accademia della Crusca, 2004), 63.

internazionale e l'inglese la lingua di conversazione e, da un certo punto in poi, anche della musica (gli oratori).¹⁶

Il processo di penetrazione della musica italiana in Inghilterra, o meglio nella sua onnipotente capitale, era ovviamente iniziato in precedenza, e Händel riceveva il testimone di una staffetta apertasi almeno un ventennio prima. Il percorso di avvicinamento della lingua italiana alla costa di Dover era già stato descritto in epoca di musicologia apologetica da Sesto Fassini, che affermava:

[...] avvenne che l'opera italiana estese i suoi domini sulla lontana Albione, vi signoreggiò padrona assoluta, sorretta dal braccio poderoso di Federico Händel, dallo *snobismo* e dal fascino che anche allora i virtuosi e le virtuose del nostro paese esercitavano su quel popolo.¹⁷

Nel contesto di un paese ancora percorso dagli algidi ricordi del puritanesimo, ma ancor più linguisticamente votato al culto della parola recitata, l'irruzione dell'idioma del paese "papista" e della sua musica vocale non poteva che provocare reazioni negative.¹⁸

E tante ce ne furono quando le strutture teatrali britanniche, il "dramma recitato," la semiopera, il *masque* che aveva avuto il suo campione in Henry Purcell, vennero insidiati da questi volatili e lascivi personaggi che erano i cantanti italiani, in particolare i castrati, oggetto di "orrida" venerazione. Iniziarono dapprima sporadicamente questi cantanti, minuscoli ambasciatori di un gusto e di una nuova tendenza sonora osteggiata, ma non per questo respinta, per la forte carica di curiosità di

¹⁶ Coletti, *L'italiano in Inghilterra*, 56.

¹⁷ Fassini, *Il melodramma italiano*, 3. Il fatale destino dell'egemonia della parola italiana sulla musica scenica era già stato preconizzato nel 1685 dal drammaturgo, poeta, traduttore e librettista Dryden allorché, nella prefazione al suo *Albion and Albanus*, attestava che chiunque volesse cimentarsi nel teatro doveva tener conto delle invenzioni e delle innovazioni realizzate dagli italiani, ed era "obliged to imitate the Italians, who have not only invented, but brought to perfection, this sort of dramatick musical entertainment." John Dryden, "The Preface," in *Albion and Albanus: An Opera* (London: Tonson, 1691), ii.

¹⁸ Da Addison e Steele a Samuel Johnson e John Brown, la pubblicistica britannica si cautela verso quello che appare "the smoothest and softest running language that there is." Ilaria Bonomi, "La questione linguistico-musicale in Francia, Inghilterra e Germania," in *Il docile idioma. L'italiano lingua per musica* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1998), 93-105 (si veda soprattutto la sezione "Gli inglesi"). Nel 1695 William Wotton riconosceva che la lingua italiana è talmente musicale che "no Art can mend it."

cui si connotava. Per di più, come è stato osservato, gli inglesi avevano ormai tutto, erano onnipotenti sui mari, commerciavano col mondo, e potevano procacciarsi qualunque cosa sollecitasse la loro attenzione, senza per questo farsene influenzare più di tanto.¹⁹

L'inizio coincise forse con Giovanni Francesco Grossi, il Siface degli annali degli eunuchi celebri intravisti alla corte di Giacomo II. Siamo negli ultimi decenni del 1600 e, probabilmente grazie alle sue esibizioni, i drammi recitati si ravvivano di *Italian songs*.²⁰ Nel 1693 è attestata la presenza di una *Italian Lady* che canta ai concerti agli York Buildings. La si identifica con Margarita de l'Épine, ma il fatto è che venne apprezzata dalla principessa Anna di Danimarca, che sarà poi la regina degli anni händeliani. Nel 1699 un signor Clementine, evirato al servizio dell'Elettore di Baviera, provoca sensazione al Theatre Royal. Intanto, in processo concomitante, ma autonomo, si diffonde il gusto per le sonate violinistiche italiane, "appositamente fatte arrivare da Roma." Erano le produzioni di Arcangelo Corelli e le eseguiva il violinista Gasparo Visconti, detto "Gasparino." Non erano cantate, ma il "corellismo," che tanti frutti strumentali farà sbocciare in Inghilterra, era pur sempre un "parlare italiano" con l'arco e con le corde.²¹

Campo di azione dell'infiltrazione italiana nella metropoli londinese furono due teatri, dove si misurarono, a colpi di speculazioni economiche e di astuzie di mercato, gli agenti di una vera e propria epidemia del suono italiano. Il Theatre Royal a Drury Lane, regno di Purcell, e il Queen's Theatre a Haymarket, roccaforte degli attori drammatici, furono, nel primo decennio del Settecento, i luoghi in cui, alternativamente, le prime, embrionali opere cantate solo in parte in italiano lanciarono la loro sfida a un paese e a una cultura dominati da un raffinato teatro di parola. Impensabile, per un londinese, ascoltare un'opera cantata da cima a fondo

¹⁹ Giorgio Pestelli, "L'opera italiana in Inghilterra," in *Italiani all'estero*, vol. 2 di *Musica in scena*, cur. Alberto Basso (Torino: Utet, 1996), 69.

²⁰ Il cantante si era visto attribuire il nome "Siface" nel 1678, dopo una strabillante interpretazione del personaggio in *Scipione l'Africano* di Cavalli, a Venezia. Cfr. Patrick Barbier, *Gli evirati cantori. I castrati e la storia della musica tra '600 e '800* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1991), 82.

²¹ Geminiani, Veracini, Barsanti, Giardini, Viotti e Muzio Clementi rappresentano il progressivo sviluppo della diffusione della musica di Corelli a Londra. Per la conoscenza delle opere di Corelli a Londra, si veda Michael Talbot, "Lingua romana in bocca veneziana": Vivaldi, Corelli and the Roman School," *Studi corelliani IV: Atti del quarto congresso internazionale* (Firenze: Olschki, 1990), 305-18.

e seguire un protagonista che desse sfogo alle proprie emozioni gorgheggiando.

Eppure, di sostenitori del “recitar cantando” se ne trovarono, anche ai massimi livelli politici, a cominciare dal Lord Ciambellano, Henry Grey, conte di Kent, investito di grandi poteri sull’attività dei teatri londinesi. Fautore dell’ingresso dell’opera italiana, il conte di Kent fu affiancato da altri nomi dell’aristocrazia, dal duca di Bedford al conte di Halifax. Nella mischia agivano gli alleati dei due schieramenti, l’architetto e scrittore teatrale John Vanbrugh, il drammaturgo William Congreve, lo spregiudicato Christopher Rich, il violoncellista romano Nicola Francesco Haym, i compositori John Eccles e William Corbett.

Nel gennaio del 1705, al Drury Lane, era apparso un *Arsinoe, Queen of Cypress*, un pasticcio con versi inglesi tagliati su arie di produzione italiana. All’Haymarket, il 9 aprile dello stesso anno, si montava *The Loves of Ergasto*, una pastorale italiana di cui si conserva il libretto stampato con versi inglesi e italiani. I cantanti, anche questo è accertato, erano italiani, anche se non dei migliori. Il che fa comunque supporre che, almeno loro, si esprimessero nella lingua madre. L’apparizione di una vera opera tutta cantata, senza interventi di attori di prosa, si registrò nel 1706 all’Haymarket. Si trattava di *Camilla* di Bononcini, con cantanti inglesi e recitativi composti di sana pianta in inglese. L’impatto con l’ascolto integrale di un’opera solo cantata inferse un duro colpo al teatro musicale inglese, fatto di alternanza di recitazione e di inserti vocali. A lotta avanzata, e con la discesa in campo del duca di Manchester, il partito a favore dell’italiano si sbilanciò verso l’Haymarket. Mentre il Drury Lane riacquisiva il primato della prosa e dei drammi con musiche di scena, secondo la migliore tradizione inglese, l’Haymarket si vide assegnare il determinante contributo del castrato Nicolino Grimaldi. Era l’inizio del 1709 e tutto era pronto per l’arrivo di Händel.²²

A parabola händeliana estinta, e quando già si profilava l’avvento di un altro italianista acquisito alla musica, Mozart, il dottor Burney analizzava il “trionfo” dell’opera italiana con gli strumenti linguistici dell’epoca,²³

²² Le fasi del processo di penetrazione degli italiani nel contesto musicale londinese sono esposte, con straordinaria ricchezza di documenti, da Curtis A. Price, “1700-1710: dieci anni cruciali per il teatro in musica inglese,” in Mainwaring, *Memorie*, 83-116.

²³ La conoscenza della figura del giovanissimo Mozart risale al 1772, allorché Burney, viaggiando in Germania e nei Paesi Bassi, mostra di essere al corrente dello straordinario talento salisburghese. Cfr. Charles Burney, *Viaggio musicale in Germania e nei Paesi Bassi*, cur. Enrico Fubini (Torino: EdT, 1986), 257; titolo originale: *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands and United*

con esiti che poi, ancora oggi, si rivelano validi e spendibili. L'approccio tecnicamente ineccepibile del dottor Burney alle fonti della naturale "musicalità" della lingua italiana emerge in maniera lata nel quarto libro della sua *General History*. Caratterizzato dal titolo "Saggio sull'eufonia o dolcezza delle lingue e loro appropriatezza alla musica," il capitolo si apre con l'osservazione preliminare su quelle che sono le componenti minime di una lingua per la musica, ovvero le sue vocali:

Non vi è alcun dubbio che la lingua che ha il maggior numero di vocali aperte, mescolate con le consonanti, è la più favorita per scopi vocali. Le note prodotte dalla voce possono essere udite con purezza e chiarezza soltanto con l'aiuto delle vocali [...].²⁴

La constatazione, che appare a prima vista delle più ovvie, necessita comunque di approfondimenti e questo concerne non solo la facilità con cui le sillabe possono essere emesse con pulizia e articolazione, ma anche la frequenza delle terminazioni vocaliche di parole che consentono al cantante di pronunciare la relativa frase musicale con purezza.²⁵

A questo punto, il dottore *oxoniensis*, con vero *fair play*, celebra uno dei riti più difficili per un buon inglese, ovvero quello di dissacrare la propria lingua. Burney, infatti, scrive senza ambiguità che, se il tedesco è un idioma gutturale, il francese è nasale mentre l'inglese risulta sibilante.²⁶ "Non è facile difendere la nostra lingua dal sibilare," continua Burney, ma la questione non è tanto difendere l'idioma anglico dalle accuse degli stranieri, quanto cercare di attestare la "musicabilità" di altre lingue. Da questa possibilità è escluso anche il francese per la frequenza di vocali nasali e mute.

Provinces. Sul paradigmatico uso della lingua italiana da parte di Mozart si veda Gianfranco Folena, *L'italiano di Mozart nel concerto europeo del suo epistolario* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), 452-72. La parola finale sull'uso dell'italiano nell'opera internazionale fu pronunciata proprio da Mozart. Cfr. Bonomi, *Il docile idioma*, 114.

²⁴ Traduzione italiana in Bonomi, *Il docile idioma*, 129. L'originale, "Essay on the Euphonic or Sweetness of Languages and their Fitness for Music," si legge in Burney, *General History*, 497-505.

²⁵ "There cannot be doubt but that the dialect which has the greatest number of open vowels, mixed with its consonants, is the most favourable for vocal purposes." Burney, "Essay on the Euphonic," 497.

²⁶ "[...] the English *sibilating* and loaded with consonants, nasal syllables ending with *ng*, and other harsh and mute terminations." Burney, "Essay on the Euphonic," 497.