

# *Contrafacta*

*Modes of Music Re-textualization  
in the Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*

edited by  
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*On the cover*

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# INTRODUCTORY ESSAY



Marina Toffetti

## ***Contrafacere*. Retextualizing polyphonic music from the late sixteenth to the seventeenth century**

### **Preliminary considerations**

This volume explores some approaches to retextualization in music from the age of the European Reformations. The procedures of substituting or adapting texts examined here encompass a fairly wide geographical area, which includes the territories of today's Italy, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, and cover a time-span of around a century (from the last decades of the 16th<sup>1</sup> to the end of the 17th century);<sup>2</sup> whereas, not rarely, the compositions subjected to these procedures had been composed and published several

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<sup>1</sup> Dating from 1587 is the *Primus liber suavissimas praestantissimorum nostrae aetatis artificum Italianorum cantilenas [...] continens*, Erfurt: Georg Baumann, 1587, examined in the essay by Michael CHIZZALI, "Text and context of the Thuringian *contrafactum*. New insights into Melchior Backhaus's *Primus liber* (1587)", in the present volume; the following year saw the publication of the collection *Musica transalpina. Madrigales translated of foure, five and sixe parts*, London: Thomas East, 1588, whose importance for the transmission of Italian musical modes to the British Isles is repeatedly underlined in the essay by Alessandra PETRINA, "The court of James VI of Scotland (1566-1625) and its reception of Italian musical modes", in this same volume.

<sup>2</sup> The last essay in this volume analyzes the musical compositions performed at the funeral of Queen Ulrika Eleonora the Elder in 1693, and among these the motet *Aspice e caelis* by the Flemish composer Daniel Danielis, revised for the occasion with a new text in Swedish. See Lars BERGLUND, "Mourning a dead Queen. The music at the funeral of Ulrika Eleonora the Elder in Stockholm (1693)".

decades beforehand and sometimes in areas very far from the place where their texts were modified. With few exceptions, the compositions considered here are polyphonic works belonging to both the secular (canzonette, villanelle, and especially madrigals, mainly of Italian origin, disseminated, as is known, throughout much of Europe) and sacred genres (mostly motets). As we shall see, the substitution of the text in many cases determines what, at least formally, might be defined a ‘transmigration’ of the secular genre into the sacred.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking (but with many distinctions), the compositions used as the starting point for the operation have been named *models*, while the results of the procedure of retextualization are called *contrafacta*.

In musicological literature the term *contrafactum* has been used sometimes in a limited sense, to refer to a vocal composition originally with a secular text later substituted by a sacred text, so it could be performed in a liturgical or devotional context, and sometimes in a wider sense, to indicate a vocal composition of which the original text, whatever the language and subject matter, at a certain point in its history and for a variety of reasons, has been more or less extensively modified or substituted by a new text, sometimes in another language, evidently held to be more suited to a new and different context.<sup>4</sup> Herein we will use the term in the second, broader sense, investigating the diverse ways, times, conditions and reasons that led to the creation of the different *contrafacta* examined.

The presence of an original text, of a musical construct ‘made to measure’, and of a new text, adapted to the same musical construct or in turn ‘made to measure’, makes the *contrafactum* an intertextual artifact *par excellence*, where the system of correspondences between the music and the original text, between the new text and the music, and between the substitute text and the original creates in many cases an intricate network of more or less explicit references, characterized by a rare wealth and complexity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Further considerations on this matter can be found in Section 4 (Sacred, secular, devotional) of this introduction.

<sup>4</sup> See Robert FALCK – Martin PICKER, “Contrafactum”, in NG2, vol. 6, pp. 367–370; Georg VON DADELSEN – Armin BRINZING – Hartmut SCHICK – Reinhard SCHULZ, “Parodie und Kontrafaktur”, in MGG2, Sachteil, vol. 7 (1997), coll. 1394–1416.

<sup>5</sup> On the concept of intertextuality, see the chapter “Intertestualità e arte allusiva” [Intertextuality and allusive art] in Maria CARACI VELA, *La filologia musicale. Istituzione, storia, strumenti critici. Volume II*, Lucca: LIM, 2009, pp. 117–173.

Precisely due to its particular complexity, the *contrafactum* not only lends itself to varying forms of investigation, but *needs* to be considered from different perspectives and with complementary methodological approaches. Aspects to be taken into account in order to understand the nature, characteristics and the *raison d'être* of a vocal composition with a substitute text may involve historical-musical questions of a more traditional type (who wrote the poetic text set to music? Where, when and through which channels did the composer come to know of it? Where, when and through which channels did the author of the new text come into contact with the original vocal composition? What motivations – theological, doctrinal, liturgical, political, cultural, practical – lie behind the different procedures of retextualization?), aspects connected to the aesthetics and history of its reception (which features of the poetic text mostly struck the composer? What does his music reveal in its manner of 'reading' and interpreting the poetic composition? How did the different kinds of listeners of the time react on hearing the model and the *contrafactum*? How do today's listeners react?), as well as questions of a technical-compositional kind (which techniques and what musical strategies did the composer adopt to express the emotions he felt on reading the poetic text? What relation exists between the form of the poetic text and the musical structure? At what level, topical and/or macro-structural, can the correspondences between the poetic text and the musical construct it inspired be placed? And what about those between the music and the substitute text?).

When faced with a *contrafactum* we must also ask ourselves, from one case to the other, *how many* compositions constitute the object of study. The answer is not univocal: in some cases, in fact, the text of a vocal composition has been modified only slightly, with the result that these modifications, though evidently deemed necessary to redefine the function of the composition, are not such as to modify the original composition in a significant manner. In other instances, on the contrary, the contrafact differs considerably from its model, sometimes with different subject matter or even with an opposite meaning compared to the original, sometimes also in a different language – a circumstance that gives the composition an overall novel and at times also surprising sound. In such cases it is opportune to consider the original composition and its *contrafactum* as two distinct compositions, though closely related by the presence of a largely corresponding musical construct. We are, then, dealing with three different aesthetic objects, involved in a complex play of reciprocal

references: the poetic text, produced by the impact of one or more experiences (we will never know which) on the sensibility of the poet, who, armed with his artistic predisposition and his skills in versification, has translated them into the language of poetry; the polyphonic-vocal composition with the same text, resulting from the impact of the poetic composition on the sensibility of the composer (in this case acting in the guise of a reader), who has translated his personal aesthetic experience into the language of music (here, instead, acting more properly in the capacity of an artist); and the *contrafactum*, that is the result of a procedure of textual modification or substitution, arising in turn from the impact of listening to the madrigal on a listener with musical and poetic-literary skills.

Alongside these three distinct artistic products, we find three different actors that take their turn on the stage (the poet, the composer, and the author, or the adapter of the new text) and the same number of scenarios regarding their fruition: from the reading (public or private, aloud or silent) of the poem (“c’est l’exécution du poème, qui est le poème”),<sup>6</sup> to the listening (real or mental) to the original composition, and to that resulting from its retextualization. Studying a *contrafactum* therefore means coming to terms with these multiple aspects, taking into account the different moments in the history of the transmission and the reception and trying to identify oneself with the principal protagonists and consumers of the various poetic and musical products, each with their own particular perspectives and horizons of expectation.

When a vocal composition is, for any reason, subjected to a procedure of retextualization, the outcome could, in reality, prove more effective than the original. One needs to assess, case by case, whether the new text, or the more or less extensive modification of the original, has given the composition fresh life, brought about by a novel creative act, is a simple adaptation without any significant consequences, or instead is an unwarranted distortion of the original due to a merely instrumental and at times also fundamentally ill-advised operation.

Other aspects that need to be considered are the phonetic characteristics of the original and the substitute text, and the extent to which they are effectively

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<sup>6</sup> In its time, Paul Valéry’s well known statement had the effect of a detonator, triggering a process of reflection that would lead to the formulation of the so-called theory of reception. On this matter, see Hans Robert JAUSS, “Retrospectiva sulla teoria della ricezione – *ad usum musicae scientiae*”, in *L’esperienza musicale*, pp. 39–50: 39–40.



highlighted in the musical setting; the meaning of the two texts and of the individual words contained in them, and how it is reflected in the musical construct; and, last but not least, the sense perceived when listening to the composition used as a model and to its retextualization, keeping in mind that music is able to convey the general or the profound sense of a text, even without rendering its meaning overtly or topically.

Finally, an investigation into the re-use of pre-existing vocal compositions should not overlook the motivations that lie behind each case of retextualization – whether of a theological, doctrinal, political, practical, or any other kind – and the functions of the *contrafacta* in relation to the circumstances of their use; nor should one neglect to reflect on the relation between the sacred and secular contexts and on the respective musical genres of reference.

## 1. Transmission, translation, be-trayal

Now I'd like to ask a question that takes us to the heart of the matter:  
every language is a translation. [...]  
A translation by whom? Of what? What is the original?<sup>7</sup>

As far as the history of transmission is concerned, the simple fact that a poetic text has been set to music by a composer indicates, at the very least, that he must have had access to the related text. In the same way, the fact that a pre-existent polyphonic composition, in a given time and space, was provided with a new text, suggests that at that moment and in that place it was accessible, known, and probably appreciated. From the perspective of the history of transmission, a *contrafactum* could therefore be seen as a sign of the diffusion (or dissemination) of a composition, while in the perspective of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as an indicator of the duration of its efficacy:<sup>8</sup> glancing through the list of collections including *contrafacta* in the addendum to this volume,<sup>9</sup> published from 1576 to

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<sup>7</sup> Raimon PANIKKAR, *Parliamo dello stesso Dio?*, Milano: Jaca Book, 2014, p. 19. Unless otherwise specified, the English translations given here are by Michael Webb.

<sup>8</sup> “the study of receptive behaviour should aim both to identify the reasons for the different fortunes of some works and composers over the course of history, and more especially to clarify why over the course of history some features of a work are highlighted rather than others”. See Michela GARDA, “Teoria della ricezione e musicologia”, in *L'esperienza musicale. Teoria e storia della ricezione*, eds. Gianmario Borio – Michela Garda, Torino: EDT, 1989, pp. 1–35: 22–23.

<sup>9</sup> See Marco GIULIANI, “Printed collections including *contrafacta* (1576–1621)”, pp. 267–324; Gabriele TASCETTI, “Printed collections including *contrafacta* (1646–1649)”, pp. 325–332.

1621 and from 1646 to 1649, one comes to realize how canzonette, canzoni vilanesche and madrigals were widely circulated in various parts of Europe with substitute texts in Latin, English and German, which tells us that they were still performed and appreciated many years (if not decades) after they had been published, often in places quite far from their place of publication and from the center in which the respective composers were (or had been) active.

However, there can be quite different ways to approach and revitalize the previous poetic or poetic-musical texts. At a first level, the translation of poetic texts was in some circumstances simply a means to make musical products, deemed aesthetically worthy, available for use in other linguistic areas. Consider, for example, Giovanni Battista Pinello di Ghirardi's *Primo libro de le napoletane a cinque voci* (1584), printed in the same year in the German translation *Narwe kurtzweilige deutsche Lieder mit fünf Stimmen*,<sup>10</sup> or the bilingual Italian-German edition of Cesare de Zacharia's *Soave e dilettevole canzonette* (1590) (see figure 1).<sup>11</sup> In other contexts, the translation has moved far beyond the level of a mere transliteration, at times reaching that of a genuine transcreation.<sup>12</sup>

Just as every good translation (where the Latin *traducere* indicates the act of unveiling, but more especially of transferring, taking beyond) is 'a journey towards the elsewhere and the otherwise said', an attempt to deepen the sense of the text, transporting the signified beyond the linguistic barrier of the signifier and revealing meanings that the original language was not able to express in a satisfactory manner, in the same way the affixing of a new text to the musical structure of a pre-existing vocal composition might illuminate its sense in a more effective way than the original.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, just as a mediocre

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<sup>10</sup> On this matter, see CHIZZALI, "Text and context of the Thuringian *contrafactum*", pp. 61–82: 63; and Chiara COMPARIN, "From Venice to Nuremberg and Leipzig. *Il trionfo di Dori* (1592) and its German retextualizations", in this volume, pp. 117–150: 117 footnote 2.

<sup>11</sup> Cesare de ZACHARIA, *Soave et dilettevole canzonette*, Munich: Adam Berg, 1590. See COMPARIN, "From Venice to Nuremberg and Leipzig", p. 117, footnote 2.

<sup>12</sup> On this matter, see the reflections on the cultural climate at the court of James VI of Scotland, in which "translation often becomes [...] *transcreation*: within this concept, adaptation and musical transposition also find a place". See PETRINA, "The court of James VI of Scotland", pp. 43–60 : 53 and 58–59.

<sup>13</sup> "For Buddhists, language is not something that saves us because we identify with it; rather, it is something that can transform us when we interact with it. [...] there does not seem to be room in the Buddhist wardrobe for any "one and only" [...] doctrines or words. All words are servants of the truth. And the truth needs many servants". See Paul KNITTER, *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian*, London: One World Publications, 2013, p. 63.

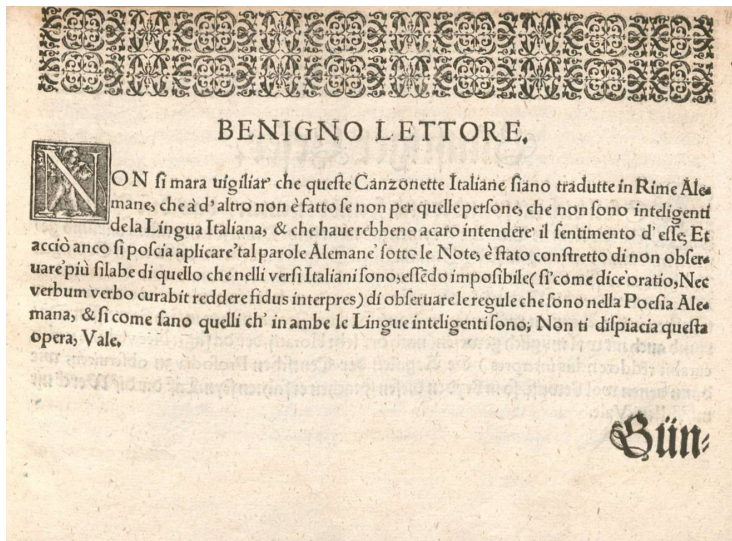


Figure 1a. Cesare de Zacharia, *Soave e dilettevole canzonette* (Munich: Adam Berg, 1590),  
 foreword to the “Benigno lettore”.  
 München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Musikabteilung, 4 Mus. pr. 88.

I.

**S**Anzon vanc volando sempre forte gridando Canzon  
 Eh hin fleug in die Welt Esang schrey laut laß hören dein Clang Eh hin  
 vanc volan- do sempre forte gridando Ogn'vn corre'à ve-  
 fleug in die Welt Esang Schrey laut laß hören dein Clang! Wer sehen wil das  
 der l' afflitta mesta Alma ch'el crud'amor tanto mole-  
 sehr betrübte Herz mein Der lauff geschwindt die Lieb macht mir schwere  
 sta tanto mo- lesta ogn'vn corre'à veder l'afflitta è  
 Peyn macht mir schwere Peyn Wer sehen wil das sehr betrübte

Figure 1b. Cesare de Zacharia, *Soave e dilettevole canzonette*  
 (Munich: Adam Berg, 1590), fol. 1.  
 München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Musikabteilung, 4 Mus. pr. 88.

version can distort the sense of the original text, in the same way a new text can betray the sense of the madrigal model (contrary to *traducere*, the verb *vertere*, hence the noun ‘version’, means to address, modify, transform, and communicates the will to bend a text to make it mean something different compared to its original meaning).

It should nevertheless be noted that in some circumstances the deformation (or rather the radical distortion) of the sense of a polyphonic-vocal composition was anything but involuntary. Giovanni Maria Nanino’s madrigal *Morir non può l mio core*,<sup>14</sup> first published in his first book of 5-voice madrigals (c.1570-1575),<sup>15</sup> reappears in his third book of 5-voice madrigals (1586)<sup>16</sup> in a substantially identical musical version, but with a deeply modified text (*Morir può il vostro core*) which, though playing with precise analogies of meaning and with numerous correspondences of signifiers, overturns its global sense:

Giovanni Maria Nanino (1579)

Morir non può l mio core  
e ucciderlo vorrei poi che vi piace,  
ma trar non si può fuori  
del petto vostr’ove gran tempo giace,  
ed uccidendol’io come desio  
so che morreste voi morend’anch’io.

(My heart cannot die  
and I would kill it since it pleases you,  
but it cannot be taken out  
from your breast where it has long lain,  
and on killing it as I desire  
I know you would die as I too would die).

Giovanni Maria Nanino (1586)

Morir **può il vostro** core.  
**Ancidetelo pur come** vi piace,  
**che quant’al trarlo fuore**  
del petto **mio, se pur vi giacqu’o** giace,  
**non averrà com’è vostro** desio  
**ch’ucciso lui debba morir** anch’io.

(Your heart can die.  
**So kill it as you like**  
**because taking it out**  
from my breast, **where it has lain or lies**  
**it will not be, as you desire,**  
**that on killing it I too must die).**

<sup>14</sup> Different versions are known of this madrigal with substitute text. For more details see Addendum. Printed collections including *contrafacta*, pp. 282, 302, 320.

<sup>15</sup> The *editio princeps* of Giovanni Maria Nanino’s anthology was printed approximately between 1570 and 1575, but the first edition to have survived is the reprint of 1579: *Di Gio. Maria Nanino maestro di capella in S. Maria Maggiore di Roma il primo libro de madrigali a cinque voci novamente ristampati*, In Venezia: Appresso Angelo Gardano, 1579 (RISM A/I N 26). See Anthony NEWCOMB, “Nanino, Giovanni Maria”, in NG2, vol. 27, p. 611.

<sup>16</sup> *Di Gio. Maria Nanino musico nella capella di Sua Santità il terzo libro de madrigali a cinque voci. Novamente composti, e dati in luce*, In Venetia: Appresso Angelo Gardano, 1586 (RISM A/I N 31, NN 31; RISM B/I 1586<sup>1/8</sup>).

Therefore, the question that needs to be asked, case by case, is: were the *contrafacta* we are considering conceived with the intention of *traducere* or *vertere*? And do they have the effect of communicating, transferring and transmitting, or modifying? Observing a *contrafactum* from this point of view means entering the realm of cultural transfer, and of the history of reception and assimilation, asking oneself not only *until where* and *until when* the diffusion of a composition arrived, but more especially *how* it was received and what sense it assumed in a new context: it means moving away from a quantifiable context and dealing with cultural questions that are qualitatively more nuanced. Given a vocal composition that is well known and appreciated, but based on a poetic text that is obsolete, or deemed scarcely consonant with a new cultural climate or a new political, social or confessional context, it is one thing to set out to revitalize it, to provide it with a text that is able to say something new, it is another to appropriate it in a merely instrumental fashion, with the sole purpose of adapting it to contingent needs and at the cost of betraying its sense and the original expressive instances. In the first case we are witnessing an act of love, in the second an act of violence. From this perspective, the *contrafacta* examined in this volume, as we shall see, cover a variety of cases.

Traditional music historiography invariably repeats that in the madrigal a unique and inimitable union between music and the text is created:<sup>17</sup> which is certainly true, at least in many cases. Equally true is the fact that, starting from the same music, other unions – countless unions – can be created, each of them just as unique and inimitable.<sup>18</sup> In a certain sense, what is created between the text and music is a unique relationship, but one that is not necessarily indissoluble: it is a love-story open to infinity. Each poetic text is potentially open to countless encounters with the music: each composer can engage with the text and allow himself to be inspired by it, and each encounter can result in a new and surprising outcome. A new sensibility can join that of the poet, each time focusing on different aspects, and the different musical guises assumed by a single poetic text can highlight different aspects on each occasion. Moreover,

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<sup>17</sup> On the subjection of the music to the word within the Italian madrigal see, for example, Claudio GALLICO, *L'età dell'Umanesimo e del Rinascimento*, Torino: E.D.T. Edizioni di Torino, 1978 (Storia della musica a cura della Società Italiana di Musicologia, 3), p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> On this matter, what Giovanni Pozzi wrote about mystic experiences comes to mind: "One of the paradoxes of the mystic experience, perhaps the first, is that, though highly personal, it is always the same: the same single path". See Angela da FOLIGNO, *Il libro dell'esperienza*, ed. Giovanni Pozzi, Milano: Adelphi, 1992, pp. 31–32.

for us in our attempt to read this process *ex post*, the poetic text set to music could act as a litmus test, able to reveal, through the same reagent, the different reactions prompted by the text in the various different composers.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, when it is the poetic-musical products themselves (madrigals, canzonette, but also sacred compositions like psalms, motets and others still) that in turn prompt other cultural reactions, inspiring the composition of new texts created *ex novo* or adapted from pre-existing texts, it is the music that will act as a litmus test, able to reveal the differences between the reactions of the authors, or of the adaptors, of the new texts. Each text will thus be able to underline and emphasize, but sometimes also reveal, or uncover, aspects of the music that the union with the original text was not able to express in full.

## 2. Sense, sound, and *signifié*

E come giga e arpa, in tempra tesa  
di molte corde, fa dolce tintinno  
a tal da cui la nota non è intesa,  
così da' lumi che li m'apparinno  
s'accogliea per la croce una melode  
che mi rapiva, senza intender l'inno.<sup>20</sup>

Il *sens*o delle parole non può essere equiparato alla *realità* delle parole.  
E nella parola stessa è annidato un mistero.<sup>21</sup>

The first time I heard a *contrafactum* (I think it was *Felle amaro*, where Aquilino Coppini's new text had been set to Claudio Monteverdi's well known madrigal *Cruda Amarilli*) I remember feeling an emotion that was at the same time intense and ambivalent, that I reflected upon for long afterwards. The question

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<sup>19</sup> “The pictorial-tonal representation of the events and sentiments expressed in the text is also surely found in the music, to the extent in which it has been felt important by the author”. See Arnold SCHÖNBERG, *Pierrot lunaire, Vorwort*, Wien: Universal-Edition, 1914; quoted (in Italian) in Luigi ROGNONI, “Tempo durata, esecuzione musicale”, in ID., *Fenomenologia della musica radicale*, pp. 13–22: 18.

<sup>20</sup> (And as a lute and harp, accordant strung / with many strings, a dulcet tinkling make / to him by whom the notes are not distinguished, / so from the lights that there to me appeared / upgathered through the cross a melody / which rapt me, without distinguishing the hymn). See Dante ALIGHIERI, *Divina Commedia, Paradiso*, commento di Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, Milano: Mondadori, 2018<sup>14</sup> (Oscar classici), XIV, 118-123, pp. 407–408; translation by Henry Longfellow, Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1867.

<sup>21</sup> (The *sense* of the words cannot be compared to the *reality* of the words. And a mystery is nested in the word itself). PANIKKAR, *Parliamo dello stesso Dio?*, p. 16.

I asked myself at the time was something like this: what happened to me while I was listening to this *contrafactum*? What was it that stirred inside me? and why? This section does not claim to give a definitive answer, but attempts to examine the terms of the question.

In order to properly understand the *raison d'être* of a vocal composition with a substitute text, I believe one should ask, in the first place, what is the point of setting a poetic text to music, affixing a text to a piece of music and, in a broader sense, “uniting words and sounds”. On this matter it seems helpful to quote the words of the philosopher and musician Massimo Donà:

why unite words and sounds? [...] perhaps to reinforce or ‘underline’ musically the meanings of these or those propositional sequences? [...] The fact is that, [...] even where it is used as a simple ‘reinforcement’ of a written (sung) text, music transfigures the *verbum* until making it shine with a sense that in any case will “exceed” (to a greater or lesser extent) the semantics of the word. [...] That is, even where the meaning is only intended to be ‘reinforced’ by this procedure, to take place it will in any case be a process at the end of which the meaning will make a purely rhythmic-timbral ‘enunciation’ possible. [...] But what exactly can we say about such ‘exceeding’? For now we can limit ourselves to pointing out how it shifts the question of the *meaning*, inscribing it, *sic et simpliciter*, within the realm of “sense”.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the musical construct is perceived as tightly linked to the text from which it is derived, but at the same time as something autonomous, able to go beyond and to reveal, more than the meaning or the meanings conveyed by the text, its deepest sense, translating it into the language of sounds.<sup>23</sup> Following this line of thought, we can say that, in the case of a *contrafactum*, also the substitute text can, in some circumstances and in its own way, help to illuminate this sense; indeed, this sometimes happens even despite the fact that the meanings it conveys differ from those conveyed by the text of the model. If, then we postulate an implicit unity of *sense*, made explicit by the music, over and above the most explicit meanings of the two texts set in reciprocal relation by the procedure of textual substitution, it should come as no surprise to note

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<sup>22</sup> Massimo DONÀ, *Parole sonanti. Filosofia e forme dell'immaginazione*, Bergamo: Moretti & Vitali, 2014, pp. 82–83.

<sup>23</sup> In trying to explain why music has a superior semantic capacity than verbal language, Quirino Principe writes: “The word is in action if the combinations of phonemes that constitute it are able to produce a meaning [...]. In music the number of combinations is staggering and unlimited [...]. This explains why music possesses semantic faculties immeasurably more numerous and powerful in extent and subtlety than the word”. See Quirino PRINCIPES, *Il fantasma dell'Opera. Sognando una filosofia*, Milano: Jaca Book, 2018, pp. 82–83.

that music inspired by the reading of a poetic text that speaks the love of a lover for his loved one, can prove to be so effectively consonant with a text that describes the quivering of the soul in the presence of the Beloved.

The question has also been raised as to whether or not the compositions with substitute texts were in line with the poetics of the *seconda prattica*, which conceived music as *ancella dell'orazione* (the servant of the word). In this case the difficulty lies in the fact that, in a *contrafactum*, the substitute text was composed *after* the music, which would rule out the possibility that music could have an 'ancillary' role in its regard. In reality it is a false difficulty, since, in the best cases, the sensitivity of the poet has ensured that the new text could combine perfectly with the music, so that the latter could be perceived as its servant. What, then, does it mean for music to be 'the servant of the word'? It means adapting itself to the text, highlighting the meanings topically and rendering its overall sense: which, as we have seen, occurs even in the best compositions with a substitute text. It should not be forgotten, in fact, that Claudio Monteverdi, far from complaining about it, spoke favorably about the operation of retextualization carried out by Aquilino Coppini on his own madrigals.<sup>24</sup>

But there is a further aspect to take into consideration. As we have seen above, two of the three protagonists (the composer of the model and the author of the new text) participating in the process that leads to the creation of a *contrafactum* are involved not only as artists, but also as consumers of the artistic objects. In examining the act of fruition, it should therefore be remembered that when contemplating a work of art (or listening to music), what is contemplated is not so much (or at least, not only) the quality of the aesthetic object, but the effect the same object has on the subject (on the listener). If the object determines the effect at a first level, the aesthetic qualities that the subject attributes to the object are produced within the aesthetic experience thanks to their imaginative perception (as is also demonstrated by the fact that irrational beings can perceive sounds, but cannot appreciate music). In saying this, I draw my inspiration freely from the thought of Roger Scruton, and in particular his concept of metaphor.<sup>25</sup> According to Scruton, the imagination

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<sup>24</sup> See Margaret Ann RORKE, "Sacred contrafacta of Monteverdi and Cardinal Borromeo's Milan", *Music & Letters*, 65, 1984/2, pp. 168–175: 175.

<sup>25</sup> See Roger SCRUTON, *The Aesthetics of Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 (2009<sup>2</sup>); ID., *Beauty*, Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2009; ID., *Understanding Music. Philosophy and Interpretation*, New York: Continuum, 2009.



is the faculty responsible for metaphors, which, in their turn, form the basis of aesthetic experience, and in particular of aesthetic-musical experience:<sup>26</sup> “take the metaphor away, and you cease to describe the experience of music”.<sup>27</sup> But what does Scruton mean by metaphor? The metaphor is something that juxtaposes two objects that ordinary experience perceives as dissimilar, something that changes the aspect of an object by relating it to another conceptually distant object, thus transfiguring the response of the receiver. Through the metaphor we arrive at “the experience of seeing and responding to one thing in terms suggested by another”.<sup>28</sup> “The point of such a comparison lies not in the analogy, which is merely a vehicle, but in the transformation of the reader’s experience”.<sup>29</sup> The result is a deeper level of understanding of both.

Allowing ourselves to be guided by this theory of musical fruition, we might suppose that in a vocal composition it is not only the poetic-musical construct, but also the text and the meanings it autonomously conveys that help to direct the formation of metaphors in the listener. In a composition with a substitute text, in fact, the metaphors can be conditioned by the new poetic-musical construct, but also by the text of the model, by the substitute text, and by the relation that is established between the two. If we therefore accept that through the metaphor we can concentrate on two objects at the same time, on the way they appear, and respond to one in terms of the other and vice versa, *contrafacta* can be seen as paradigmatic aesthetic objects, since they make it particularly clear what it means to place oneself in a metaphoric disposition while listening. In fact, in a *contrafactum* two different texts, one secular and the other sacred, one poetic and the other in prose, one in the vernacular and the other in Latin (or in a language different from that of the model), find themselves associated by the sole fact of being set to the same music. Within its structure, music casts a bridge that allows the listener to grasp correspondences, analogies and differences between the two texts in an apparently much more immediate way (but in reality mediated by the musical construct) than reading them one after the other, considering the secular text from the point of view of the sacred and the sacred from the point of view of the secular, thus

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<sup>26</sup> See SCRUTON, *The Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 79–96.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 85. See also Giulio Panizzolo, *Metafore in musica. Sulle tesi di R. Scruton e M. Spitzer* [Metaphors in music. On the theses of R. Scruton and M. Spitzer], BA dissertation, Università di Padova, 2017-2018.

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, p. 86.

enhancing the sense of both the first (through the second) and the second (through the first).

One might, of course, object that this mechanism can be triggered only in those who already know the texts, and so, when listening, can recognize and understand them. Those who instead do not know them, have never read them or heard them recited, will not be able to recognize them, and will lack the cultural tools necessary to understand them. However, on listening first to a vocal polyphonic composition with a text in one language, and then to 'the same music' (the same notes) with a different text in a different language, any listener, even the least cultured and least prepared, will be able to realize that the same music with a different text sounds different, having been *de facto* transformed into a different music, as happens when we listen to a different arrangement of a composition we know, in which the theme originally played by one instrument is now played by another. Such listening experiences lead the listener to wonder what, compared to the previously known composition, has remained the same, and what instead has changed. Any listener will also realize that their personal response to the aesthetic experience of the first and second listening is different. According to Scruton, the difference between two objects can be revealed through their juxtaposition within a metaphor, which will occur only if our attention is focused on their appearance, irrespective of their true coordinates. We might add that, on listening to a vocal composition with a substitute text, the mere fact that we realize that the composition closely recalls another composition that we know, but at the same time sounds a little different, produces a sort of aesthetic 'short circuit' that helps us to enter into a metaphoric mode of listening. Since we do not understand the text, our attention will be focused exclusively on its purely phonic aspect (Scruton would probably say: on the appearance), irrespective of the true coordinates (the meaning) of the two texts.

Moreover, on listening to a *contrafactum* with a text in Latin, anyone, even not understanding the Latin, will be able to understand that the text *is in Latin*, and will tend to associate the Latin with the church, with religious rites, to the mass, in other words with the liturgical or sacred sphere; and so, despite not understanding it ("sanza intender l'inno"), the listener will be able to instinctively establish a link between the new text and sacrality. The mere fact of recognizing the Latin language will trigger a range of impressions different from those prompted by listening to the madrigal, with the result that the new

composition is perceived in a very different way compared to its model; and it is also likely that, in attempting to describe his or her personal aesthetic experience, the listener to a *contrafactum* in Latin will tend to produce metaphors associated with the sphere of the sacred.

### 3. Language, phonetics, timbre

La musica è sorella di quella poesia  
che vuole assorellarsi seco;  
quando non s'intendono bene fra di loro,  
non sono né attenenti, né amiche.<sup>30</sup>

It is self-evident that the same piece of music will sound different when it is associated with texts in different languages. This depends not only on the fact that the presence of a new text determines of necessity a different combination of syllables, and therefore a different distribution of vowels and consonants (which also happens when the new text is in the same language as the original), but also on the phonetic differences between the different languages, that is to say the different way of pronouncing the same letters, and especially the vowels and diphthongs, which, if only on account of their longer duration, most influence the 'sound' of a musical setting.<sup>31</sup> In passing from one language to another the composition thus undergoes a phonetic metamorphosis that the more alert listener cannot help but notice, as shown paradigmatically in Andrea Gabrieli's madrigal *Non ti sdegnar, o Filli*, which was first published in Venice in 1580, was reset seven years later in Thuringia with a German text, and again after another twenty years in Federico Borromeo's Milan with a text in Latin (see table 1).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> (Music is the sister of poetry / that wishes to become its kin; / when they understand one another little, / they are neither relatives, nor friends). The words of Giulio Strozzi on his drama *La Delia*. See *Libretti d'opera italiani dal Seicento al Novecento*, eds. Giovanna Gronda – Paolo Fabbri, Milano: Mondadori, 1997, p. LVII.

<sup>31</sup> It should also be taken into account that, although we do not know how Italian, English, German and even Latin was pronounced in the 16th and 17th centuries, it is quite likely that the pronunciation was in any case different from that of today.

<sup>32</sup> The madrigal *Non ti sdegnar o Filli* was first published in Andrea GABRIELI, *Il secondo libro de madrigali a sei voci*, Venezia: Angelo Gardano, 1580 (RISM A/I G 72); the *contrafactum* *Gott ist getrew* is included in *Primus liber suavissimas praestantissimorum nostrae aetatis artificum Italianorum cantilenas*, Erfurt: Georg Baumann, 1587; the *contrafactum* *Ne confide in forma generosa* appears in *Musica tolta da i madrigali di Claudio Monteverde, e d'altri autori, a cinque et a sei voci, e fatta spirituale da Aquilino Coppini, Accademico Inquieto*, Milano: Agostino Tradate, 1607

Table 1

ANDREA GABRIELI 1580	MELCHIOR BACKHAUS 1587	AQUILINO COPPINI 1607
Non ti sdegnar, o Filli, ch'io ti segua, perché la tua bellezza in un momento fugge e si dilegua e se pria che ti giunga aspra vecchiezza non cogli il frutto de la tua beltade potrai forse pentirti in altra etade.	Gott ist getreu der euch nicht lest versuchen uber ewer vermügen sondern machet das ewer anfechtung so ein endt gewinne das ihrs köndt ertragen wer steht mag wol zu sehen das nit falle, <i>wer steht mag wol zu sehen das er nit falle.</i>	Ne confide in forma generosa neque spem tuam pone in volubilitate divitiarum. Sperne prudens honores, popula res, er qui dilabuntur ut in sole nives nec satiare queunt sitim tuam.

Generally speaking, the greater the difference between the two languages (think of the difference in sound between Italian and German, much greater than that between Latin and Italian), the greater the difference will be between the resulting sound of the *contrafactum* and that of its model. However, on observing certain *contrafacta*, it becomes clear that there has been an attempt to introduce a series of vowels in the substitute text that are as close as possible to those of the original text, almost as if wishing to maintain as close a sound as possible, despite the phonetic differences between the languages. This is what happens, for example, in the first phrase of the madrigal *Non ti sdegnar, o Filli* mentioned above, of which the *contrafactum* in German maintains the succession of the first three vowels O – I – E (see example 1).

(RISM B/I 1607<sup>20</sup>). On *contrafacta* in German, see Helen GEYER, “Wenig beachtete Transfer-Wege italienischer Renaissance- und Frühbarock-Musik im thüringischen Mitteldeutschland”, in *Freiberger Studien zur Orgel. Nr. 11*, Altenburg: Kamprad, 2010, pp. 30–49; Stephen ROSE, “Patriotic purification: cleansing Italian secular vocal music in Thuringia, 1575–1600”, *Early Music History*, 35, 2016, pp. 203–260; on Aquilino Coppini’s *contrafacta*, see RORKE, “Sacred contrafacta of Monteverdi”; Uwe WOLF, “Prima Arianna, poi Maria. Rielaborazioni religiose di musica vocale profana degli inizi del XVII secolo”, in *Intorno a Monteverdi*, eds. Maria Caraci Vela – Rodobaldo Tibaldi, Lucca: LIM, 1999, pp. 351–366; and Marina TOFFETTI, “Aspects of the reception of the music of Andrea Gabrieli in Milan”, *Musica Iagellonica*, 8, 2017, *Special issue: The music of Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli in Europe: dissemination, assimilation, adaptation* (guest editor: Marina Toffetti), pp. 5–29.

Cantus 

Non	ti	sde	-	gnar	
Gott	ist	ge	-	treu	
Ne	con	-	fi	-	de
<b>O</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>E</b>			

Example 1. Andrea Gabrieli, *Non ti sdegnar / Gott ist getreu / Ne confide*, Cantus, bb. 1–3

Ultimately, if a vocal composition sounds as it sounds, it is because a particular succession of syllables, with a certain sound, is set to a particular succession of notes. Furthermore, in polyphonic music we find ‘vertical’ situations of momentary reinforcement when several voices, in a homorhythmic context, simultaneously sing the same syllable (and thus the same vowel), while in the imitative sections more complex contrapuntal situations are often created, in which different voices simultaneously sing different syllables (and at times also vowels). The final outcome of these combinations of vowels is not totally predictable, and it is likely that, at least to a certain extent, it could even escape the control of the composer himself.

If this is what happens in any polyphonic composition, in the compositions with a substitute text the effects of reinforcement will continue to occur in the homorhythmic episodes (although now the syllables – and thus the vowels – highlighted will be those of the new text), whereas in the imitative episodes the presence of a combination of syllables different from that of the original can produce these effects at different moments (and on different vowels) compared to those of the model. This phenomenon could of course be studied in a more scientific manner, by calculating the exact frequency of the single vowels and consonants and of the respective reinforcements in the original composition and in the one with a new text; but even without the aid of statistics it seems evident that the preeminence of one vowel in place of another could significantly modify the timbral effect of entire passages.

It remains to be ascertained whether, and to what extent, the authors of the *contrafacta* were aware of the consequences the substitute text would have on the timbre, and whether, at least in some cases, such awareness had led them to carry out a careful topical control of the phonetic aspects of the new text. In this respect a distinction should be made between the cases where the original poetic text has been replaced with a pre-existing text, and those where the new text has been purposely prepared. In fact, when a pre-existing text is

used, the creative input of whoever made the adaptation is much more limited, and in most cases is simply a matter of choosing the text (often made on the basis of the content rather than on phonetic or musical considerations) and of how to use it (integrally or in part, faithfully or not faithfully, with or without cuts, repetitions or additions of any sort). Besides this, of course, the adapter must place the syllables correctly beneath the notes, and sometimes adapt the music itself to the new text by making some slight changes (repeated notes, small variations in rhythm, adding rests, and so on). In these cases, then, the correspondences between one text and the other are generally less frequent and, even where present, are likely not to have been entirely planned by the adapter.<sup>33</sup>

Quite different is the case of *contrafacta* with a poetic text created purposely for the new setting, in which numerous and precise topical correspondences can be found, not only concerning the contents (the meanings of the new text, often linked, by analogy or by contrast, to those of the former text), but also metrical and rhythmic elements (the use, in the new text at the same point, of words with the same number of syllables and the same stress pattern) as well as phonetic aspects (assonances or alliterations that occur at corresponding points). In more refined cases – and these are quite numerous – such correspondences, far from being casual, are quite evidently the fruit of very precise aesthetic choices and denote the cultural refinement and versifying skill of the respective authors. In any case, independently of the degree of awareness and scrutiny on the part of whoever carried out the task, in every *contrafactum* a new relationship is created between the text (and its language) and the musical structure of the model.

As concerns the questions as to whether the authors of the substitute texts were aware of the differences in timbre between one text and the other, the answer therefore seems to be mainly in the affirmative: among the *contrafacta* so far examined in the musicological literature – including the essays in the

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<sup>33</sup> On this point, see the observations on the textual adaptation procedures adopted by Geronimo Cavaglieri or by Orfeo Vecchi in their respective *contrafacta* in Antonio DELFINO, “Geronimo Cavaglieri e alcuni contrafacta di madrigali marenziani”, in *Luca Marenzio musicista europeo. Atti della Giornata di Studi marenziani (Brescia, 6 marzo 1988)*, eds. Maria Teresa Rosa Barezzi – Mariella Sala, Brescia: Edizioni di Storia Bresciana, 1990, pp. 165–216; in TOFFETTI, “Aspects of the reception”, and EAD., “*Contrafacta* of Palestrina’s works printed in Milan (1597–1605)”, in the present volume, pp. 83–115.

present volume<sup>34</sup> – many have been identified in which the author of the retextualization displays care and singular expertise in the choice of terms to insert in the new text, in close correlation with the phonetic aspect of the original text. In some cases one can observe a tendency to introduce words that start with the same initial letter as the corresponding term of the model, thus creating ‘virtual’ alliterations between the words of original text and those of the substitute text placed in the same position and thus associated with the same motive.<sup>35</sup>

Andrea Gabrieli, *Dolcissimo ben mio* (1580)    Geronimo Cavaglieri, *Surge formosa mea* (1610)<sup>36</sup>

Dolcissimo ben **mio**  
(My very sweetest one).

Surge formosa **mea**  
(Arise my beauty).

Elsewhere it can be observed how the author of the *contrafactum* has deliberately placed the same vowels in corresponding positions, giving rise to virtual phenomena of assonance.<sup>37</sup>

Andrea Gabrieli, *Sonno diletto e caro* (1580)    Aquilino Coppini, *Bonum est et suave* (1607)<sup>38</sup>

Sonno diletto e **caro**  
(Beloved and dearest slumber).

Bonum est **et suave**  
(It is good and sweet).

In other passages, where the original text features alliterations, assonances or other refined poetic procedures, one can note the effort to likewise insert a recurrent syllable or initial letter, even though different from that of the model.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See in particular the articles by Toffetti, Chizzali, Comparin and Jež.

<sup>35</sup> On Geronimo Cavaglieri’s collections of *contrafacta*, see DELFINO, “Geronimo Cavaglieri e alcuni contrafacta di madrigali marenziani”; TOFFETTI, “Aspects of the reception”, p. 27; and Laura MACY, “Geronimo Cavaglieri, the “Song of Songs” and female spirituality in Federico Borromeo’s Milan”, *Early Music*, 39, 2011/3, pp. 349-357.

<sup>36</sup> See Addendum, table xxv: 11.

<sup>37</sup> See TOFFETTI, “Aspects of the reception”, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> See Addendum, table xvii: 21.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Marco Scacchi, *Dove, ah dove te n'vai* (1634)    Ambrosius Profe, *Ach wo sol ich binkehren* (1646)<sup>40</sup>

**Perché** mi fuggi e m'abbandoni, ah lasso,  
sul **periglioso** passo?  
Qual bene or **più** m'avanza,  
se fuggi tu, dolcissima **Speranza**?

(Why do you flee and abandon me, alas  
wretched,  
on the perilous path?  
What good or else is left me,  
if you flee, sweetest Hope?).

**Herr** sei mir gnädig und wenn ich komme  
zum sterben  
so **hab** mich nicht verderben  
mit deiner **H**and mich führe  
und leite mich hinauf zur **H**immelstüre.

(Lord be merciful to me and when I come to  
die  
so spoil me not  
guide me with your hand  
and lead me up to the door of Heaven).

The correspondences mentioned so far concern the sound of the words of the substitute text and that of the original. Besides this, many *contrafacta* show correspondences at a semantic level.<sup>41</sup>

Andrea Gabrieli, *Sonno diletto e caro* (1580)    Simone Molinaro, *Christe Rex virtus nostra* (1610)<sup>42</sup>

Tu mi dimostri, e sia **pur falso o vero**

(You show to me, and whether it be false or  
true).

Auctor salutis guida nos **non falsa, sed vera**

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<sup>40</sup> See Tomasz JEŻ, “*Contrafacta* of Italian madrigals in Polish musical sources”, in the present volume, pp. 151–170: 162–163.

<sup>41</sup> For Gabrieli’s madrigal and the respective *contrafactum*, see *Ibid.*; on the madrigals of Marco Scacchi and the respective retextualizations, see Tomasz JEŻ, “Contraffazioni di madrigali italiani nelle fonti musicali polacche”, in *Il sacro nel Rinascimento. Atti del XII Convegno internazionale* (Chianciano-Pienza, 17–20 luglio 2000), ed. Luisa Secchi Tarugi, Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2002, pp. 163–179 (English translation: “*Contrafacta* of Italian madrigals in Polish musical sources” in this same volume).

<sup>42</sup> See Addendum, table xxiv: 20.



Marco Scacchi, <i>Donna voi vi credete</i> (1634)	Ambrosius Profe, <i>O Tod du darfst nicht glauben</i> (1646) <sup>43</sup>
anzi ero <b>morto</b> e quando vi lasciai <b>rinacqui</b> si ch'io non <b>morro</b> più mai.	das <b>Leben</b> ich doch erbe welches Christus mir herrlich hat erworben aller selber für mich <b>gestorben</b> .
(before I was dead and when I left you I was born anew such as I shall never die again).	(I inherit <b>life</b> which Christ has gloriously acquired for me he who himself <b>died</b> for me).

Similar correspondences are particularly frequent in the poetic texts purposely written by Aquilino Coppini for the madrigals of Monteverdi.<sup>44</sup>

Claudio Monteverdi, <i>Piagn'è sospira</i> (1603)	Aquilino Coppini, <i>Plorat amare</i> (1609) <sup>45</sup>
Piagn'è sospira (She weeps and sighs).	Plorat amare (He cries bitterly).

In several cases, moreover, the substitute text uses, in the same position, a term in the new language that exactly matches that of the original text.<sup>46</sup>

Andrea Gabrieli, <i>Sonno diletto e caro</i> (1580)	Geronimo Cavaglieri, <i>Veni dilecta mea</i> (1610) <sup>47</sup>
Sonno <b>diletto</b> e caro (Beloved and dearest slumber).	Veni <b>dilecta</b> mea (come, my beloved).

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<sup>43</sup> See JEŽ, “*Contrafacta* of Italian madrigals”, pp. 162 and 165.

<sup>44</sup> The passage is taken from the madrigal *Voi pur da me partite*, published in Claudio MONTEVERDI, *Il quarto libro de madrigali a cinque voci*, Venezia: Appresso Ricciardo Amadino, 1603 (RISM A/I M 3467); the *contrafactum Tu vis a me* appears in Aquilino Coppini’s collection published in 1609 (see Addendum, table XXI: 8); see RORKE, “Sacred contrafacta of Monteverdi”, p. 171.

<sup>45</sup> See Addendum, table XXI: 10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> See Addendum, table XXV: 2.

However, the majority of the correspondences highlighted could most likely be perceived and appreciated only by a very limited circle of listeners: by those able to understand the meaning of the substitute text and to remember at least the sense (but possibly also the single words) of that of the model. We must therefore postulate that there could be various levels of fruition depending on the different degree of cultural awareness, sufficient to determine a different approach during the listening. It is not easy to say how many listeners were able, at the time, to enjoy these sophisticated musical products to the full. In any case it would be a huge mistake to conclude that this music could speak only to the cultural élites of the era, leaving all the other listeners indifferent. Also the less cultured listener, even “*sanza intender l’inno*” (“without distinguishing the hymn”, i.e. without understanding the text), would have been able to realize that with a different text, and even more so if in a different language, the music sounded different.

#### 4. Sacred, secular, devotional

Si le beau est présence réelle de Dieu dans la matière,  
si le contact avec le beau est au plein sens du mot un sacrement,  
comment y a-t-il tant d’esthètes pervers?<sup>48</sup>

We have seen how a large number of the *contrafacta* published between the end of the 16th and first half of the 17th century were madrigals, which were then given a new sacred text. In such cases it is generally believed that a secular composition has been ‘transformed’ into a sacred composition (that a madrigal has been transformed into a motet) through a simple substitution of the text. But is it really possible to ‘make sacred’ something that is not sacred? And are we sure that such an operation of substitution is really a simple, ingenuous, or unfailingly instrumental operation? In order to verify the validity of such an affirmation, I believe we must clarify what we mean by sacred music, and more especially what was meant by sacred music in the period in which the practice of textual substitution under examination took place. In the passage quoted at the start of this section Simone Weil defines beauty as an authentic ‘sacrament’;

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<sup>48</sup> (If beauty is the true presence of God in matter, if contact with beauty is, in the full sense of the word, a sacrament, why is it that there are so many perverse aesthetes?). Simone WEIL, *L’ombra e la grazia*, eds. Georges Hourdin – Franco Fortini, Firenze: Giunti–Bompiani, 2017 (1 ed. Bompiani, 2000; ed. orig.: *La pesanteur et la grace*, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1947), p. 268.

and elsewhere, she refers specifically to the art of music, defining it as nourishment for the mind of the listener.<sup>49</sup> Sacred is therefore what acts, functions, prompts an effect: an artistic object able to transform all those who expose themselves to it. In the case of music, sacred is a composition that involves the listener while listening, that produces an impact on him or her, because, while listening, something actually happens inside him or her; sacred is high music, which fathoms the depths of the human soul and intimately probes the listener, allowing him to connect with his deepest sphere and with his most secret dimension; it is music that asks the final question, interrogates about sense; music born from thought, that is itself thought, and generates thought.

But how was sacred music conceived between the end of the 16th and start of the 17th century? And what do the compositions subjected to textual substitution tell us about this? Does it make sense to maintain that the simple substitution of a text was sufficient to ‘make sacred’ a composition that was not sacred? Is it a well-posed question? On the one hand it is true that the definition ‘sacred music’ commonly refers to compositions which, by virtue of their text and their generally serious and solemn character, are thought to be at least ‘suitable’ for use in a liturgical or devotional context.<sup>50</sup> The presence of a text taken from the Holy Scriptures (and especially from certain particularly well-loved books, like the Psalms or the Song of Songs, not by chance both poetic in nature) or from the liturgy are surely important indicators for the purposes of assigning a composition to the sacred as opposed to the secular genre. On the other hand, one might say that the authors of the substitute text – not by chance endowed with a refined musical sensitivity, as denoted by their musical choices – far from perceiving anything *lascivum aut impurum* in it,<sup>51</sup> had in

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<sup>49</sup> “Quand on écoute du Bach ou une mélodie grégorienne, toutes les facultés de l’âme se tendent et se taisent, pour apprehender cette chose parfaitement belle, chacune à sa façon. L’intelligence entre autres: elle n’y trouve rien à affirmer et à nier, mais elle s’en nourrit”. (When one listens to Bach or to a Gregorian melody, all the faculties of the soul stretch out and are silent in order to grasp that perfectly beautiful object, each in their own way. Intelligence among others; it finds nothing there to affirm or to deny; but is nourished). See WEIL, *L’ombra e la grazia*, pp. 228–229.

<sup>50</sup> On church and devotional music in the Catholic and Lutheran contexts, see Lorenzo BIANCONI, *Il Seicento*, Torino: E.D.T. Edizioni di Torino, 1982 (Storia della musica a cura della Società Italiana di Musicologia, 5), pp. 115–157.

<sup>51</sup> Uwe Wolf is convinced that the *contrafacta* contravened what he believes to be the “only concrete norm on church music expressed in the Council of Trent, namely that in mensural music during the Mass nothing could be performed that was of secular provenance”. In reality

some way perceived the ‘sacredness’ of the music that they subsequently retextualized (otherwise they would probably have made use of different music); and that the substitution of the text had if anything helped to make evident this intrinsic quality. Besides, if their wish was to celebrate the Divine (admitted, and not taking for granted, that this was the intention of the authors of the new texts), why should they have done so using second-rate music?

For a long time it was believed that, given a sacred text, the music simply served to convey the text or – at most – to enhance its sense (think of what St Augustine wrote in the famous chapter of his *Confessions* dedicated to the sense of hearing).<sup>52</sup> And yet St Augustine, in the same chapter, had repeatedly oscillated between condemning the pleasure of listening and praising the capacity of music to uplift the soul of listeners, thus placing himself under the sign of an irreducible ambivalence. The ambivalence of music, already lucidly discussed by philosophers and theologians of every era (including, in recent times, Hans Küng),<sup>53</sup> led to very different, and even opposite, reactions and attitudes among the principal exponents of the Reformation (think of Martin Luther’s attitude, for whom music was a wonderful gift of God, and that of Calvin, who on the contrary feared its charm and ostracized it) and of the so-called Counter-reformation (think of the different ways the synthetic and generic dispositions regarding music issued during the Council of Trent were interpreted at a local level).<sup>54</sup>

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the indication emanated by the Council asked to avoid performing, with voices or with the organ, music in which “lascivum aut impurum aliquid misceatur”: but the compositions subjected to retextualization were clearly not held to be lascivious or impure. See WOLF, “Prima Arianna, poi Maria”, p. 364.

<sup>52</sup> See AGOSTINO, *Confessioni*, Testo latino a fronte, Monografia introduttiva, traduzione, parafrasi, note e indici di Giovanni Reale, Milano: Bompiani, 2012 (Il pensiero occidentale), pp. 968–971: 969.

<sup>53</sup> “While there are truly religious people who have exalted music as the purest form of spirituality, there are others, precisely for religious reasons, who have condemned it as the most reprovable form of sensuality. Indeed, if some also approve of instrumental music, considering it the highest point of religious enthusiasm, others – not only the Fathers of the Church, but also Calvin – have attempted to ban it from the cult and often even from secular life”. Hans KÜNG, *Musik und Religion. Mozart – Wagner – Bruckner*, München: Piper Verlag, 2006 (trad. it.: Brescia: Queriniana, 2012, p. 12).

<sup>54</sup> See Craig MONSON, “The Council of Trent revisited”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 55, 2002/1, pp. 1–37; see also the more recent David J. BURN – Grantley McDONALD, “Music, Theology, and the European Reformations”, in *Music and Theology in the European Reformations*, eds. David J. Burn – Grantley McDonald – Joseph Verheyden – Peter De Mey, Turnhout: Brepols, 2019 (Épitome musical), pp. 25–32.

Besides these aspects, it is necessary to clarify whether, in the period we are dealing with, there actually existed a substantial distinction between sacred and secular music and, if so, what did this consist of concretely in terms of technique and style. If we attempted to identify the intrinsically musical features that allow us to distinguish the sacred repertoire from the secular, we would probably find rather few. Of course, certain conventions existed regarding the genre of the composition, the choice of text to set (which could be a poetic text, a liturgical or devotional text, or a text on a spiritual matter taken from different sources or composed *ex-novo*), or else the language (Latin for sacred compositions in the catholic sphere, the vernacular for sacred music in territories affected by the Reformation and for secular music). These conventions, however, acted as 'markers' to indicate what in different times and places was defined sacred or secular, or rather, what was considered suitable for a given context of performance. But what, in terms of the musical substance, did these conventions entail? In the case of a vocal composition, did they concern only the text, or did they also involve the formal structure, the type of motives, the tonal plan, and the rhythmic gait of the music?

On this matter it seems helpful to turn to certain concepts already clearly expressed by Heinrich Bessler,<sup>55</sup> whose volume on listening to music in the modern age (1959) offers an original point of view, dealing in a historical perspective with a theme, such as listening to music, traditionally held to be the exclusive territory of the systematic musicologist. In particular, his considerations on the solemn and elevated style of the madrigal in the 16th century contain points of reflection that are still valid today:

Solemnity, dignity are the ideal of the time; throughout Europe music is made in the same way. [...]

The Netherlands, Spain, England, Central and Eastern Europe are all tuned to the same diapason. It is under the sign of this dignity that the Italian madrigal knows its imposing affirmation; and since the art of counterpoint merges here with a new culture of musical blends, the madrigal soon becomes the point of reference everywhere. [...] The vocal polyphonic current originated in the sacred music of the 15th century, with the birth of choral polyphony. In the following century also secular compositions were reshaped according to the same model.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> We like to recall that Heinrich Bessler, before studying musicology with Wilibald Gurlitt, Guido Adler and Wilhelm Fischer, had studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger.

<sup>56</sup> HEINRICH BESSELER, *Das musikalische Hören der Neuzeit*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959 (trad. it. Maurizio Giani, *L'ascolto musicale nell'età moderna*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993, p. 37).

In the late Renaissance, then, the same uninterrupted flow, the same *gravitas*, and the same composure pervade not only the musical forms with sacred texts, but also those with secular texts (or at least some of them, among which certainly the madrigal). Just as Heinrich Bessler had noted in the 1950s, this can be perceived by any listener in any period. From this, it can be inferred that in the late Renaissance there were no appreciable technical-stylistic differences allowing the listener to distinguish between the sacred output and the secular. And it is precisely this fundamental homogeneity of style that provides the grounds for making such operations of retextualization practicable, aimed, substantially, at transforming compositions born as madrigals into motets. This transformation took place, then, not by ‘rendering sacred’ a composition that previously was not, but rather by modifying its *facies* (the text: the most characterizing element in defining the sacred genre) so as to make it acceptable and practicable also in liturgical or devotional contexts, after having recognized and experienced its charm.

Such considerations should not, on the other hand, lead us to commit the error of believing that the text did not assume any appreciable role. In reflecting on the characteristics of perception and of musical listening in the age of the European Reformations, Bessler suitably underlined the crucial role of the *conceptual* comprehension of the texts of vocal polyphonic compositions. According to him, the 16th century is distinguished by a model of listening oriented towards the “perception” of the meaning of the text, prevalently religious: a model in which “the listener cannot limit himself to listening with the senses, but must at the same time also perceive with his mind”.<sup>57</sup> Bessler claims, in fact, that in compositions from this period “the primary element is not the sonic-musical aspect, but rather a content that is formulated conceptually”<sup>58</sup> within the text, whether poetic, liturgical or paraliturgical, that is set case by case to music. Moreover, “the course of the compositions tends to be organized in a prosastic form, in a free succession of ever new segments (*durchkomponiert*) adhering to the portions of text in turn set to sounds”.<sup>59</sup> In other words, Bessler believes that listening to the vocal music of the 16th century “presupposes that the text is followed section by section, and that the motives are understood

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<sup>57</sup> Ivi, p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> Ivi, p. 39.

<sup>59</sup> Antonio SERRAVEZZA, *Introduzione all'edizione italiana*, in Ivi, p. 10.

starting from the words”,<sup>60</sup> which furthermore explains the use of German in liturgical music within the Lutheran context.<sup>61</sup> But what was the purpose of such an intense form of listening? Solely “to attain a spiritual understanding”.<sup>62</sup>

We know, however, that the retextualized music of the 16th and 17th century did not make use exclusively of the high and powerful genre of the madrigal, but also metabolized simpler and lighter musical genres, based on strophic poetic compositions aimed at pure entertainment, with joyfully sensual or elegantly allusive subject matters: there are numerous cases of canzonette, villanelle, canzoni “alla napolitana” and other light genres that have been given, at times with loving care, at others with a more bigoted intent and like fig leaves, texts of edifying character with a function of educational entertainment.<sup>63</sup> While it is evident that the authors of such operations, understandably in line with the education they themselves had received, were concerned about the malice of the original texts, they nevertheless appear not only to have received, but also appreciated the pleasant freshness and sweet refinement of the compositions chosen as models to serve the noble cause of molding a healthy youth.<sup>64</sup> An example from among the many is Giovanni Ferretti’s 8-voice mascherata *O consia caldari* (1575), taken up by Melchior Backhaus with the substitute text *Veritas triumphat* in his first book of *contrafacta* (1587).<sup>65</sup>

If, then, on the one hand one might be inclined to suggest that in the period under examination the text was the only truly distinctive element in qualifying a vocal composition as sacred or secular (music with a sacred text was sacred,

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<sup>60</sup> BESSELER, *L’ascolto musicale*, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, the use of German was not an end in itself: “If the congregation understands the language, there is no reason to change it, as the general purpose of reforming the liturgy in terms of language was to make it clear and understandable, not necessarily to make it non-Latin”. See Katarzyna SPURGJASZ, “*Salve Iesu Christe, Rex misericordiae*. Lutheran adaptations of pre-Reformation repertoire from St Elisabeth’s Church in Wrocław”, in this same volume, pp. 173–186: 174.

<sup>62</sup> BESSELER, *L’ascolto musicale*, p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> Numerous collections of *contrafacta* of canzonette and other light genres are included in the Addendum.

<sup>64</sup> In underlining certain no less significant aspects of the phenomenon of the spiritual parody of songs with an erotic subject, Lorenzo Bianconi stressed the “process of the exploitation and domestication of popular culture [...] undertaken with propagandistic zeal by the Church [...] in the modern era”, defining it as a process of appropriation-expropriation. See BIANCONI, *Il Seicento*, p. 130.

<sup>65</sup> On this matter, see the cited article by CHIZZALI, “Text and context of the Thuringian *contrafactum*”, p. 65.

and thus performable in liturgical or devotional settings; music with a secular text was secular, deemed suitable for other contexts), on the other, reflection on the phenomenon of retextualization seems to lead to rather more nuanced conclusions. Far from being a coarse ‘imbraghetamento’<sup>66</sup> or ‘cover-up’, a mere re-packaging or a superficial *maquillage*, many of the *contrafacta* examined prove to be highly refined and accomplished artifacts. They are often the outcome of efforts by culturally sensitive and up-to-date lay individuals or clerics, lovers of music and probably motivated to contribute to the diffusion and perhaps also to a more widespread and ‘democratic’ fruition (a diffusion that, over and above the intentions of the authors of the new texts, actually proved to be wider) of certain artistic-musical products of good quality, which until then had been the exclusive prerogative of quite limited aristocratic circles.

In conclusion, it could be said that in the historical phase we are dealing with, the majority of the retextualization procedures were motivated by two main aims, which were moreover not wholly incompatible: that of prolonging the life of particularly well-loved polyphonic-vocal compositions, by making them performable also in contexts in which they would not have been considered so with their original text; and that of making available to the faithful, and also to the less cultivated, music of appreciable quality that could accompany prayer and make it more effective and elevated.

## 5. Doctrine, boundaries, and *religio*

The reflections made so far could well refer in general terms to any operation of textual substitution; however they more closely concern the *contrafacta* of madrigals by the most famous composers and the operations that could be considered more culturally refined. But in the century we are dealing with in this volume we can also find other ways of re-elaborating the texts set to music, many of which respond to much more concrete needs, among which that of helping the comprehension of a text already set to music where its

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<sup>66</sup> Daniele Ricciarelli (1509–1566), better known as Daniele da Volterra, alias “Il Braghettone” or the “Breeches-maker” was a respectable 16th century painter who would surely have been forgotten were he not sadly known for having “breeched” (that is, covered with clothing and fig leaves) the nudes depicted in Michelangelo’s Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel (certainly, on order of the then pope Pius IV, to whom it would presumably not have been easy to say no...).



language was not understood, and that of making well-loved and appreciated compositions acceptable and performable in a context that is different and far from the original one. It is worth noting that, in some areas affected by different religious reforms and by frequent shifts of borders, it was precisely music that acted as an authentic *religio*, in the etymological sense of the term, and that is as a socio-cultural and properly *religious* unifier irrespective of any geo-political frontier – Katarzyna Spurgjasz expresses this well in her essay on Lutheran adaptations of pre-Reformation repertoire: “The soundscapes of different neighboring ecclesiastical communities seem to be quite similar”<sup>67</sup> – over and above any doctrinal discussion or confessional division, and despite any attempt to impose limits or labels on it. In such a perspective, we will look more indulgently at the countless episodes of textual adaptations (a good number are examined in the present volume, especially in Maria Schildt’s article on the materials of the Düben collection, but there are good reasons to believe that the phenomenon actually assumed much larger proportions), and at the countless topical ‘patches’ applied to the sacred texts to normalize their *facies* and/or to guarantee their usability (think of the many Madonnas praised in pre-Reformation liturgical songs, which were readily transformed into as many Christs by the zeal of the Lutheran choir masters).

As previously mentioned, the use or re-use of a poetic or musical text can be an act of creation, or re-creation, which gives rise to a new birth; when the intention is instead to take up an artistic object, a poetic or musical composition, and to remould it for new functions or for extraneous purposes at the cost of deforming it and misconstruing its sense, then it becomes a case of mis-use, violence, abuse. The first category includes operations of retextualization that respect the sense of the original text, paying attention to its metric and phonetic values, and which are therefore effective as a whole; the second comprises approximate procedures, carried out hurriedly and without respecting the balance between the rhythmic and metric structure of the model and that of the new text, with little attention to the correct accentuation of the words and thus on the whole poorly accomplished. An exemplary case of effective and creative retextualization is that of Claudio Monteverdi’s madrigal *Cruda Amarilli*, reshaped with the substitute text *Felle amaro* in Aquilino Coppini’s collection

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<sup>67</sup> See SPURGJASZ, “*Salve Iesu Christe*”, pp. 173–186: 175.

(1607);<sup>68</sup> a paradigmatic example of a poorly made, miscarried and unaccomplished *contrafactum* is that of Stefano Landi's madrigal *Arde, Filli*, to which Gustav Düben partially affixed the sacred text *Isti sunt triumphatores*, though later abandoning the undertaking.<sup>69</sup>

Alongside these 'extreme' cases, however, there are countless intermediate situations, where a pre-existing vocal composition has undergone only slight modifications without resulting completely transformed or re-created, nor irredeemably disfigured, but simply adapted to a new context. The numerous adaptations made to liturgical music in the Lutheran context (Maria Schildt has examined several of different kinds) mostly belong to this category,<sup>70</sup> and stem from the desire to conciliate the love for traditional liturgical or devotional music with the respect for certain unrenounceable principles of the new doctrine. As Katarzyna Spurgjasz effectively points out, "all such adjustments, adaptations and *contrafacta* might be considered as traces of living music culture in the times of confessional changes".<sup>71</sup> Paraphrasing somewhat freely the fourth Gospel (John 3, 8), we can only remark that *music* – authentic sacrament, and at times the only true *religio* – *sounds* (and is always resounded) *where it wishes*.

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<sup>68</sup> See Addendum, table xvii: 1; RORKE, "Sacred contrafacta", p. 169.

<sup>69</sup> See Lars BERGLUND, "*Arde Fillis / Isti sunt*: a *contrafactum* by Gustav Düben, based on a madrigal by Stefano Landi, and previously attributed to Giacomo Carissimi", in this same volume, pp. 187–208.

<sup>70</sup> Maria SCHILDT, "Re-using pre-existing music with new texts. Repertoire for court and church in seventeenth-century Sweden", in this same volume, pp. 209–245.

<sup>71</sup> See SPURGJASZ, "*Salve Iesu Christe*", p. 175.

### Summary

The present article examines the *contrafacta*, vocal compositions in which the original text has been modified or substituted with a new text, sometimes in a different language, thus representing intertextual artifacts *par excellence*. The phenomenon of re-textualization is investigated from different points of view: from the phonetic-timbre perspective, it has been observed that the substitution of the text, especially when the new text is in a different language, determines a change in the way the composition sounds, as any listener can note, even without being able to distinguish the words while listening; with regards the reception, it has been observed that the different categories of listeners could appreciate the *contrafacta* each with a different level of comprehension: the more simple listener enjoying it in a less conscious manner; the more informed listener being able to grasp its more refined aspects; from the viewpoint of transmission, the *contrafacta* have been read as signs of the dissemination of a composition; from that of the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as indicators of the duration of its effectiveness.

Besides the quantitative data of the phenomenon (which madrigals were subjected to the greatest number of re-textualization procedures? Which collections were appreciated longer than others?), an attempt has been made to assess *in what way* the compositions assumed as models have been given new life. From this point of view, the procedure of textual substitution proved to be partly similar to translation. Just as a good translation (*traducere* means to transfer) aims to revive the sense of a text by unveiling in a new language meanings that the original language was not able to render explicit, music similarly does not limit itself to 'clothing' a text, but goes beyond, revealing its deeper sense. In the same way, the affixation of a new text to a pre-existing composition can at times shed further light on the sense of the original text, even if the meaning of the new text is apparently far from that of the first, while in other cases it can betray it. This explains the efficacy of the apparent 'transmigration' of compositions from the secular domain to the sacred: sacred is what produces an emotional impact on the listener, it is the sense conveyed by the music, over and above the meaning of the text that has been set. It is no coincidence that, in an era of frequent doctrinal reforms and confessional divisions such as the one in question (16th- and 17th-century), music acted, in varying circumstances, as a genuine *religio*, uniting different communities within a relatively stable and common sonic landscape, irrespective of the constantly shifting geopolitical borders of the time.

Keywords: *contrafactum*, sense/signifié, text/music, text/context, sacred/secular, music and religion, adaptation/re-use.

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