CLAIMING VOICE:
MADALENA CASULANA AND THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN MADRIGAL

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This thesis explores the ways in which Madalena Casulana (ca. 1540—ca. 1590) expressed her stated desire to overturn the misconceptions of sixteenth-century patriarchy that maintained that women did not have the ability to think and compose music as men did. Through an investigation into her life and works, as well as her philosophical and musical heritage, this thesis reveals that Casulana was not only aware of the gender barriers and stereotypes that made her position as a female composer precarious at best, but also that she sought to liberate women from their rigidly proscribed status. Examining the Greco-Roman roots of contemporary thoughts about biology and gender difference provides insight into the segregated world in which Casulana worked and explains the language of innuendo that permeated Casulana's musical medium, the madrigal. Her madrigals reveal a high level of training and creativity within the medium, but it is the way in which she utilizes her skill of representation through the madrigal

that reveals her own voice amid the traditional tropes. Through manipulation of madrigal tropes, Casulana liberates the female voice from its traditional role as the conquered victim of male sexual fantasy, bridges the gap between the traditional associations of men as intellectual beings and women as sensual, and emphasizes unity and equality between the sexes.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

As the first woman known to have her works appear in print, Madalena Casulana (ca. 1540—ca. 1590) distinguished herself further by dedicating her publication to Isabella de Medici-Orsina, thereby asserting Casulana's wish to "show also the world … the conceited error of men. They believe so strongly to be the masters of the high gifts of the intellect that, in their opinion, these gifts cannot likewise be shared by Women."[1] Casulana's insistence to be taken seriously and treated with the same respect given to men in her profession is unique, as there are no records of other women from this time who attempted to do so. Furthermore, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Casulana was indeed a respected performer, teacher, and composer and was not relegated to the more prevalent and traditional female roles of courtly performer or courtesan. She seems to have negotiated a realm within the traditional male and female spheres without suffering the criticism of being an overly ambitious woman or inadequate male impersonator. Additionally, examination of her works reveals that Casulana displayed a high level of mastery of her genre of choice, the Italian madrigal. She set sophisticated texts in creative and adventurous ways, explored the philosophical paradoxes of the time, and did not shy away from

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[1] Thomasin LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

The full dedication, in Italian, can be found in the Appendix, as transcribed by Beatrice Pescerelli in *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 7.

the sexual imagery and innuendo that was common in madrigal literature. In fact, her choice of texts reveals that she was well-versed in the philosophical debates of the time regarding sexuality. Nonetheless, the way that she set these texts to music distinguishes her as she reinforces her self-proclaimed desire to reveal the "conceited error of men." This thesis explores the ways in which Casulana created her own space within the male-dominated society of sixteenth-century Italy and how, through her mastery of signs and symbols of the madrigal, she sought to alter the poetic representation of women within the madrigal texts. Through such indicators, she metaphorically liberated women from their role as the hunted, conquered, and the sexually inviting objects of male fantasy and set herself apart as a skilled and creative composer.

1.1 FEMINIST INQUIRY

As history has taught us, the understanding of music as a pure art form, ethereal and otherworldly, outside of the cultural influences that gave rise to it, impedes deep understanding of it as a product of human creativity and invention. Feminist musicologists, especially, have championed this approach, extending the cultural factors to include the different cultural norms for men and women as contributing influences to the aesthetic and stylistic choices of male versus female composers. Sally MacArthur discusses the stumbling blocks that hinder feminist inquiry in music. She writes:

> Music has been slowest to take up the idea that women's music adopts aesthetic strategies different from those in men's music… it is thought that meanings that reside in music itself can never be decoded in terms of the social and political contexts in which it was produced… The idea that meanings are embedded in music

> itself, including meanings concerning the sex of a composer, was not really given serious inquiry until the decade of the 1990's.[2]

Since then, several feminist musicologists have attempted to seek out methods for finding how gender is encoded in the work of female composers and how to pinpoint the meaning of such musical and cultural indicators. This task is fraught with many dangers. First of all, the supposition that gender is encoded in a musical work, while true, is also hugely general and immeasurably fluid. As Joan Scott notes, gender is both a matter of the "individual subject" and the greater "social organization," and the interrelationship between them.[3] Therefore, it is not enough to examine the cultural influences, the power relations, the ideologies of decorum, sexuality, and biology, but also how the individual responds to these external factors. Because of this, understanding completely how a particular woman composer encodes her gender in her work can be a treacherous endeavor. Treacherous because it leads the researcher into the trap of stereotyping and relying on binary oppositions which are agents of patriarchal gender differentiation as ancient as the origins of Western civilization. Many different approaches to tackling this problem have surfaced over the last several years. Sally MacArthur notes a shift from identifying tendencies in stylistic and aesthetic choices of female composers, such as Eva Reiger's list of similarities common to women's music of the twentieth-century, to a broader acceptance that, while concepts of "femininity" and "masculinity" exist as constructs, they cannot be applied wholesale to individual composers. Composers, male or female, may utilize these constructs, identify with them, or subvert them, but a composer's identity (stylistic or

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[2] Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 12.

[3] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1067.

otherwise) cannot be deduced by simply applying the characteristics of a gendered construct to a body of work.[4]

MacArthur explains that feminist musicologists, such as Eva Reiger, Marcia Citron, and Susan McClary, attempt to find ways to differentiate women's music without ghettoizing it or relying on vague stereotypes, realizing that the influences on style and composition, as well as gender identity, may be indefinable, even to the composer herself. As an example of one way to overcome this, MacArthur explains McClary's research method:

> …McClary chooses to analyze music by contemporary women composers and performance artists who are concerned with their own representations as women in the music that they write and/or perform.[5]

However, I do not believe that we must limit ourselves to the study of contemporary women, particularly in the case of Madalena Casulana, who, through her writings, revealed a level of self-awareness of and concern for her representation as a woman and composer. Her dedication to Isabella de'Medici invites the researcher to view her as a woman composer with a desire to express the validity of her music as a female work of high intellect, not a feminine equivalent of a masculine achievement. I find the phrasing of Casulana's stated intent to be very important in discerning her purpose in composing and her self-understanding as a woman and composer. She states:

> I would like, which would be, other than to give Your Excellence some proof of my devotion, to show also to the world (as much as is allowed me in this musical profession) the conceited error of men. They believe so strongly to be the masters of the high gifts of

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[4] Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 12-19.

[5] Ibid, 19.

> the intellect that, in their opinion, these gifts cannot likewise be shared by Women.[6]

It is important to note that she did not claim to be as good as a man or better. She did not claim to write as well as a man, or in the style of men, but that she, a "Woman" (capitalization Casulana's), possessed the "gift of high intellect" in the same way that men can. As Suzanne Cusick notes, because of the traditional association of the male with the mind (reason and intellect) and the female with the body (sensuality and emotion), the "composer is implicitly always gendered masculine…*not because so many individuals who live in the category are biologically male*, but because the composer has come to be understood to be *mind*."[7] This mind-body dialectic, created as early as the Greco-Roman thinkers, is still very much in play today, but was especially strong during Casulana's day. Hence, her exhortation to be respected as a female composer of high intellectual merit would have been highly unusual and perhaps deemed by some to be biologically impossible. Even more striking is the fact that she appears to have been quite successful and well respected, and did not suffer criticism as being either an inadequate male impersonator or an improper woman.[8] Because of all of these things, her awareness of gender stereotypes, her desire to subvert them, as well as her refusal to work within traditionally feminine musical spheres, her choice of highly intelligent and often erotic texts, and her compositional skill within the complex madrigal genre, Madalena Casulana presents a perfect

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[6] Thomasin LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

[7] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Winter 1994), 16.

[8] Thomasin LaMay, "Composing from the Throat: Madalena Casulana's Primo libro de madrigali, 1568," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 376.

subject for a feminist inquiry. Throughout this thesis, it is my goal to seek out and decode some of Casulana's social, musical, and philosophical markers within her works, helping to unlock some of the mysteries of her unique life and perhaps provide tools for further inquiry.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

In attempting to understand the music of Madalena Casulana, it is important to explore the musical and ideological world in which she lived. As such, I have organized my inquiry into the life and music of Madalena Casulana along three axes: aspects of biography, heritage of thoughts about biology and sexual difference, and musical heritage. It would prove rather useless to attempt to understand Casulana's music without attempting to see through the lens—or at the very least be aware of it—with which Madalena viewed her world and her place within it. During a time when definitions of "womanhood" were confused somewhere between passive observer and singing voice, and commendations on beauty and purity were tempered by fear of what evil could lay within, Madalena's choice to claim voice via composing and publishing is both startling and telling.

Framed by the three axes of my inquiry, my methodology exposes Casulana's stated desire to reveal the "conceited error of men" and be equal to them, as expressed through her use of poetic texts that are sexual and philosophical in nature (topics deemed unsuitable for women to discuss), and her musical choices which deny what Thomasin LaMay calls, the "male musical climax" and emphasize unity between lovers, as well as the obvious indicator of her choice of a

female patron.[9] In order to discuss the importance of Casulana's choice of poetic texts and her place within Renaissance Italy, it is necessary to examine the Greco-Roman roots of Italian thought on sex, gender difference, and the nature of the soul. Such an examination not only provides background information, allowing today's reader to imagine the cultural norms of Casulana's world, but also serves as the medium for the language of sexual innuendo and philosophical debate that permeates Casulana's madrigal texts. Therefore, an analysis of Greco-Roman ideologies combined with a musical analysis of some of Casulana's madrigals establishes Casulana's unique voice within the madrigal repertory and provides the best means of understanding her works in all of their multifaceted complexity.

[9] Thomasin LaMay, "Composing from the Throat: Madalena Casulana's Primo libro de madrigali, 1568," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 384.

2.0 RENAISSANCE BODY IDEALS

Renaissance body ideals were the product of ancient philosophies regarding sexual difference. Philosophers such as Galen of Pergamum compiled the most accepted philosophies, which were treated as medical and scientific truth until the late eighteenth-century. Madrigal writers, such as Madalena Casulana, as well as the poets whose works she set, would have been well aware of the connotations of the sexual innuendo in the texts; innuendo which is based on the well-established understanding of the physical nature of the human body, the soul, and the sex act.

Galen, a Greek physician and philosopher in the second-century, formulated ideas about the body, the function of its parts, and its relationship to the soul, which centered on temperature difference as the main distinguisher of gender difference.[10] He asserted that there exists only one type of human body and that both males and females contain the same parts. The difference in appearance occurs because of temperature variation in the womb, which then carries over into the life of the person. If, in the womb, a fetus is not heated to the proper temperature, Galen states that it will not develop fully. At proper heat, the external genitalia will emerge, but if the fetus is "undercooked," so to speak, then the genitals remain inside the body, resulting in the perfect inversion of the external genitalia of the male body, creating a woman. The temperature differential remains throughout a person's life. Men, being warmer, were therefore considered to

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[10] Stephen Garton, *Histories of Sexuality: Antiquity to Sexual Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 38.

be, "bold, courageous, innovative, reasoning, and active" while women, being colder, were, "moist, damp and imperfect," as well as weaker and inferior because of their under-developed bodies.[11] This definition of gender difference played a significant role over the centuries in defining the nature of gender politics, such as social hierarchies, restrictions placed upon women, male fear of effeminacy, and the many ideologies that have sprung from them. However, in this thesis, the definition of gender difference is intimately aligned with thoughts about sex, procreation, and death.

Another major aspect of Galen's theories is his understanding of the system of humors. Based on the ancient theory of the four elements of fire, air, earth, and water, and the four qualities of matter (warm, cold, dry, and moist), Galen's system of humors finds that these elements can be mixed with the four types of bodily fluids (blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm) in various combinations to create substances within the body with different qualities and functions.[12] For instance, Galen states in *De sanitate tuenda*:

> Each one is a mixture of the same type of elements, [that is] of moist, dry, warm, and cold, or—if one prefers to name these not by their qualities but according to their substances—of earth and water, of air and fire… But they differ in the quantity of the mixture. For in semen there is more fiery and airy substance, while in blood there is more earthy and watery substance.[13]

Different types of humors can build up in the body, or be lacking in the body, which can create physical symptoms of diseases or physical urges. For instance, orgasm was seen as the consequence of the body's need to expel the build up of the humor of semen, which had been

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[11] Ibid, 39.

[12] Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 53.

[13] Ibid, 54.

heated through friction against the skin and other bodily movements.[14] Galen believed that both men and women produced semen. Stemming from his belief that the female organs of procreation were the same as the male organs, only inverted, Galen asserted that both males and females produced semen through the mixture of blood and *pnuema* (life breath) and that the semen was "cooked" and stored in the testicles.[15] Semen was therefore considered a "vital life fluid," and, while its expulsion was necessary for procreation, expelling such a fluid was dangerous.[16] It was as if, through procreation, the parents each expelled a bit of their own souls in semen—necessary for the fetus to live, but dangerous for the parents who jeopardized an imbalance in body chemistry and a potential loss of soul in the process.

It is in this way that orgasm began to be associated with death, because in both instances life (or soul) is being expelled, either in the form of semen in sex or one's final breath in death. Additionally, the moment of orgasm presented a moment of complete loss of control over the body, (a fact that ancient philosophers loathed and feared) which paralleled the loss of control over the body in death. Thomas Laqueur notes, in paraphrase, that ancient texts asked, "Why… did someone having sexual intercourse, and also a dying person, cast his or her eyes upward?" and was answered that because the heat was leaving the body in an upward direction, and that, "sexual heat is the most intense form of the heat of life," one gazes upward to look after the life

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[14] Stephen Garton, *Histories of Sexuality: Antiquity to Sexual Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 39.

[15] What Galen called the female testicles are, in actuality, the ovaries.

[16] Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 54.

that has left the body.[17] It was not only the ancient Greeks who contemplated this association. Christian writer, Tertullian, based his theory of the soul on the phenomenon of orgasm. Tertullian states that:

> [Do we not]…in that very heat of extreme gratification when the generative fluid is ejected, feel that somewhat of our soul has gone out from us? And do we not experience a faintness and prostration along with a dimness of sight?[18]

Therefore, the association with orgasm and death was firmly rooted in medical theory, practical application, and common belief in the nature of the soul. This association remained strong throughout the centuries, up until the late-eighteenth century. Examples of how this belief and association not merely lingered, but formed the foundation of medical and sexual understanding can be seen throughout the arts. A particularly poignant example can be found in the sixteenth-century secular madrigal, where topics of love and death, laden with implications of sexual intercourse, invoke both the humorous quality of a private joke and the serious philosophical conundrum presented by the deeply rooted fear of death as connected with sex.

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[17] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 46.

[18] Ibid, 47.

3.0 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Details of Madalena Casulana's biography are, in general, sparse. The most complete account of her life is located in the preface to Beatrice Pescerelli's *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana.*[19] According to Pescerelli, Madalena was born around 1540, possibly in the village of Casola d'Elsa, also known as Casula, making the surname Casulana a possible result of the location of her birth.[20] Pescerelli believes that Madalena was educated in Florence. Her first monograph publication was her *Il primo libro de madrigali à quattro voci*, published by Girolamo Scotto in 1568 in Venice and dedicated to Isabella de'Medici-Orsina. It is this dedication which provides great insight into Casulana's character, and where she wrote about her desire to show the "conceited error of men."[21] Her choice of a female patron instead of a male patron, her words condemning the "conceited error of men," and her insistence on the importance of having her works published all signal her special importance and unique standing within sixteenth-century Italy.[22] As Thomasin LaMay writes, Madalena's dedication to Isabella de'Medici was an

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[19] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979).

[20] A helpful English translation of Pescerelli's findings can be found in Ellen D. Lerner, "Madalena Casulana," in *Women Composers: Music through the Ages*, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 1:98.

[21] See the Appendix for the full dedication as it appears in Pescerelli's edition of Casulana's madrigals.

[22] Thomasin LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

"especially provocative gesture from a woman composer."[23] She explains that, "Discourse from a man was considered rhetoric, but the same discourse from a woman was perceived as sexually inviting."[24] LaMay explains that Casulana was likely aware that by engaging in this type of discourse, as found in her dedication, her words would be interpreted as, "asking for sex."[25] To further complicate the issue, by claiming voice, that is, the right to engage in discourse with men, Madalena would have been "thought to have lost her biological properties, to have become 'man'."[26] However, it seems that Madalena was not a victim of these gender conflations, as LaMay notes; she "seemed determined at least to question this [gender] conception, if not subvert."[27]

Madalena published three distinct volumes of her work (two of which received at least one reprint). Her first published works were in the anthology *Il desiderio*, published by Girolamo Scotto in Venice in 1566.[28] This anthology contained four of her pieces, "Vedesti Amor giamai di bel sole," "Sculpio ne l'alm'Amore," "Morire non può il mio cuore," and "Se sciôr si ved'il lacci'a cui dianz'io."[29] These pieces constitute the first musical works by a woman to appear in print, and they are contained within a volume alongside pieces by Orlando di Lasso and Cipriano de Rore, among others. Another of Casulana's madrigals appeared in the third volume of *Il*

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[23] Ibid, 43.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, 44.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Karin Pendle, "Musical Women in Early Modern Europe," in *Women and Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 86.

[29] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 6.

desiderio, printed in 1567, followed shortly after by the first of her monographic works. They are, *Il primo libro de madrigali à quattro voci,* published in 1568 in Venice by Scotto (and reprinted twice in 1583), *Il secondo libro de madrigali à quattro voci,* published in 1570 in Venice, also by Scotto, and *Il primo libro de madrigali à cinque voci,* published in 1583 by Angelo Gardano in Venice.[30] The final publication containing one of her pieces is *Il gaudio*, an anthology published in Venice in 1586, and the piece contained within is "Stavasi il mio bel Sol," which appears to be the only three-voice madrigal Casulana ever published.[31] Based on the dedications of Casulana's first and subsequent volumes, Pescerelli found that Casulana apparently traveled freely throughout Italy. Ellen Lerner notes, "her dedication of Molino's second book of madrigals… suggests ties to both Venice and Vicenza."[32] Karin Pendle notes that during the 1570s, it seems that Casulana may have moved around a great deal. She writes:

> Casulana appears to have moved to Venice, where she gave private lessons in composition. In Vicenza she is reported to have played the lute for a private entertainment. Her next home may have been Milan, for her second collection of madrigals is dedicated to a Milanese government official. Another source, also from Milan, notes that Casulana was making her living as a composer.[33]

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[30] Jane A. Bernstein, *Music Printing in Renaissance Venice: The Scotto Press 1539-1572* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 693, 727, 735-737, 802-804.

[31] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 20.

[32] Ellen D. Lerner, "Madalena Casulana," in *Women Composers: Music through the Ages*, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 1:98-99.

[33] Karin Pendle, "Musical Women in Early Modern Europe," in *Women and Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 87. This source provides ambiguous bibliographical information. Pescerelli's edition provides letters to and from Casulana from various sources and locations.

By the 1580s Madalena is referred to as “Signora Maddalena Casualana de Mezarii or Maddalena Mezarii detta Casulana.”[34] This has led some scholars to assume that she married, a scenario that might explain the relative lack of published compositions and the reduction of written records of her activities. Both Pescerelli, Pendle, and Lerner report that Casulana likely married “sometime after 1570 and made her home in Vicenza,” a fact suggested by a change of surname on the title page of her *Il primo libro à cinque voci* to “Madalena Mezarii detta Casulana Vicentina.”[35] However, Thomasin LaMay finds no evidence of marriage documents and insists that, “her high profile would have made it likely that such information might have been mentioned.”[36] LaMay posits instead that, upon achieving success as a “full-fledged composer, wealthy dedicatee and established professional,” Madalena was able to use her surname instead of her “pet name” denoting her place of birth.[37] Either way, Madalena apparently withdrew from “professional musical life” sometime after the early 1580s.[38]

Madalena was unique not only in her desire to publish and her self-proclaimed desire to prove the “conceited error of men,” but in her lifestyle and evident freedom within society. Unlike other women composers, she was not tied to a particular patron or academy, she did not,

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[34] Ibid, 86.

[35] Ibid, 99.

[36] Thomasin LaMay, “Composing from the Throat: Madalena Casulana’s *Primo libro de madrigali*, 1568,” in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women*, ed. Thomasin LaMay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 376.

[37] Ibid, 377.

[38] Ellen D. Lerner, “Madalena Casulana,” in *Women Composers: Music through the Ages*, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 1:100-101.

as far as today's scholars can deduce, fulfill the role of courtesan, she was not of noble birth, nor was she cloistered among the religious.[39] As LaMay writes:

> She was an independent woman who apparently came from modest means and chose to earn her own living. We know that women should not have been able to do that then, for they were property of either their father, brother, or husband, or existentially of a convent."[40]

Casulana, it seems, had a widespread influence as a teacher, singer, and composer.[41] As LaMay succinctly summarizes, "At the very least, we can know that Madalena was highly unusual in her quest for a self-identifying voice, and that she must have experienced life quite differently not only from other women, but also from other women performers."[42]

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Thomasin LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43.

[41] Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians? Professional Women Musicians in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 107.

[42] Thomasin LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43.

4.0 MADRIGAL

As previously stated, Madalena Casulana exclusively composed madrigals. As a genre, the Italian madrigal flourished throughout the sixteenth century with the majority of texts from the fourteenth-century poets such as Petrarch and his contemporaries. James Haar writes, “Madrigalian verse in the early sixteenth century owed its style, imagery and even vocabulary to the lyrics of Petrarch, whose poetry enjoyed an extraordinary revival at this time.”[43] Madalena, like her fellow madrigalists, was indeed fond of Petrarch’s poetry and set several of his poems. Additionally, she frequently set the poetry of Jacopo Sannazaro, Luigi Tansillo, Tasso, Quirino, and Serafino Aquilano.[44]

Madrigals were primarily chamber pieces, performed in private gatherings among friends. Laura Macy discusses the social function of singing madrigals in court settings by citing Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano,* his influential writing about the ways in which a proper courtier and court lady should behave.[45] Macy notes that “elegant conversation skills were the well-bred

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[43] James Haar, “Madrigal: Italy, 16th Century: Origins.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40075 (accessed March 21, 2009).

[44] Ellen D. Lerner, “Madalena Casulana,” in *Women Composers: Music through the Ages*, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 1:100-101.

[45] Baldassare Castiglione, *Libro del cortegiano. English*, trans. Robert Sampler (London: published for A. Bettesworth et al., 1724), http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO?c=1&stp=

courtier's most important asset," an asset that could be improved and reinforced through "scripted" practice with madrigal texts.[46] Macy writes, "Madrigals had all the necessary features for the teaching of gracious wit. Their texts were a resource of conceits and clever phrases to be memorized, used, and incorporated into future conversations."[47] Part of this "witty repartee" included the use of allegories and metaphors commonly associated with matters sexual in nature. Madrigal texts often served as the dramatizing of erotic literature, whose "metaphors and musical gestures mirrored common sexual innuendoes, graphically describing physical intimacy in ways that were clearly understood by contemporary readers."[48] Madrigals were often performed by small groups of men, enjoying the shared activity of singing and the intellectual jokes of sexual innuendo held within the verses. Speaking plainly of matters sexual in nature did not befit a courtier, so madrigal texts provided a proper and safe environment for these men to engage in sexual discourse.

Throughout the sixteenth century however, the madrigal's role expanded to include more public and formal ceremonies. As the *concerti delle donne* gained more prominence, the role of the madrigal effectively shifted from courtly situation of directing and shaping courtly conversations to acting as spectacle, removing court members from the actual music-making and placing the poetic voices in another's mouth. LaMay outlines how the madrigal texts shifted

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Author&ste=11&af=BN&ae=T144309&tiPG=1&dd=0&dc=flc&docNum=CW113879566&vrsn=1.0&srchtp=a&d4=0.33&n=10&SU=0LRK&locID=upitt_main (accessed March 21, 2009).

[46] Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal," *Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 6.

[47] Ibid, 7.

[48] Thomasin LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: my body knows unheard of songs," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002), 53.

from "polite conversation" to, during the 1560s, "explicitly erotic," depicting sex happening.[49] LaMay emphasizes the effect of the *concerti delle donne*, troupes of female madrigal singers, hired by nobility to perform the sexually charged repertoire for an audience of the duke and his court, stating that these female performers,

> …radically changed [the function of the repertoire] in large part due to the reversal of who performed and who watched: what had been gendered 'male' became embodied 'female,' and this must have created a real crisis of voice, but also of gender. So I must ask… how Madalena would have situated herself: performer *(wearer of texts)*, composer *(acting like a man),* woman looking for a body?[50]

As LaMay clearly states, because of these gender conflations, both in terms of madrigal texts and singers and Casulana's own paradoxical role as female composer, seeking out the ways in which Casulana encoded gender in her works is both intriguing and daunting. Surely, Casulana was aware of the gender conflations presented to her, and through her works we see multiple expressions of her own voice, as she resisted classification as either sexualized body (feminine) or disembodied mind (masculine), choosing instead to be an embodied mind, so to speak, that refused to submit the female performers of her music to sexual objectification by their male spectators.

Laura Macy explains the sexual gratification of the male spectators of the *concerti delle donne*. She notes:

> Within the court's inner sanctum a group of amateur courtier-singers were gradually replaced by professionals by the music-loving (but apparently not music-making) duke [of Ferrara]: the madrigal became a spectator sport. Alfonso II founded an ensemble of beautiful women to make his wanton words and

[49] Ibid, 57.

[50] Ibid.

> musical friction for him—on command and in the privacy of his apartments. The madrigal's audience changed from participants in sexual play to a select group of noble voyeurs—or auditeurs."[51]

This change impacted the reception and understanding of the madrigal in several ways. Now that the sexualized feminine objects of madrigal texts were the performers, singing male lyrics with female voices and bodies, the gender conflations and erotic metaphors of the madrigal texts became stronger. In addition to imagining sexual relations with a woman through the texts, the physical presence of women performing the music provided a visual representation (and metaphor) of the musically simulated sexual experience. Whether Casulana performed many of her own madrigals is unknown—Thomasin LaMay believes it is likely—it is clearly evident that Casulana understood the implications of performing madrigal texts, the delicate balance of the speaker versus performer's voice, and the objectification of women inherent in the genre.[52] This is perhaps one of the reasons that spurred Madalena to musically deny the sexual gratification of her male speakers and emphasize unity between men and women.

4.1 SEX AND THE MADRIGAL

Stemming from our understanding of the sixteenth-century Italian madrigal as a vehicle for discourse both sexual and philosophical in nature, we can now examine in detail some of the most common sexual innuendoes found in madrigal literature. Laura Macy's article provides an

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[51] Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal," *Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 17.

[52] Thomasin LaMay, "Composing from the Throat: Madalena Casulana's *Primo libro de madrigali*, 1568," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women*, ed. Thomasin LaMay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 367.

in-depth look at the most common sexual innuendoes. As we will see, these innuendoes were based on current medical ideas about gender difference and sexual intercourse, taken nearly wholesale from Galen's theories. Without understanding this contextual background, a modern listener would completely miss both the tone and purpose of the madrigal.

One common conceit in poetic literature is the supposed "coldness" of a desired female lover.[53] This conceit, while it can be interpreted figuratively to mean that the female is unresponsive or distant to the advances of the male speaker, would have also related literally to an accepted understanding of the female condition. Based on Galen's medical theory of the "system of humors," which incorporated not only bodily organs, but also feelings and emotions, the female's cold nature made her less responsive to sexual advances of her warmer by nature male lover.[54] Because of this, common wisdom explained that, "the female needed to be roused to proper 'heat' in order for conception to occur."[55] Sixteenth-century French surgeon Ambroise Paré wrote treatises on how a husband should physically prepare his wife for sex. He states:

> …if he perceive her to be slow, and more cold, he must cherish, embrace, and tickle her, and shall not abruptly, the nerves being suddenly distended, breake into the field of nature, but rather shall creepe in by little and little intermixing more wanton kisses with wanton words and speeches, handling her secret parts and dugs [breasts], that she may take fire and bee enflamed to venery [sic].[56]

Therefore, through friction, fondling, and sweet talk, the colder by nature female may be made,

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[53] Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal," *Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 3-4.

[54] Ibid, 2.

[55] Thomasin LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002), 53.

[56] Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal," *Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 4.

somewhat ironically, more like the male in order that sex and conception can occur. This state of arousal, wherein the cold female was inflamed with passion, was often described in Petrarchan terms as "icy fire."[57]

As has already been stated, Galen's system of humors led to an association of orgasm with death through the expulsion of life. It is with this understanding that another of the common conceptions of sex, and therefore common reference within the madrigal repertory, must be explained. As stated above, Galen's understanding of sexual intercourse stemmed from the idea that upon conception, both the male and female expelled life (commonly called *spirito* in Italian) which was the foundation of the new life within the mother's womb.[58] Life was defined as the presence of spirit; therefore, in death (it was believed) people exhaled their spirit with their dying breath. Therefore, within this conceit, the word "spirit" has both physical and spiritual connotations, as both the life-forming bodily fluid emitted during sex and the spiritual connection implied by that union. Because of both the physical and spiritual connotations of spirit, it was thought to pass between lovers in many different ways. As Macy notes, "In poetry, it passes between lovers through the eyes, the kiss, and, if the embrace is tight enough, directly from heart to heart. It takes up residence in the beloved's heart, raising the lover's question: if my spirit leaves me to reside in you, am I dead or do I live in you?"[59] Therefore any of these actions, kissing, gazing, embracing, and dying, can be used in poetry to metaphorically imply sex. Furthermore, other bodily fluids such as tears or "emissions of spirit" such as breathing or sighing can metaphorically represent physical orgasm.

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid, 2.

With this in mind, it becomes apparent that singing madrigals was more than simply entertainment. It provided a safe, appropriate arena for flirting and speaking about sex. Through the texts, as Macy explains, the erotic energy of the poetic material was mediated by music and by metaphor which contained the sexual tension and relieved it in a socially appropriate manner.[60] Casulana was particularly adept at channeling the erotic energy of the madrigal, harnessing it to explore the dynamics of a sexual partnership or denying it altogether in favor of a more contemplative atmosphere for addressing the paradox of love's power to ignite and extinguish, to give life and take it away.

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[60] Ibid, 8.

5.0 MUSICAL ANALYSIS

This section examines four of Casulana's pieces that reveal the many ways in which Casulana musically expresses her own understanding of sexuality through music and texts, and emphasizes the point of unity and togetherness in love versus the climactic release signaling the end of sex and the separation of partners. Before embarking on detailed analyses of particular songs, I would like to briefly mention a few distinguishing characteristics of Casulana's style. First, as Thomasin LaMay has noted, Casulana's stylistic choices, her uses of musical tropes, her choice of poetic texts, and the techniques that permeate her works are similar to those used by her peers, such as Lasso.[61] It is her specific usage of these musical and poetic tools that separate her from her contemporaries. It is the fact that Casulana displays mastery of the "musical cliché" and tools of the late sixteenth-century madrigal, but uses them in non-conventional ways or eschews their use altogether that convinces LaMay, and myself, that Casulana was a highly educated and skilled composer with a specific vision, utilizing the tools of her trade to express her message. Thankfully, she has given us the clues to decode her message. Through her dedication to Isabella de'Medici-Orsina, Casulana invites us to treat her works as deliberate attempts to show the

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[61] Thomasin LaMay, "Composing from the Throat: Madalena Casulana's Primo libro de madrigali, 1568," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women*, 365-398 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 367.

"conceited error of men" who think that women do not share the same gift of intellect as themselves. LaMay writes:

> It was rather how she chose to combine those tools, the words she elected to embellish, and importantly the words she chose to leave alone which gave her madrigals an integrity quite separate from that of her peers. While she wrote to showcase her virtuosity, she was also well-aware of how that virtuosity was heard and watched, and what it meant to her listeners.[62]

As I've stated before, any understanding of Casulana's madrigals must include the context of her life, taking into consideration not only her history (of which we know very little) but also the history of madrigal literature and performance, and the philosophical ideologies that informed the madrigal texts. With this in mind, I'd like to call attention to a few of the facets of my analyses. First, I will be focusing on Casulana's musical text settings, words she emphasizes and those she does not, and how her settings either reinforce or contradict the poetic meaning. For instance, Casulana, unlike her male contemporaries, seems to downplay the point of musical climax, denying, what LaMay calls, the "male musical climax."[63] She tends to emphasize passages that speak of togetherness, or unity between the sexes. This and other examples of Casulana's musical and poetic choices are explored. The discrepancy between Casulana's choices and those of her male contemporaries points to the need to explore Casulana's message. Discerning that message brings me to the second facet, the need to bear in mind the concept of voice, which entails searching for Casulana's voice but also listening for others, should they

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid, 384.

exist, through the music and poetry. It is through an examination of all the constituent factors, then, that the nature of Casulana's unique compositional voice can be revealed more clearly.

5.1 SIMULATING SEX

In some of Madalena's madrigals, she uses her mastery of word painting and other tools of the madrigal to simulate the sex act, much like her male contemporaries. However, unlike them, she uses her skills to emphasize unity between the sexual partners, deemphasizing the moment of climax in favor of extended passages of "foreplay." The two pieces discussed here are both the only pieces to have been discussed by other scholars. They are, "Morir non può il mio cuore" and "Morte – Che vôi? – Te chiamo." The first is a text by Jacobo Sannazaro, which has been set by many other composers, both before and after Casulana's publication in 1566. This text features the double-entendre of hearts pulling in and out of lovers' breasts in perpetual dying, a common conceit in madrigal literature. The second, by Serafino Aquilano, features a conversation with Death wherein the speaker calls to Death, wishing to die, and Death decides whether or not the speaker is properly prepared. Each of these metaphorical texts embrace the conceit of "death" as orgasm and Casulana's music takes the listener through the speaker's plight, musically replicating the actions dictated by the text. These texts simulate sex, depicting for the audience a musical representation of an intimate encounter. Rather than give her male audience the climax they anticipate, Casulana defies tradition, replacing the voice of patriarchal gratification with her own.

5.1.1 Morir non può il mio cuore

Morir non può il mio cuore

Madalena Casulana

Figure 1: Morir non può il mio cuore

Morir non può il mio cuore

Figure 2: Morir non può il mio cuore (Continued)[64]

[64] All figures are my transcriptions, taken from Beatrice Pescerelli's *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979). Some alternations have been made in cleffing—most

"Morir non può il mio cuore" first appeared in the anthology, *Il desiderio*, published in 1566, and then again in *Il primo libro di madrigali a quattro voci* in 1568. Based on a poem by Jacobo Sannazaro, the text of "Morir non può il mio cuore," embraces the typical metaphoric use of hearts pulling in and out of the other's breast in perpetual dying, a conceit familiar to madrigal literature.[65] The text reads,

> Morir non può il mio cuore: ucciderlo vorrei,
> Poi che vi piace,
> Ma trar no si può fuore dal petto
> Vostr'ove gran tempo giace;
> Et uccidendol'io, come desio,
> So che morreste voi,
> Morrend' anch'io[66]
>
> My heart cannot die: I would like to kill it,
> since that would please you,
> but it cannot be pulled out of your breast,
> where it has been dwelling for a long time;
> and if I killed it, as I wish,
> I know that you would die, and I would die too.[67]

The poetic text provides a paradoxical tension, mitigated by the dual meaning of "morire" (to die). The speaker, as well as the reader, feels both the desire for "death," as in sexual orgasm, as well as the fear of actual "death" and separation from the beloved. This desire for and fear of sexual "death" mirrors the ancient beliefs about the connectedness of sex and death. Casulana's setting of this poetic text highlights that tension by outlining the reach for climax and the

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tenor clefs have been moved to better accommodate the notes— and ficta for reasons explained in the text.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 27.

[67] Thomasin LaMay, "Composing from the Throat: Madalena Casulana's Primo libro de madrigali, 1568," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 384.

resistance against that climb, the lovers' straining for the orgasm that would allow them to "die" and separate, and the fear of death and the reluctance to allow even joyous release to terminate their unity. Casulana uses several musical devices to express the emotion and tension in this piece. Through evaded cadences which underscore climactic climbs, sections of homophony versus sections of imitation, and overlapping half-step movement, Casulana paints the pleasure and pain of two lovers, torn between the desire to "die" and part, or to remain united in love.

The following sections represent my reading of "Morir non può il mio cuore," which illustrates how Casulana uses the above-mentioned musical devices to emphasize the importance of unity between the sexes and deemphasize fleeting sexual gratification. I will offer my reading by phrase units, explicitly pointing out instances of cadential movement, imitative or homophonic texture variations, and important points of word painting, as well as how these musical gestures illustrate Casulana's message.

The first phrase encompasses mm. 1-3, with the words, "Morir non può il mio cuore" (My heart cannot die). It begins with a solo entrance in the canto on "Morir." Before the canto reaches the second syllable of "morir," the tenor enters on the same pitch, G, an octave below. While the canto moves to B-flat, the tenor moves instead to a very distinctive E-flat, which lends a feeling of longing to the opening statement. This feeling of longing is elaborated on throughout the piece. The first phrase closes with a perfect cadence on "cuore" on the downbeat of m. 4; however, the closure of this cadential movement is undermined by the fact that each voice ends on the same pitch, an octave apart. The first phrase, therefore, has a symmetrical quality, beginning with one voice and ending in unison. It provides a musical representation of attempting to remove the heart (by expanding musical material) but being unable to do so (as the

musical material returns to a unison). It is in this phrase that I find the first evidence of Casulana's message, the importance of unity over division.

The second half of the poetic line, "ucciderlo vorrei, poi che vi piace" (I would like to kill it since that would please you), contrasts sharply with the first phrase in texture, as it appears in strict homophony as opposed the first phrase's additive structure. This texture provides another kind of unity, as the voices, moving together, express a desire for death and the pleasure of the other. This phrase also ends with a perfect cadence on G in m. 6, coming to a full closure before embarking further into the piece.

The third phrase, "ma trar non sipuò fuore" (but it cannot be pulled out), is where LaMay posits the climax of the piece. They are musically set twice before a relaxed cadence in m. 10 on B-flat, where the canto makes the move from A to B-flat, while the basso jumps the fifth from F down to B-flat, forming the cadence.[68] This passage contains the highest pitch in the piece, D, as well as an extended and ornamented treatment of the word "fuore" (out) which indicates the effort, perhaps in vain, of trying to pull one's heart out of another's breast. These musical indicators signal that the sentiment of inability or reluctance to remove one's heart from the other's breast is the most important in the piece. LaMay notes that this section is set in a manner atypical of a "male musical climax."[69] LaMay coined this phrase to refer to the tradition of piling up of "deaths" at the end of a piece, where musical gestures such as heightened pitch material or faster-moving rhythmic patterns underscore the poetic climax. (A clear example can be found in

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[68] Karol Berger, *Musica ficta: Theories of Accidental Inflections in Vocal Polyphony from Marchetto da Padova to Gioseffo Zarlino* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 122-123. The term "relaxed cadence," refers to cadential movement where, in addition to the half step in one line, the lower cadential gesture does not move by minor third or major sixth, but instead jumps to the cadence point via perfect fourth or fifth. The term "relaxed" refers to the fact that such a cadence "relaxes" the traditional rules of counterpoint.
[69] Ibid.

Arcadelt's "Il bianco e dolce cigno" where the speaker describes dying a "thousand deaths a day.") While the voices rise to emphasize D, the highest pitch in the piece, the statement closes in a relaxed cadence in m. 10 on B-flat, not G, which has already been established as the prominent cadence point. The repetition of words, while providing emphasis, also makes the first half of what would be an antecedent/consequent phrase double its normal length. This causes the musical structure, in striving for symmetry, to cadence in the middle of a syntactic unit (on "fuore" despite the fact that poetic phrase continues with "dal petto vostr'ove gran tempo giace".) Following the pattern of polyphony/homophony set up in the first two phrases, the first half of the sentence is set imitatively, while at the entrance of "dal petto" in m. 10, homophony returns. Therefore, while it may seem awkward to argue for a cadence on the word "fuore" in m. 10, the music, if not the text, clearly calls for a structural division at that juncture. By creating a weaker cadence on a less stable tone in the middle of a syntactic unit, Casulana, despite emphasizing the words in register and through repetition, denies the line a strong climax-worthy closure, thereby extending the longing and desire. In addition, the cadence does not linger to enjoy its closure as the words, "dal petto vostr'ove gran tempo giace" (where it has been dwelling for some time), enter rapidly and propel the piece onward.

As stated above, homophonic texture returns for the fourth phrase, beginning in m. 10 on "dal petto" and dominates the rest of the phrase. The homophony is essential for expressing the stasis of "dal petto vostr'ove gran tempo giace" which speak of where the speaker's heart has been dwelling. Prolonged note values on the words "gran tempo giace" (dwelling for some time), illustrate the time spent and serve to slow down melodic and harmonic movement in the piece. A drawn out cadence is provided in m. 12, again on G. Its position in the lower register and its weaker status as a relaxed cadence creates a subtle, more subdued closure, that, while closing off

the preceding phrase, prepares the listener for the new material to come. It represents a turning point in the music, where the speaker moves from describing the situation to taking action to either leave his heart in his lover's chest, or remove it and cause them both to die.

The last three phrases depict that attempt to separate and die. In m. 12, the basso voice initiates another section that begins with homophony before dissolving into imitative polyphony on the words, "Et uccidendol'io, comme desio, so che morreste voi, morrend'anch'io" (and if I killed it, as I wish, I know that you would die, and I would die too). The homophonic section ends after an interesting cadence on C on the word "desio," in m.14, and the imitation and successive cadences begin on the words, "so che morreste." This is the most rhythmically active section of the piece, following, as LaMay notes, the "traditional fashion, [in which] the madrigal piles several deaths at the end."[70] However, this section, and its repetition, treat these many deaths with a very specific mixture of tension and release which, instead of providing one large-scale ascent to climax, creates several, smaller climactic movements which are evaded rather than enforced. Within each voice, a chromatic movement underlies (most prominently) the movement between the last two syllables in "morreste" (another derivation of morire). Each of these chromatic movements is supported in the basso voice with a fourth or fifth movement, creating, in essence, relaxed cadences. For instance, in m. 15, the chromatic movement in the tenor line, from F-sharp to G, is supported by a basso movement, dropping the fifth, from D to G. This pattern is continued throughout this section in all of the voices at different times. Casulana used chromatically altered notes and ascending patterns to create tension. The canto is perhaps the most audibly obvious in its ascending pattern, and would certainly work to provide tension towards a climax; however, its movement is undercut by continued rhythmic motion and

[70] Ibid.

cadential evasion in the lower voices. When the canto reaches the highest pitch in the piece, the D, a relaxed cadence on D occurs between the canto and the basso. This already weak cadence coupled with the rhythmic movement in the other voices creates only a moment of pause instead of a climactic release. Not until the words, "anch'io" in mm. 25-26, is a rhythmically strong cadence achieved. LaMay describes this cadence as the female speaker's "climax," writing, "her [orgasm] comes at the end, almost an afterthought in the lower register of the canto voice and without ornamentation."[71] On this point, I would, however, like to offer an alternative interpretation.

As I have mentioned above, LaMay argues that the most important phrase of the text is the phrase, "ma trar non si può fuore" (it cannot be pulled out). It is this concept of unity, sameness, or perhaps equality, which dominates the tone of the piece. The most rhythmically active sections of the piece, the "many deaths," which are treated in a way deemed by LaMay as "common chattering," illustrate the author's meaning metaphorically.[72] It is my interpretation that the undermining rhythms and cadences, hindering the piece from reaching climax, illustrate the two lovers, who, in attempting to separate, to terminate their unity, both suffer. Neither can be satisfied and so the piece, like the lovers, comes to an end that is not one of joyous release but of temperate resolution. Having proclaimed a desire to reveal the "conceited error of men" who do not believe that women possess the same gifts of intellect as themselves, Casulana would perhaps use her madrigals to show the negative effects of inequality or non-cooperation between men and women. While on a lower level the madrigal hints at a sexual encounter gone, (as LaMay states) "soft," on a more metaphorical level it reveals the struggle between the sexes, the

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

attempts to unite, the dialogue back and forth, and the oft-encountered inability to cooperate.[73] What Casulana's madrigal reveals is that, without a united effort, the engagements between men and women undermine each other and keep both parties from reaching fulfillment.

[73] Ibid.

5.1.2 Morte – Che Vôi? – Te Chiamo

Morte-Che Vôi?- Te Chiamo

Madalena Casulana

Mor - te, te chia - mo. Ec - com' ap - pres -

Che vô - i? Ec-com' ap - pres - so.

Mor - - - - te, te chia - mo. Ec - com' appres -

Te chia - mo. Ec - com' ap - pres - so.

so. Pren - di-m'e fa che man - ch'il mio do - lo - re. Non pô - i? Perch'-

Non pos - so. Non, perch'

so. Pren - dim' e fa che man - ch'il mio do-lo - re. Non po - i?

Pren - di-m'e fa che man - ch'il mio do - lo - re. Non pô - i? Perchè?

Figure 3: Morte - Che vôi? - Te chiamo

Morte-Che Vôi?- Te Chiamo

10

in te non regna'il co-re. Sì fa! Sì fa! ché chi vi-

in te non regna'il co-re. Non fa! Non fa! Fat-te'l re-sti-tu - i - re, ché chi vi-

Perch' in te non regna'il co-re. Non fa! Non fa! ché chi vi-

Sì fa! Sì fa! Fat-te'l re - sti-tu - i - re. ché chi vi-

14

tanonha nonpuò mo - ri - re. Perch'-in te non regna'il co-re. Sì fa! Sì

tanonhanonpuò mo-ri - - - re. Perchè? Perch' in te non regna'il co-re. Non fa!

tanonhanon può,non può mo-ri - re. Perch' in te non regna'il co re. Non fa!

tanonhanonpuò,nonpuò mo - ri - re. Per-ché? Sì fa! Sì

18

fa! ché chi vi - tanonhanon può,non può mo-rir - re.

Non fa! Fat-te'l re-sti-tu i re. ché chi vi - tanonha nonpuò mo - ri - - - - re.

Non fa! ché chi vi - tanonhanonpuò mo-ri - - - - re.

fa! Fat-te'l re - sti-tu - i - re, ché chi vi - tanonhanonpuò,nonpuò mo - ri - - - - re.

Figure 4: Morte - Che Vôi? - Te Chiamo (Continued)

Another piece dealing with this conceit of death is entitled, “Morte – Che vôi? – Te chiamo” and is based on a poem by Serafino Aquilano. This piece was contained in Casulana’s *Il secondo libro de madrigali à quattro voci*, published in 1570 in Venice by Girolamo Scotto.[74] The text of this piece provides a slightly more enigmatic and abstract concept of death. Instead of a dialogue between lovers, this text features a dialogue between Death and the speaker.

The abstract character of the piece is exacerbated by the English translation provided by Beatrice Pescerelli and James Briscoe. I admit that I was unable to glean any meaning from their translation, and instead sought my own reading of the text by attempting a more word-for-word translation. Perhaps it is because of this abstract translation that Beatrice Pescerelli, James Briscoe, Karin Pendle, and others who have worked with Casulana’s madrigals have had little to say about the text or meaning of this piece. For reference purposes and to illustrate the changes I have made, below is a copy of Pescerelli and Briscoe’s translation of “Morte – Che vôi? – Te chiamo”:

> Death, you whom I call, behold, for I draw near.
> Take me and complete thereby all that remains of my sorrow.
> You cannot do so?
> Since, in you, no longer shall my heart reign,
> Yes… no… have done!
> Then restore that which life can no longer destroy.[75]

My translation is based on a closer examination of verb tenses and sentence structure. I have also added divisions within the structure of the poem to illustrate the two speakers and, hopefully, further elucidate the text. It is with this translation that I have examined the piece both musically and poetically.

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[74] Beatrice Pescerelli, “Maddalena Casulana,” in *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 45.

[75] Ibid.

Below I have included both the Italian poem and my English translation:

- Morte
    - Che vôi?
- Te chiamo. Eccom'appresso
- Prendi m'e fa che manch'il mio dolore
    - Non posso
- Non pôi?
    - Non. Perch'in te non regna'il core
- Sì fa!
    - Non fa!
    - Fatte'l restituire, ché chi vita non ha non può morire.[76]

- Death
    - What do you wish?
- I call you, behold, for I draw near
- Take me and complete all that remains of my sorrow
    - I cannot
- You cannot do so? Why?
    - Because, in you, the heart does not reign
- Yes it does!
    - No it does not!
    - (Done.) Make the return, because those without life cannot die (again).

As a quick explanation of the differences between the two translations, I would like to note that I have included the text as it appears in all voices. Pescerelli and Briscoe's translation does not include the dialogue; for example, their translation does not include the place where the alto speaks, "Che vôi?" (What do you wish?) in m. 2, in response to the canto and tenor voices which call out to Death. I found these interjections (which are mostly in the form of questions) to be intrinsic to understanding the plot of the narrative and have included them in my translation. I have also altered, as I have mentioned, verb tenses and sentence structure from what is found in Pescerelli and Briscoe's translation to provide a more literal translation of Aquilano's text.

[76] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 22.

Aquilano's poem, "Morte – Che vôi? – Te chiamo" features a dialogue between the speaker and Death. Within the dialogue it becomes apparent that the speaker is calling to Death, and is asking for Death to end his sorrow. As dying was a main conceit for orgasm, the author's true intentions become apparent as early as the second line of text, "I call you [death], behold, for I draw near." As the speaker and Death converse it appears that there is an argument between Death and the speaker as to whether or not Death can "complete all that remains of [the speaker's] sorrow." The section "sì fa! / non fa!," translated literally into "Yes it does! / No it doesn't!," illustrates the argument in the contradicting voices disagreeing on whether or not the speaker is properly prepared for death/orgasm. As Death states in the previous line, the speaker cannot die, "Because, in you, the heart does not reign." This statement relates to the Galenic system of humors. As different humors and temperaments rule the body, and in the same way that the naturally "cold" female body must be roused to proper warmth before sexual "death" can be attained, the body must be in a state where the passions of the heart rule before sexual "death" can ensue. The following argument between Death and the speaker is apparently sufficient to rouse the speaker and allow Death to grant him release, since the following line begins with Death's acceptance and the moral of the story. This final line, "Make the return, because those without life cannot die (again)" provides final proof of the poem's sexual overtones. The speaker's sorrowful longing for death, the insistent badgering of Death, and the return to life with the promise of dying again, all work to metaphorically describe sexual intercourse. It is therefore with this understanding of the text that one can examine the musical choices that Casulana made, and their subsequent impact on metaphorical meaning.

As Karin Pendle notes, the alto line in this madrigal takes on the voice of Death by answering, “What is your wish?” to the summons issued by the canto and the tenor.[77] While the rest of the voices move in small intervals, the alto jumps an octave between Es before settling on the A between them. This very angular line leaps above the pitches in the canto range to a note that is one of the highest in the alto range. Pendle suggests that this line, “aptly establish[s] the mood for the rest of the piece,” as the both the voices and the text embody a reaching, a yearning for death.[78]

My reading of the piece centers on this concept of yearning, striving for death, and how the voices, through dialogue with Death, embody the speaker who learns of the struggle toward death and the fleeting release that is his only reward. A phrase-by-phrase analysis reveals Casulana’s intricate counterpoint and the seamless inclusion of Death’s voice among the vocal lines.

The first phrase, “Morte, (che vôi?) te chiamo” opens with a hollow call to Death in the canto line. Death immediately replies with a swooping gesture up an octave in the alto line. Chromatically altered notes dominate the tenor line, creating tension and leading to create a perfect fifth with the alto on the downbeat of m. 3, which amplifies the eerie, hollow quality of the opening phrase. The phrase ends with a relaxed cadence on G on the downbeat of m. 4. Despite the chromatically altered notes and somewhat cadential pattern in m. 2 which create the illusion of a cadence on A on the downbeat of m. 3, the canto line drops out and the B, that could have gone to A, reappears a beat later on a C-sharp. The canto and basso voices create a relaxed

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[77] Karin Pendle, “Musical Women in Early Modern Europe,” in *Women and Music: A History*, ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 87.

[78] Ibid.

cadence on D in order to set up the final cadence on G. The leading tones and cadential gestures that abound in this first phrase serve to set up the feeling of tension and movement that dominate the rest of the piece. The second phrase, "Eccom'appresso" (I draw near) very nearly cadences on G on the downbeat of m. 6, but both the alto and the basso evade the cadential movement by dropping out, leaving the tenor's cadential ornament, the F-sharp moving to G, completely unsupported. This evaded cadence mirrors the speaker's unfulfilled desire for closure.

When the next phrase, "Prendim'e fa che manchi il mio dolore" (Take me and complete all that remains of my sorrow) enters in m. 6, the alto is left out. It is not until m. 8 that the alto's voice again sounds, answering the request of the other voices. The alto replies, "non posso" (I cannot) to the other voices' request that Death remove their sorrow. Cadentially, the phrase ends with a Phrygian A cadence on the downbeat of m. 9, the end of the word, "dolore." While Casulana is historically far removed from Aristotle, and his words regarding the character of Phrygian harmony likely had little effect on Casulana's use of Phrygian cadences, employing Phrygian cadences, if not thought of as "violently exciting and emotional," were still often imbued with meaning.[79] Therefore, it is important to note these differences and where they occur if one is to attempt to uncover any semantic meaning assigned to them by the composer. In this case, the Phrygian cadence on the word, "dolore" serves to underpin and accentuate the speaker's feelings of sorrow.

The next phrase picks up with another exchange between Death and the speaker. Tenor and basso begin with "Non pôi?" (You cannot?) in m. 9, followed by the canto which echoes the question, and finally the alto, which answers the question with a simple, "Non." Again, a G

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[79] Renée Cox Lorrainem "Recovering Jouissance: Feminist Aesthetics and Music," in *Women and Music: A History*, ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 4.

cadence appears to be implied by the canto, tenor, and basso in the second beat of m. 9, but the canto and basso move to C instead, providing a decidedly unfinished sound to the end of the phrase. This unfinished quality does not linger as the basso begins the next phrase, "Perch'in te non regna il core" (Because in you the heart does not reign). The basso initiates the section with the question "Perchè?" (Why?) with an octave leap reminiscent of the alto's first entry (and its association with the role of Death). The basso drops out, but the tenor picks up the line, also initiated with an octave leap. The basso and tenor create a relaxed G cadence on the word, "core" in m. 11, tying off the section before the entrance of the argument.

The argument section is the only section of the piece that has been discussed by other scholars. Pescerelli and Briscoe note that, "the exclamations 'sì fa!' and 'non fa!' inspired a musical interpretation using the corresponding notes B (si) and F (fa). At measure 17 'sì fa' is set to B and C; and immediately thereupon in the alto 'non fa' is set to E and F."[80] This observation poses several interesting questions that Pescerelli and Briscoe do not address. Any and all discussion of mode (or even, anachronistically, key) is lacking, and so any discussion of "fa" or "si" pointless and unhelpful. In an attempt to assign a mode to the piece, one finds that the tenor line does not outline a particular mode. The absence of accidentals in the key signature suggests and untransposed mode, and the final cadence on D suggests mode 1. As the majority of internal cadences fall on G, a common cadence point in mode 1, this hypothesis is strengthened. This being the case, F in mode 1, would not be "fa". Additionally, "si" was not used as a solfege syllable at all, and wouldn't have had a note equivalent. Therefore, this assertion is unfounded and irrelevant. In my reading, the importance in this section centers on metaphor, not specific

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[80] Beatrice Pescerelli, "Maddalena Casulana," in *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 45.

pitch associations. The outer voices move in opposing motion, while the inner voice move in parallel thirds. This provides a heavier emphasis on “sì fa!” but allows “non fa!” to finish the phrase and continue onto the next one. “Sì fa!” impedes forward motion. The speaker, who, not yet roused for “death” speaks in short fragments that impede movement toward closure. The parallel motion on “non fa!” leads into Death’s concession and the speaker’s “death.” Also, it appears that metaphorically, the argument with Death is enough to rouse the speaker into the proper humor for sexual death. The short “sì fa!” section ends abruptly as “non fa!” transitions directly into “fatte” (done) as Death, in an almost nonchalant manner, grants the speaker’s request and ends the argument. Death does not linger on this concession but offers the final command, or moral, if you will, of the poem; “Make the return, because those without life cannot die (again)”.

These last two sections of text are repeated twice in Casulana’s madrigal, with slightly different music. This repetition is a large-scale representation of the poem’s metaphorical “moral”—that upon dying, one must return to life in order to die again. The first time through, the command “return” is punctuated by a C cadence on the third beat of m. 13, which sets it apart from the consequent portion of the phrase. Casulana introduces B-flats into the basso and alto voices in m. 14 to accentuate the word “vita” (life) and then two beats later to accentuate “morire” (to die). By tying these two opposites, Casulana emphasizes their intrinsic relationship to each other and the speaker’s ability to experience both. “Morire” is also emphasized by a Phrygian A cadence on beat one of m. 15, calling to mind the previous Phrygian cadence on the word “dolore” in m. 9. The Phrygian A cadence leads directly to a relaxed cadence, providing the closure sought by the speaker. However, the speaker’s peace does not last long as the alto initiates another repetition of the argument and climax with the word “perchè?.” This time the

voices enter in strict homophony; the rhythmic duration of the upper voices has been diminished so that they line up with the tenor. Another important difference is that the C cadence, which should occur in m. 19, is evaded by the alto voice. This evaded attempt at closure builds harmonic tension. The canto and alto voices switch lines as the alto finishes the final descent to climax on E. Because of this, the Phrygian A cadence in m. 21 occurs between alto and basso rather than canto and basso as it did in m. 15. After this voice shifting, the final cadence occurs between the tenor and basso voices, creating another relaxed cadence on D.

Throughout the piece, Casulana plays with voicing, register, dialogue, cadences, and sonorities to emphasize different aspects of the text's many-layered prose. Instead of allowing only one interpretation of the text to dominate her musical setting, Casulana seems to have embraced all of the artistic potential of the text, assigning different musical techniques to each special aspect of the text. One such example is Casulana's use of octave leaps.

The leap of an octave plays a vital role in the piece as it winds throughout the lower three voices. As is mentioned above, the alto initiates with an octave leap that crosses the canto line and sets the question "Che vôi?." The next occurrence happens in the basso on the word "Perchè" followed in rapid succession by the tenor's octave leap on the same word. In m. 13, the octave leap occurs in the alto line on C between the words, "restituire" and "ché." At the end of the phrase, after descending farther than an octave, the alto again leaps an octave, this time on D, as it initiates the final section with the word, "Perchè". This time, instead of the basso posing the question, as it did in m. 9, the alto initiates. The alto continues the line, beginning on another E, above the canto's C in m. 16, and descends yet again farther than an octave before coming to rest on the lower E in m. 19. Not content to rest yet, the alto again leaps an octave, this time on E before descending, frequently in thirds above the canto, down a fifth.

Assigning a particular semantic meaning for the octave leap proves less useful in this case than examining the melodic contour enabled by the octave leap. Each leap allows the voices to begin another long descent, which creates tension and a feeling of approaching resolution. While many of these descents do not result in closure, the musical gesture implies movement toward resolution, a movement to mirror the speaker's metaphorical striving for "death." The alto line provides a particularly strong example of this semantic association. The alto line, particularly in the second section, after the argument, when the speaker is experiencing death, repeatedly outlines a descent and search for closure. In the first half, the alto plays the role of Death, answering the questions of the other voices and arguing with them, but when Death and the speaker agree ("fatto"), the alto ceases to voice Death's thoughts and, through octave leaps and descending lines, exclusively mimes the physical action of sexual death.

In searching for the keys to unlock meaning in Casulana's seting of "Morte – Che vôi? – Te chiamo," we begin to notice that she avoided some of the more common musical conceits used by her male contemporaries to portray sex. As LaMay notes, for Casulana, death is not musically represented by "suspensions and resolved dissonances, but rather in rapid dialogue which project his death."[81] It is in the word "fatte" (done) that Death apparently grants the wish of the speaker, a word that is passed over quickly so that Death may offer his final command about returning to life. The speaker who so longs for climax receives only fleeting release before beginning the pattern of longing and release again. Casulana's musical undermining of the "male musical climax," coupled with her repetition of and strong attention to the "sorrow" and the

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[81] Thomasin LaMay, "Composing from the Throat: Madalena Casulana's *Primo libro de madrigali*, 1568," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women*, ed. Thomasin LaMay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 384.

longing which proceeds it again places the importance on the state of being together, not the state of separation and short-lived pleasure.[82]

5.2 MEDITATING ON THE METAPHYSICAL

While some of Casulana's pieces simulate the sex act, others merely meditate on the metaphysical implications of the association of sex and death. The two pieces discussed here share the common theme of life and death in love, tying them firmly to the same madrigalian trope that dominates the first two examples. The primary difference between them is that while the first two pieces deal with sexual death as if it were occurring during the time of the musical narrative, these two pieces do not imitate the sex act. They instead meditate on the philosophical and semantic correlation between the associated words and thoughts about sex and death. As such, the musical settings of these two pieces, while still containing madrigalian word-painting, contain far less "musical *frisson*" (as LaMay calls it), and instead utilize much subtler movements, allowing the listener to contemplate the subject rather than be badgered by blatant sexual reference. This is possibly another way in which Casulana allowed performers of her works to embody beautiful, philosophical music without becoming sexualized objects of the male gaze.

"Ahi possanza d'amor" and "Gran miracol d'amore," both from Casulana's *Il secondo libro de madrigali a quattro voci* published in 1570, highlight similar poetic themes and serve as good examples of Casulana's poetic voice and compositional style. "Ahi possanza d'amor" is

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[82] Ibid.

based on a poem by Francesco Petrarch. “Gran miracol d’amore” is based on a poem by Jacobo Sannazaro. The texts both emphasize the paradoxical nature of love, that it causes both joy and pain, anticipation and fear.

This sentiment mirrors the pieces we have already discussed and is a common theme throughout all of Casulana’s works. Casulana’s choice of poetic texts, as I’ve stated earlier, reveals an appreciation for and familiarity with the famous poets of the era, such as Petrarch, Quirino, Sannazaro, Aquilano, whose poetic texts dwell on philosophical or mythological themes. Unlike some other female composers, both earlier and later than her time, Casulana’s repertory does not contain laments in the traditional sense. Speaking of female composers of the Middle Ages, Maria Coldwell mentions the traditional tropes of the “woman’s song,” such as the loss of a lover, the parting of lovers, or the song of the unhappily married woman.[83] Obviously, the genres and time periods do not align, but similar tropes can be found in the music of Barbara Strozzi. For example, “Lagrime mie” (1659) speaks of the pain of separation of lovers. Casulana seems to have specifically chosen less emotionally charged texts, like the lament, or a traditional “woman’s song,” in favor of more pensive, thought-provoking, or humorous texts. The texts of “Ahi possanza d’amor” and “Gran miracol d’amore” fit that description; they are both studies in the subtle balance between honest discussions of love and life and the tongue-in-cheek humor of love and sex.

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[83] Maria V. Coldwell, “Jongleresses and Trobairitz: Secular Musicians in Medieval France,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1986), 47.

5.2.1 Ahi possanza d’amor

Ahi possanza d'amor

Madalena Casulana

Figure 5: Ahi possanza d'amor

Ahì possanza d'amor

Figure 6: Ahi possanza d'amor (Continued)

"Ahi possanza d'amor" speaks of the "power of love" to provoke joy and pain, hope and despair. As stated above, this meditative text ponders the paradoxical nature of love, citing the Greco-Roman association between sex and death as counterpart or explanation for the abstract character of love's effect on human emotions. The speaker begins with a general description of the power of love, citing its power over his feelings and desires, and ends with a more sequential exposition of how these feelings lead to a desire for "death."

The text, in Italian and English translation, reads as follows:

> Ahi possanza d'amor, com'in un tempo
> E speranz'e timor al cor mi porgi!
> Io pur chiegio per lei e mort'e vita,
> Ard' et agiaccio, e taccio e forte grido
> Aita al mio perir; poi morte chiegio.
> Così servo d'altrui felice aspetto.[84]

> Ah the power of love, how you give my heart
> Both hope and fear at the same time!
> Because of it [the power of love] I ask for life and death
> I burn and freeze, am silent and cry aloud
> For help as I perish; then I ask for death.
> Thus, as Love's servant, content, I wait [for death].[85]

Despite the apparently narrative structure of the poem, Casulana treats the text with a musical setting that encourages a meditative reading rather than as actions narrated by the speaker. She does this in several ways. Through usage of Phrygian cadences, Casulana allows the piece to slide effortlessly through many harmonic regions, granting the piece a meditative quality. Through rhythmic enjambment, she denies cadences strong closure and ensures forward motion

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[84] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 22.

[85] I would like to thank Francesca Savoia for her help with this translation.

throughout the piece. Finally, through word painting, Casulana emphasizes important words and ideas within the poetic text.

Throughout the piece, Phrygian A cadences dominate, alternating infrequently with normal A cadences, allowing the piece to slide seamlessly between harmonic regions on (what we now call) A major, A minor, D major, and D minor, with occasional cadences on C, B-flat, or G, before a final cadence on D, ending the piece with a D major sonority. These Phrygian A cadences play an important structural and harmonic role in the piece besides their ability to grant access to both major and minor tonal areas in A and D. They also create a feeling of tenuous closure, such that the mind feels the pause but the tension lingers on slightly, allowing the line to continue. Casulana emphasizes this tenuous character by connecting her phrases at rhythmically weak points, for instance in m. 4, the tenor and basso lines enter on the new phrase, "e speranz' e timor" on the upbeat to beat four directly after the short Phrygian A cadence between the canto and basso. This rhythmic overlapping of phrases by the use of the Phrygian A cadence occurs twice elsewhere in the piece (mm. 3 and 7). The long and connected phrases created by these weakened Phrygian cadences contribute to the relatively stable, meditative tone of the piece.

Word painting plays an important role in this piece. With only two exceptions, the majority of Casulana's words of emphasis receive a lengthening in duration to express their importance in the text. The first instance of an emphatic lengthening appears in the first phrase as all voices draw out the word "possanza" (power). Clearly, this line would have likely received such a treatment, not only because it is the first entrance of the voices into song but also because it is the purpose of the text, the subject of meditation. However, it is important to notice this treatment as later, in m. 8, when the voices speak "per lei" (for her), they are again lengthened. These words seem unimportant alone, but upon realizing that "per lei" speaks of "possanza" (the

power of love), their emphasis is perhaps more justified. Casulana also granted their lengthening treatment to “morte” (death) in m. 9. I find this interesting, especially in how its treatment compares to the following word, “vita” (life) in mm. 9-10. The canto line provides a striking descending line from E, the highest note heard in the piece, down to F-sharp before the cadence on A. These running eighth notes paint the word “vita” (life) as active, compared to the stagnant harmony on “morte” (death). Compared to the way that Casulana painted “morreste” (form of “death”) in “Morir non può il mio cuore,” with building harmonic tension and ascending melodic lines, one might wonder why “death” is treated so differently in “Ahi possanza d’amor.” I think the difference hinges on two facts. First, as I’ve stated, the purpose of this piece is strikingly different. Rather than create musical sex, Casulana wishes to ponder the mysteries of its power. Secondly, because of this difference, “death” in this piece embodies the point of release, of peace, of the cessation of striving for climax rather than the musical foreplay that dominates the text of “Morir non può il mio cuore,” for instance.

The last instance of word painting that I want to mention appears in mm. 11 and 12 on the words, “agiaccio” and “taccio,” rhyming words that receive the same treatment. “Agiaccio” (I freeze) is contrasted with “ard[o]” (I burn) in m. 10. Of course, this combination of fire and ice, as has been discussed earlier, relates to Petrarch’s concept of “icy fire,” the constitution of an aroused woman. Casulana lengthens “agiaccio” as if the singers’ voices freeze in the pronunciation of it. “Taccio” (I am silent) also is lengthened but this treatment is coupled with a stagnation of the melodic movement and a lowering in register, not to mention three beats of silence after the singers finish. These rather conventional uses of word painting reveal Casulana’s training in and familiarity with traditional madrigal tropes.

The final section of "Ahi possanza d'amor," mm. 16 to the end, as can be seen elsewhere in Casulana's poetic selections, serves almost as a moral for the preceding lines. Casulana sets up this interpretation by setting off the final section musically. In m. 16, after a D cadence on beat three of "chiegio" (I ask), Casulana extends the D major sonority, swapping pitches between the alto and canto and bringing the basso up the octave. While this allows the final section to connect seamlessly to the previous sections, it also, in essence, signals its difference. Immediately, melodic and harmonic movement has slowed down and the first heavily accented D major sonority appears. The final section continues to assert its independence as a striking descending triad of A minor falls through the voices, beginning with the canto in m. 18. This triad purposefully accents the word "felice" (content), describing the speaker's happiness as he awaits "death." A perfect cadence on A appears in m. 22 between the canto and alto, but the bottom three voices continue on and form the D cadence in m. 23. This plagal coda, terminating with a D major sonority after a heavy emphasis on the descending A minor triad, concludes the speaker's wait for "death" with a pleasant arrival point.

Throughout the piece, Casulana uses several madrigal conventions. Between word painting, rhythmic and harmonic dexterity, conventional melodic cadential patterns, alternation between imitative and homophonic sections, and specific cadential placement, Casulana shows her mastery of the compositional techniques of the madrigal. Additionally, her sensitive reading of the text reveals an education in the madrigal tradition. By choosing to emphasize the philosophical aspect of this association between sex and death, and by setting this text with subtle instances of word painting, perhaps Casulana sought to release her performers from their roles as sexual muses, while still revealing her intelligence and skill in the madrigal tradition.

5.2.2 Gran miracol d'amore

Gran miracol d'amore

Madalena Casulana

Figure 7: Gran miracol d'amore

Gran miracol d'amore

10

o che di lui viv' - - - e'in lui mor'-ell' - et i -

o che di lui viv' - e'in lui mor'-ell' - et i -

o che di lui viv' - - - e'in lui mor'-ell' et i - o, et i - - - -

o che di lui viv' - - - e'in lui mor' - ell et i -

13

o, che, mentr'-es - ser più'in vi - ta li di-spia - ce, - tal di mort' - ha de - si -

o, che, mentr'-es - ser più'in vi - ta li di-spia - - - ce, tal - di mort' - ha de - si -

o, che, mentr'-es - ser più'in vi - ta li di-spia - ce, tal - di mort' ha de - si -

o, più'in vi - ta li di-spia - ce, tal - di mort' ha de - si -

16

o che di lui viv' - e'in lui mor'-ell' et i - o.

o che di lui viv' - e'in lui mor'-ell et i - o.

o che di lui viv' - - - e'in lui mor'-ell' - et i - o, et i - - - o.

o che di lui viv' - e'in lui mor' - ell' et i - o.

Figure 8: Gran miracol d'amore (Continued)

"Gran miracol d'amore" also appeared in Casulana's *Il secondo libro de madrigali a quattro voci* published in 1570. The poem, by Jacobo Sannazaro, also discusses the dual power of love to cause both joy and pain. Like Petrarch's poem, Sannazaro's speaks of love's power to kill and yet also revive the soul, depicting a death so pleasurable that the soul regrets living and chooses to die instead. Again, unlike the first two pieces discussed above, this text remains meditative, speaking of the soul and the body in sex and death rather than depicting a specific speaker's journey through them. The text, in Italian and English translation, reads as follows:

> Gran miracol d'amore, quel che uccide,
> Dà vit'e in un si sface,
> L'alma s'aviv'e more
> Che, mentr'essere più in vita li dispiace,
> Tal di mort' ha desio
> Che di lui viv'e in lui mor'ell'et io.[86]
>
> Great miracle of love, that which kills,
> It gives life and in one can destroy,
> The soul revives and dies
> When she (the soul) regrets living
> She has such a wish to die
> That she lives of him (Love)
> And in him she dies, and I with her.[87]

Casulana's setting of this text is very similar to her setting of "Ahi possanza d'amor;" however, for this piece she employs greater rhythmic diversity and freedom between voices as well as more extended passages of imitation. As far as word painting is concerned, this piece, also from her later publication in 1570, demonstrates a more subtle application of the technique,

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[86] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 27.

[87] Thanks to Francesca Savoia for her translation of this text.

particularly emphasizing the difference between “life” and “death” within the text. Harmonically, the piece dwells within a C mode, only touching on F-sharp and B-flat infrequently to allow harmonic shifts into G major and G minor areas. Unlike “Ahi possanza d’amor,” in “Gran miracol d’amor,” Casulana only links a few phrases by rhythmically undermining cadence points, clearly delineating others for dramatic or structural purposes.

Word painting appears most clearly on the words, “s’aviv’e” (revives), “viv’e” (lives), and “more” (dies). When either of the first two words appears in the text, it is accompanied by a rising scalar motion in m. 4. For instance, in m. 4, the basso line portrays the soul being revived, as it rises up the scale. Conversely, directly following that gesture, all of the voices (save the tenor) descend on half notes on the word “more” (death), as the once revived soul dies again. This pattern continues in the piece when, in m. 10, the voices break into an extended imitation spurred by this rising scalar motion, occurring first in the tenor . The voices race and rise on the word, “viv’e” (lives) before descending in quarter notes as the line reads “e’in lui mor’ell’et io” (and in him dies she and I). The word “io” (I) is highlighted by two full beats before creating the cadence on C on the first beat of m. 13, effectively slowing the harmonic and melodic pace and preparing for the next section. Measures 13-18 to the end are a direct repetition of mm. 7-12. This does not appear to be the case in Pescerelli’s edition because she added two F-sharps in the alto line in m. 12 (but not in m. 18) and marked a B-flat in the canto line in m. 13, but not in m. 7, of which 13 is a direct repetition. In my transcription above, I have kept the B-flats in mm. 7 and 13 because they coincide closely with a B-flat in the tenor voice. Additionally, I have returned the B at the end of each of those measures to B natural so that it leads in the C in mm. 8 and 14. I have removed the F-sharps in m. 12 because I can find no reason why they need to be

added, but have added an F-sharp in the tenor line in m. 5, creating the perfect cadence on G between the tenor and basso.

The last instance of text painting that I'd like mention occurs in mm. 7-9, and 13 and 14 over the phrases, "mentr'esser più vita li dispiace" (when she regrets living) and "tal di mort' ha desio" (she has such a desire for death). Casulana emphasizes this crucial junction by highlighting "dispiace" (regrets) with an intricate cadential ornament and an accented chromatic movement in the alto line on "tal di" (then). The F-sharps in the alto line, in m. 8 and again in m. 14, move from an F major harmony on the last beat of "dispiace" directly to a D major sonority on the weak second half of beat four. This syncopated chromatic movement highlights the textual division, emphasizing the shift into the speaker's desire for death, away from the meditating on the dual nature of Love.

Texture also plays an important role in this piece. For the majority of the piece, the voices move in relative homophony. Occasionally the lowest voice will enter late or the highest voice will enter before the others, but for the most part, the voices move together. It is not until "che di lui viv' mor'ell'et io" (That she lives of him [Love] and in him she dies, and I with her) in m. 10 that an extended passage of imitation begins, initiated by the tenor voice. As I stated above, the first part of the poem is relatively stagnant in terms of movement; it meditates on the dual nature of Love, its power to kill and revive. But once the poem speaks of Love's influence on the soul, the poetic text moves from explanatory to somewhat sequential (i.e., the soul regrets living, wishes for death, lives of Love, and she and I die). As the poem speaks of the soul's journey to death, taking the speaker with her, the voices follow the tenor's lead, building upon each other and leading each other into a C cadence on "io" (I). Dividing the poem thus, Casulana reveals her sensitivity to poetic syntax and her ability to musically represent both stillness and motion

within the tranquility of a meditative tone. Therefore, in much the same way as “Ahi possanza d’amor,” Casulana is able to depict sexual/philosophical texts in such a way to de-emphasize sexual gratification and to avoid objectification for her performers, as well as herself. Poetically, Casulana emphasizes the mysteries of love and the joys of togetherness, rather than the heated race to climax. She keeps in mind the ways in which her voice is encoded in the music by releasing performers from the role of sexual conquests and by insisting, as a composer, to assert her musical merit through creative and intelligent music and text settings. Casulana refuses to be caged in gender stereotypes that limit her to the realm of the physical, and through her music she attempts to liberate herself and the other victims of the male gaze by claiming voice, restoring the *mind* to the *body*, as it were.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Through this analysis of Madalena Casulana's world, musical and philosophical heritage, and the musical devices with which she expresses her unique voice, we find that an inquiry into how Casulana's individual and gender-specific identity is encoded into her works. Rather than relegate ourselves to stereotypical signs or symbols of traditional gender associations, or insist that feminine gender identity be present as the opposite of traditional or male gender identity in music, we have embraced a multiplicity of identity and gender markers gleaned from an investigation into Casulana's life, words, cultural and musical heritage, and her works.

Casulana's stated desire to reveal the "conceited error of men," is clearly shown in her works in several different ways. Her sensitive and intelligent settings of philosophical texts reveal her training in the classics and her knowledge of the rhetoric and innuendo of the madrigal literature. Her compositional style, through intricate application of imitation, homophony, colorful harmony, and word painting, reveals training in musical technique as well as individual skill and creativity. Finally, her manipulation of her many skills, in text and music, articulates her desire for equality with men, either through depicting the consequences of non-cooperation, as in "Morir non può il mio cuore," or emphasizing the state of unity between lovers instead of the moment of release and detachment, as in "Morte – Che vôi? – Te chiamo," or through meditation on the paradox of love and the pleasure of waiting for "death" as in "Ahi possanza d'amor" and "Gran miracol d'amore." In all of these ways, whether through explicit exhortations

for unity between men and women, or through exhibitions of her merit as philosopher and composer, Casulana exposed the "conceited error of men" by proving that she too possessed the "high gifts of the intellect."

Madalena Casulana sought not only to have a voice within the male dominated society of sixteenth-century Italy through her music, but to use her music to illustrate the flaws and failings of a society based on exclusion and domination of women. Adopting and reapplying the sexual metaphors of madrigal literature, Madalena worked within this male dominated genre and transformed the feminine objects into human actors, partners with the male poetic speakers. Her manipulation of musical semantics, text, and metaphor reveal an emphasis on a more egalitarian view of male-female relations. In her efforts to reveal to men that they are not the only possessors of the "high gifts of the intellect," Madalena sought to equalize sexual relations in poetry, replacing the hunted, conquered, and victimized women of male sexual fantasy with living, breathing partners in sexual union. Rather than denounce or attack men, Casulana elevated herself through musical manipulation, asserting equality with men and emphasizing that intelligence is not gender specific. Madalena Casulana found her voice within the realm of the sixteenth-century Italian madrigal, taking up the responsibility for showing the world that women, through work of their own, not hindered by gender stereotypes, nor needing to impersonate men, can possess the gift of intellect and produce great works of art.

APPENDIX

DEDICATION TO ISABELLA DE' MEDICI-ORSINA (1568)

This dedication appeared in Casulana's *Il primo libro de madrigali a quattro voci*, published in 1568 in Venice by Girolamo Scotto:

All'Illustrissima et Eccellentissima Signora, la Signora Donna Isabella De'Medici Orsina, Duchessa dei Bracciano.

Conosco veramente Illustrissima et Eccellentissima Signora, che queste mie primitie, per la debolezza loro, non possono partorir quell'effetto, ch'io vorrei, che sarebbe oltre il dar qualche testimonio all'Eccellentia Vostra della divotion mio, di mostrar anche al mondo (per quanto mi fosse concesso in questa profession della Musica) il vano error de gl'huomini, che de gli alti doni dell'intelletto tanto si credono patroni, che par loro, ch'alle Donne non possono medesimamente esser communi. Ma con tutto ciò non ho voluto mancar di mandarle in luce, sperando che dal chiaro nome di Vostra Eccellentia (a cui riverentemente le dedico) tanto di lumi debbano consequire, che da quello possa accendersi qualche altro più elevato ingegno, a dimostrar con chiari effetti quello che non ho potuto dimostrar'io se non con l'animo. Gradisca dunque l'Eccellentia Vostra questa mia candida intentione, e se da così immaturi frutti non me ne potrà venir quella lode, che sola è il premio delle virtuose fatiche, faccia almeno la bontà di lei, ch'io ne god ail premio della sua gratia, che così, se non per buoni, almeno per fortunatissimi saranno da me sempre reputati; et a Vostra Eccellenta humilmente bacio le mani.

De Venetia il di x. d'Aprile. 1568. Di Vostra Eccellentia Humilissima Servitrice. Maddalena Casulana.[88]

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[88] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 7.

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